

Truth & Beauty: A Friendship Study Guide

Truth & Beauty: A Friendship by Ann Patchett

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Plot Summary

Truth & Beauty by Ann Patchett was about the lifelong friendship between two famous writers, Ann Patchett and Lucy Grealy. Lucy struggled with a disfigured face. They both struggled for years to become famous writers, but remained best friends through all the ups and downs of their lives and relationship until Lucy's death.

Ann Patchett went to the prestigious Iowa Writers' Workshop in 1985. She found an apartment on Governor Street, which was both modest and cheap. Her roommate was Lucy Grealy, a fellow writer from Ann's Alma mater, Sarah Lawrence College. At SLC, Lucy had a rock star reputation for her great writing and her disfigured face. Lucy had childhood cancer and due to chemotherapy, she lost part of her jaw and only had her six front teeth.

Ann and Lucy built the foundation of their lifelong friendship on Governor Street. They partied, danced, and drank until all hours. They exchanged writing ideas. Lucy asked Ann if she was beautiful and if anyone would ever love her. Ann took the nurturing role and told Lucy she would be fine. At Iowa Writers' Workshop, Lucy was just as famous as she was at Sarah Lawrence. Ann was the organized, quiet friend who worked hard at her writing. Lucy loved being around people and being the center of attention. She was a natural talent, who could hand in a perfect piece of writing last minute.

After they left Iowa, Ann and Lucy constantly wrote letters to each other. In this book, there were excerpts of Lucy's letters only. Ann worked as a waitress at TGIFriday's in Nashville. Lucy went to Aberdeen, Scotland to have more reconstructive surgeries. They both hated their lives. They submitted their writing to magazines and applied to fellowships, but nothing came through. Lucy's surgery was unsuccessful, as were all of them. Ann won a fellowship in Provincetown, Massachusetts. She flourished in her writing there. Lucy won two fellowships as well. They both became published writers.

Lucy became a literary star with her powerful memoir, *Autobiography of a Face*. She was a rock star on the literary scene in NYC. Ann's book could not compare. They shared in each other's successes. Lucy decided to have one last miracle surgery, her 39th surgery. It did not work. Lucy spiraled downward into a depression of self-loathing and heroin addiction.

Meanwhile, Ann had great success with her fourth book. She became a rising star, but she still took care of Lucy. She would fly from Nashville to NYC to nurse her after surgery. She tried to talk her out of using heroin. Nothing worked. Lucy became more distant. Ann could not handle her and almost decided to leave the friendship altogether.

Lucy died of an accidental heroin overdose. Ann realized then her dear friend Lucy was not invincible. She was just like everyone else.



Chapter 1 and Chapter 2

Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 Summary and Analysis

Truth & Beauty by Ann Patchett was about the friendship of Ann Patchett and Lucy Grealy. They started out as two struggling writers trying to become famous. They endured the hardships of life and the successes of being famous writers until Lucy's death in 2002.

In Chapter 1, in June 1985, Ann Patchett, as a twenty-one year-old recent graduate of Sarah Lawrence College, went to find an apartment she could afford in Iowa City, Iowa. She would be there for two years to attend the prestigious Iowa Writers' Workshop and receive Master's in creative writing. She was also looking for another SLC graduate called Lucy Grealy. Lucy was famous at SLC because of her great writing and disfigured face. Ann was always in awe of Lucy. She tried to talk with her once but Lucy just walked away. Lucy wrote her and asked if she would look for an apartment for her too. Ann found an apartment on Governor Street that was modest and cheap, and they both could afford if they were roommates.

When Lucy moved in, she heaved her tiny body into Ann's arms. She was excited that Ann was there. There was an excerpt from a letter that Lucy wrote to Ann years later that said how much Lucy loved Ann. Ann said she was in a car accident as a child and her face needed repairing too. Everyone stared at Lucy's disfigured face at first. She had childhood cancer and chemotherapy, which led to a partially missing jaw and only six front teeth left. Lucy could not close her mouth all the way and had a lot of scars.

Lucy began to date B-. She finally had sex. B- would never love Lucy. The chapter ended with a long letter from Lucy. Lucy said she just slept with a man like B- in Aberdeen, Scotland, where she lived after Iowa to have more surgery. He left and Lucy tried hard to stay positive.

In Chapter 2, Ann and Lucy had teaching fellowships in Iowa. Ann taught the books she knew. Lucy taught books she never read and would not let the students read ahead. That way Lucy was always ahead of her students. Lucy lectured easily. Life in Iowa passed slowly. They had endless amounts of time. They drank, partied, swapped clothes, wrote poems and exchanged ideas. Lucy was messy. Ann cleaned up the mess and cooked. Lucy was upset she was flat-chested. She took out a government loan and got breast implants. Lucy was used to having a lot of debt due to hospital bills and student loans. She loved her implants.

A borrowed car Ann and Lucy drove broke down. They hitchhiked. The guy who picked them up made them promise to pick up a hitchhiker in the future no matter what s/he looked like.



In the analysis for Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, Ann represented the mother figure, the person who always took care of Lucy. At this point in the book, Lucy's mother had not been mentioned, as opposed to Ann's parents. Therefore, Lucy lacked a mother. Ann took up the role of Lucy's mother by cleaning their apartment and cooking for Lucy without any complaint. This foreshadows that this mother role might be the role Ann took during the entire course of their friendship. In turn, Lucy took a child role. Lucy acted like a child or teenager. She had a fascination with her body, especially her breasts. She looked to Ann for reassurance of her body image. She liked to be babied and be taken care of by Ann. Thus both women fulfilled their predestined roles and because they knew their roles, they had no problem filling them.

Lucy's disfigured face controlled her life. It controlled the men she dated. It controlled her outlook on her own body. Lucy could not just be. She always had her face to worry about. Her breast implants were an overcompensation for her face as she tried to distract her own attention away from her face. Thus, she went ahead with the surgery not only because of her small breasts, but because Lucy needed to feel good about one area of her body. The new breasts represented a security blanket for body image issues.



Chapter 3 and Chapter 4

Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 3, Lucy was from Ireland, but her family came to the US when she was 4 years old. Her father died when she was 14. Lucy wrote in her letter that grief remained with her throughout life. She forgot she had cancer. Her father's memory haunted her all the time.

