

# The Hate U Give



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ANGIE THOMAS

Angie Thomas was born in Jackson, Mississippi. She began writing *The Hate U Give* as a senior project while studying creative writing at Belhaven University, a predominantly white college in her hometown. Thomas has stated that her work initially focused on fantasy, but, following the encouragement of a professor, she decided to draw more heavily from her experience as a black woman in the southern United States. She also decided to focus specifically on a female protagonist in her debut novel, feeling that black girls' experiences were too often overlooked by mainstream media and activism. In 2016, the as-of-yet unpublished Thomas won an inaugural grant from the nonprofit We Need Diverse Books. Upon publication in 2017, *The Hate U Give* became an immediate bestseller and won numerous accolades, including the Coretta Scott King Award. Thomas is a lover of hip hop briefly performed as a rapper as a teen. She has stated that she is deeply influenced by the work of Tupac Shakur, whose definition of the phrase "Thug Life" grants the novel its title.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Thomas's novel invokes the language of the modern protest movement Black Lives Matter, which grew in response to real-world incidents of police brutality. Thomas has stated that she was specifically inspired by Oscar Grant, an unarmed black man whose 2009 killing at the hands of a white police officer serves as the plot of the film *Fruitvale Station*. In Thomas's novel, Starr says that she "can't breathe" following Khalil's shooting, directly invoking the death of Eric Garner; Garner was an unarmed black man killed after being put in a chokehold by a police officer, and his last words, "I can't breathe", subsequently became a rallying cry in protests across the country. The fact that officials "leave Khalil's body in the street like it's an exhibit" also echoes the treatment of Michael Brown, a black teen shot and killed by a white officer in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014; Brown's body was infamously left in the street for four hours by authorities. The final page of *The Hate U Give* includes a list of black individuals whose deaths at the hands of the police echo Khalil's, such as Trayvon Martin, Rekia Boyd, Tamir Rice, and Philando Castile. These names, among many others, continue to spur protests against racial injustice throughout the United States. Thomas's novel also draws upon the historical legacy of the Civil Rights movement. On her blog Starr posts a photograph of Emmett Till, the fourteen-year-old black child lynched in 1955 after allegedly whistling at a white woman. Maverick makes his children memorize teachings from the

Black Panthers, a political party founded in the 1960s to defend minority communities from police violence, and he has a photograph in his store of party co-founder Huey Newton.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Thomas's novel is one of many recent works inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement. Jay Coles' *Tyler Johnson Was Here*, Kekla Magoon's *How It Went Down*, and Brendan Kiely and Jason Reynolds' *All American Boys* are similarly geared toward young adult readers and tackle issues of racism and police violence against black communities. Ta-Nehisi Coates' bestselling nonfiction work *Between the World and Me* focuses on the realities of being a young black man in America, while journalist and professor Marc Lamont Hill explores the historical context of state-sanctioned violence in *Nobody: Casualties of America's War on the Vulnerable, from Ferguson to Flint and Beyond*. Thomas' novel repeatedly also references the words of "Brother Malcolm"—i.e. activist Malcolm X, whose *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* is considered a pivotal work of the Civil Rights Movement. *The Hate U Give* also touches on the theme of double consciousness, a concept put forth by scholar W. E. B. Du Bois in *The Soul of Black Folk*, and which describes the sensation felt by black individuals upon seeing themselves through the lens of a racist society. Finally, *The Hate U Give* makes repeated references to J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* fantasy series; not only are Starr, Khalil, Natasha, and Seven fans of the books, but Maverick also compares the Hogwarts houses to gangs.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Hate U Give*
- **When Written:** 2017
- **Where Written:** Jackson, Mississippi, U.S.
- **When Published:** February 28, 2017
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Young Adult Fiction
- **Setting:** The lower-class, predominantly black neighborhood of Garden Heights and the upper-crust world of Williamson Prep.
- **Climax:** Starr and her neighbors embrace the power of their voices to create change; Starr defends Khalil's life at the protests following the indictment verdict, while Garden Heights residents tell police that King set fire to Maverick's store.
- **Antagonist:** One-Fifteen, King
- **Point of View:** First person

## EXTRA CREDIT

**Personal Experience.** Like the protagonist of her novel, Angie Thomas witnessed a shootout as a child in her hometown of Jackson, Mississippi.

**Historical Connections.** Thomas grew up close to civil rights activist Medgar Evers' home, and says her mother heard the gunshot that killed him.



## PLOT SUMMARY

Sixteen-year-old Starr Carter begrudgingly attends a party in Garden Heights with Kenya, a childhood friend with whom she shares an older half-brother, Seven. At the party Starr reconnects with Khalil, a close childhood friend. When shots ring out, Khalil and Starr run from the party together and Khalil offers to drive Starr home.

While in the car, Khalil explains rapper Tupac Shakur's definition of the phrase Thug Life as "The Hate U Give Little Infants Fucks Everybody." A police officer pulls Khalil over. A terrified Starr implores Khalil to do whatever the officer, whose badge number she notes is one-fifteen, says. One-Fifteen demands Khalil get out of the car, searches him, and then tells him to stay where he is while he walks back to his patrol car. When Khalil opens the car door to ask if Starr is okay, One-Fifteen shoots and kills him. One-Fifteen tells Starr not to move and points his gun on her until other officials and an ambulance arrive.

Later that night Starr overhears her parents, Lisa and Maverick, arguing with Lisa's brother Carlos, a detective, about Khalil's shooting. Carlos reveals that he is on the same force as One-Fifteen and defends his colleague's actions, questioning why Starr was in the car with a "drug dealer."

On Monday Starr returns to Williamson, the prep school she has attended for the past six years, but tells no one about the shooting. Things are tense with Hailey, her oldest friend at school, and have been ever since Hailey unfollowed Starr's Tumblr after she posted a photograph of Emmett Till. Outside a classroom Starr sees her boyfriend Chris, who is white, but recoils when he reaches for her hand.

That afternoon Starr and Lisa arrive at the police station for Starr's interview with detectives about the shooting. The detectives ask Starr whether Khalil was drinking, sold drugs, and or was in a gang. Lisa asks why it seems like they are putting Starr and Khalil on trial instead of One-Fifteen.

Khalil's name appears on the news, along with the title "Suspected Drug Dealer." At Williamson, Starr plays basketball with Hailey and another friend, an Asian-American girl named Maya. They ask Starr about Khalil, but she denies knowing him. At Khalil's funeral, Starr sees multiple people in "RIP Khalil" t-

shirts. April O'fray addresses the church and says she is with Just Us for Justice, an organization calling for police accountability. She tells the church that Khalil was unarmed at the time of his death. King, a local gang leader and Kenya and Seven's father, arrives and lays a gray bandana across Khalil's body, signaling he was a King Lord (a member of King's gang). Starr is appalled that Khalil joined a gang.

That evening, protests erupt in Khalil's name throughout Garden Heights. The police appear on television to say they have no reason to arrest One-Fifteen, and mention an unnamed witness who spoke to investigators.

Maverick and Starr go to the family grocery store and find DeVante, a local teen and King Lord, hiding from King. DeVante asks Maverick, who was once a King Lord too, for help getting out of the gang, and Maverick agrees. Starr learns Khalil's case will be going in front of a grand jury. In preparation she and her parents meet with April O'fray, who reveals that One-Fifteen allegedly mistook a **hairbrush** in Khalil's car for a gun. She encourages Starr to use her voice to help Khalil.

Realizing how unsafe DeVante is in Garden Heights, Carlos agrees to take him in. Chris shows up unannounced at Carlos's house, and Maverick is furious to learn that Starr has a white boyfriend. DeVante later tells Starr that King tried to get Khalil to become a King Lord, but Khalil refused; the bandana at the funeral was King's way of saving face. DeVante further explains that Khalil only started selling drugs to pay back his mother's debt to King.

Starr goes to Maya's house, and they, along with Hailey, watch a television interview with One-Fifteen's father. Starr is outraged when he portrays Khalil as dangerous. Hailey expresses sympathy for One-Fifteen, which angers Starr. After Hailey storms out, Maya confesses that Hailey has made racist comments to her too. She and Starr form a "minority alliance" to hold Hailey accountable for her prejudice.

Starr does an interview with a major television network, in which she gives an account of the Khalil she knew and calls out his unfair treatment by the media. She also dry snitches on King for being the biggest gang leader in Garden Heights. At prom Chris tells Starr he recognized her voice in the interview and knows she is the witness. Starr opens up to him about her life in Garden Heights.

The night before Starr testifies in front of a grand jury, someone shoots and throws a brick at the Carters' house. In response, Maverick enlists the protection of his former gang mates. The next day, Starr begins her testimony in front of the grand jury. After a somewhat halting start, she is strengthened by the thought that Khalil needs her voice.

Two weeks later, Hailey tells Starr that the cops did the world a favor by killing Khalil and ridding the world of another drug dealer. The two get into a physical fight.

Carlos throws a barbeque to celebrate Seven's birthday and

graduation. Iesha, Seven's mother, shows up unannounced and says that King has it out for the Carters ever since Starr snitched. Later, DeVante goes missing. Starr, Chris, and Seven find DeVante at Iesha and King's house, huddled in pain from being beaten. Iesha distracts King as they escape.

The grand jury decides not to indict One-Fifteen and riots erupt throughout Garden Heights. At the protests, Starr, Seven, DeVante, and Chris see April O'Frah, who again tells Starr that her voice is her biggest weapon. Starr climbs atop a patrol car and begins a chant to honor Khalil's life. Police tear-gas the protestors.

Starr and her friends get a ride from Maverick's former gang members to the family store. While inside, it is set on fire. Maverick arrives and opens the back door so everyone can escape. King pulls up across the street and laughs. When the police and a firetruck arrive, Maverick tells them King started the fire. Soon, many neighbors join in to snitch on King. Maverick gains respect for Chris upon learning that he stayed with Starr all night through the riots. DeVante agrees to turn witness on King if it will mean putting him away for good, echoing the claim that his voice is his strongest weapon.

Later, The Carter family has moved to a new house in a safer neighborhood. Starr wakes in her new bedroom and looks at the poster of Tupac on her wall. Starr decides it is time to "unfuck" everybody. The family goes to see the remains of the store. Mr. Lewis, their neighbor whose shop was also ruined, says he is retiring and wants Maverick to take over his own shop so he can expand and remain a good influence on Garden Heights. Kenya and Starr reconnect. Starr thinks about all the people killed by police brutality and promises to keep speaking up for racial justice.

by her family and by activist April Oprah, eventually decides to give a television interview to tell the world what happened. Despite witnessing Khalil's death, as well as that of her friend Natasha at age ten, Starr tries her best to live a normal life; she loves basketball, sneakers, and *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, which she feels echoes her own experience as a student at Williamson. As the media peddles more narratives about Khalil being a thug, however, Starr becomes more engaged in the fight for racial justice, going so far as to climb on a police car and address the crowd at riots following the indictment verdict in Khalil's case. In the end of the novel, she lists the names of many black individuals killed at the hands of police, and promises to never stay silent again.

**Khalil Harris** – Starr's childhood best friend, Khalil is a teenager from Garden Heights who is shot and killed by One-Fifteen, a white police officer, during a traffic stop. Dismissed by many in the media as a "thug," "gangbanger," and "drug dealer," Khalil's death becomes a catalyst for protests against racial injustice throughout the community. He and Starr were extremely close as children, sharing their first kiss and formative years together in Garden Heights, and Starr feels extremely guilty for losing touch with him before his death. Khalil often has to take care of his mother, Brenda, who is addicted to drugs, and grandmother, Mrs. Rosalie, who is going through chemotherapy and lost her job because of it. Though Khalil's motivations for selling drugs remain unclear for much of the novel, DeVante eventually reveals that he refused to join the King Lords gang and only sold drugs to repay Brenda's debt after she stole money from King, the biggest drug dealer in the neighborhood.

**Maverick Carter** – Starr's father, Lisa's husband, and a former felon, Maverick was essentially born into a life of crime. His father was one of the biggest drug dealers in Garden Heights, but Maverick decided to leave gang life behind after having children. He went to prison for three years for King in exchange for getting out the King Lords, and later helps DeVante when he, too, wants to leave the gang. Frequently referred to as "Big Mav," Maverick owns a small grocery store in Garden Heights and is seen as a pillar of the community. His son Seven is the result of a one-night affair Maverick had with Iesha after a fight with Lisa, and Iesha remains an "Achilles heel" of his and Lisa's relationship. Maverick also frequently clashes with Carlos, Lisa's brother, partly out of insecurity; Carlos cared for the children while Maverick was in prison. Maverick is deeply committed to improving the lives of his community, and instills his children with teachings from the Black Panthers, including encouragement to fight against police brutality. Because of this, he refuses to let the family move away from Garden Heights. Only after having seen the toll violence has taken on his family does he agree to move at the end of the novel, asserting he can still help Garden Heights without living there.

**Lisa Carter** – Mother to Starr and Sekani, wife to Maverick, and



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Starr Carter** – The novel's protagonist, Starr is a sixteen-year-old black teenager who witnesses the shooting of her unarmed friend, Khalil. Starr lives in the primarily black, lower-class neighborhood of Garden Heights but attends Williamson Prep, a wealthy, predominantly white school in another town. Starr constantly feels pulled between two versions of herself—Williamson Starr and Garden Heights Starr—and changes her speech patterns out of fear that her classmates will think she is "ghetto." Traumatized by Khalil's death, Starr is initially reluctant to speak up about the shooting and doesn't tell Maya and Hailey, her closest friends at school, about what she saw. The shooting also makes her reevaluate her relationship with Chris, her boyfriend from a white, wealthy family. Starr feels immense guilt for not being a part of Khalil's life in the months before he died. She starts a Tumblr blog showing the world the side of him she knew, and, emboldened

step-mother to Seven, Lisa is a deeply loving and supportive presence in her children's lives. After becoming pregnant with Starr as a teenager, Lisa was thrown out of her house by Nana and lived with Mrs. Rosalie, Khalil's grandmother. She works as a nurse in a Garden Heights clinic and, along with Maverick, attempts to educate her children about racial injustice. She raises Seven like her own son, despite him being the product of Maverick's affair with Iesha, and advises Starr to determine whether the good outweighs the bad in her own strained relationship with Hailey. Lisa desperately wants to move away from Garden Heights, something over which she frequently clashes with Maverick. At the end of the novel, Lisa obtains a higher paying job at a hospital to support the family's move out to a safer neighborhood.

**Seven** – Starr's older half-brother, Seven is the son of Maverick and Iesha. He frequently stays at the Carter house, and attends Williamson with Starr and Sekani. Seven is fiercely protective of both Starr and his other sister Kenya, but has a strained relationship with his mother Iesha, whom he feels always chooses her boyfriend King over her son, and eventually kicks him out of the house. When Iesha fails to attend his high school graduation but shows up at his birthday party uninvited, Seven screams that he is ashamed of her before breaking down in tears. Even so, he feels it is his duty to protect his mother. Seven is a strong presence in Starr's life, evidenced by the fact that he picks her up from school and plays basketball with her once a month. He drives Starr, DeVante, and Chris around on the night of the riots, and has, along with Starr, memorized the Black Panther's Ten-Point Program. He is accepted to six colleges, yet wishes to remain in Garden Heights to look after his mother and sister. Maverick encourages him to take advantage of the opportunities he has been given.

**Kenya** – The daughter of King and Iesha, Kenya is also Seven's half-sister and one of the few people in Garden Heights with whom Starr has remained close. Starr describes her as being pretty enough to be a model, with a flamboyant personality and love of drama. Kenya keeps Starr connected to the community and is the one who drags Starr to Big D's party at the beginning of the novel. She frequently refers to Seven as "my brother" rather than "our brother" in front of Starr, a verbal tick stemming from fear that Seven is ashamed of her. When she learns Starr is the witness in Khalil's case, she calls her out for not speaking up more on his behalf and for acting as though she is ashamed of her ties to Garden Heights. This criticism is a large part of what makes Starr eventually lean in to activism. Though she is King's daughter, Kenya remains close with the Carters and helps DeVante escape after King beats him. King beats her as well, and she eventually moves in with her grandmother and little sister Lyric. Despite their differences, Kenya is a steady presence in Starr's life and the two reaffirm their friendship at the end of the novel.

**Chris** – Starr's boyfriend, Chris is a wealthy white student at

Williamson who bonds with Starr over their shared love of *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, sneakers, and rap music. Starr attempts to hide her Garden Heights world from Chris for much of the story, fearing both Maverick's reaction to her dating a white boy and Chris's reaction to her background. Chris is heartbroken when he learns how much of her background Starr has kept from him. Though he makes occasionally ignorant comments about race, Chris is a frequent source of comfort and happiness for Starr. She calls him her "normal," and his own awareness of racial injustice grows throughout the novel. He stays with Starr all night during the riots following the indictment verdict, a fact that makes Maverick ultimately respect him a little bit more.

