

Winner of the Newbery Medal

the
higher
power
of
Lucky



★ "A small gem." – Kirkus Reviews, *starred review*

by **susan patron** with illustrations by **matt phelan**



1. eavesdropping

Lucky Trimble crouched in a wedge of shade behind the Dumpster. Her ear near a hole in the paint-chipped wall of Hard Pan's Found Object Wind Chime Museum and Visitor Center, she listened as Short Sammy told the story of how he hit rock bottom. How he quit drinking and found his Higher Power. Short Sammy's story, of all the rock-bottom stories Lucky had heard at twelve-step anonymous meetings—alcoholics, gamblers, smokers, and overeaters—was still her favorite.

Sammy told of the day when he had drunk half a gallon of rum listening to Johnny Cash all morning in his parked '62 Cadillac, then fallen out of the car when he saw a rattlesnake on the passenger seat biting his dog, Roy, on the scrotum.

Lucky balanced herself with a hand above the little hole that Short Sammy's voice was coming out of. With her other hand, she lifted the way-too-curly hair off her neck. She noticed two small black birds nearby, panting like dogs from the heat, their beaks open, their feathers puffed up. She put her ear to the

hole because Sammy's voice always got low and soft when he came to the tragical end of the story.

But Short Sammy didn't head right to the good part. To stretch it out and get more suspense going for the big ending, he veered off and told about the old days when he was broke and couldn't afford to buy rum, so he made homemade liquor from cereal box raisins and any kind of fruit he could scrounge up. This was the usual roundabout way he talked, and Lucky had noticed that it made people stay interested, even if the story got quite a bit longer than if someone else had been telling it.

2 She stood up, her neck and the backs of her knees sweating, and mashed wads of hair up under the edges of her floppy hat. She carefully angled an old lawn chair with frayed webbing into her wedge of shade, and made sure the chair wouldn't break by easing herself onto it. Flies came, the little biting ones; she fanned them away with her plastic dustpan. Heat blasted off the Dumpster.

There was a little silence, except for the wobbly ticking noise of the ceiling fan inside and people shifting in their folding metal chairs. She was pretty sure they had already heard the story of Short Sammy hitting rock bottom before, as she had, and that they loved the pure glory and splendiferousness of it as much as she did—even though it was hard to imagine Short Sammy being drunk. Short Sammy's voice sounded like it could barely stand to say what came next.

"That Roy, man," said Sammy, who called everyone "man,"

even people like Lucky who were not men. "He was one brave dog. He killed that snake even though it bit him in the place where it hurts the worst for a male. And there I am, trying to get away, falling out of the Cad. I break a tooth, I cut my cheek, I give myself a black eye, I even sprain my ankle, but I'm so drunk, man, I don't even know I'm messed up—not till much later. Then I pass out.

"Next day I wake up on the ground, sand in my mouth, and it feels like death. I mean, it's like I *died*, man, but at the same time, like I'm too sick and ashamed to be dead. There's a mangled rattlesnake under the car, there's blood, lots of blood—I don't even know if it's my blood or Roy's or the snake's. Roy's gone. I call him—nothing. I figure maybe after saving my stupid life he went off to die alone somewhere. It's probably like a hundred degrees in the shade, man, about as hot as it is now, but I'm so cold I can't stop shivering."

Lucky's hands smelled metallic, like the thin arms of the lawn chair; they felt sticky. She pushed her hat back from her forehead; air cooled the sweat there.

"I make this deal with myself," Sammy continued. "The deal is if Roy is okay I'll quit drinking, join AA, get clean."

Lucky edged her bare leg away from a rough, poking strand of chair webbing. Each time Short Sammy came to this part in his story, Lucky thought of what kind of deal *she* would make with *herself* if she hit rock bottom. Like, let's say she didn't know if her dog, HMS Beagle, was alive or dead; she would have to do something really hard and drastic as her end of the bargain. Or,

Lucky is mostly happy in Hard Pan, California (population 43), with her guardian, Brigitte, and her beloved dog, HMS Beagle. But Lucky knows that the difference between a guardian and an actual mom is that a mom can't resign. So when she becomes convinced Brigitte is planning to return to France, what can Lucky do except run away from home, with HMS Beagle and the world's heaviest survival-kit backpack in tow?

But she hadn't counted on a dust storm, or a troublesome five-year-old turning up, minus one shoe, with a cholla burr stuck into his heel. And she hadn't counted on discovering the many different ways of defining "family."

Newbery Medal Winner

ALA Notable Children's Book

Cooperative Children's Book Council
Choice

Dorothy Canfield Fisher Book Award

Kirkus Reviews Editor's Choice

"Lucky, with a personality that fans of Ramona Quimby will easily recognize and appreciate . . . is a true heroine." —*Booklist*



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