A film producer in Ireland contacted Lucy to do a documentary about her life and call it "The Triumph of the Human Spirit." Lucy agreed only because her father was a television personality and the producer knew her father. The film crew came, but Lucy decided not to go through with the documentary.

Lucy went back to writing her poetry. Poetry gave Lucy purpose and meaning. In a letter, Lucy wrote that her life became dependent on art.

Lucy continued to date B- even though he told her she was not going to amount to anything. Ann ran into B- and B- told Ann the same exact thing that Ann would not amount to anything other than a waitress. B- also made fun of Lucy for her lack of sexual experience. Lucy continued to worry that she would never find anyone to love her. Ann continued to tell her that was untrue and consoled her.

In a letter, Lucy wrote that her loneliness was her obsession. On cold mornings, Lucy crawled into Ann's bed with her. They both agreed they would one day look back on their time in Iowa with great fondness and nostalgia.

In Chapter 4, Ann moved out of the Governor Street apartment to move in with her boyfriend, Dennis, to a small cottage. She moved out even though he did not love her. Ann said it hurt her and Lucy's friendship. Ann and Lucy still saw each other all the time. They went to a fortune teller, who told Ann that she would be with Dennis forever. She told Lucy that she would always be alone and never have love or children. This devastated Lucy.

Lucy grew famous to everyone in Iowa, just the same as she was famous at Sarah Lawrence. Ann knew she was in a relationship with Dennis that was not going to last. Lucy looked fantastic during those days in Iowa, but she still had to endure future surgeries. Due to her radiation treatments as a child, her reconstructive surgeries never lasted. She complained and was depressed.

Lucy wrote in a letter that another surgery failed.

They left Iowa City. Lucy stayed in Iowa City for a bit longer then went to NYC and then to Berlin. Ann moved back to Nashville, worked in a bookstore and got married, but it was a problematic marriage from the start. She could not get a job teaching creative writing. She downplayed her resume and got a job as a waitress at TGIF. Ann made



good friends there and all of them strove for more. Meanwhile, Lucy went to Aberdeen, Scotland for innovative reconstructive surgery. Lucy saw every surgery as a chance to be more beautiful. Enduring surgery was a nightmare though. She had a saline balloon placed under her face and blown up. Lucy wrote the balloon was not working and made her depressed. Ann's mother advised Ann to save all their letters for when they were famous writers one day.

In the analysis for Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, the film producer served as a connection to Lucy's family. It was a connection not yet seen in the book. Ann's family was mentioned, but not Lucy's. The film producer symbolized a connection to Lucy's family and insight into Lucy's past. However, when he came to Iowa, he hardly talked about her father and discovered that Lucy was not the right subject for his documentary. When Lucy pulled out of the documentary, this represented her pulling away from the past and separating herself further from her family. In order to move forward, Lucy could not grieve over the past anymore. She could only grieve over her present problems.

Lucy's life was an anomaly. In other words, it was inconsistent. By day, she was the most loved and popular person at Iowa Writers' Workshop and even in Iowa City. When she was alone however, Lucy was an unhappy and depressed person. Lucy's love of people and to be surrounded by others and to be the center attention was not enough to fully satisfy her emotional needs. Even Ann was not enough to pull Lucy out of her depression. Lucy's motivation for living became art in the form of poetry. The words Lucy created symbolized an escape for her, and created a world which Lucy could manifest and control completely.



Chapter 5 and Chapter 6

Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 5, Lucy and Ann wrote to each other constantly. Lucy wrote she was happy when Ann and Dennis broke up. When they did, it confirmed for Lucy that the fortune teller was wrong about her not finding love. Ann and Lucy treated writing like it was a job. Writing was the way out of their miserable lives. They submitted articles, stories and they applied for fellowships. They felt very connected to each other because of this. Lucy was the more diligent one about applying to every fellowship, grant and contest. Aberdeen was a place where Lucy could just write.

Lucy wrote in a letter how much she hated life in Aberdeen. She hated everything about the depressing town. She kept getting rejected from fellowships, grants, etc. In November 1989, Ann's father bought Ann a ticket to visit Lucy in Aberdeen. Ann called it the best gift she ever received. Ann was shocked at seeing the balloon expander in Lucy's face. Ann realized how truly depressing Aberdeen was. Lucy's dorm looked like a YMCA. It rained all the time and there was hardly any sun. Ann and Lucy worked out at the gym and smoked cigarettes. Lucy had been bullied and made fun by other kids when she was young. The same thing happened in Aberdeen. The Scots laughed, screamed, teased, and chased her. Ann tried to defend Lucy one night against drunken men who teased her, but the men only laughed harder. On television one night in Aberdeen, Ann saw one of her professors from college discuss the publication of his first book. She decided then and there she would be like him and Lucy. She would write her way into a better life.

Ann was divorced by this time. Her sister got married and didn't invite the family. Ann was hurt and sad. Ann wanted Lucy to give her compassion, but Lucy said Ann will always be fine because this was Ann's blessing.

In Chapter 6, Ann left Aberdeen. Ann and Lucy applied to the same fellowships. Their dream was to both be accepted into the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, which was a seven month fellowship to write. Ann was a finalist for the prestigious Bunting Fellowship at Radcliffe at Harvard University. Ann saw an old friend, whom she had to humiliatingly serve at TGIFriday's. Ann did not get the Bunting Fellowship. Lucy got a fellowship, but had to turn it down to get more surgeries. Ann finally got accepted into Provincetown, but Lucy did not. Lucy was happy for her.

Ann went to Provincetown. She was lonely. She knocked on doors in the writers' colony until someone opened up. Elizabeth McCracken, a future famous writer, opened up her door and a lifelong friendship began. Ann was happy. She had completed the first hundred pages of her novel. She and Elizabeth edited each other's work. Lucy visited in December and immediately went to party. Lucy became good friends with Eli, Ann's boyfriend, and Elizabeth. Lucy stayed for a while and made friends with everyone. Ann finished her first novel in April called *The Patron Saint of Liars*.