**Uncle Carlos** – Carlos is Lisa's older brother and a detective on the same police force as One-Fifteen. A second father figure to Starr, Carlos helped take care of the Carter children while Maverick was in jail—a fact that creates tension between him and his brother-in-law. Carlos is extremely close to Starr, and frequently has the family over for barbecues at his beautiful house in a gated community. Carlos initially questions why Starr was in the car with a drug dealer, and defends the actions of One-Fifteen. Throughout the story, however, he comes to realize that he was wrongly trying to justify Khalil's death. He ultimately chooses his family over his squad and punches One-Fifteen in the face, resulting in a forced leave of absence. When Maverick enlists King Lords to guard the family the night before Starr testifies in front of a grand jury, Carlos is outraged. Maverick accuses him of not caring about the children, and Carlos details everything he did for them while Maverick was in jail. That evening, the two put aside their differences. Carlos also takes in DeVante, in part out of guilt for leaving Garden Heights and failing people like Khalil. He and his wife, Pam, grow to love DeVante and say he can stay with them for his entire senior year of school.

**DeVante** – Devante is a teenager from Garden Heights whose brother is killed at Big D's party in the beginning of the story. He becomes involved with the King Lords to help support his family, and at one point sold drugs with Khalil. DeVante steals from King to help his mother and sister flee Garden Heights, and then turns to Maverick for guidance on getting out of the gang. DeVante is later taken in by Carlos and Pam. He helps Starr understand that people turn to gangs and drugs when they don't have other choices, and that being a King Lord offered him the sort of protection and support he'd never had before in his life. He also is the one to tell Starr that Khalil wasn't in a gang and only sold drugs to pay back his mother's debt. His words help Starr realize that even if Khalil were a "thug," that should not have been a death sentence. DeVante has a flirtatious relationship with Kenya, despite the fact that her father is after him. King beats DeVante badly in the end of the novel, but he is saved from potentially being killed by Chris, Starr, and Seven. He agrees to "turn witness" on King at the end



of the novel in order to help the Garden Heights community.

**Hailey Grant** – Hailey is Starr’s oldest friend at Williamson, the two having grown close when Hailey’s mother died of cancer around same time that Natasha was killed. Their friendship unravels over the course of the novel, however. First, Hailey unfollows Starr’s Tumblr account after the latter posts a picture of Emmett Till, a black teen murdered for whistling at a white woman in the 1950s. Hailey’s racism then becomes increasingly apparent throughout the story. She dismisses Khalil as a drug dealer and thug who the world is better off without, leading to a physical altercation with Starr. Though Hailey tries to make up with Starr, she fails to admit to or apologize for her racism. At the end of the novel, Starr decides to cut Hailey out of her life entirely.

**Maya Yang** – Maya is a close friend of Starr’s at Williamson. She is on the basketball team with Starr and Hailey, and initially tries to keep the peace between the three. An Asian American, Maya later tells Starr that Hailey has made racist comments to her too about eating cat at Thanksgiving. The two form a “minority alliance” to call out Hailey’s prejudice.

**King** – King is the biggest drug dealer in Garden Heights, a leader of the King Lords, and father to Kenya and Lyric. He is abusive towards both his girlfriend Iesha and his daughters, and reviled by much of the neighborhood. King’s attempts to recruit Khalil to the King Lords are rebuffed, and he tries to save face by laying a gray bandana across Khalil’s body at his funeral (thus falsely suggesting that Khalil *had* joined the King Lords). King repeatedly threatens the Carters for speaking up in the wake of Khalil’s murder, and beats up the elderly Mr. Lewis for snitching on him in a television interview. He also badly beats DeVante after finding out he stole from him, and would likely have killed the teen if he wasn’t saved by Starr, Seven, Chris, and Kenya. After he sets fire to Maverick’s store, the neighborhood turns on King and he is arrested. DeVante agrees to turn witness on King, which Carlos says will ensure he remains locked up.

**Iesha** – Seven, Kenya, and Lyric’s mother, and King’s girlfriend. Seven resents Iesha’s lack of maternal support. She is also a sore spot in Starr’s parents’ relationship, as Maverick cheated on Lisa with her. Though unwilling to stand up to King for much of the novel, Iesha ultimately redeems herself by distracting him while Seven helps his sisters and DeVante escape from the house. King’s subsequent beating sends her to the hospital.

**Sekani Carver** – Starr and Seven’s little brother and a frequent source of comic relief. At eight years old, Sekani does not yet understand the nuances and racial tensions of his neighborhood. At the end of the story, Starr overhears her father Maverick having “the talk” about how to behave in front of police officers with him.

**One-Fifteen / Officer Brian Cruise** – The white officer who kills Khalil. One-Fifteen thus acts as the overarching antagonist

of the book—though he doesn’t appear in person after Khalil’s death—and comes to represent police brutality, systemic racism, and corruption in the police force. One-Fifteen is described as being in his mid-thirties to early forties with a buzz cut and scar above his lip. He frames his actions as the result of fearing for his life.

**Mr. Lewis** – Mr. Lewis is an older gentleman who owns the barbershop next to Maverick’s store and is a frequent source of annoyance for the latter. Mr. Lewis snitches on King on live television and is later beaten up by King Lords. At the end of the story he retires and gives his store to Maverick so that Maverick can continue to be a good influence on Garden Heights.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**One-Fifteen’s Father** – The father of Officer Brian Cruise, who gives a television interview defending his son, justifying Khalil’s shooting by saying his son feared for his life.

**Mrs. Rosalie** – Mrs. Rosalie is Khalil’s grandmother. She also took in Lisa when she got pregnant in high school with Starr. She is going through chemotherapy and had recently lost her job at the time of Khalil’s death.

**Brenda Harris** – Brenda is Khalil’s mother. Her struggles with addiction make her a frequent disappointment to and source of sadness for her son. Later in the story Starr learns that Brenda stole money from King, and that Khalil only began selling drugs to pay back his mother’s debt.

**Natasha** – Starr and Khalil’s childhood friend who, at age ten, was killed in a drive-by shooting in front of Starr.

**Tammy** – Khalil’s aunt, who lives in New York City and was friends with Lisa as a child.

**Jess** – A girl on the Williamson basketball team with Starr. Starr admires that Jess does not attend the protest at Williamson and refuses to use Khalil’s death to get out of class.

**Pastor Eldridge** – The pastor who leads the funeral service for Khalil.

**April Ofrah** – A lawyer with Just Us for Justice who agrees to represent Starr pro bono and encourages Starr’s activism throughout the story.

**Lyric** – Seven and Kenya’s little sister.

**Remy** – Hailey’s older brother and a student at Williamson who starts a protest for Khalil—mostly just in order to get out of class.

**Karen Monroe/DA** – The District Attorney in Khalil’s case, described as a middle-aged white woman.

**Larry** – A black police officer who forces Maverick to the ground.

**Diane Carey** – The journalist who interviews Starr for a network television special.

**Nana** – Lisa’s mother, a former alcoholic who lives with Carlos and Pam.

**Pam** – Carlos’s wife, a surgeon.

**Dalvin** – DeVante’s brother who is shot and killed at Big D’s party.

**Mr. Reuben** – Owns a soul food establishment frequented by Starr and Maverick.

**Tim** – Mr. Reuben’s nephew.

**Mrs. Rooks** – A regular at Maverick’s store.

**Luke** – A student at Williamson who takes Hailey to prom.

**Britt** – A girl on the Williamson basketball team with Starr.

**Layla** – Seven’s girlfriend and another black student at Williamson.

**Ryan** – Maya’s boyfriend and the only other black student in Starr’s grade at Williamson.

**Detective Gomez** – A Latina officer who interviews Starr after the shooting.

**Detective Wilkes** – A white officer who interviews Starr after the shooting.

**Ava** – Carlos’s daughter and Starr’s young cousin.

**Goon** – A King Lord and friend of Maverick who watches over the Carters the night before Starr testifies in front of the grand jury.

**Cameron** – Khalil’s nine-year-old brother.

**Bianca** – A friend of Kenya’s at Big D’s party.

**Chance** – A friend of Kenya’s at Big D’s party.

**Denaisa** – A Garden Heights teen who dances with DeVante at Big D’s party.

**Fo’ty Ounce** – A man who lives in Garden Heights.

**Big D** – He never appears in person in the narrative, but his annual party in Garden Heights is the catalyst for the novel’s action.

example, Starr dry snitches during her television interview when she says **Khalil** only sold drugs to help pay off his mother’s debt to the “biggest drug dealer and gang leader in the neighborhood.” Though she does not mention **King** by name, she understands that anyone familiar with Garden Heights will know who she is talking about.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



### RACISM AND POLICE BRUTALITY

*The Hate U Give* follows sixteen-year-old Starr Carter after she witnesses the killing of Khalil Harris, her unarmed black friend, by a white police officer.

Though this specific moment of police brutality spurs the action of the novel, author Angie Thomas also presents excessive force as part of a larger tapestry of racism and the criminalization of black communities in America as a whole.

Police brutality is such a reality in Starr’s world that her parents Maverick and Lisa give each of their children “the talk” about how to behave around law enforcement. When pulled over after Big D’s party, Starr is grateful that her parents told her “what to do if a cop stopped” her and hopes “somebody had the talk with Khalil.” For black children, knowing how to act in front of law enforcement can be a matter of life and death. Maverick further instills in his children knowledge of how systemic racism manifests in society. Starr and her half-brother Seven are taught to recite the Black Panther’s Ten-Point Program, including the phrase, “We want an immediate end to police brutality and the murder of black people, other people of color, and oppressed people.” These steps are necessary in a world quick to assume that black individuals are dangerous.

The criminalization of black youth appears early in the novel, when Khalil is shot during a traffic stop despite posing no threat to One-Fifteen, the officer who pulls him over. One-Fifteen then points his gun at the unarmed, terrified Starr until backup arrives. This scene establishes that black people, even children, are not only not afforded a presumption of innocence, but are often deemed threats. The media then attempts to present Khalil as a thug in an effort to rationalize One-Fifteen’s actions. Even Carlos, Starr’s uncle and a detective on the same force as One-Fifteen, describes the officer as “a good guy” who was in over his head. Maverick pointedly responds by questioning why One-Fifteen “assumed” that Khalil was “a thug” just “by looking at” him. In his television interview, One-Fifteen’s father further attempts to garner sympathy for his son by painting him as a

## TERMS

**Code switching** – Code switching refers to the act of changing the way one presents oneself in different surroundings. **Starr** and her family engage in code switching throughout the novel, altering their inflection, vocabulary, and dress based on whether they are talking to fellow residents of Garden Heights, white people, or law enforcement. Starr feels that she shifts into an entirely separate version of herself at Williamson, dropping many of the tics of her speech so as to not appear “ghetto” to her classmates.

**Dry snitching** – Dry snitching is the term **Starr** uses to describe telling on someone without directly stating their name. For

man who feared for his life. The media's focus on Khalil's alleged background as a drug dealer is another tool to exonerate One-Fifteen. As Starr points out, however, selling drugs should not be a death sentence. The novel thus suggests that black children are not simply robbed of their innocence, but also killed for minor transgressions.

Though Khalil's death is the novel's most horrific example of excessive force, the thinking that underlies police brutality manifests throughout Thomas's story. The fact that a black officer, Larry, later forces Maverick to the ground suggests that though brutality is targeted towards communities of color, its perpetrators need not be white. Thomas elevates police brutality beyond an issue of black vs. white individuals and suggests that the systemic criminalization of people of color can be internalized by anyone.

The inclusion of Carlos further complicates the notion that all police officers are "bad." Carlos defends the force to Maverick, pointing out he'd "be surprised at how many of us want justice in this case." Starr is initially conflicted about joining in protests following Khalil's death in part because of her uncle. Ultimately, however, she decides that the issue "isn't him or his coworkers who do their jobs right. Rather, 'This is about One-Fifteen, those detectives with their bullshit questions, and those cops who made Daddy lie on the ground.'" Thomas suggests that police brutality is not just about individual officers, but rather a culture that allows prejudice and violence against communities of color to go unchecked. The fact that Carlos eventually does confront One-Fifteen and is put on leave for it also suggests that anyone who doesn't defend the "bad apples" risks their job. This points to a broken culture of policing in general, even if not all officers are actively racist.



### DUELING IDENTITIES AND DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS

Starr feels pulled between two worlds throughout *The Hate U Give*—namely, that of the poor, primarily

black Garden Heights and the affluent, primarily white Williamson Prep. Thomas explores the tension felt by characters of color who must navigate the boundary between who they are and how the outside world portrays them. In doing so, she evokes scholar W. E. B. Du Bois' famous notion of "double consciousness," the sensation of "two-ness" experienced by black individuals seeing themselves through the eyes of a racist society. Du Bois put forth this term in 1903 to describe the experience of being black in an American culture that has devalued blackness for its entire history. Black identity is split between the way black individuals perceive themselves and the way they know the white world will view them, creating a sense of internal conflict.

From the time she steps into Big D's party at the beginning of the novel, Starr makes it clear that she feels there are two

"versions" of herself. She negotiates the boundary between "Williamson Starr" and Garden Heights Starr, not fully comfortable with either identity and frequently shifting her tone and vocabulary based on her audience. "I don't talk like me or sound like me," she says of the way she behaves beyond the boundaries of her neighborhood. "I choose every word carefully and make sure I pronounce them well. I can never, ever let anyone think I'm ghetto."

Lisa and Maverick engage in this sort of code switching too. When Lisa is talking to the District Attorney on the phone, for example, she "speaks in her 'other voice.'" On the way to Starr's network news interview, Lisa also gives her children specific instructions as to how to act: "When we get there, don't touch anything and only speak when somebody speaks to you. It's 'yes, ma'am' and 'yes, sir' or 'no, ma'am' and 'no, sir.'" Starr further observes that her family has dressed up so as to not look like "hood rats." The Carters know they must speak, dress, and behave a certain way in a world that prioritizes white conceptions of respectability. Much like "the talk" the Carter children receive about how to act in front of police officers, this code-switching is a measure of self-protection in a society that dismisses and criminalizes blackness.

Other characters must also contend with competing pulls on their identities as a consequence of prejudice. Maverick, for example, is a former felon but also a father and activist. Khalil is a drug dealer, but also a desperate young man forced to take care of his own mother. DeVante is a gang member, but also a video-game loving teen trying to support his family. While Starr is easily able to reconcile all these facets of their lives, society flattens black identity and in effect robs black individuals of their full humanity. The media is quick to label Khalil a "thug," for example, and to use a photo of him that aligns with racist narratives about poor black communities. Maverick calls this photo "Khalil's thugshot." By turning all black kids into threats, the media is more easily able to dismiss the violence they face as the victims' own doing. As Starr points out, it is as if Khalil is on trial for his own murder. Starr, meanwhile, begins a Tumblr blog devoted to showing the world the Khalil she knew. Thomas ultimately presents blackness itself as a multifaceted and often contradictory identity, complicating the stereotypical assumptions thrust upon Starr, her family, and Garden Heights at large.



### THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

From the lyrics of hip-hop to the teachings of the Black Panthers, language in *The Hate U Give* is a tool for education, justice, and speaking truth to power.

Starr is initially hesitant to speak out about what she witnessed, fearing retaliation against her family and worrying that she is not worthy of speaking up for Khalil. Throughout the novel, however, she comes to understand her voice as the most powerful tool she possesses. Kenya calls Starr a coward for

“staying quiet,” reiterating that the best thing Starr can do for Khalil is speak on his behalf. Similarly, activist April O’frah repeatedly tells Starr that her voice is her strongest “weapon” in the fight for justice for Khalil. Towards the end of the novel, while standing atop a police car during the riots, Starr observes that her “bullhorn is as heavy as a gun. Ironic since Ms. O’frah said to use my weapon.” The crowd shouts encouragement for her to “speak,” echoing the power that her voice has in that moment.

Thomas further suggests that if language is a form of power, then silence is a means of control. When Maverick gives Starr “the talk,” he insists that she “only speak when” police ask her to, a point that feels especially pertinent to Starr given that her father “has the biggest mouth of anybody I know.” Thomas also repeatedly mentions the stigma associated with snitching on other members of the Garden Heights community. Ratting someone out is considered the ultimate betrayal, a fact that King—the biggest drug dealer and gang leader in Garden Heights—uses to his advantage, terrifying much of the neighborhood into silent submission. When Garden Heights residents confirm to police that King set fire to Maverick’s store, it is thus an act of rebellion. Similarly, when DeVante agrees to turn witness against King, he is using his voice to better his community: “And that lady said our voices are weapons,” he says. “I should use mine, right?” Thomas is suggesting that fear breeds silence, and that silence is a tool of oppression. The way to fight back, it follows, is to speak up.

The power of language also manifests in the novel’s frequent use of rap lyrics as a source of education and catharsis. For example, Chris raps the theme song to *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air* to earn Starr’s forgiveness at prom. More importantly, hip hop is a tool to inspire and incite, as can be seen when people join in rapping NWA’s “Fuck tha Police” during the riots in Garden Heights.

Cementing hip hop’s importance to Starr’s world is the fact that the novel’s title is taken directly from Tupac Shakur’s explanation of the phrase “Thug Life.” Khalil explains Tupac’s definition of Thug Life to Starr shortly before he is killed, but Starr does not fully comprehend its meaning until the end of the novel. One of the most famous hip hop artists of all time, Shakur frequently rapped about the racism and violence facing black inner cities. By using his words to frame the novel, Thomas asserts the power of hip hop to encapsulate the black experience. Together with Thomas’ emphasis on speaking truth to power, language thus becomes the ultimate means to spur meaningful societal change.



## COMMUNITY AND LOYALTY

Throughout *The Hate U Give*, competing loyalties test both individual characters and the communities to which they belong. Communities in the novel reveal a basic human desire for connection as well as

the importance of ultimately dissolving boundaries in the fight for racial justice.

The King Lords and Garden Disciples are the most rigid examples of community in the novel. Each gang can be identified by specific colors, controls specific territories in the neighborhood, and is largely defined by the loyalty of its members (Maverick calls himself “loyal like a motha” after taking a fall for King, for example). Starr, meanwhile, cannot “understand fighting over streets nobody owns.” Maverick’s comparison between gangs and the houses of *Harry Potter* serves to add an element of humor and further underscore how arbitrary many of these divisions really are. “Daddy claims the Hogwarts houses are really gangs,” Starr notes. “They have their own colors, their own hideouts, and they are always riding for each other, like gangs. Harry, Ron, and Hermione never snitch on one another, just like gangbangers. Death Eaters even have matching tattoos.”

By this formulation, the police force could be viewed as a sort of gang as well. Officers’ loyalty is reflected by the fact that they close ranks around One-Fifteen following his killing of Khalil. Suggesting law enforcement is its own type of gang, is important, as it undercuts the validity of its power over marginalized communities. The police are not impartial upholders of justice, Thomas’s novel suggests, because they are more concerned with protecting their own than the community they serve.

In Garden Heights, the one thing more important than gang association is family. Starr is extremely close with her parents and siblings, and family ties inform the actions of many characters throughout the novel. Both Khalil and DeVante, for example, become associated with gangs in order to help their families. Maverick, meanwhile, leaves gang life behind after he becomes a father. Though hesitant to stand up to King, Isha ultimately remains loyal to her children—Seven, Kenya, and Lyric—by distracting King while they escape his house. Even Carlos finally rejects the police in favor of his family by calling out One-Fifteen for his actions, despite the fact that this results in him being forced to take time off.

In the end, Thomas suggests, communities must join together if they are to defeat issues that hold everyone back. Maya creates a “minority alliance” with Starr, for example, in order to hold their white friend Hailey accountable for her prejudice. King Lords and Garden Disciplines chant side by side during protests following the indictment decision in Khalil’s case. “My anger is theirs, and theirs is mine,” Starr says, recognizing the shared emotion in this moment that brings enemies together. The ultimate bonding of King Lords and Garden Disciples represents the dissolving of boundaries in the face of a greater threat, and reveals the power of putting aside differences to work toward a better future for all. The only real sides, Thomas’s novel suggests, are those supporting oppression and those fighting to end it.





## THE CYCLE OF POVERTY AND CRIME

*The Hate U Give* depicts gangs, drugs, and violence as largely the result of lack of opportunity. The deck is stacked against many residents of Garden

Heights, who may turn to gangs and drug dealing as their only means of supporting their loved ones and protecting themselves. This, in turn, traps the community in a vicious cycle of poverty and crime.

The cycle of crime is especially evident in Maverick, whose father was one of the biggest drug dealers in Garden Heights. Maverick was born into a life of “kinging” and joined the gang at just twelve years old, he tells Starr and DeVante, because “that was the only way to survive.” For Maverick, joining a gang was, ironically, the best means of protection from gang violence. “Somebody was always coming at me ‘cause of my pops,” he continues, “but if I was a King Lord I had folks to watch my back.” DeVante echoes this sense of security when he tells Starr, “With King Lords, we had a whole bunch of folks who had our backs, no matter what.” He appreciates the community and protection that the King Lords offer, even as they contribute to the insecurity of the neighborhood on the whole. Further illustrating the need for alternative forms of protection in Garden Heights is the fact that, after a brick is thrown through the Carters’ window, King Lords help protect the Carter family when the police can’t (or won’t).

Even for those not so explicitly born into crime, Thomas creates nuanced portrayals of characters who choose to sell drugs even when they can see the harm this has on their communities. At first, Starr cannot understand why Khalil would sell the same drugs that have ruined his mother’s life. DeVante explains Khalil’s specific motivations—paying back his mother’s debt to King—and also the broader pressures created by poverty. “Nobody likes selling drugs,” he says, “But I hated seeing my momma and my sisters go hungry, you know?” Once a part of that world, however, it is nearly impossible to get out; Maverick had to go to prison to escape, becoming a felon in the process—another mark against him in society that makes it even more difficult to get a job and support his family even years later.

It’s important to note that Thomas also highlights her characters’ resiliency and strength throughout the novel, painting a picture of a community defined as much by perseverance as oppression. In illustrating the cycle of poverty and crime, however, she rebuts the common racist narrative that her characters’ circumstances are the result of personal failings rather than broad, systemic injustice. The novel thus suggests that, unable to trust police and largely abandoned by the rest of society, Garden Heights has been forced to create its own system of economic opportunity and justice. The irony, of course, is that this system—powered by gangs and drugs—further entrenches Garden Heights in the issues its residents want to escape.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



### KHALIL'S HAIRBRUSH

The hairbrush represents both the blinding power and senselessness of racism. One-Fifteen alleges that he shot Khalil because he mistook his hairbrush for a gun. Maverick says One-Fifteen made this assumption not simply because the hairbrush handle was “black enough” to have looked like a gun, but because Khalil himself was “black enough” to have been carrying one; racist assumptions about the criminality of black youth contributed to One-Fifteen seeing a weapon where there was none. The public latches on to this fact, leading to the chant of “a hairbrush is not a gun” in the riots following the indictment verdict. The fact that an object meant for grooming contributes to Khalil’s death further suggests that black individuals can do everything to adhere to societal expectations of propriety and still be targeted simply because of the color of their skin.



### MAVERICK'S ROSES

The roses that Maverick repeatedly tends to throughout the novel represent the Carter family. Starr notes that Maverick “waters them like he’s supposed to, but for someone reason they’re dry looking”; although Maverick is taking care of his family as best he can, they are still struggling to thrive in the dangerous world of Garden Heights. The connection between the family and the roses is further established after Starr and Seven play basketball outside following violent riots, much to the anger of their parents. After driving them home, Maverick turns his frustration on his roses, saying “y’all gotta do better than this.” As time goes on and the family becomes more entrenched in the complications of Garden Heights, the roses appear to be dying. Maverick brings the rosebush with him when the family finally moves to a new neighborhood at the end of the novel. When Starr asks if the roses will be all right, Maverick replies that they are “a li’l damaged, but alive. I’m gon’ try something different with them. Putting them in new soil can be like hitting a reset button.” Starr, too, has been damaged, in the sense that seeing Khalil’s death forever changed her, but her new surroundings—her new soil—will help her, and the entire Carter family, move forward. The roses thus also represent how opportunity—and the lack thereof—affects people’s lives, and how those with rich soil are more likely to thrive.



## QUOTES



Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Harper Collins edition of *The Hate U Give* published in 2017.

## Chapter 1 Quotes

●● As long as I play it cool and keep to myself, I should be fine. The ironic thing is though, at Williamson I don't have to "play it cool" — I'm cool by default because I'm one of the only black kids there. I have to earn coolness in Garden Heights, and that's more difficult than buying retro Jordans on release day.

Funny how it works with white kids though. It's dope to be black until it's hard to be black.

**Related Characters:** Starr Carter (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 11

**Explanation and Analysis**

At the beginning of the novel Starr arrives at Big D's party with Kenya and, having lost touch with much of Garden Heights, immediately feels out of place. She expresses being torn between her Williamson and Garden Heights identities, and will continue to feel conflicted by these competing personas throughout the book. Starr asserts that she is naturally "cool" at Williamson—her posh, primarily white school—because she is black. She will repeat this sentiment later in the novel, pointing out how her white friends assume her to be an arbiter of new trends and dances. This fetishizing of blackness is still a form of prejudice, as it denies black people the right to robust, diverse identities. More importantly, associating being black with being edgy comes from the same thinking that associates blackness with innate criminality. Starr also knows that many white people take joy in black culture without acknowledging the specific hardships faced by black communities—for example, rapping along with hip hop lyrics about drugs but then dismissing drug dealers like Khalil as thugs not worthy of sympathy.

●● Garden Heights has been a battlefield for the past two months over some stupid territory wars. I was born a "queen" 'cause Daddy used to be a King Lord. But when he left the game, my street royalty status ended. But even if I'd grown up in it, I wouldn't understand fighting over streets nobody owns.

**Related Characters:** Starr Carter (speaker), Maverick Carter

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 17

**Explanation and Analysis**

After driving away from Big D's party, Khalil suggests that the gunfire he and Starr heard was probably the result of a fight between rival gangs the King Lords and the Garden Disciples. This moment introduces the reader to these two groups, which tightly control life in Garden Heights and will reappear throughout the novel as sources of both terror and community. This is also the first time Starr mentions that Maverick used to be a King Lord, and his leaving the gang foreshadows DeVante later trying to do the same. The fact that Starr was once a "queen" further reflects the cycle of crime in Garden Heights, revealing that many people are born directly into this world of drugs and violence. It also suggests Starr's disillusionment with gangs, as she points out the arbitrariness of claiming public space and creating needless strife for the neighborhood.

●● Listen! The Hate U-the letter U-Give Little Infants Fucks Everybody. T-H-U-G L-I-F-E. Meaning what society give us as youth, it bites them in the ass when we wild out. Get it?

**Related Characters:** Khalil Harris (speaker), Starr Carter

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 17

**Explanation and Analysis**

While driving Starr home after Big D's party, Khalil explains rapper Tupac Shakur's definition of the phrase Thug Life. This quote gives the novel its title and reappears throughout the text to underscore Starr's growing commitment to the fight for racial justice. Tupac is describing the cycle of poverty and crime in many black communities: society criminalizes black youths, robbing them of both innocence and opportunity. When these children grow up, they are often forced to turn to gangs, drugs, and violence to survive and harbor resentment towards the system that granted them no other choice. A direct manifestation of the "hate" in Tupac's quote occurs almost immediately after Khalil's explanation, when One-Fifteen pulls Khalil over, assumes Khalil to be a "thug," and kills him. Starr later discusses Tupac's words with Maverick

and puts the rapper's poster up on her bedroom wall to honor Khalil. Tupac's continued presence in the novel emphasizes the power of language—and specifically hip hop—to serve as a force for education and change.

## Chapter 2 Quotes

☝☝ The other talk was about what to do if a cop stopped me. ... "Starr-Starr, you do whatever they tell you to do," he said. "Keep your hands visible. Don't make any sudden moves. Only speak when they speak to you."

I knew it must've been serious. Daddy has the biggest mouth of anybody I know, and if he said to be quiet, I needed to be quiet.

**Related Characters:** Maverick Carter, Starr Carter (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 20

### Explanation and Analysis

After being pulled over by the police in Khalil's car, Starr flashes back to "the talk" her parents gave her when she was twelve regarding how to behave in front of law enforcement. Here Thomas is directly linking police brutality to racist assumptions about black youth: Maverick's emphasis on the need to act in as nonthreatening a way as possible underscores the fact that much of the world will view Starr as dangerous simply because she is black. People like Starr must engage in code switching to survive, altering their behavior to better conform with white notions of respectability and put others at ease. Starr also asserts the seriousness of the advice by noting the incongruity of her loudmouthed father telling her to be quiet. Silence, in this situation, becomes a tool of oppression, as others are allowed to determine when and how black people speak. Later in the novel, when police officers confront Maverick and Mr. Lewis following an argument, Starr observes that the latter behaves in such a way that he must have had "the talk" as well—revealing how deeply embedded racist violence is in communities like Garden Heights.

## Chapter 4 Quotes

☝☝ But I swear I wanna cuss Khalil out. How he could sell the very stuff that took his momma from him? Did he realize that he was taking somebody else's momma from them? Did he realize that if he does become a hashtag, some people will only see him as a drug dealer?

He was so much more than that.

**Related Characters:** Starr Carter (speaker), Brenda Harris, Khalil Harris

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 64

### Explanation and Analysis

Starr, Lisa, and Maverick visit Mrs. Rosalie, Khalil's grandmother, shortly after the shooting. There, Mrs. Rosalie confirms that Khalil was selling drugs and had wanted to ask Maverick for help. Starr is heartbroken to learn that Khalil contributed to a practice that has caused so much pain for their community. Further complicating matters is the fact that Brenda, Khalil's mother, is addicted to drugs, and before his death Khalil was forced to care for both her and the rest of the family. Later Starr will learn that Khalil only sold drugs to repay his mother's debt to King. Regardless, Khalil's life exemplifies how entrenched Garden Heights remains in a cycle of poverty and crime that is near-impossible to escape. Here Thomas's novel also connects itself to the many real-world victims of police brutality whose names have become viral hashtags online. Starr realizes that, for many, the fact that Khalil dealt drugs will overshadow everything else about him; if real-world history is any indication, people will look for any excuse to justify his death and exonerate the police officer involved.

## Chapter 5 Quotes

☝☝ Williamson Starr doesn't use slang—if a rapper would say it, she doesn't say it, even if her white friends do. Slang makes them cool. Slang makes her "hood." Williamson Starr holds her tongue when people piss her off so nobody will think she's the "angry black girl." Williamson Starr is approachable. No stank-eyes, side-eyes, none of that. Williamson Starr is nonconfrontational. Basically, Williamson Starr doesn't give anyone a reason to call her ghetto.

**Related Characters:** Starr Carter (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   


**Page Number:** 71

### Explanation and Analysis

On her first day back at Williamson after Khalil's death, Starr is especially conscious of how she comes across to her predominantly white classmates. Just as she changes her behavior in front of the police, so too does Starr code switch at her school in an effort to avoid the racist ire or pity of other students. Starr feels pulled between these two different versions of herself throughout the novel, often experiencing the "double consciousness" faced by black people seeing themselves through the eyes of a white society. Starr understands that the white world is quick to flatten black identity to conform to racist caricatures, and as such that she must be hyperaware of not doing anything that could play into stereotypes of black people as ignorant or violent. White people, on the other hand, are not beholden to such competing pulls on their identity. They can use black slang to make themselves seem edgier without fear of being dismissed as thugs, because society does not automatically assume them to be criminal—a double standard rooted in the same racism that undergirds police brutality against black communities.

☝ Hailey texted me immediately after, freaking out. I thought it was because she couldn't believe someone would do that to a kid. No. She couldn't believe I would reblog such an awful picture.

**Related Characters:** Starr Carter (speaker), Hailey Grant

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 77

### Explanation and Analysis

Upon seeing Hailey for the first time since they went on spring break, Starr notes the continued tension in their relation that has been there ever since Hailey unfollowed Starr's Tumblr account. Starr lives far from her friends at Williamson, and Tumblr is a major way for her to stay connected with her friends at school. As such, Hailey's actions are deeply hurtful to Starr. Worse, she unfollowed Starr after the latter posted a photograph of Emmett Till, the 14-year-old black child lynched for allegedly whistling at a white woman in the 1950s, and whose death was a major inciting factor in the Civil Rights Movement. Rather than be distressed by such horrific racism, Hailey can only think about her own discomfort with seeing the photo. This is the first hint of Hailey's prejudice, which grows only more

apparent throughout the novel. Emmett Till's name also reappears at the end of the novel when Starr commits herself to fighting for justice for him and all the other individuals killed by racist violence.

## Chapter 6 Quotes

☝☝ My voice is changing already. It always happens around "other" people, whether I'm at Williamson or not. I don't talk like me or sound like me. I choose every word carefully and make sure I pronounce them well. I can never, ever let anyone think I'm ghetto.

**Related Characters:** Starr Carter (speaker), Detective Wilkes, Detective Gomez

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 95

### Explanation and Analysis

Starr and Lisa go to the police station to speak to detectives Gomez and Wilkes about Khalil's death. In the interview room Starr immediately engages in code switching once again. This moment reflects the double consciousness Starr continues to feel, the result of being aware how she, a young black girl from a poor neighborhood, is seen by outsiders. Regardless of the fact that she has done nothing wrong, Starr knows the detectives are more likely to listen to her and take her seriously if she presents herself in a manner that white society has deemed acceptable. Nevertheless, Gomez and Wilkes almost immediately press Starr to portray Khalil as a dangerous thug who provoked One-Fifteen. No matter how hard she tries to speak "properly," her story holds less value because she is a young black girl and One-Fifteen is a white, male officer.

## Chapter 7 Quotes

☝☝ "Hustle! Pretend the ball is some fried chicken. Bet you'll stay on it then."