Lucy won the Yaddo fellowship for the summer and then the Bunting fellowship, which gave her a \$23,000 stipend and unlimited privileges from Harvard. Ann had an agent and gave her novel to her. Ann drove from Provincetown to Nashville and by the time she was in Nashville, her novel had sold. She was a published author.

Lucy started Yaddo and worked on poetry. Ann had a new book contract and taught in Kentucky. Ann felt she and Lucy were in the right places. They were lucky.

In the analysis for Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, Lucy's struggle with her facial surgery and the balloon symbolized her struggle with her life in general and her attempts to become a famous writer. The balloon was uncomfortable, noticeable and caused her humiliation and depression. In turn, this was a direct representation of how Lucy felt about her life in general. Additionally, Lucy's struggle also manifested in Ann's struggle. Ann struggled to come to the truth she was only a waitress. This reality caused her humiliation and depression as well. Lucy's struggles with her face connected both her and Ann, since their lives were so interwoven with one another. When Lucy's face began to heal, their lives began to heal as well. Ann received the Provincetown fellowship and Lucy moved out of Aberdeen and finally won two fellowships.

Ann took on the mothering role once again as she tried to defend Lucy against the drunken men. Her first instinct, like a mother, was to scream and hit the men. She attacked them with force, but all the men could do was laugh harder. Ann felt protective of Lucy and even risked confronting drunken men to protect her. But in the end, it did not work. The men laughed harder, leaving Ann and Lucy to walk away. As a mother figure, Ann learned she could not protect Lucy from everyone and certainly in Aberdeen, it was impossible to protect Lucy.

Ann's relied heavily on her writing career to assess whether she was a success or not. While she had good friends at TGIF, she was not a success. When she and Lucy wrote letters to each other and maintained a close friendship, she was not a success. Finally, when Ann won the Provincetown fellowship, she felt better about herself. When she sold her first novel, she felt successful. Thus, Ann equated success with career. Ann's motivations were solely focused on her career and her motivation helped her achieve her goal.



Chapter 7 and Chapter 8

Chapter 7 and Chapter 8 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 7, Lucy found strength and camaraderie in suffering and cruelty. It helped her deal with her own life. Lucy wrote in a letter that she read Primo Levi's Auschwitz book and it comforted her. She pretended she was in a concentration camp for days. It made her think about writing non-fiction instead of a novel. Lucy wrote in another letter about her visit to Prague. She visited the old Jewish ghetto and saw the children's drawings of Terezin, the concentration camp. She was moved and upset. She cried. She felt empty about art. It was her 28th birthday.

In Chapter 8, when Ann was young, she thought being a starving writer would be romantic and glamorous. It was not. Lucy fell into a lucky situation at Yaddo because she and the writers lived in a beautiful mansion where the writers had maid and food service. To call Yaddo was a major event. It was before cell phones, and everyone fought for the one phone line. Ann made sure to call all the time so Lucy would feel the most loved.

They never landed the same fellowship at the same time. Lucy surrounded herself with friends and roommates in Boston. Lucy went into therapy and discovered she could not stop her low self-esteem. Lucy wrote an autobiographical essay about cancer and her face that amazed Ann. It was so powerful and beautiful. She won an award for it. She finally won the Provincetown fellowship. In November 1991, Ann moved to Kentucky and dated a poet. Lucy was furious because she was jealous. She made sure Ann loved her the most. Lucy's face had improved and she had a book coming out. Lucy said she could write the book. Lucy was not mad at Ann anymore for dating the poet.

In the analysis for Chapter 7 and Chapter 8, Lucy's obsession with the Holocaust foreshadowed a possible complete mental breakdown. As the letters continued, Lucy wrote more about her sadness. She felt connected to sadness and suffering. When she pretended she was in a concentration camp for days, she began to lose touch with reality. Though she did not want to feel alone in her depression, pretending to be a concentration camp prisoner for days was not normal behavior. However, Ann did not worry about this abnormal behavior. Instead, she seemed to think it was just Lucy's way of coping. This fictional world Lucy created set up a complete break down or mania within Lucy for the future.



Chapter 9 and Chapter 10

Chapter 9 and Chapter 10 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 9, Lucy felt she didn't accomplish enough in Bunting. She felt hopeful about Provincetown. She had a book to finish with a deadline. Lucy hated the process of writing. Lucy could not write in Provincetown. She partied and looked for things to do. Lucy fell in love for the first time with a painter. They slept together a few times, but he just wanted to be friends. Lucy cried because she did not want to be alone anymore. By spring, Lucy was still upset over the painter and she had to leave Provincetown. Her book deadline had passed and Lucy was not close to finished. Lucy finished it at the last possible second and it was perfect. Meanwhile, Ann had to labor at her own writing.

Ann finally won the Bunting fellowship and moved to Boston. Lucy was in NYC, so they would see each other a lot. Ann met a philanthropist adviser in NYC. He was an older man who charmed her. He told her how much he loved her book and he wanted to help her and her friends succeed. Ann was thrilled. Then he revealed his real intention. He was in love with Ann. He stalked Ann for a while and then let up. Ann was afraid her dismissal of him would lead to her not winning the Whiting Award and her writing friends not getting funded.

Lucy got an abortion. Lucy and Ann saw Ann's book cover and they screamed in delight. Ann did not win the Whiting Award, but Lucy did.

In Chapter 10, Lucy was famous. They picked out an outfit for her to wear on the Today Show. People flocked to Lucy in NYC, just like at Sarah Lawrence or in Iowa. She was a literary star. Lucy was in fashion magazines and in People. Lucy was finally being recognized for her writing, not just her face. Lucy kept asking if she would ever have sex again. Ann told her she would. Lucy also asked if Ann loved her and if she was pretty. Lucy was shameful about how she ate, but she was not shameful about sex. Lucy's memoir, *Autobiography of a Face*, came out to rave reviews. Ann and Lucy had readings and signings together, but Lucy had all the fans and attention. Lucy did not listen to her cancer survivor fans. She wanted all the attention for herself.