**Related Characters:** Hailey Grant (speaker), Starr Carter

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 111

### Explanation and Analysis

Hailey shouts this at Starr while playing basketball in gym



class at Williamson. Starr is aghast that her friend would make such a comment to the only black girl in the room; fried chicken is stereotypically associated with black people. When Starr confronts her about it after the game, Hailey argues that she was joking and simply referring to the lunch served in the cafeteria earlier in the day. Instead of trying to understand her friend's pain, Hailey makes herself the victim by acting outraged that Starr would accuse her of racism. By this point in the novel, Hailey has already displayed ignorance of and insensitivity towards a photograph of Emmett Till, and Starr does not give her the benefit of the doubt. This quote further evidences Hailey's racism, her ignorance of her own prejudice, and her refusal to examine the ways in which she contributes to oppression. The fact that she is friends with Starr makes the moment all the more infuriating and painful, as knowing Starr has not precluded Hailey from harboring reductive and offensive stereotypes about people of color.

☞ The drug dealer. That's how they see him. It doesn't matter that he's suspected of doing it. "Drug dealer" is louder than "suspected" ever will be.

If it's revealed that I was in the car, what will that make me? The thug ghetto girl with the drug dealer? What will my teachers think about me? My friends? The whole fucking world, possibly?

**Related Characters:** Starr Carter (speaker), Khalil Harris, Hailey Grant, Maya Yang

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 113

### Explanation and Analysis

After the fried chicken incident, Hailey and Maya ask Starr if she is acting strangely because she knew Khalil, whose name they have heard on the news. They ask if this is the same Khalil who used to go to Starr's birthday parties. Hailey dismissively refers to him as "the drug dealer," confirming Starr's fears that, for many people, this part of Khalil's life will overshadow everything else about him. The fact that Hailey is so quick to view Khalil in a way that conforms to stereotypical narratives about black people further evidences her prejudice. Starr worries that the rest of the world will similarly use this small part of Khalil's life to justify his death; she is all too aware that society often denies black youths their full humanity and instead defines them by their lowest moments or flaws. Despite her anger, Starr also knows that being associated with Khalil would threaten the carefully curated image she has worked so

hard to present at Williamson. Her two identities once again pull her in different directions, and she guiltily denies knowing Khalil to protect her own life from being dismissed too.

## Chapter 10 Quotes

☞ "Drugs come from somewhere, and they're destroying our community," he says. "You got folks like Brenda, who think they need them to survive, and then you got the Khalils who think they need to sell them to survive. The Brendas can't get jobs unless they're clean, and they can't pay for rehab unless they got jobs. When the Khalils get arrested for selling drugs, they either spend most of their life in prison, another billion-dollar industry, or they have a hard time getting a real job and probably start selling drugs again. That's the hate they're giving us, baby, a system designed against us. That's 'Thug Life.'"

**Related Characters:** Maverick Carter (speaker), Brenda Harris, Khalil Harris, Starr Carter

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 170

### Explanation and Analysis

While driving to the family store, Maverick plays Tupac, and Starr brings up what Khalil said about Tupac's definition of "Thug Life." Maverick pushes Starr to explain exactly what Tupac meant and how this connects to life in Garden Heights, exemplifying his commitment to activism and to helping his daughter understand the specific issues facing black communities. He goes on to explain how Garden Heights and neighborhoods like it become trapped in a cycle of poverty and crime. People like them are born into a world that grants few economic opportunities to survive, and the justice system cares more about arresting drug dealers than getting drugs out of black communities in the first place; prisons and drug companies profit off black pain. The entire economic and justice system is primed to keep black people entrenched in the issues that tear communities like Garden Heights apart. It follows that only by remaking the system can black people thrive. Maverick's speech helps Starr gain a deeper appreciation of Tupac's words, as well as some newfound sympathy for Khalil's choices.

## Chapter 12 Quotes

☞ [Tupac] explains Thug Life like Khalil said he did. The Hate U Give Little Infants Fucks Everybody. ‘Pac spells out “Fucks” because that kid is looking dead in his face. When Khalil told me what it meant I kinda understood it. I really understand it now.

**Related Characters:** Starr Carter (speaker), Khalil Harris

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 205

**Explanation and Analysis**

After being called a coward by Kenya for not speaking up more on behalf of Khalil, Starr creates a Tumblr blog called *The Khalil I Know* to honor the side of her friend that the media has not been showing. Her goal is to emphasize that Khalil was so much more than a drug dealer or a “thug,” and that, regardless, his life mattered. She is touched to see many people like her photos and add their own, and surprised when someone posts a video clip of Tupac defining “Thug Life.” His explanation aligns with what Khalil told Starr in the moments before his death: the way society treats black communities, children in particular, comes back to hurt the whole world when those children grow up. It has taken the events of the previous weeks, however, for the meaning of Tupac’s words to really sink in. Starr has experienced firsthand how the criminalization of black youth tears communities apart, and she now understands why people like Khalil and DeVante turned to gangs and drugs in the first place. The fact that a stranger posted the video of Tupac further reveals how much his words continue to resonate, reasserting the power of language and hip hop to educate and inspire.


☞ “That’s the so-called gun,” Ms. Ofrah explains. “Officer Cruise claims he saw it in the car door, and he assumed Khalil was reaching for it. The handle was thick enough, black enough, for him to assume it was a gun.”

“And Khalil was black enough,” Daddy adds.

A hairbrush. Khalil died over a fucking hairbrush.

**Related Characters:** Starr Carter, Maverick Carter, April Ofrah (speaker), One-Fifteen / Officer Brian Cruise, Khalil Harris

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 217

**Explanation and Analysis**

While sitting in the Just Us for Justice Office, Starr expresses concern about answering the District Attorney’s questions regarding Khalil’s death. For one thing, she says, she does not actually know whether or not he had a gun in the car. April Ofrah then reveals that the alleged gun the media has been talking about was really just a hairbrush. Upon hearing this, Starr is newly outraged by the senselessness of Khalil’s death. Importantly, Maverick also points out that One-Fifteen would not have mistaken the hairbrush for a gun were Khalil not black; the officer was blinded by racist assumptions about the criminality of black youth. Later the public, too, latches onto the hairbrush as symbol of both Khalil’s innocence and the power of hate to twist the most harmless object into a lethal weapon. In the riots following the indictment verdict, Starr notably joins in a chant of “a hairbrush is not a gun.”

☞ “I’ve tried to forget it, but I remember everything. The shots, the look on Natasha’s face. They never caught the person who did it. I guess it didn’t matter enough. But it did matter. She mattered.” I look at Ms. Ofrah, but I can barely see her for all the tears. “And I want everyone to know that Khalil mattered too.”

**Related Characters:** Starr Carter (speaker), April Ofrah, Natasha, Khalil Harris

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 219

**Explanation and Analysis**



While in the Just Us for Justice office, Starr opens up to April Ofrah about witnessing Natasha’s death six years earlier. Natasha was killed in a drive-by shooting in front of Starr, and Starr suggests that authorities did not care enough about the life of a black child killed in a dangerous neighborhood to pursue justice. Starr’s words in this moment directly echo the name of modern protest movement Black Lives Matter, created in response to police brutality against black communities. The use of the word “matter” reflects the lack of attention paid to the deaths of black individuals and the need to focus on justice specifically for people of color. The violence of Natasha’s death is

similar to Khalil's, and together they push Starr to become a more vocal activist. After this moment Starr agrees to do a television interview, effectively using her voice to make change.

## Chapter 14 Quotes

☝️ Funny. Slave masters thought they were making a difference in black people's lives too. Saving them from their wild African ways. Same shit, different century. I wish people like them would stop thinking that people like me need saving.

**Related Characters:** Starr Carter (speaker), One-Fifteen's Father, One-Fifteen / Officer Brian Cruise

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 245-246

### Explanation and Analysis

In his television interview, One-Fifteen's father asserts that his son "loved" working in Garden Heights and wanted to make a difference in the neighborhood. Starr, who is watching the interview alongside Hailey and Maya at Maya's house, scoffs at this attitude, asserting that it is based on the racist idea that black people are inherently inferior and in need of outside help. She compares it to the backwards thinking that allowed slaves owners to believe they were saving their slaves from lives of savagery. Starr knows that many residents of Garden Heights, including her father and Ms. Ofrah, are already working every day to lift their community out of poverty and crime. There are also *good* parts of life in Garden Heights that the media doesn't show, choosing instead to highlight only those elements that support the narrative that black people need saving from themselves. When men like One-Fifteen then position themselves as the saviors of these dangerous black neighborhoods, they are simply upholding the notion that black people are dangerous and criminal—the same racist assumption that robs black children of their innocence and contributed to One-Fifteen's shooting of Khalil.

☝️ That's the problem. We let people say stuff, and they say it so much that it becomes okay to them and normal for us. What's the point of having a voice if you're gonna be silent in those moments you shouldn't be?

**Related Characters:** Starr Carter (speaker), Hailey Grant,

Maya Yang

**Related Themes:**   


**Page Number:** 252


### Explanation and Analysis

After Starr confronts Hailey for her racist comments at Maya's house, Hailey refuses to apologize and storms out. Maya, who is Asian-American, then confesses to Starr that, in their freshman year, Hailey asked if her family ate cat for Thanksgiving. The comment hurt Maya deeply, but neither she nor Starr said anything to Hailey at the time; in fact, when Hailey started to laugh they both joined in. Starr is appalled at her younger self. She wonders if she felt she had to laugh in that moment, putting aside her—and Maya's—discomfort to be accepted. Starr has since learned that avoiding confrontation is no reason to let people get away with racist comments, and that such comments, however small, contribute to a more prejudiced society. People of color should not have to accept casual racism as a "normal" part of life. This moment evidences Starr's growing appreciation of her voice as her strongest weapon in the fight for justice. Immediately after it, she and Maya form a "minority alliance" to call Hailey out for her racism.

☝️ "I knew that boy. Watched him grow up with you. He was more than any bad decision he made," he says. "I hate that I let myself fall into that mind-set of trying to rationalize his death. And at the end of the day, you don't kill someone for opening a car door. If you do, you shouldn't be a cop."

**Related Characters:** Uncle Carlos (speaker), Khalil Harris, One-Fifteen / Officer Brian Cruise, Starr Carter

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 256

### Explanation and Analysis

After One-Fifteen's father's television interview, Starr finds Carlos—who never drinks—sipping a beer outside his house, a clear sign of his distress. Carlos is disgusted by the interview and the presentation of Khalil and Starr as threatening. He no longer tries to defend One-Fifteen, and instead expresses regret for buying into racist narratives that painted Khalil as a "thug." His words assert that black people should be allowed to be complicated human beings,

and that regardless of Khalil's background, he should not have been killed. Khalil did not do anything to warrant his death; rather, One-Fifteen's racist assumptions led him to see danger where there was none. Carlos further recognizes that individuals who cannot see past their own prejudice should not be tasked with protecting a community. In this conversation Carlos also tells Starr that he became a cop because of her, and that he has been put on leave for punching One-Fifteen; Carlos understands that this issue is bigger than one incident, and that the police closing ranks around One-Fifteen is wrong.



## Chapter 16 Quotes

Ms. Ofrah says this interview is the way I fight. When you fight, you put yourself out there, not caring who you hurt or if you'll get hurt.

So I throw one more blow, right at One-Fifteen.

"I'd ask him if he wished he shot me too."

**Related Characters:** Starr Carter (speaker), Diane Carey, April Ofrah, One-Fifteen / Officer Brian Cruise

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 290

### Explanation and Analysis

At the end of Starr's emotional national news interview, host Diane Carey asks what she would say to One-Fifteen were he sitting in the room with them. Remembering April Ofrah's comment that her voice is her weapon, Starr has been picturing the interview as a boxing match in which she is fighting off everyone who has tried to justify Khalil's death or pressure her into silence. She has grown bolder and bolder, refusing to censor the truth about Khalil's drug dealing and expressing her frank anger about the way they have both been portrayed by the media. Moments earlier, she revealed that One-Fifteen pointed his gun at her after killing Khalil, effectively refuting claims that he acted out of fear for his life and shattering the image of him as a noble officer doing his duty. Starr has spent much of the novel concerned with how the rest of the world will perceive her, but here she asserts her power to take control of the narrative. Starr considers this final line to be her strongest blow yet, as she basically tells One-Fifteen he cannot silence her.

## Chapter 17 Quotes

Being two different people is so exhausting. I've taught myself to speak with two different voices and only say certain things around certain people. I've mastered it. As much as I say I don't have to choose which Starr I am with Chris, maybe without realizing it, I have to an extent. Part of me feels like I can't exist around people like him.

**Related Characters:** Starr Carter (speaker), Chris

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 301

### Explanation and Analysis

While sitting in the Rolls Royce outside prom, Chris tells Starr he knows that she is the witness in Khalil's case. He is hurt and angry that she kept this from him, and Starr realizes that she has been hiding part of herself from Chris out of fear he would pity and think less of her. Starr has felt guilty for dating Chris ever since Khalil's death, and has been trying to navigate how to be with someone from such a different world. Chris is not simply much wealthier and more privileged than Starr, but he is also white, and as such cannot understand the specific pressures and expectations black people like Starr face—especially when it comes to issues like police brutality. Tired of constant code switching and the competing pulls of her two identities, Starr finally opens up to Chris about the hardships of growing up in Garden Heights. This act reflects not only a turning point in their romantic relationship, but also Starr's growing acceptance of where she came from and comfort with who she is.

## Chapter 19 Quotes

"Brave doesn't mean you're not scared, Starr," she says. "It means you go on even though you're scared. And you're doing that."

**Related Characters:** Lisa Carter (speaker), Starr Carter

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 331

### Explanation and Analysis

Lisa tells Starr how brave she is before she enters the courthouse to testify in front of the grand jury. Starr has refuted suggestions of her bravery throughout the novel, feeling instead that her silence has failed her friend. In this



moment, however, Lisa redefines bravery for her daughter, acknowledging that it does not require an absence of fear. This reasserts Lisa's wisdom and care for her daughter and reiterates the value of family and community in Thomas's novel. When Starr subsequently enters the courtroom, she says she feels like both of her parents are there with her. Their support allows her to be brave and tell the jury about the night of Khalil's death.

## Chapter 20 Quotes

☝☝ Hailey hands me two pictures. One is Khalil's thugshot, as Daddy calls it. One of the pictures they've shown on the news. Hailey printed it off the internet. Khalil wears a smirk, gripping a handful of money and throwing up a sideways peace sign.

The other picture, he's twelve. I know because I'm twelve in it too. It's my birthday party at this laser tag place downtown. Khalil's on one side of me, shoveling strawberry cake into his mouth, and Hailey's on my other side, grinning for the camera along with me.

**Related Characters:** Starr Carter (speaker), Khalil Harris, Hailey Grant

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 339



### Explanation and Analysis

Starr approaches Maya and Hailey outside the latter's locker at Williamson, and Hailey immediately accuses Starr of being a liar for pretending not to know Khalil. The photos she then presents as evidence exemplify how the world flattens the humanity of black individuals and is quick to portray black youths as criminal. The news has chosen to share a less flattering photograph of Khalil in order to bolster the narrative that he was a thug who deserved to be shot. Starr, however, knows that the photo simply shows someone who never had money and was excited to finally hold some in his hands. The second photograph shows Khalil as the child he was, excited to have cake because he was going hungry at home. These two images are a physical illustration of the double consciousness experienced by black characters in the novel; Starr can see Khalil both as he was and as white society sees him. Furthermore, the fact that Hailey is in the first photo highlights how drastically different the world has treated a poor black boy and a wealthy white girl. It also reveals the depth of Hailey's prejudice; despite having played with Khalil as a child, she, too, dismisses the value of his life.

## Chapter 21 Quotes

☝☝ Chris and Maya walk through the gate, and my stomach gets all jittery. I should be used to my two worlds colliding, but I never know which Starr I should be. I can use some slang, but not too much slang, some attitude, but not too much attitude, so I'm not a "sassy black girl." I have to watch what I say and how I say it, but I can't sound "white."

**Related Characters:** Starr Carter (speaker), Maya Yang, Chris

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 357

### Explanation and Analysis

Starr feels her worlds colliding when Carlos hosts a Memorial Day barbeque and her Williamson friends meet her family and friends from Garden Heights. Starr has spent much of the novel code switching between these two groups, changing how she presents herself to better fit in with her surroundings. Though she has worked to keep "Williamson Starr" and "Garden Heights Starr" separate, in this moment she feels she has been placed in the impossible position of inhabiting both identities at once: she must not scare off Chris and Maya without entirely rejecting her roots. Much to her relief, however, everyone seems to get along. The double consciousness that has ruled much of her experience finally quiets, as Starr is able to stop worrying so much about how others perceive her and simply be herself.

## Chapter 23 Quotes

☝☝ "Anyway, Chris," Seven says, "DeVante's got a point. What makes his name or our names any less normal than yours? Who or what defines 'normal' to you? If my pops were here, he'd say you've fallen into the trap of the white standard."

**Related Characters:** Seven (speaker), DeVante, Chris

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 401

### Explanation and Analysis



When the riots in Garden Heights following the indictment verdict get out of hand, Starr, Chris, DeVante, and Seven pile into Seven's car and drive away. The atmosphere in the car lightens as they try to "test" Chris by asking him about certain elements of black culture. The mood becomes slightly tense, however, when Chris subsequently asks why

black people have “odd names.” Seven points out that Chris is judging things based on the assumption that white names are neutral, when, in fact, they are just as subjective as those of any other group. Seven goes on to point out that many so-called “odd” names are common in black communities, and further suggests that white people do not get to define the baseline for normality. Though the specific focus of this conversation is names, this logic could easily be applied to other elements of culture that are taken as “normal” but are, in fact, part of the same white standard. For example, the language Starr uses at Williamson is no more normal than that she employs in Garden Heights; it is just more accepted by white society.

## Chapter 24 Quotes

●● The bullhorn is as heavy as a gun. Ironic since Ms. Ofrah said to use my weapon.

**Related Characters:** Starr Carter (speaker), April Ofrah

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 411

### Explanation and Analysis

Starr, Chris, DeVante, and Seven attend the protests in Garden Heights following the indictment verdict. When they reach the street where Khalil was killed, they run into April Ofrah, who is leading the crowd in a chant of “a hairbrush is not a gun.” Upon seeing them, Ms. Ofrah once again encourages Starr to speak up. She orders Starr to fire her as her lawyer—so that her actions are those of an activist and not legal counsel—hands Starr a bullhorn, and then guides her to stand atop a police car in order to address the crowd. The comparison between the bullhorn and a gun asserts the weight of Starr’s voice in this moment. Standing on the same street where Khalil died, Starr is no longer afraid and finally embraces her power to demand justice. Though she does not know what to say at first, the crowd encourages her to “speak.” An emboldened Starr begins a chant to honor Khalil’s life.

## Chapter 26 Quotes

●● He said Thug Life stood for “The Hate U Give Little Infants Fucks Everybody.” We did all that stuff last night because we were pissed, and it fucked all of us. Now we have to somehow un-fuck everybody.

**Related Characters:** Starr Carter (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 432

### Explanation and Analysis

The morning after the riots in Garden Heights, Starr sits in her bedroom in the Carters’ new house and looks at the Tupac poster she has put on her wall. The poster was the first thing she put in her new room, and is her way of keeping Khalil with her. Tupac’s quote has appeared throughout the novel multiple times at this point, as a sort of link to Khalil and reminder of the cycle of poverty and crime in black communities. Now, Starr has grown to the point that she not only understands Tupac’s quote but feels compelled to pick up where it leaves off. Starr recognizes the previous night’s chaos and destruction to have been the result of righteous anger, but also that anger is not enough to bring justice for people like Khalil. Starr is no longer content with accepting the hate she has been given, and instead wants to work towards fixing a broken system.

●● It would be easy to quit if it was just about me, Khalil, that night, and that cop. It's about way more than that though. It's about Seven. Sekani. Kenya. DeVante.

It's also about Oscar.

Aiyana.

Trayvon.

Rekia.

Michael.

Eric.

Tamir.

John.

Ezell.

Sandra.

Freddie.

Alton.

Philando.

It's even about that little boy in 1955 who nobody recognized at first—Emmett.

**Related Characters:** Starr Carter (speaker)

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 443

**Explanation and Analysis**

The final moments of Thomas's novel connect Starr's story to the real world. Starr lists the names of actual victims of police brutality whose deaths have spurred nationwide protests against racism and the criminalization of black communities. Listing these names together asserts that none of these incidents were isolated, and that they must be understood as part of a larger system of oppression. At the

same time, each name represents a unique individual whose life—like Khalil's—mattered. Starr's mention of Emmett Till at the end then reveals the deep roots and long history of the injustice against which she vows to fight, and also circles back to her Tumblr post at the beginning of the novel (which made Hailey unfollow her). Starr has grown greatly as an activist since then, speaking up not only online but in the real world, and here recommits herself to using her voice to fight for racial justice.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## CHAPTER 1

Starr Carter begrudgingly attends Big D's spring break party in Garden Heights. She feels like neither "version" of herself belongs there, and she feels out of place. People are dancing, drinking, and smoking marijuana, and the environment is loud and hot. Starr is there with Kenya, a childhood friend. Kenya tells Starr to go dance, because people already think Starr feels like she's "all that" because she goes to Williamson Prep school. Kenya also calls Starr out on her clothes—she's wearing a hoodie from Kenya's brother, Seven. Starr clarifies that Seven is both hers and Kenya's brother. Kenya's mom is Seven's mom, and Starr's dad is Seven's dad.

Starr describes Kenya, who is beautiful and fashionable. She's the only person Starr really hangs out with in Garden Heights, since Starr lost touch with her Garden Heights peers after transferring to Williamson Prep six years earlier. At the party, Kenya is glaring at her nemesis, a girl named Denasia. Kenya tries to enlist Starr to help her "handle" Denasia tonight, but Starr tries to back her way out of any drama. Kenya complains about Starr's "bougie" white friends, saying they "don't count" and so Starr is obligated to help her only real friend: Kenya.

Kenya walks away to get another drink, leaving Starr alone and uncomfortable with so many unfamiliar faces. Starr notes that at Williamson, being one of the only black kids automatically makes her cool; in Garden Heights, on the other hand, she is invisible.

Starr then sees Khalil, a close childhood friend who until recently worked at the Carter family's store. She notices how handsome he looks, momentarily forgetting that she already has a boyfriend, Chris. She also notes that Khalil is wearing expensive sneakers and jewelry. He says he has been keeping "busy," which Starr understands to mean he has been selling drugs. Khalil says his grandmother is going through chemotherapy, and that his mother, Brenda, continues to struggle to get clean.

*Big D's party introduces the sometimes-overwhelming world of Garden Heights. It also establishes the "code switching" that Starr will grapple with throughout the novel, as she feels pulled between her competing identities as a girl from the "ghetto" and a student at Williamson. This scene also introduces Kenya, Starr's closest friend in Garden Heights and someone who keeps her connected to the neighborhood.*



*Tensions between Kenya and Starr will continue throughout the rest of the novel. Kenya suggests that she feels abandoned by Starr and calls Starr out for acting as though she is ashamed of her Garden Heights roots. This echoes the novel's themes of loyalty and community, and foreshadows Starr's later tensions with her Williamson friends as well.*



*Starr notes the different perceptions of blackness based on her surroundings, suggesting the struggle to inhabit two different identities simultaneously.*



*Starr and Khalil's reunion suggests romantic tension, as well as showing how distant Starr has grown from her childhood friends. Drug dealing is common enough in Garden Heights that Starr easily recognizes what Khalil has been up to, while his family struggles hint at the complicated reasons he turned to such a life.*





Suddenly shots ring out at the party. Starr worries about where Kenya is, but Khalil grabs Starr's hand and the two run to his car. Starr texts Kenya, who says she is fine and on her way to "handle" Denasia, which Starr thinks is crazy after just being close to gunshots. As she gets in, Starr notices that Khalil's car has a customized green interior.

Khalil reaches for his **hairbrush** and combs his hair while noting that a fight between rival gangs—the King Lords and Garden Disciples—probably caused the gunshots. Starr notes that Garden Heights has been in the grip of "stupid territory wars" for some time. Her own father, Maverick, was a King Lord at one point but "left the game."

Khalil turns on the radio and Tupac comes on. Starr thinks Tupac is old and irrelevant. Khalil explains Tupac's importance to Starr, noting that he defined Thug Life as "The Hate U Give Little Infants Fucks Everybody." According to Khalil, this means the way society treats black kids comes back around to hurt everyone. Starr worries what Khalil is doing to "fuck everybody."

Starr calls Khalil out for selling drugs. He defends himself by saying his grandmother lost her job at the hospital, ironically due to being too sick to work. He is trying to support his family and got tired of "choosing between lights and food."

Seven texts Starr, worried about where she is. Starr and Khalil laugh about Seven's overprotectiveness and reminisce about another old friend, Natasha, noting that the three of them used call themselves "tighter than the inside of Voldemort's nose." Khalil says how strange it feels that it has been "six years." Just then, police sirens flash in the rear window.

## CHAPTER 2

Starr remembers "the talk" her parents gave her when she was twelve about how to behave in front of police officers. Lisa, her mother, thought she was too young, but Maverick, her father, said she was old enough to be arrested or shot. He emphasized doing exactly what she was told and speaking only when spoken to. Starr notes that if her loud-mouthed father said to be quiet, she knew she'd better listen.

*Khalil's immediate move to protect Starr illustrates his deep care for her. The fact that Kenya seems unfazed by the gunshots also suggests that this violence is simply another part of life in Garden Heights. The color green is associated with the Garden Disciples gang, a fact that later confuses Starr when Khalil is said to have been in the rival King Lords.*



*Khalil's hairbrush will soon become an important symbol of his innocence as well as the blinding power of racism. This scene establishes the dangerous turf wars taking over the neighborhood and reveals Starr's connection to the King Lords through her father.*



*Tupac Shakur was a rapper acclaimed for his often-philosophical lyrics and focus on racism and inner city black communities. His words grant the novel its title and reflect the importance of hip hop in Starr's world. This quote will reappear multiple times in the text as a sort of motif that underscores Starr's growing awareness of and commitment to ending racial injustice.*



*Khalil's story complicates stereotypical notions of drug dealers, establishing him as a good kid simply faced with impossible choices.*



*Though what happened to Natasha is not yet explained, it is clear that Starr has already experienced tragedy in Garden Heights. The police sirens end the chapter on a note of suspense and dread.*



*The "talk" establishes how deeply embedded police brutality is in Starr's world. Knowing how cops will look at her as a black individual, Starr must code switch for her own safety. Silence here also becomes a tool of oppression, as Maverick asserts that Starr must cede control of the conversation to the cops.*



Back in the present, the officer approaches the car and Starr hopes Khalil has had “the talk” too. Khalil is immediately skeptical of what “this fool” wants. Remembering her father’s warning that if there were any contraband in a car everyone present would get in trouble, Starr anxiously asks Khalil if there is anything in the car. He says there isn’t. The officer shines his light in their faces and asks Khalil for his license and registration. Khalil asks why they were pulled over, breaking the “rules” of how to engage with law enforcement. The increasingly terrified Starr implores Khalil to just do what he says.

Starr remembers Maverick’s instructions to get a good look at the cop’s face, and notes that the officer is a white man with the badge number one-fifteen. One-Fifteen says he has pulled them over for a broken taillight and asks where they are coming from, to which Khalil responds with “nunya.” One-Fifteen demands that Khalil get out of the car, pins his arm behind his back, and proceeds to search him.

Finding nothing, One-Fifteen angrily tells Khalil to stay where he is and not to move while he walks back to his patrol car. Starr mentally recites the lessons her parents taught her, including that it’s not smart to make sudden movements when an officer has his back to you. Khalil does this anyways, opening the door to ask Starr if she is okay.

One-Fifteen shoots Khalil three times in the back. Starr watches in horror as blood spurts from her friend and Khalil drops to the ground. She rushes out of the car to his side as he dies. One-Fifteen tells her not to move and points his gun at her.

## CHAPTER 3

While waiting for her parents to pick her up, Starr notes that officials “leave Khalil’s body in the street like an exhibit.” The police rummage through his car and she doesn’t want them to touch his things, including his **hairbrush**. When an officer finally puts a sheet over Khalil, Starr worries he “can’t breathe” under it, and notes that suddenly she “can’t breathe” either.

*Khalil’s actions directly contrast with Maverick’s instructions regarding how to behave in front of the police, creating a sense of mounting tension and dread in the scene. Though Khalil’s behavior is relatively innocuous, and he is certainly within his rights to ask why he has been pulled out of the car, Starr understands that, as black kids, even the slightest hint of noncompliance could spell danger.*



*Starr remembers her father’s advice even amidst her growing fear, and she will refer to One-Fifteen by his badge number throughout the novel. The officer’s forceful, impatient response to Khalil exemplifies the police behavior Maverick warned Starr about.*



*The tension grows as Khalil repeatedly thwarts the advice Starr recites in her head. Violence seems increasingly inevitable. The fact that Khalil’s final act is to check in on Starr increases the poignancy of the next moment.*



*Khalil’s sudden death is violent, bloody, and senseless. The fact that One-Fifteen then points his gun at Starr reveals the depth of his prejudice: even as Starr is overcome with fear and pain, he still views her as a threat.*



*Khalil’s treatment echoes that of Michael Brown, the real-world teen shot and killed by a white officer and whose body was infamously left in the street for hours by officials. Starr’s mention of Khalil’s hairbrush foreshadows its importance as a symbol of racist violence. The phrase “I can’t breathe” also reflects the final words of Eric Garner, whose choking death at the hands of police caused nationwide protests in the United States in 2014.*



A distraught Maverick and Lisa arrive and take Starr home. They tenderly put her to bed. The following morning Starr wakes up and thinks about Natasha. At age ten, Natasha excitedly called for Starr to join her in running through a busted fire hydrant. While happily playing in the water, shots suddenly rang out. Starr dove into a bush of **roses** for cover, but Natasha was struck and killed.

Starr walks to the kitchen, noting that the Carter home has pictures of Malcolm X alongside Black Jesus on its walls. She calls her family “Christlins”—a mixture of Christian and Muslim—with Maverick following the Black Panther’s Ten-Point Program more closely than the Bible. At breakfast, Seven discusses how King, a major neighborhood drug dealer, has moved in with his girlfriend, Seven’s mother Iesha. Maverick offers to let Seven live with the Carters, but Seven wants to be there to protect his mother and sisters—Kenya and Lyric—from King’s beatings.

Seven asks why they shot Khalil, and Starr responds that she and Khalil didn’t do anything wrong, and that Khalil did not have a gun. Maverick notes that this will cause people in the neighborhood to “lose their minds.” Starr worries about what will happen when the world finds out she was in the car; she has seen “all hell” break loose in similar situations before, and always thought she would have the “loudest voice” if someone she knew were killed. Now, however, she is afraid to speak up.

Starr wishes she could stay home to watch her favorite show, *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, which has many similarities to her own life. She also wants to talk to Chris, whom she has been ignoring. She wonders if she should call her other Williamson friends Maya and Hailey. Then she recalls inviting them to a sleepover years earlier, that Hailey’s parents wouldn’t let her attend because they didn’t want their daughter spending the night in the “ghetto.” That was the first moment Starr realized she had to keep her Garden Heights and Williamson worlds separate.

Starr feeds the family pit bull, Brickz, who she notes is sweet to anyone unless they try to break into the house. She watches Maverick tend to his **rose garden**, which he spends hours in every night. Then Maverick and Starr drive to Carter’s Grocery, the family store. Starr notes the familiar neighborhood faces opening up their own business nearby. Mr. Lewis, who owns the barbershop next door, scolds Maverick for replacing a photograph of Martin Luther King, Jr. with one of Huey Newton. He also says he heard Khalil “got himself killed last night.” Starr angrily makes him coffee with day-old grounds. Other regulars then come into the store.

*The explanation of Natasha’s death reveals that Starr has witnessed gun violence before and underscores the danger of life in Garden Heights. Roses, which saved Starr in this moment, grow to symbolize the Carter family throughout the novel.*



*The Carters are a family deeply aware of racial injustice and the history of civil rights. The Black Panther party, which Maverick admires and teaches his children about, specifically fought against police brutality. This scene also further establishes Seven’s backstory and care for his other sisters, as well as King’s cruelty.*



*Seven searches for a reason behind Khalil’s death, but there is none apart from prejudiced fear on the part of One-Fifteen. Starr does not yet comprehend the power her voice will have in the fight for justice for Khalil, and her fear will silence her for some time to come.*



*Starr identifies with “The Fresh Prince” because it tells the story of a black teen sent away from his dangerous neighborhood to live with his posh relatives. The divide between Starr’s two identities becomes all the more poignant as she reflects on the inability to explain or share her Garden Heights world with her Williamson friends.*



*Brickz is unfairly stereotyped as being more dangerous than he is, much like Khalil was in the moments before his death. The health of Maverick’s roses is linked to the Carter family throughout the novel. Mr. Lewis’s preference for Martin Luther King, Jr.—who is often, perhaps unfairly, positioned in opposition to the Black Panthers—suggests he is less radical than Maverick. He also tries to justify Khalil’s death, as many others will do in the book.*



Starr thinks about the texts she has not responded to from her boyfriend Chris, who is white. She notes that while Seven and Lisa know about Chris and have accepted the relationship. Starr is frightened to tell Maverick that she is dating a white person.

*Starr's dueling identities result in competing loyalties, and she will struggle throughout the novel to reconcile Chris being white with the oppression she and her community faces.*



Kenya enters the store and asks if “her” brother — not “our,” a verbal tic that annoys Starr — stayed with the Carters the previous night. Kenya then expresses sympathy for Khalil’s death, and shares a bag of Cheetos with Starr as a means of comforting her. She says that DeVante, a boy from Big D’s party, finally asked for her number. Starr wishes she had stayed with Kenya that night.