In the analysis for Chapter 9 and Chapter 10, Ann revealed her own insecurities. Until this point in the book, she mostly discussed Lucy's true insecurities. Her situation with the philanthropist adviser showed Ann's lack of self esteem. Even though the situation seemed bad, Ann still naively believed the adviser and was thrilled that he loved her book. This showed Ann's insecurity. As Lucy discovered that she cannot stop her low self-esteem, Ann realized that she had the same problem. Ann spent so much time focusing on Lucy's insecurities and helping her feel secure that Ann neglected taking a closer look at herself. Due to the adviser, Ann was forced to see that she was naive and lacked confidence.

Lucy's fame did not cause a rift in the friendship. Ann was happy for Lucy, even though her book was not nearly as successful. Ann demonstrated unconditional love throughout the book, and when Lucy became famous, she continued to show it. Ann's motivation was to love Lucy with all her heart and to share in her success. Jealousy did not factor into the equation. Ann would not let it. Ann remained a true friend, despite having to watch Lucy rise to fame while she did not.



Chapter 11 and Chapter 12

Chapter 11 and Chapter 12 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 11, Ann moved back to Nashville and started to date Karl. He was a doctor, which Lucy liked. Lucy fell in love with all her doctors and she fantasized that they fell in love with her. Ann dating Karl was Lucy's penultimate fantasy. Ann brought Karl to NYC in October 1994 to meet Lucy. Karl listened to Lucy's medical history over brunch. Karl said he would find the right doctors to get her teeth. He said it was easy to find the money and right doctors.

Lucy flew to Nashville. She met with an oral surgeon who said he could not give her teeth. Lucy was embarrassed Ann saw inside of her mouth. A plastic surgeon also said giving Lucy teeth was not possible. Karl said they tried. But Ann was devastated. Lucy understood that Karl spoke to Lucy as a doctor, not as a miracle worker.

In Chapter 12, Lucy was terrible with money. She owed a huge amount of debt and forgot to cash checks. Ann gave her money to help her. Magazine editors wanted Lucy to write for them, but she would not complete the assignments or did not want to do it. Lucy read her tango essay at a Provincetown reading, which was scandalous. She talked about masturbating 17 times. The audience was unaffected, but Ann was shocked.

Lucy went back to teaching. Lucy was getting nowhere on her book proposal. She finally finished it in January 1998. It sold and she decided to write a novel. Lucy had money from her advance. Lucy read Ann an excerpt of her draft and Ann believed Lucy was a poet and novelist.

In the analysis for Chapter 11 and Chapter 12, Ann's naivety was brought to the surface. Ann naively believed that Karl, a doctor from Nashville, could help Lucy get teeth. She naively was shocked by Lucy's story about masturbation. Therefore, Ann symbolized the innocence of the book, while Lucy symbolized the fall from innocence. Lucy was shameless about sex and talking about sex. She was wild and crazy. Ann played everything close to the vest, whether it was her writing or her committed relationships to different men. However, this juxtaposition melded the friendship into one cohesive bond. The ying-yang friendship of Ann and Lucy represented the friendship that many people can relate to. As friends, they might be polar opposites, but in the end, they were perfect for each other.



Chapter 13 and Chapter 14

Chapter 13 and Chapter 14 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 13, loneliness swallowed Lucy. She dated two painters, Steve and Andy, but she felt there were better guys out there for her. She felt completely alone. Lucy had a ton of friends, but she felt romantic love was missing. It consumed her. She placed a personal ad and went on a date with George Stephanopoulos. But there were no sparks. Lucy began to see psychiatrists. She would ask them if she was pretty and if she would ever have sex again. She seemed happier. Lucy was on antidepressants. She prepared for another reconstructive surgery. Over dinner with Ann and Karl, Lucy discussed a new surgery where the doctor would take a bone in her leg, the fibula, and use it for her jaw. After that surgery, the doctor would put bolts in her jaw. Her Scottish surgeon, Mr. Fenton, thought the surgery was too new and risky. Lucy scheduled the surgery for June 2000.

Ann helped Lucy sort through her bills. This made Lucy happy.

In Chapter 14, Ann got chicken pox that morphed into horrible hives. Her eye was swollen shut and she had large, red hives all over her. People moved away from her and stared at her. She traveled to NYC anyway because Lucy was to have her surgery. Lucy said she would worry about finding love after all of her surgeries. She had too much to worry about now. Lucy said she would write her book during her recovery.

Lucy had friends visit around the clock to not feel lonely. All the surgeons went on vacation in July. Ann nursed Lucy herself. Ann took over her medical care and instructed the surgical residents. Ann demanded Lucy get pain medication. Lucy roomed with an intrusive woman who said Lucy was lucky because she had all these friends around. She told Lucy things will get better. Ann had Lucy transferred to another room. Lucy finally left the hospital. Ann carried her up to Lucy's apartment. She filled every pain prescription available for Lucy. Ann finally left in a tearful goodbye.

In the analysis for Chapter 13 and Chapter 14, Lucy spiraled downward into her depression and loneliness for a while. Though she had fame and good friends, nothing could stop this downward spiral. Ann began to take notice of Lucy's depression, since Lucy went to psychiatrists. This foreshadowed that Lucy might struggle with depression and it might lead to a serious consequence. Lucy could only stay happy for a little while and then she was back immersed in her depression again.

Ann's hives were worse than Lucy's post surgical face. Ann finally received an understanding of what it was like to be Lucy for one day. She realized how Lucy must struggle with what she saw in the mirror every day. Thus, Ann turned into more of a mother figure, since she literally nursed Lucy in the hospital. She fed and washed her and brought Lucy to the bathroom. She carried Lucy up to her apartment. Therefore, Ann was the ultimate mother figure, not giving up on Lucy in the hardest of times.



Chapter 15 and Chapter 16

Chapter 15 and Chapter 16 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 15, the pain in Lucy's leg was still there. She was happy with the surgical results in her face so far. The doctors said teeth would come down the line. Lucy started to ask more questions about how she looked and if anyone would love her. Ann bought a house in Nashville and was still dating Karl. Lucy liked Ann's house and deemed the guest room "Lucy's room." Ann tried to convince Lucy to stay in Nashville, but Lucy planned to have another surgery. Ann thought Lucy's depression and moods stemmed from hardly eating, drinking too much and never sleeping. Lucy gave Ann a book of her doodles for a Christmas present. Ann thought it was sweet, but Lucy avoided writing her novel. Lucy was good when she was in Nashville. But Lucy revealed back in NYC and Vermont, she dabbled in heroin. She also wanted to drink and take Percosets and drive her car into a tree. Ann told her to stop all of it.