*Kenya's claiming of Seven reflects her insecurity about their relationship. Nevertheless, she is one of the few characters who understands and accepts Starr's Garden Heights identity, and as such is able to offer comfort with few words.*



Kenya and Starr walk to get food from Mr. Reuben’s, a kindly shopkeeper who remembers all his regulars’ names and orders. On the way back, they are stopped by Kenya’s father, King, Maverick, who used to be in the same gang as King, bristles when King addresses him by his former gang affiliation. King asks to keep a package — ostensibly of drugs — at Maverick’s store, and Maverick angrily refuses. He tells King not to forget that he went to jail on his behalf, and further warns him not to lay a hand on Seven. King takes Kenya and speeds away.

*Mr. Reuben reflects one of the best parts of Garden Heights—that is, its strong sense of community. King, on the other hand, represents the extent to which gangs and drugs control many residents' lives. He serves as a foil to Maverick throughout the novel, symbolizing the violent, dangerous path some men take to survive in the world of Garden Heights and how this path hurts everyone around them.*



## CHAPTER 4

Starr overhears her parents arguing with Carlos, who is Lisa’s brother and a detective, about Khalil’s shooting. Carlos reveals that he is on the same force as One-Fifteen and defends his colleague’s actions, saying Maverick always makes things “about race” and questioning why Starr was in the car with a “drug dealer.” Maverick argues that the officer only assumed Khalil was a “thug” because he was black. Carlos says Lisa needs to move away from the “poisonous” Garden Heights — something Maverick refuses to ever do.

*Carlos complicates the notion that all police officers are bad, though he, too, has succumbed to rationalizing Khalil's death as his own fault. Lisa and Maverick will argue about leaving Garden Heights throughout the novel; Maverick feels to leave would be to betray the community, and that they must stay to help it.*



Starr enters the room and Carlos asks if she would be willing to talk to some detectives. Starr is scared of facing the police again but, with Carlos’s assurance that it will help Khalil, she agrees.

*Starr remains hesitant to speak up, while beginning to understand the power her voice can have in the fight for justice for Khalil.*



Starr thinks the real reason her father and uncle fight is because of Maverick’s insecurity and guilt about not being there for part of his children’s lives: Carlos took care of Starr, Seven, and Lisa while Maverick was in prison for three years, and is a surrogate father to Starr. Maverick tells his daughter that he witnessed people being shot and killed in front of him as well, and that he named her Starr because she was his “light in the darkness.” He tells her to hold her own when speaking to the detectives, and to remember that she did nothing wrong.

*Maverick complicates stereotypes about former felons; ironically, he went to prison to leave the world of crime, and cares about his family just as much as Carlos, a man on the opposite side of the law, does. Maverick's insecurity around Carlos leads to tension in their relationship.*





On Sunday morning Starr and her parents visit Mrs. Rosalie, Khalil's grandmother who also helped care for Lisa when she got pregnant with Starr. Starr is flooded with memories of Khalil upon entering Mrs. Rosalie's house, and reminisces about all the games they played together as children.

*Starr and Khalil's connection is deepened, making the different paths they took all the more poignant. Starr was able to escape Garden Heights and survive, while Khalil, who was left behind, did not.*



Tammy, Khalil's well-to-do aunt, is at the house as well. She and Lisa were very close when Starr was little, and Khalil used to say he wished Tammy were his mother instead of Brenda. Tammy says they do not know where Brenda is, and she hopes Khalil's death will finally force Brenda to stop taking drugs.

*Brenda's absence underscores how difficult Khalil's life must have been before his death. The fact that he sold drugs despite his mother being an addict further reflects the novel's theme of the cycle of poverty and crime.*



Mrs. Rosalie tells Starr that she was the best friend Khalil ever had, which makes Starr feel at once heartbroken and guilty for having lost touch with so much of Garden Heights. Mrs. Rosalie confirms that Khalil was selling drugs, but also says he wanted to talk to Maverick about how to get out of the game. Starr worries that the public will only see Khalil as a drug dealer, even though "he was so much more than that." She looks around at Khalil's family and notes that regardless of what he did, he mattered to them. Maverick and Lisa then give Mrs. Rosalie money to pay for Khalil's funeral.

*Starr understands that white society flattens black identity and will be all too quick to define Khalil in a way that conforms with prejudiced assumptions about black people. Despite its danger, Garden Heights is clearly home to many people, like Lisa and Maverick, who carry deep love for and appreciation of their neighbors.*



## CHAPTER 5

Lisa drives Starr and Sekani to Williamson Prep, passing by Carlos's gated neighborhood on the way. Starr wonders if the gate is trying to keep people out or in. Upon arriving at school, Starr flips the "switch" in her brain to become "Williamson Starr," the persona she inhabits to fit in with the posh, predominantly white world of Williamson. She avoids slang and "stank eyes," and holds her tongue so that she won't seem like a stereotypical "angry black girl." Above all, she does not want anyone to think she is "ghetto."

*Starr "code switches" at Williamson as a measure of self-protection. Understanding white society's assumptions about people like her, Starr feels pulled between two versions of herself throughout the novel. She experiences the "double consciousness" faced by black people seeing themselves through the eyes of a white society.*



Starr greets her friend Maya, an Asian American student at Williamson whose boyfriend, Ryan, is the only other black student in their grade. Starr says that other students assumed she and Ryan would date because both are black. They find Hailey, Starr's oldest friend at Williamson, and other members of the basketball team. As her friends talk about their extravagant spring breaks spent at fancy islands and amusement parks, Starr feels distinctly out of place once again. She also feels tension with Hailey, and notes that she has ever since Hailey unfollowed Starr's Tumblr when she posted a photograph of Emmett Till. In their world, unfollowing a Tumblr is equivalent to saying, "I don't like you anymore." Starr also recalls that she and Hailey became close through grief; Hailey's mother died of cancer around the same time that Natasha was killed.

Before first period, Starr runs into Chris, whom she has been ignoring since he took out a condom while they were in his bedroom, despite her telling him she was not ready to have sex. Starr misses him, however, and finds herself unable to stay angry when Chris goofily raps the introduction to *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*. Starr feels like she can be herself with Chris, rather than "Williamson Starr." When Chris grabs her hand, however, she flashes back to Khalil's shooting, unable to separate Chris's whiteness from One-Fifteen's. She recoils.

Though it feels like a betrayal, Starr is relieved that no one at school mentions Khalil. At the end of the day she finds Seven with his girlfriend Layla, another black student at Williamson who is "smart enough for Harvard but Howard bound." Seven drives Starr and Sekani to the clinic where Lisa works. On the way, a police car pulls beside them at a stoplight. Tension fills the car. Seven immediately turns his music down and stares straight ahead, while Starr prays for the light to change. When it does, Seven lets the cop pass, but his shoulders remain tense until they reach the freeway.

The children arrive at the clinic and greet Lisa. Soon an anguished Brenda arrives, looking completely disheveled with dirty clothes and uncombed hair. She is beside herself over Khalil's death, but Starr judges her in her grief, pointing out that she was not there for her son in his time of need. Lisa scolds Starr, asserting that she has no right to judge and that Brenda was Khalil's mother no matter what either of them did.

*The subtle prejudice of Williamson is evidenced by the fact that students assume "others" will self-segregate—that like will stick with like, and Starr would date the only black boy in her class. The stark contrast between Starr and her friends' spring breaks further illustrates just how different life in Garden Heights is from anything Starr's classmates have experienced. This moment further hints at Hailey's discomfort with talking about race and foreshadows her later insensitivity towards Khalil's death. Yet it also establishes that Hailey has faced hardship in her life too.*



*Starr and Chris bond over their shared love of certain elements of black culture. Chris's goofy rapping reflects hip hop as a tool for catharsis and connection. Starr struggles to separate her anger over Khalil's death due to racist violence from the fact that Chris is white, and thus cannot understand a fundamental aspect of her experience, and is also inextricably linked to perpetrators like One-Fifteen.*



*Starr's two identities continue to pull her in different directions and test her loyalty to Garden Heights. Starr has been traumatized by Khalil's death and remains on edge around the police for much of the novel. Police brutality is such a reality in Garden Heights (as elsewhere) that Seven, too, grows tense and wary around cops despite knowing that he is doing nothing wrong.*



*Starr's anger with Brenda stems in part from her own guilt; she feels that they both failed Khalil, and that Brenda does not deserve such an elaborate display of grief.*



## CHAPTER 6

Lisa reminds an extremely anxious Starr to breathe as they arrive at the police station for Starr's interview with the detectives, Gomez and Wilkes. They pass Carlos's desk, which Starr notices has pictures of her on it. Though Starr is terrified, Carlos says that she must talk to the detectives today if she wants the case to be handled properly. Lisa demands to go into the interview room with Starr. Knowing she is not alone, Starr feels ready to take on the interview. Upon entering the interview room, she repeats the teachings of "the talk" in her head and immediately feels her voice changing to ensure she does not sound "ghetto." She remains hyper aware of her speech and gestures throughout the interview.

Gomez and Wilkes ask Starr whether Khalil seemed "irate" after being pulled over by One-Fifteen, and assert that he was "hesitant" to get out of the car. Starr grows increasingly nervous, and feels as though the room is getting hotter. She recalls her father's advice to not let them put words in her mouth, and counters the detectives' assertions that Khalil was being difficult. The detectives continue to present Khalil as resistant to arrest in their questioning, and also ask Starr whether he was drinking, sold drugs, or was in a gang. Starr can no longer hold her tongue, and quips that Khalil "didn't pull the trigger on himself." Lisa asks why it seems like they are putting Starr and Khalil on trial instead of One-Fifteen. They leave the interview with the shared knowledge that "this is gonna be some bullshit."

## CHAPTER 7

Khalil's name finally appears on the news, along with the title "Suspected Drug Dealer." The news does not mention that he was unarmed, and says the police spoke to an "unnamed witness."

At Williamson, fried chicken is served for lunch in the cafeteria, much to Starr's delight. In gym class, Starr sits between Hailey and Maya and scoffs at a girls vs. boys basketball game in which the girls mostly flirt instead of playing. Starr spots Chris on a bench, and looks at him as though she has suddenly "really, really" realized that he is white—a fact that feels like a "fuck you" to the black men in her life. She wonders if she is betraying Khalil by dating him.

*Family continues to be a major source of comfort and strength for Starr. Carlos reiterates the power of language in the fight for racial justice—silence will only serve those in power who want to maintain the status quo. Starr code switches once again upon talking to the detectives, knowing all too well that she will be taken more seriously if she acts in a more "white" manner.*



*The fact that Gomez is a woman of color underscores that anyone can fall victim to racist thinking and that police brutality is generally a systemic rather than individual issue. In attempting to paint Khalil as having provoked his own death, the detectives are prioritizing One-Fifteen's wellbeing and remaining more loyal to the police than to the search for justice. Despite Khalil's obvious innocence, Starr and Lisa recognize that the world will do anything to make a black boy appear guilty of his own murder.*



*As Starr feared, Khalil's drug dealing overshadows everything else about him and is already being used to make him seem guilty.*



*Starr continues to grapple with her feelings of guilt about dating a white boy, fearing that it is the ultimate rejection of Garden Heights and her black identity. The implication is that she, too, fears she has absorbed notions of antiblackness.*



Hailey drags Starr and Maya onto the basketball court to play. Starr doesn't really want to join in the game, and reflects that, without her noticing it, Hailey has somehow become the leader in their friend group. The game starts off well until Starr becomes distracted by Chris. To Starr's shock and disgust, Hailey yells for her to "pretend the ball is some fried chicken." They lose the game, and afterwards Starr calls Hailey out about "making a fried chicken comment to the only black girl in the room." Hailey is utterly indignant at the insinuation that she could possibly have said something racist, insisting it was just a joke in reference to lunch earlier that day.

Hailey and Maya ask if the Khalil they heard about on the news was the same Khalil who attended Starr's birthday parties as a child, and if that is why she is behaving weirdly. Hailey dismissively refers to Khalil as "the drug dealer," and Starr realizes that is all the world will ever see Khalil as. Worried what they will think of her, Starr denies knowing Khalil. She feels as though this is the ultimate betrayal.

Hailey then asks Starr if she is upset because of the anniversary of Natasha's death, reminding Starr that the anniversary of her own mother's death was a few weeks earlier. Starr bursts into tears and the gym teacher sends her to the school shrink. Not wanting pity, Starr runs off before her classmates see her crying and think of her as a "the Weak Black Girl."

Starr goes to the headmaster's office instead of the shrink's, and fakes menstrual cramps to convince Carlos to sign her out of school. He takes her to get frozen yogurt, and, unconvinced by her act, asks what is going on. Starr says that because she had not seen Khalil in months before his death, she is worried about attending the funeral. She then pushes Carlos to explain why One-Fifteen has not been arrested yet. Carlos defends his colleague, saying one can never know how they will react in that sort of situation. He cannot say definitively whether he would have shot Khalil too. Starr confesses that One-Fifteen pointed his gun at her, too, and Carlos holds her. He repeatedly tells her "I'm sorry," and that he knows "that's not enough."

## CHAPTER 8

It is the day of Khalil's funeral. The parking lot is packed when the Carters arrive, and Starr sees multiple people dressed in "RIP Khalil" t-shirts. The Carters wear suits and dresses. Starr feels uncomfortable in Christ Temple, which the family stopped attending years ago in favor of a more "diverse" church, where the service is led by a "white guy with a guitar."

*Starr grows more aware and resentful of the power imbalance in her relationship with Hailey. This is the first time she has called Hailey out for a racist comment, reflecting her growing awareness of injustice and belief in the strength of her own voice. Hailey's comment, and her haughty defense of it, further reveals her ignorance and prejudice, as well as her refusal to reflect on the way her actions (however innocuous they might seem to her) could uphold or contribute to larger systems of oppression.*



*Hailey refers to Khalil in a way that fits with stereotypical narratives about black people, latching onto the fact that he sold drugs rather than the fact that he was murdered. Starr fears that association with Khalil will destroy the "Williamson Starr" identity she has worked so hard to build.*



*Even in her grief, Starr is forced to remain constantly aware of the assumptions others will make about her because she is black.*



*Carlos is further established as a second father figure to Starr. His own identity is pulled in two different directions, as he must navigate being both a cop and a black man confronted with violence against his community. He initially remains loyal to the police force, preferring to rationalize Khalil's death than accept that he is part of a broken system. But Starr's reveal that One-Fifteen pointed his gun at her, too, begins to crack Carlos's belief in the righteousness of his squad.*



*Khalil's death is already sparking unrest throughout Garden Heights, and the t-shirts suggest that his name will become part of a larger movement against injustice. The fact that Starr attends a different (and whiter) church further evidences her distance from the community.*



Pastor Eldridge greets the family and looks at Starr with pity. Starr feels her legs trembling and a wave of nausea as her family gets in line to approach Khalil's open casket. She counts down the remaining people in front of her with increasing dread, until finally the moment arrives. The Khalil inside looks like a mannequin of himself, lacking the spark and dimples she knew and loved. Starr flashes back to seeing Natasha in her casket years before, remembering her horrified screams for her friend to wake up.

A woman wearing one of the "RIP Khalil" t-shirt and exhibiting an air of authority directs people to their seats. Starr feels like a "phony" when her family is seated in the front row of the church, a place of honor for Khalil's friends. She stares at the flower arrangements and photos of Khalil as she knew him, as the young boy who used to play with her and Natasha. Pastor Eldridge leads a service for Khalil, framing the day as one of joy. The choir sings and nearly everyone except for Starr joins in. Friends of Khalil's whom Starr has never met go to the front of the church to tell stories about him that Starr has never heard. She feels even more unworthy of her seat.

The authoritative woman who led them to their seats then gets up to addresses the church. She introduces herself as April O'frah with Just Us for Justice, an organization calling for police accountability. She tells the church that the police have no intention of arresting One-Fifteen, and that Khalil was unarmed at the time of his death. This latter statement in particular causes unrest throughout the church; confused murmurs are quickly replaced with people shouting that "this is bullshit." O'frah then invites people to join a march past the police station after the ceremony.

King, Iesha, and a group of King Lords suddenly enter from the back of the church. Iesha wears heavy makeup and a skimpy black dress, and Starr can sense the tension between her parents in that moment. Iesha, a prostitute, is the "Achilles heel" of their marriage; Seven is the result of a "for-hire" session between her and Maverick.

The group walks to the front of the church and one of the King Lords lays a gray bandana across Khalil's chest. A furious Mrs. Rosalie snatches the bandana and throws it back at King, calling him a demon and screaming for them all to leave. Iesha calls Mrs. Rosalie an "old hag," and reveals that King offered to pay for the funeral. Mrs. Rosalie says she refused the "filthy money" and scorns Iesha for entering a church. The King Lords leave.

*Khalil's open casket echoes the photograph of Emmett Till that Starr posted on her Tumblr blog, positioning Khalil as another catalyst in the fight against racial injustice. Starr's flashback to Natasha reiterates the reality of gun violence in Garden Heights and how much tragedy she has already been forced to live through.*



*Starr continues to feel as though she has abandoned Garden Heights and Khalil, and that she is not worthy of speaking on his behalf. Her disconnect from the rest of the church reflects how much she has distanced herself from the community and how hesitant she remains to associate with it—and also to act like she is still a part of it in this time of crisis.*



*The existence of Just Us for Justice asserts that Garden Heights has been aware of and fighting against racial injustice for some time, and places Khalil's death in the larger context of violence against black communities. The reveal that he was unarmed will be a major factor behind the coming protests and riots.*



*Thomas complicates Lisa and Maverick's relationship, which to this point has been portrayed as deeply loving. The bombastic entrance and appearance of King and Iesha makes them appear insensitive and villainous.*



*The bandana is the King Lords' way of "claiming" a member, and signals to the community that Khalil was in the gang—yet Khalil can no longer speak for himself to either support or oppose such a claim, and the notion that he was in a gang will surely hurt his case in court and the media. Mrs. Rosalie's anger reflects that many in Garden Heights do not approve of King and want to rid their neighborhood of gang influence.*





Starr is appalled to think that Khalil could have become a King Lord, knowing how much pain and violence gangs and drugs have wreaked on Garden Heights. She is also confused; though King Lords “crown their fallen comrades” with a gray bandana, the inside of his car was green — the color of the Garden Disciples. Starr feels even more guilt for abandoning Khalil when he was alive, positing that she could have talked him out of joining a gang. She admits to herself that Khalil was her first crush, as well as one of the best friends she ever had, no matter how little they saw each other.

After the funeral, protestors outside of the church hold signs demanding “Justice for Khalil”, “Am I Next?”, and “Enough Is Enough.” News vans have arrived as well. Maverick says he wants Seven and Sekani to be a part of the march, but Lisa insists on taking Starr home. April O’frah approaches the Carters and offers to help Starr with legal representation. She asserts that the case is about to get national media attention, and she wants to help protect Starr’s privacy.

## CHAPTER 9

That evening, protests erupt in Khalil’s name throughout Garden Heights. Maverick spends the night at his store to protect it from rioters and instructs his family to stay indoors. Starr compares her neighborhood to a “war zone.” Upon hearing the sound of machine gunfire Lisa instructs the children to move to the den, where there are no windows.

The family turns on the television to watch coverage of the protests, which have grown violent; police are tear-gassing protestors, cars have been set on fire, and people are running and screaming through the streets. The police appear on screen and say they have no reason to arrest One-Fifteen. To Starr’s anger, the news makes it sound as though “it’s Khalil’s fault he died,” alleging there was a gun in the car and calling Khalil a drug dealer and gang banger. Starr is not sure what to believe, but knows that regardless, Khalil did not deserve to die.

That night, Starr has a vivid nightmare about Natasha’s death. The next morning Seven bangs on her bedroom door, reminding her that it’s the day of their monthly basketball game. Starr yells out to her parents that they’re leaving, and the two head to Rose Park—a large park filled with rusting playground equipment, broken beer bottles, trash, and cigarette butts. Still, the park holds sentimental value for Starr, who played there with Khalil and Natasha.

*The mention of Khalil’s car suggests all may not be as it seems regarding his gang affiliation. Though still upset, Starr now exhibits a firmer belief in her ability to make a difference in Garden Heights and finally allows herself to acknowledge the deep connection she had with Khalil—but this also makes her alleged “betrayal” seem all the more painful.*



*It is becoming increasingly clear that outrage over Khalil’s death will only grow stronger. Maverick is committed to educating his children about fighting injustice. April O’frah’s offer suggests that Starr’s world is about to be turned upside down, and she won’t be able to stay quiet for much longer.*



*The riots reflect Tupac’s definition of Thug Life, as people’s anger over racist violence sometimes leads them to destroy even their own community. Maverick guarding his store then foreshadows its destruction later in the novel.*



*The media and police continue to attack Khalil’s character to rationalize his death and defend the police. Starr recognizes that society is being unfair by focusing on this one small part of Khalil’s identity, and that his background should not be relevant regardless—only the immediate events of his death should be. She understands the quickness with which society dismisses the value of black life.*



*Seven clearly cares for his sister, and their recurrent basketball game reflects the closeness and supportive nature of their relationship. Rose Park is like a microcosm of Garden Heights, representing how children are forced to play and grow amidst a background of violence and neglect that follows them throughout their adult lives.*



Starr and Seven play basketball, but then two young teens in the colors of the Garden Disciples approach. They ask Seven if he is “kinging”—that is, part of their rival gang—and even though he says he is neutral, the teens demand he and Starr hand over their things. DeVante, a King Lord around Starr’s age sitting nearby, intervenes. He asserts that Rose Park is King territory and pulls up his shirt to reveal the gun in his waistband. The Garden Disciples leave.

Starr initially thinks DeVante is cute, until he calls her “li’l mamma”; Starr hates nicknames. Seven introduces them and Starr realizes this is the same DeVante Kenya fought over at Big D’s party. Seven tells DeVante he’s sorry about his brother, Dalvin.

Maverick pulls up to the basketball court, furious that Starr and Seven left the house without telling him or Lisa. He rants as he drives them home, pointing out the danger of going to play ball when the neighborhood is so dangerous that the National Guard has arrived. Back home, Lisa is equally angry. She demands Starr and Seven hand over their cellphones, and says they are all going to Carlos’s house.

Later that day, Starr watches Maverick examine his **roses**, which are looking dry despite his frequent watering. Lisa drives Starr to Carlos’s house. On the way, they see protestors marching for Khalil, and Lisa can sense her daughter’s feelings of guilt. Lisa tells Starr that Starr was not breathing when she was born; though Lisa had tried to do everything right throughout her pregnancy, this moment made her feel as though she had done something terribly wrong. A nurse grabbed Lisa’s hand and said even when doing the right thing, things can turn out wrong; “the key is to never stop doing right.”

They arrive at Carlos’s house, which is in a gated community close to where Chris lives. Starr notices how peaceful and safe everything is there, with joggers and kids playing in the streets. Nana, Lisa’s mother, greets them and immediately begins to complain about how Carlos’s wife Pam has started baking rather than frying her fish. Chris shows up at the front door unannounced, wanting to check on Starr following the riots and also demanding to know why she has been ignoring him. Starr angrily blurts out that he simply cannot understand what is going on with her because he is white. Chris insists he doesn’t care about their differences, and asks Starr to help him understand. Starr decides she has missed him too much and he is her “normal,” and they reconcile. She still cannot bring herself to tell him she is the witness in Khalil’s case.

*The fact that the two Garden Disciples are so young reveals how strong the pull of gang culture is in Garden Heights, and how deeply it shapes the lives of all who live there. Ironically, the person who saves Seven and Starr from the Garden Disciples is another gang member, reflecting the cycle of crime in the community.*



*DeVante’s arrogance is immediately tempered by the mention of his brother, complicating the image of him as just another gangbanger.*



*Garden Heights can be so dangerous that Starr and Seven aren’t even supposed to go out to play basketball without notifying their parents. The National Guard’s arrival adds to the feeling of being in a war zone.*



*Maverick’s roses represent the Carters; the flowers’ dryness in this moment reflects how Starr and her family are struggling to thrive in Garden Heights in the wake of Khalil’s death. Lisa’s story reassures Starr that she—and Khalil—did nothing wrong, and that Starr must continue to fight for justice even when the complications and frustrations of the world keep getting in her way.*



*The calm and security of Carlos’s predominantly white neighborhood is presented in stark contrast to Garden Heights, which is rapidly becoming more and more like a war zone. Nana’s complaints provide some comic relief, while Chris’s arrival shows his concern for and commitment to Starr. Nevertheless, Starr is not yet able to open up to him, and continues to present a calculated version of her life to avoid his pity and judgment.*



## CHAPTER 10

Lisa and Starr spend the night at Carlos’s to avoid the riots, but protests continue to fill the streets when they drive home the next morning. Starr is terrified when they have to pass throughout a police checkpoint, and grips the door handle. They make it through without issue, but Starr does not let go of the handle until they get home.

Back at their house, Maverick asks Starr to hang out with him that day, promising her ice cream and the chance to watch Harry Potter. Starr relays her father’s theory that the Hogwarts houses are really just gangs; they wear the same colors, never snitch on each other, and some (the Death Eaters, at least) even have matching tattoos.

Starr gets into the car with Maverick, who plays Tupac as he drives. Starr lightheartedly mocks him for showing his age, but Maverick insists Tupac cared about uplifting black people. Starr tells Maverick what Khalil told her about Tupac’s definition of Thug Life. Maverick asks what Starr thinks Tupac meant, and she replies those at the “bottom of society” “get the short end of the stick,” and are also feared the most by society.

Maverick continues to push Starr to explain how drugs, racism, and a lack of opportunity trap communities like Garden Heights in a cycle of poverty and crime. He says that people become drug dealers because they need money and “don’t have a lot of other ways to get it.” He connects this to the lack of proper education in minority communities, drug industries, and a justice system that disproportionately punishes black people.

After listening to her father’s words, Starr realizes that the protests and anger in her community are much bigger than Khalil. She decides that she cannot be silent if she wants the system of oppression to change, stating “my silence isn’t helping Us.”

When Maverick and Starr arrive back at the store they find DeVante. It becomes clear that he is trying to hide from someone; he finally admits he is trying to hide from King because King wants him to “handle”—kill—the people who killed his brother Dalvin. Starr realizes that the gunshots she heard at Big D’s party were the same that killed DeVante’s brother. DeVante wants advice from Maverick on getting out of the gang, since Maverick got out years earlier.

*Starr’s continued trauma is evidenced by her fear of police even in a mundane situation. She now knows from experience that a black person does not have to be doing anything wrong to be targeted by the cops.*



*By comparing gangs to a fantasy book, Maverick’s theory makes fierce disputes between groups like the King Lords and Garden Disciples seem all the more arbitrary and ridiculous.*



*Hip hop is once again presented as an important tool for education and empowerment. Starr’s understanding of “Thug Life” has grown, as she can now connect Tupac’s words to her own neighborhood’s struggles with police brutality.*



*Maverick’s speech effectively captures the thesis of the novel—that the entire economic and justice system is primed to keep black people entrenched in the issues that tear communities like Garden Heights apart. It follows that only by remaking the system can black people thrive.*



*By connecting Khalil’s death to a larger tapestry of racism and violence, Starr finally understands her community’s anger and feels empowered to speak up.*



*DeVante’s story represents the impossible situations black youths often find themselves in. His brother’s death is yet another example of the effects of gun violence on life in Garden Heights. The novel refuses to gloss over the moment of gang violence at Big D’s party, instead asserting that the victim, regardless of gang affiliation, was someone whose life mattered.*



Maverick says that his father was the “biggest drug dealer” Garden Heights had ever seen, effectively making Maverick a King from birth. Maverick had to “king” since childhood as a way to survive; people would have it out for him because of his father, but as a King Lord people would have his back. Once he had children, he decided the gang was not worth it anymore. He took a drug charge for King and went to prison for three years. There he reconnected with his father, who told him how much he regretted missing time with his own children. In exchange for protecting King, the latter let Maverick leave the gang.

Maverick agrees to help DeVante get free of King, and says he can start by working in the store. While showing him how to put price stickers on items, DeVante opens up to Starr about feeling helpless as he watched Dalvin die—a feeling Starr knows all too well. Maverick allows DeVante to stay with the Carters that night. Later Starr overhears her parents fighting, Lisa angry with Maverick for putting the family in danger by bringing DeVante home, and more broadly for insisting they continue to live in Garden Heights. She says she has made her choice and will do what she needs to do for her children.

*Maverick’s story is an explicit manifestation of the cycle of crime, as he was literally born into a gang and had to go to prison to leave it. He asserts that family is a community worth more than any gang. The reasons behind Maverick’s prison sentence also make him appear more sympathetic, and make King seem all the more selfish, calculating, and cruel.*



*Maverick helping DeVante reiterates his commitment to the Garden Heights community. DeVante’s tough posturing crumbles as he tells Starr about his brother’s death, complicating any dismissal of him as just another gangbanger and instead presenting him as what he is: a kid trying his best to make his way in the world. Lisa knows things will only get worse for the Carters if they remain in such a toxic environment.*



## CHAPTER 11

The next day at Williamson things are eerily quiet. Starr asks what is going on, and Hailey reveals that her brother, Remy, is starting a protest for Khalil simply to get out of class. Making matters worse, Hailey says it is messed up that they’re protesting a “drug dealer’s” death. A disgusted Starr tells her that should have nothing to do with it and tells Hailey to leave her alone. She decides she is “done following Hailey.” Five minutes into class students start chanting “Justice for Khalil” and students walk out of the classroom. Only Starr and Chris stay behind. Later in the lunchroom, Starr is happy to see that Jess, a friend from the basketball team who is white, refused to join the protest as well. She, Starr, Chris, Seven, and Layla joke that they are protesting the “Get Out of Class Protest.”

After school, Starr sees Mr. Lewis standing outside Maverick’s store and preparing to give an on-camera interview. Maverick says it is in response to some cops getting jumped around the corner. Starr mentally begs the news crew not to put Mr. Lewis on live TV, but the interview begins. Mr. Lewis bluntly tells the interviewer that thugs have been terrorizing Garden Heights for years, and he will “name one right now they can come and get.” Much to Starr and her family’s horror, he then snitches on King.

*Hailey’s prejudice and insensitivity become yet more apparent as she uses Khalil’s death for her own ends. Her relationship with Starr finally reaches its breaking point. Starr refuses to join the protest despite the fact that almost everyone else at Williamson does, signifying a step towards being herself rather than changing who she is to better fit in with white society. It is especially insensitive that the rich white students who are totally disconnected from Khalil and his experience would then use his murder as an easy excuse to miss a few minutes of class.*



*Snitching is one of the most dangerous offenses in Garden Heights, and men like King use this fact to their advantage—avoiding punishment by terrifying the community into silence. As such, Mr. Lewis’s actions are seen as the ultimate transgression against the rules of the neighborhood.*



Maverick calls Mr. Lewis crazy after the interview for snitching on television, insisting he is “a dead man walking.” Mr. Lewis asserts that unlike the rest of the neighborhood, he isn’t scared of King. He reveals the prosthetic leg he got from the war as well as a scar on his stomach he got “after some white boys cut me ‘cause I drank from their fountain.” Compared to all that, he says, King’s “games” are nothing. He says King is still controlling everyone in Garden Heights, including Maverick.

*Mr. Lewis’s mention of segregation and war highlights the relative absurdity of gangs, as well as the fact that they lead to dissention within a community that must stick together in the face of oppression. Mr. Lewis also calls out the way in which King uses silence and fear to control the neighborhood.*



A police car with two officers shows up and they approach Maverick and Mr. Lewis. An officer named Larry, who is black, accuses Maverick of harassing Mr. Lewis, a claim both calmly deny. Starr notes that Mr. Lewis has his hands by his sides, and must have had “the talk” too. She also thinks they have targeted her father because of his baggy clothes and tattoos. Larry asks for Maverick’s ID, which he very slowly hands him, not wanting to make any sudden movements. Upon seeing his name, Larry forces Maverick to the ground and thrusts his knee into his back. A crowd of familiar neighborhood faces, including Mr. Reuben’s nephew Tim, has formed at this point; the officers tell them to leave, but they insist they this “is their business.” Larry begrudgingly lets Maverick up. Before the cops leave, Larry tells Maverick he will “keep an eye on him.”

*Mr. Lewis’s code switching in front of the officers shows how deeply embedded knowledge of police brutality is in Garden Heights. Maverick is targeted because he does not conform to white notions of respectability— notions that have been absorbed even by the black police officer who confronts him. The perpetrators of police brutality need not be white, as assumptions about the criminality of black communities are common enough to be internalized by anyone.*



After the incident, a shaken Maverick and the others go inside the store. Maverick slams his fists on the counter in anger. Mr. Lewis, no longer at odds with Maverick, tries to comfort him, while Sekani asks his siblings why the officers treated “daddy like that”? Seven comforts his little brother. Tim says that the officers humiliated him in order to scare Starr off from speaking up; news had spread that she was the witness.

*Mr. Lewis and Maverick resolve their differences over a shared understanding of the racism they just had to endure. Sekani, who has not had “the talk” yet, is too young to understand what happened. Tim suggests the police, too, understand the power of Starr’s voice to make trouble for them.*



Kenya overhears this and calls Starr a coward for not speaking up more on behalf of Khalil. She says that if Khalil were from Williamson, Starr would be have defended him, and further accuses Starr of abandoning both Khalil and her for the bougie world of her private school. Kenya insists Starr has a chance to help the entire neighborhood, and that Khalil would have spoken up for her.