Lucy published a book of essays that did not do well. Lucy went to have the bolts put in her face. But when the doctors opened her up, they discovered the bone was too fragile. They could not put the bolts in. They could not help Lucy anymore. Ann talked on the phone with her and cried. She came to the realization, this was it. Lucy could not be cured.

Lucy began to cut herself. She did more drugs. She talked of suicide or committing herself to a mental hospital. Upon Ann's advice, Lucy committed herself to a mental ward. But she was not admitted for a day, so Ann told her to get one of her doctors to help her sign out. Lucy flew out to Nashville. Ann set ground rules that Lucy could not do drugs while she stayed with her.

Ann realized she could not make Lucy happy. Lucy discussed the characters in her novel with Ann. Ann said she would write the novel for Lucy. Lucy was mortified. Ann tried to convince Lucy to live with her, but Lucy said no.

In Chapter 16, Ann was in NYC for memorial service for her editor. She was there on September 11, 2001. She sat in a restaurant as it happened. She went near the World Trade Center to look and then ended up in the mob of running people. Ann was upset and could not leave Manhattan. Lucy was not in Manhattan and felt left out.

Lucy had another surgery and looked horrible afterwards. Lucy had tons of visitors and she wanted her doctor, Stuart, to love her. Lucy was in horrible condition. She cried and was disoriented. She went home. Ann picked up her prescriptions, including a new one for OxyContin, which was a miracle pain reliever. Lucy began to grind the OxyContin and snort it.

In the analysis for Chapter 15 and Chapter 16, Lucy and Ann realized that they came to the end of the line with surgeries. The best doctors in New York operated on Lucy and



could not help her. Lucy fully understood this, and thus began her final descent into depression. To cope, she used drugs to mask the emotional and literal pain. Lucy's motivations, which were once to write her way into a better life and to fix her face, turned into suicide. All of her actions and thoughts dwelled on suicide. There was no reasoning with her, not even from her best friend. Therefore, this foreshadowed the last 10 pages of the book, which led up to her eventual suicide. Lucy could not endure life anymore and her motivation was to find a way out. Drugs were her way out.

Meanwhile, Ann fully recognized Lucy's descent. It was no longer a matter of consoling or comforting her. Lucy was on her way down and no one, including Ann, could make her happy. Ann's motivations turned into trying to help her friend recover and not spiral into a depression. But Ann could not help her. Lucy's depression overtook Ann's life, and at this point, Ann could not control the situation. This was a new feeling for Ann because she was always in control of Lucy before, especially during their days in Iowa or in her ability to make her happy. Ann knew she had lost complete control.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 17, Lucy went to AA and Narcotics Anonymous to no avail. Ann used to hear from Lucy every day, but now she went weeks without hearing from her. Lucy had a cycle where she swore to Ann she would stop heroin, but then would continue taking it. Lucy had good days too, where she was happy and talked with her psychiatrist. Lucy refused to lie to Ann and said she was doing heroin. In February 2002, Lucy slit her wrists. She was admitted to the hospital. Lucy recovered. She called Ann once in a while and lied by telling her she was writing.

Meanwhile, Ann's fourth novel *Bel Canto* was a bestseller. Ann went to an award dinner and Lucy was high and embarrassed her the whole night. Lucy was fired from her teaching job in Bennington. Lucy lost her apartment and moved to Brooklyn. She hated it. She applied for premed classes, got in and never went. Ann thought Lucy made frivolous suicide attempts and Lucy would not die. She would be the last one left. Lucy headed for rehab in Connecticut. Once she was better, they could call these the "heroin years."

In the analysis for Chapter 17, Ann firmly believed Lucy would not die. Though Lucy was in an obvious cycle of drug abuse and suicide attempts, Ann believed her friend to be invincible. Again, Ann's naivety was her downfall as she did not see what was right in front of her. Ann still symbolized the innocence of the book, while Lucy more than ever symbolized the loss of innocence as she was a heavy drug user. Ann's innocence remained throughout the book until the very end. This foreshadowed the impending doom of Lucy's death.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 18, Ann went to rehab but did not like it. She did not feel like an addict. She wanted to go back to NYC. Ann went to NYC for a movie premier and book party, but did not tell Lucy. Ann wanted to have fun and not have to deal with Lucy embarrassing her. In their last conversation, Lucy said she wanted to go to Ann's mother's house for Christmas. Ann and Lucy said they missed and they loved each other. They agreed to talk every day. On December 18, 2002, Ann arrived back in Nashville. She got a phone call saying Lucy was dead. It was an accidental heroin overdose.

Ann dreamed of her night after night. When they were in Iowa, they went to see a movie. After Lucy died, Ann thought about the movie constantly. Ann believed Lucy would not die. That was her mistake.

In the analysis for Chapter 18, Ann realized her own naivety finally. This symbolized a loss of innocence in Ann. Lucy's death also symbolized a complete loss of innocence for both Ann and Lucy. There was nothing left but sadness and the feeling that Ann made a huge mistake. Nothing could be reconciled in death, thus Ann must accept it and move on. Lucy, her best friend, and her "pet" as she lovingly referred to her, died as a great writer, and as a person who could not cope with her own life. Lucy's story was the story of many others.



Characters

Ann Patchett

Ann Patchett was the narrator of this book. She was a young woman who graduated from Sarah Lawrence College. She was accepted into the prestigious Iowa Writer's Workshop at the University of Iowa. The summer before school started, Ann traveled out to Iowa to find housing for the school year. She found housing for both herself and a young woman she knew from Sarah Lawrence named Lucy Grealy. From the start of living together, Ann and Lucy built a lifelong friendship.

Ann was always in awe of Lucy. Due to Lucy's disfigured face from childhood cancer, Lucy received a lot of attention on both the Sarah Lawrence and Iowa campuses. Lucy was a rock star for her ailment and her incredible writing. In comparison, Ann was quieter and more organized. Ann practiced her writing endlessly to improve. She had to keep a clean house and cooked meals every night. Yet, Ann also had a fun side to her. She loved to drink and party with Lucy. Ann was a pretty blond who had no problems getting boyfriends.

After Ann left Iowa, she found herself floundering in Nashville. Instead of being the famous writer she dreamed of, she worked in a TGIF as a waitress. She struggled with the fact she was only a waitress. Finally, after years of hard work, Ann's dreams came true. She was a published author after all. During this time, Ann struggled with helping Lucy from far away with her depression. They wrote letters back and forth to console each other.

When they both hit it big with writing, Ann paled in comparison to Lucy. Lucy was the shining star of the literary world, while Ann was happy to take a backseat. During this time though, Lucy began to become addicted to heroin and other drugs. Ann continued to fly out and help Lucy with her surgeries and her addiction, while trying to stay on task with her flourishing writing career. In the end, Ann struggled between helping Lucy and wanting to let her go, since she couldn't take care of her anymore.

Lucy Grealy

Lucy Grealy was a shining, literary star at Sarah Lawrence College. She was also a star for her disfigured face. Due to childhood cancer and chemotherapy, she had lost a large portion of her jaw and only had six front teeth. All her life, she had reconstructive surgeries to rebuild her face. But after every surgery, the results were the same: the jaw bone would not stay in place. Her face still looked noticeably disfigured.

Lucy and Ann lived together at Iowa Writers' Workshop. Lucy was a carefree spirit who loved entertaining and loved being around people. She always drank and partied. She was not diligent in regard to her writing, but anything she wrote at the last minute was brilliant. Lucy was a natural talent. In Iowa, she was a rock star too because of her



writing, vibrant personality and her disfigured face. Lucy thrived on being the center of attention at all times, especially to Ann. Lucy's two big insecurities were her looks and that fact she would never be loved by a man.

Lucy moved to Aberdeen, Scotland for more facial surgeries. Aberdeen was her own personal hell. People made fun of her constantly, which reminded her of her childhood. She kept some sanity by writing letters to Ann. Lucy was diligent in sending out writing submissions and applications to fellowships. Finally, she received two fellowships and left Aberdeen. She was happy to come back to the US. She thrived in these fellowships and was the life of the party once again.

Lucy became an extremely successful published author. She was the star of the NYC literary world. Her book entitled *Autobiography of a Face* was a bestseller. She was happy that she was noticed for her writing, not her face. However, Lucy's depression took a downward spiral after her last surgery which did not work. She had 39 surgeries in total. She manifested her grief in her new addiction to heroin and other drugs. She attempted suicide many times. She died of an accidental heroin overdose in 2002.

B-

B- was the name of a man Lucy had a continual sexual relationship with in Iowa. B- was arrogant and negative. He told both her and Ann they would never amount to anything.

Nancy Tate

Nancy Tate lived next door to Ann and Lucy in Iowa. She was a young mother and nice neighbor who would take them grocery shopping. After her son was asleep, she would come over to Ann and Lucy's apartment to drink wine and talk about Hegel and Marx.

Dennis

Dennis was Ann's boyfriend. Ann moved out of the apartment with Lucy and moved in with Dennis, even though he did not love her. Ann said it was a huge mistake, but she did it anyway.

Jan

Jan was a fortune teller that Ann and Lucy visited. Jan told Ann she was going to be with Dennis forever. Jan told Lucy she would never be loved, which confirmed Lucy's worst fears.



Elizabeth McCracken

Elizabeth McCracken was a fellow author Ann met during her time at a fellowship in Provincetown. They became very close friends and editors for each other's work. Lucy became friends with Elizabeth too.

Eil Gottlieb

Eli Gottlieb was a boyfriend of Ann's. Eli was the male version of Lucy. He and Lucy became good friends.

Mr. Fenton

Mr. Fenton was Lucy's surgeon who tried to reconstruct her face, but in the end he could not.

Philanthropist adviser

The philanthropist adviser contacted Ann to tell her how much he admired her book. He promised to help Ann and her writing friends. He confessed his love for her, stalked her for a while, and then finally left her alone.

Mark Levine

Mark Levine was an award-winning poet Ann dated. Lucy did not like him because she thought he took awards away from her poetry.

Karl Van-Devender

Karl Van-Devender was an older and rich doctor who Ann's mom worked for. Karl and Ann began a long-lasting relationship. He was extremely kind to Lucy, even when she was addicted to heroin. He tried to help Lucy with her face to no avail.



Objects/Places

Aesop's Fables

Aesop's Fables were ancient tales written by Greek storyteller, Aesop. The tales taught lessons of morality. Today, Aesop's Fables are still extremely popular such as The Tortoise and the Hare and The Boy Who Cried Wolf.

House on Governor Street

The house on Governor Street was where Ann and Lucy lived while attending Iowa Writers' Workshop. It was a modest place, but the rent was cheap. Ann and Lucy built the foundation of their lifelong friendship there.

Iowa Writers' Workshop

Iowa Writers' Workshop was a famous and extremely prestigious creative writing program at the University of Iowa. Today, IWW is still considered to be the number one creative writing program in the US.

Cottage

Ann left the Governor Street apartment and moved in with her boyfriend Dennis to a small cottage. The cottage had a television and a VCR. Ann and Lucy worked out to Jane Fonda. Lucy would sneak guys in when Ann and Dennis were gone to have sex in their bed.

Aberdeen

Aberdeen, Scotland was where Lucy lived for a while to have reconstructive surgeries. It was a depressing town where the residents made fun of her. The only highlight of the town was when Neighbours, an Australian soap opera, came on every week. Lucy hated Aberdeen and could not wait to leave.

Provincetown

Provincetown, Massachusetts, on Cape Cod, was the site of Ann's first fellowship. She lived there for seven months and completed her first novel. Provincetown helped Ann begin her literary career. Lucy also was a fellow there a couple years later.



Yaddo

Both Ann and Lucy lived at Yaddo, but not at the same time. Yaddo was a writers' residence in Saratoga Springs, NY. When Ann was there, it was normal. But when Lucy came a couple years later, Yaddo had moved into a beautiful mansion with food and maid service. It was the ultimate in luxury for a writers' retreat.

Bunting Institute at Radcliffe

The Bunting Institute was a part of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies at Harvard University. Bunting was a highly prestigious place for creative writers and fellows from other disciplines to hone their craft. Ann received a fellowship at Bunting and flourished in her writing.

Autobiography of a Face

Autobiography of a Face was the name of Lucy's first nonfiction book. It was a bestselling, powerfully-written memoir that made her a literary star.

Demerol

Demerol is a pain medication similar to morphine. Lucy took it after her last surgery and became addicted to drugs.



Themes

Unconditional Love

The overriding theme of this book was unconditional love. Ann and Lucy both tested each other in regard to their friendship, especially in regard to Lucy's depression, but almost any problem could be solved with unconditional love. When Ann and Lucy moved in together in Iowa, the unconditional love began even in the form of household chores. Ann simply accepted Lucy would not cook or clean. Ann did these tasks and never complained. When Ann moved out on Lucy their second year in Iowa, Lucy never complained. She accepted the situation and continued to befriend and love Ann.

After Iowa, both women went through a period of hardship. They wrote letters to each other to keep up their spirits. Lucy's hardships often trumped those of Ann's. Ann felt Lucy needed to focus on her and her problems for once. Though Ann did not receive the response she craved from Lucy, she continued to nurture and listen about her depression. As they both began to receive writing opportunities and flourish as writers, they took pride in each other's successes. They had book signings together, though Lucy received all the attention. Ann was not jealous.

Lucy became a literary star in NYC when her memoir was published. But Ann did not. Lucy shared in her success continually with Ann. As Lucy recovered from a series of surgeries, Ann continually flew in from Nashville to NYC to take care of her. She was literally Lucy's nurse. She fed and bathed her, and brought her to the bathroom. As Lucy's life began to spiral downwards due to drugs and depression, Ann continued to include her and take care of her emotionally. Though Ann went through a brief period of possibly cutting ties with Lucy, after Lucy died, Ann said she would have still taken care of her. It was a friendship of true unconditional love.

Mother Figure

A theme of the book was the mother figure. Lucy was a person that was so weighed down by her insecurities that she constantly needed a mother figure to take care of her. Interestingly enough, the mention of Lucy's own mother was rarely in the book. Lucy went to visit her rarely, but the reader never saw the visits. Instead, Ann took the place of Lucy's mother. At their Iowa apartment, Ann cooked and cleaned without complaint. Ann constantly answered Lucy's questions of insecurity such as if she looked pretty or if she would ever find love. She answered Lucy with love and compassion, ensuring her everything would be alright.

As the book progressed, other mother figures began to show up. Lucy's female friends also served as mother figures in NYC because Ann lived in Nashville. They became Lucy's nurses at the hospital when Ann was not there. Ann was still Lucy's mother figure



as she fed and bathed her at the hospital. She also took charge of Lucy's medical care, speaking with doctors and nurses on her behalf.

Another mother figure was Ann's mother to Lucy. Ann's mother adored Lucy. Lucy would come to Nashville to celebrate Christmas and Ann's mother would treat her like a real daughter. Lucy basked in the attention.

As Lucy's depression and drug use took over, Ann tried to reason with Lucy. She told her to stop using drugs and threatened to cut off communication if she kept using. Thus, she tried to use discipline to help Lucy. But nothing worked. Lucy died. Ann felt an incredible loss, speaking of Lucy as if she lost a sister, best friend and child all at the same time.

Beauty

Beauty was a constant theme in this book. Beauty was an ongoing insecurity and fear of Lucy's. The idea of being beautiful influenced Lucy in her everyday life. Lucy constantly asked Ann if she was beautiful and if she would ever find love. She had extreme body issues as well. Instead of seeing what Ann saw, a tiny woman with beautiful legs, Lucy saw an ugly person. She complained about her "fat" legs and her breasts. She felt unattractive because she had small breasts. In the name of beauty, Lucy decided to take out a government loan and pay for breast implants. She went through with the surgery and got small implants put into her chest.

As Ann and Lucy saw each other sporadically after Iowa, Ann would see that Lucy looked great. She saw that an outfit or jeans fit her perfectly and complimented Lucy on her beauty. But Lucy concentrated on her face. In fact, Lucy overdressed many times to compensate for her face. She wore stylish clothes out to the local bar. She cut her hair often and tried to look as beautiful as possible.

In contrast, Ann was a pretty blond woman. Her beauty was obvious because she had no problem dating and finding boyfriends. Though Ann discussed Lucy's beauty in the book, she did not discuss her own. Ann did not have the strong insecurities such as Lucy. She did not define herself by beauty such as Lucy either. But Ann continually found the beauty in Lucy's face and body. Ann's definition of beauty was one of looking within the person. As for the physical aspect of beauty, she also found beauty from simple things such as a cocktail dress Lucy looked beautiful in, or Lucy's flawless legs. Ann was able to see the beauty in Lucy whereas Lucy could not do that for herself.

Style

Perspective

The perspective of this book was told from the first-person perspective of Ann Patchett. The perspective details focused on the relationship between Ann and Lucy. It focused on the details of their lives from their time in Iowa to the different paths their lives took. Ann discussed not only her life and struggles, but she also discussed Lucy's life and struggles, even though Lucy was far away in Scotland or somewhere else. The perspective allowed the reader to feel connected to Lucy even though she was not present. Ann was a reliable narrator who discussed Lucy from a detailed and factual perspective. She described Lucy's surgeries and the outcome of her face in great detail. She described Lucy's struggles with reconstructive surgeries, depression and drugs with an emotional and sympathetic perspective of a best friend.

The story was told through exposition and dialogue. Ann would discuss her and Lucy's life through feelings and interactions with other characters. The longest dialogue or conversations was when Ann and Lucy spoke to each other over the phone or in person. The other people in this book rarely had a voice, even love interests or Ann's mother.

The reader also received Lucy's perspective through letters that were interspersed throughout the book. Ann and Lucy wrote letters to each other while they were living far apart. Ann did not put her own letters to Lucy in the book. Lucy's letters served as a third person perspective for the reader to understand the suffering she endured, especially in Aberdeen. Lucy's letters show her childishness, insecurities, fun-loving nature, carelessness, and passion for life and her dear friend Ann.

Tone

The tone of the book fluctuated between fun, sadness, and hope. In Iowa, the tone was fun and lighthearted. Ann and Lucy began to build the foundation of their friendship and had fun doing so by simply having fun. They drank and partied. They danced for hours on end. They talked about silly things and exchanged clothes. Ann's tone was one of a fun-loving young woman who found another fun-loving young woman.

As the two left Iowa, the tone changed to sadness. Both women tried to find their way in the world, but they kept struggling. Ann worked at TGIFriday's instead of being the famous writer she dreamed of being. Lucy had reconstructive surgeries and lived in depressing Aberdeen instead of being a famous writer. Through Ann's first person perspective and Lucy's letters, the tone shifted into a deep sadness and hopelessness as they both tried to win fellowships and get published. As they failed together, their tone continued to be sad.



That was until Ann received her first break and won a fellowship to Provincetown. The tone shifted from despair to hopefulness from both Ann and Lucy. Ann was happy and Lucy was excited for her. Lucy got her big break as well. As the women began to flourish in their literary careers, the hopeful tone endured, especially since Lucy decided to undergo a miracle surgery for her jaw bone. When the surgery failed and Lucy spiraled downward into depression and drugs, the tone of the book switched once again to despair. Lucy wanted to die. Ann was growing frustrated, almost discontinuing contact with Lucy. When Lucy died, the tone was of complete sadness as Ann thought Lucy was invincible and realized she certainly was not.

Structure

The book was divided into 18 chapters. The chapters were unnamed and simply read Chapter 1, Chapter 2, etc. The chapter length varied from 10 to 20 or more pages. The structure of the book was from Ann's first person perspective as she moved through time from their days at Iowa Writers' Workshop in 1985 to Lucy's death in NYC in 2002. The span of the book was 17 years in total. The time line moved in chronological order, with only a few excerpts of back story. Ann gave the perspective of her life and Lucy's life, even though Lucy was not physically in the same location as her throughout most of the book. Lucy's letters to Ann also moved time for the reader as s/he saw what Lucy was doing in a given time period.

The book moved through years, not days. Events marked Ann and Lucy's lives. When Ann and Lucy lived together in Iowa, that was a large portion of the book. When Ann worked at TGIFriday's and Lucy was in Aberdeen having reconstructive surgery, that was a chunk of time in the book. In the period when they both received fellowships and writing opportunities, that was another large portion of time. Thus, time moved by the major events in their lives, not by a calendar.

The book was simple and without subplots. The main of plot of Ann and Lucy's friendship and journey to success was the main focus. The book's pace was neither fast nor slow. It moved at a moderate pace. It was the average speed for an everyday reader, or an adult reader. It was an easy read with some difficult vocabulary throughout the exposition. When an unknown fellowship, award, or place came up in the text, Ann defined and described it thoroughly, so the pace continued to flow seamlessly.



Quotes

"I was twenty-one and on my way to be a fiction writer" (Chapter 1, pg. 1.)

"She could talk. She could talk on the nature of truth and beauty for hours, and after all, what novel or poem or play in an Introduction to Literature class couldn't benefit from a truth-and-beauty discussion?" (Chapter 2, pg. 18.)

"Grasshoppers and hares find the ants and tortoises. They need us to survive, but we need them as well" (Chapter 2, pg. 20.)

"Iowa City in the eighties was never going to be Paris in the twenties, but we gave it our best shot" (Chapter 2, pg. 23.)

"I left the house where I lived with someone who loved me to go to the house of someone who did not love me at all" (Chapter 4, pg. 45.)

"Our friendship was like our writing in some ways. It was the only thing that was interesting about our otherwise very dull lives" (Chapter 6, pg. 73.)

"Her life was no longer a metaphor for something else. It was a narrative that was itself as powerful and magnetic as she was a person" (Chapter 8, pg. 105.)

"You can't just make a decision not to think about something. It doesn't work that way" (Chapter 15, pg. 202.)

"I liked to think there was a moment in my life when I could have been a grasshopper and never thought of winter at all" (Chapter 15, pg. 203.)

"Now things were bad and she would come home to me and pretend that she lived the life of the very straight" (Chapter 15, p. 212.)

"With the body I could be tirelessly helpful, but with her psyche, her heart, I simply froze sometimes" (Chapter 16, pg. 228.)

"If Lucy couldn't give up the heroin, I could not give up Lucy" (Chapter 18, pg. 253.)



Topics for Discussion

What was the truth of this book? Did either Ann or Lucy find the truth and if so, what was it? If not, what was the missing truth of this book?

Beauty was a major theme in this book. How was beauty defined by Ann and by Lucy? How did others define Lucy's beauty? In society, how do we define beauty? From reading this book, is our idea of beauty right or wrong?

Did you agree that Ann Patchett wrote this book? Lucy's sister was upset it was published, and believed Ann did Lucy a disservice. Did you feel Lucy was wrongly portrayed? Did you feel anything was disrespectful to Lucy? Did you receive a full scope of Lucy's personality and being?

How did Ann and Lucy define success? Was their definition of success accurate? In the end, despite being famous writers, did they have personal success in their relationship? Who was the most successful person in the book?

Ann and Lucy's friendship was strange at times, especially when Lucy sat on Ann's lap and they referred to each other with pet names. Did you find this friendship unsettling, or did you feel they were crossing boundaries? Have you ever had a friendship where you were "in love" in a sense with your friend? Was Ann and Lucy's definition of friendship correct, or not?

Did you feel Lucy's letters served their purpose? Did they give Lucy a strong enough voice? Would the book have been better without the letters, or with Ann's letters to Lucy? Was there any other way to give Lucy's voice and perspective without the letters?

Was Ann trying to tell the reader anything? Was she telling a fable in her own way? What lesson did you learn from their friendship? How could you carry it into your friendships with others?