*Kenya’s words are a turning point for Starr, as they force her to accept that she has a duty to use her voice to better her community—to stay silent is also to take a stance. This reiterates the novel’s theme of the power and necessity of language.*





## CHAPTER 12

Tanks rumble through Garden Heights. A curfew has been implemented, and Maverick is home with the family. Everyone feels safer with him around, and the mood is lighter in the Carter home. Maverick tends to his **roses**, which he fears are dying. He and Lisa have made up, and Maverick watches his wife as she works on the computer. Starr assumes she's on Facebook updating her out-of-town relatives, but wonders how she could post positive news without mentioning everything that has been happening. Maverick asks Starr to get her old laptop to give to DeVante for school.

Back in her bedroom, Starr checks on the new Tumblr blog she has started called *The Khalil I Know*. It includes photographs and stories about Khalil that contradict and complicate the image the media is painting of him. She sends the Tumblr link to Kenya. Though this isn't speaking up on the news, Starr feels that she is still doing something for her friend. Soon, hundreds of people have liked her photos and begin posting their own memories of Khalil. Someone posts a video of Tupac explaining "Thug Life," and Starr finally feels like she fully understands what it really means.

Starr brings her old laptop to Seven's room, where he and DeVante are playing video games. She notices the Slytherin blanket on Seven's bed and notes that they all wanted to be Slytherins when they were little because they associated the Harry Potter house with being rich—which, when you are living in the projects, she says, is "the best thing anybody can be." Starr also notices the black trash bag of clothes next to Seven's bed, and Seven tells her that King moved back in with Iesha and officially kicked him out of the house. Starr tries to comfort Seven, but he insists he is okay.

Starr hears Lisa speaking in her "other" voice on the phone. She is speaking to the District Attorney about Starr coming in to talk. Maverick does not like the idea, but Starr thinks it will help Khalil, and agrees to do it.

The next morning Kenya finally texts Starr back about the Tumblr, saying simply "its aight." Starr is happy, knowing this is a compliment coming from Kenya. She wonders if Kenya took a long time to respond because she was dealing with the fallout of King, who beats her and her sister in addition to Iesha, moving back into her house. Starr knows Kenya won't open up about that, but tells Kenya she will be there for her if she needs her.

*Maverick's roses once again represent the Carter family, as they struggle to survive the increasingly dangerous environment of Garden Heights. Maverick remains committed to helping DeVante and emphasizes the importance of his continued education in helping him to rise above his current situation.*



*Starr's Tumblr is her first major step towards speaking up for Khalil. The photos she posts reflect the difference between the way she viewed Khalil and the narrative the media has superimposed on his life. This is also another appearance of Tupac's explanation of the cycle of racism, poverty, and crime. The fact that a stranger posted the video reveals how much his words continue to resonate, reasserting the power of language and hip hop to educate and inspire.*



*Slytherins are typically the villains of the Harry Potter novels, but Starr asserts that it's all a matter of perspective; those who have experienced true poverty like hers know that money signifies an escape from a world without security or opportunity. This scene also reveals the growing tension between Seven, his mother, and King.*



*Lisa, like Starr, code switches depending on who she is talking to. Speaking to the DA is another way Starr can use her voice to help Khalil.*



*King terrorizes not just the neighborhood, but his own family. Kenya's approval of Starr feels like a tacit stamp of acceptance from the world of Garden Heights, and Starr now appears more committed to the relationships she has within the community.*



Lisa take Starr to the Just Us for Justice office, which occupies an old Taco Bell. Maverick used to take Seven and Starr there right after he got out of prison and did not have much money; he often had to go to the cash advance building next door, which was the first indication to a young Starr that necessities do not simply “show up” but must be paid for by someone.

*Taco Bell, despite being a cheap fast food joint, nevertheless holds sentimental value for Starr and represents Maverick's efforts to reform himself and take care of his family. This scene also suggests the struggles people face when they first leave prison.*



The office is empty of people but filled with posters of Huey Newton, Malcolm X, and other Black Panthers. Ms. Ofrah says her colleagues are out leading discussions and protests on the street where Khalil was murdered. Starr is taken aback by how easily Ms. Ofrah uses the word “murder” to describe Khalil’s death. Maverick arrives late, explaining that he had to get DeVante situated at the shop to watch over Mr. Lewis, fearing King’s retaliation for Mr. Lewis’s snitching in his TV interview.

*Huey Newton and Malcolm X were both famous activists in the Black Panther party who fought for black liberation and an end to police brutality. Starr's surprise upon hearing Ms. Ofrah use the word “murder” reflects how desensitized she and much of society have become to the killing of black people—and how the police are assumed to be exempt from accusations of criminal behavior like this.*



Ms. Ofrah calls Starr brave for speaking to the police, though Starr does not believe it about herself. Ms. Ofrah then explains that if the District Attorney wants to talk with Starr, it means they are preparing to take Khalil’s case to a grand jury, where Starr will have to testify. Starr fears she will not be able to answer certain questions, such whether there was a gun in the car. Ms. Ofrah reveals that the “gun” the media has been mentioning was nothing more than Khalil’s **hairbrush**. In the darkness, the handle looked thick enough—and, Maverick adds, Khalil was black enough—that One-Fifteen allegedly mistook it for a weapon. Starr is horrified that Khalil died over such a meaningless thing.

*As she learns more facts, Starr is further outraged by the senselessness of Khalil's death. One-Fifteen was so blinded by racist assumptions about the criminality of black youth that he saw a weapon where there was none. Later the public, too, latches onto the hairbrush as a symbol of both Khalil's innocence and the power of hate to twist the most harmless object into a lethal weapon.*



Ms. Ofrah tells Starr that One-Fifteen’s father will be giving a television interview on his son’s behalf. Realizing the whole world will get to hear One-Fifteen’s side of the story, Starr grows determined to tell Khalil’s. Starr tells Ms. Ofrah about seeing her other friend get murdered—a word she now does not hesitate to say—as a child, and says that no one was ever caught. People did not seem to think Natasha mattered enough. Starr wants the world to know that she did matter, and that “Khalil mattered too.” Emboldened, Starr agrees to do a television interview so long as they obscure her identity.

*Starr's words in this moment directly echo the name of the modern protest movement Black Lives Matter, created in response to police brutality against black communities. The use of the word “matter” reflects the lack of attention paid to the deaths of black individuals and the need to focus on justice specifically for people of color. The violence of Natasha's death is similar to Khalil's, and together they push Starr to become a more vocal activist.*



Maverick then gets a phone call from a frantic DeVante about something the others don’t hear, and says they are on their way.

*The chapter ends on a note of suspense, as the family fears something has happened to Mr. Lewis, left behind at the store with DeVante and in danger of being targeted by King.*



## CHAPTER 13

Back at the store, the Carters find a badly beaten Mr. Lewis, his eye swollen shut and cheek slashed. He says five King Lords attacked him, and is proud of putting up a fight. Lisa and Maverick note that he is lucky to be alive; with King Lords, snitches do not simply “get stitches”—they get “graves.” Mr. Lewis scoffs at their concerns. He says they were really after DeVante—that King will kill him when he finds him, and that King also knows Maverick is hiding him.

Maverick furiously grabs DeVante by the neck, slams him against a freezer, and asks what is going on; he knows King would not want DeVante dead unless he had done something very bad. DeVante tries to brush things off as not being a big deal, but suddenly bursts into tears.

DeVante reveals that King wanted him to kill the men who shot Dalvin, which would only lead to Garden Disciples coming after him. As such, DeVante stole \$5,000 from King in order to get his mother and sister out of town. His mother refused to let DeVante come with them, fearing he would put them all in danger. Realizing how unsafe he is in Garden Heights, Maverick, though angry, softens, and brings DeVante to Carlos’s house—a move that surprises Starr, since Maverick never goes to Carlos’s house with them.

Upon arrival, Starr is surprised to see Carlos at home in sweats in the middle of a workday. DeVante is impressed by the size of Carlos and Pam’s home, but worried about staying with a cop. Carlos reveals that he was put on leave, and Starr immediately knows it was due to her. Carlos explains the rules of living in his house to DeVante: no guns, no swearing, and he must go to school. Nana rudely says she won’t live with a “murderer,” but the others shoo her away.

Starr hears a familiar laugh at the front door, and sees Chris walk into Carlos’s house; he saw the Carters’ car in the driveway and wanted to see if everything was okay. As the others greet Chris warmly, Maverick realizes he is not a new presence in Starr’s life. Maverick grows furious to learn not only that his daughter has a white boyfriend, but that he was the last one to know about it. He is especially angry that Carlos knew before him.

*The extent of King’s cruelty is exemplified by the fact that he feels no qualms about beating up an elderly man. Upon hearing that the men were really after DeVante, Maverick realizes how much danger the teen has put his family in.*



*DeVante’s posturing as a tough gangbanger almost immediately crumbles, and he appears to simply be a kid in way over his head.*



*Though he began selling drugs to help his family and gain a sense of community, DeVante has realized that the violence King demands of him will only lead to more violence. Gangs keep Garden Heights entrenched in the cycle of drugs, violence, and crime.*



*DeVante’s misgivings about staying with Carlos reveal the depth of mistrust between black communities and the police. Carlos, like Maverick, emphasizes the importance of education if DeVante wants to lift himself out of the cycle of crime.*



*Maverick’s resentment of Carlos stems from insecurity, as Carlos cared for the children while Maverick was in prison. Maverick fears not only that Starr has rejected black men because of his example, but also that she has chosen to confide in Carlos because she trusts him more than her former-felon father.*



Lisa drags Maverick out to the patio, but Starr can still hear everything they say as they argue about Chris being white. Lisa then grows angry that Maverick got DeVante—“somebody else’s child”—out of Garden Heights, yet insists his own family continue to live there. Maverick counters back that at least in Garden Heights people won’t treat the children “like shit,” and says he refuses to move to the “fake” suburbs. He then drives away from Carlos’ house in anger.

Chris, feeling awkward, says he should go and leaves. DeVante comes into the kitchen and teases Starr about dating a white boy, whom he jokingly calls “Justin Bieber.” He then says any of the guys in Garden Heights would be happy to get with Starr, but no one knows her because she never comes to parties. Starr snaps back that people get shot at parties in Garden Heights, but quickly realizes the insensitivity of her comment.

To Starr’s surprise, DeVante says that Khalil used to talk about her. He also asserts that Khalil was not in a gang. King tried to get him to become a King Lord, but Khalil refused, and the bandana at the funeral was King’s way of saving face. DeVante further explains that Khalil never wanted to sell drugs—and, in fact, that no one ever wants to. Khalil only started selling because Brenda stole from King, and he wanted to pay back her debt. Starr is ashamed that she thought the worst of Khalil, just like everyone else.

Starr begins to explain that if only the world knew the reason why Khalil was selling drugs—but DeVante finishes her thought: they would not call Khalil a “thug” like him. DeVante says he is a thug, but that he has only done what he had to in order to survive. He tells Starr that the King Lords were the closest thing he had to a family, and that they looked out for him in a way no one else could—providing the food, clothes, and protection his mother could not. Having to constantly look out for his mother and sisters, DeVante appreciated having someone to help take care of him “for a change.” Starr realizes neither he nor Khalil had much of a choice when it came to falling into a life of crime.

*Maverick still refuses to accept how much Garden Heights is holding his family back. In keeping with his dedication to empowering black people, he asserts that the danger of Garden Heights is preferable to a racist society that will make his children feel ashamed of who they are.*



*Starr’s comment about Garden Heights is particularly insensitive in this situation because of DeVante’s brother’s recent death. Yet DeVante’s words help Starr realize how much she has closed herself off from the world she comes from.*



*The rationale behind Khalil’s drug dealing reflects the cycle of poverty and crime that Tupac rapped about, and Maverick discussed with Starr earlier in the novel. Khalil had few options to support his family, and did what he needed to in order to survive.*



*Starr is relieved to learn that Khalil was not in a gang, but DeVante also makes her understand that even if Khalil were in one, that should not have warranted a death sentence. The reasons people join gangs or sell drugs are complicated, and so-called “thugs” are still human beings whose lives matter and who deserve to be understood within the context of their community. Gangs and drug dealing often result from a lack of opportunity and security.*



## CHAPTER 14

Needing to clear her head, Starr leaves and walks to Maya's house nearby. Maya is excited to see Starr, but Hailey, who is also there, remains cold. After a brief time playing video games, Hailey cuts the tension in the room and asks Starr why she is mad at them. Starr asks why Hailey attended the fake protest for Khalil, and Hailey defends herself by saying everyone else did it too. Maya apologizes for using a "tragedy to get out of class," but Hailey refuses to admit she was wrong. Instead, she demands Starr apologize for calling her racist. Starr realizes that Hailey has always been a master of twisting situations so that she seems like the victim, but Starr refuses to fall for it anymore. Starr insists her fried chicken comment was, in fact, racist. Hailey still refuses to apologize, and they sit in tense silence while watching TV.

Maya flicks through channels and lands on the television interview with One-Fifteen's father. Pictures of a smiling One-Fifteen with his wife and children flash across the screen, bolstering the image of him as an upstanding family man. The program then shows images of the worst parts of Garden Heights, dismissing it as a neighborhood "notorious for gangs and drug dealers." Starr is angry that none of the good parts of her neighborhood are highlighted, such as Mr. Reuben, Lisa's clinic, Mr. Lewis, and her family.

One-Fifteen's father goes on to say that his son "loved" working in Garden Heights and "wanted to make a difference"—an attitude Starr compares to slave masters thinking "they were making a difference in black people's lives."

As he tells the story of the shooting, One-Fifteen's father paints a picture of Khalil's death that is nothing like what Starr experienced. He portrays both Starr and Khalil as dangerous threats who cursed at One-Fifteen, resisted his orders, and conspired to take him down. One-Fifteen's father says his son was "a good boy" who rightfully feared for his life, thought he saw a gun, and just wanted to get home to his family, yet the media is portraying him as a "monster." His son's life has been "hell" since the shooting, and a fellow officer even attacked him. Starr realizes this must have been Carlos. In her outrage, she furthers notes that interview has "killed" a part of her—the part afraid of speaking out.

*Hailey insensitively equates the pain of being called a racist with actually experiencing racism—not an entirely uncommon sentiment in modern real-world discussions of these issues. She refuses to admit her mistakes and only grows more defensive when called out. Starr finally begins to recognize how many slights she has allowed Hailey to get away with throughout their friendship, silencing herself to make Hailey feel more comfortable.*



*Whereas Khalil is dismissed as nothing more than a drug dealer, One-Fifteen's father works to present his son as a decent man deserving of sympathy. Much like Khalil's drug dealing has overshadowed everything else about him, the outside world sees only the violence and strife of Garden Heights.*



*When men like One-Fifteen position themselves as the saviors of dangerous black neighborhoods, they are simply upholding the notion that black people are inferior and criminal—the same racist assumption that robs black children of their innocence and contributed to One-Fifteen's shooting of Khalil.*



*Starr knows that, as two unarmed black children, she and Khalil were in a decidedly less powerful position than One-Fifteen during their encounter. His fear, if it really existed, was a delusion fueled by racist assumptions about black youths. His father is attempting to garner sympathy for his son by denying Starr and Khalil their humanity. Thomas again asserts the power of language by saying that Starr is no longer afraid of using her voice to fight for justice.*





After the interview Hailey expresses sympathy for One-Fifteen, asserting that “his life matters too.” Starr is appalled by her sympathy, believing it rightly belongs to Khalil’s family. She angrily points out that white lives always seem to matter “more.” Hailey refuses to cede the point, saying Starr is in “bitch mode.” Starr asks why she unfollowed her Tumblr, demanding to know if it was because of the Emmett Till photo. An outraged Hailey accuses Starr of calling her racist again, and storms out of the room.

After Hailey has gone, Maya says that Hailey was lying: she *did* unfollow Starr’s Tumblr because she was tired of seeing, as Hailey put it, the “black stuff.” As Maya names civil rights activists Starr posted images of, Starr is impressed that she has been “paying attention.” Maya says she had said nothing to Starr out of hope that Hailey would come around, but feels ashamed for not knowing better; Hailey had said racist things before.

Maya tells Starr that after Thanksgiving their freshman year, Hailey asked Maya, who is Chinese, whether her family “ate cat.” Maya says Starr had looked horrified at the moment but neither of them said anything. When Hailey laughed, they joined in. Starr is deeply ashamed, wondering if she felt that she “had” to laugh in that moment. Starr says they cannot let Hailey get away with her prejudice. Maya smiles and suggests the two of them form a “minority alliance.”

Starr walks back to Carlos’s house, where she finds her uncle having a beer outside. She can tell that something is deeply wrong; Nana was a violent alcoholic, so even one beer is a big deal to Carlos. Starr notices the bruises on Carlos’ knuckles and puts things together: Carlos is on leave because he punched One-Fifteen in the face. The idea of her uncle fighting makes Starr crack up with laughter. Carlos smiles too, saying that as someone from Garden Heights, he “knows how to fight.” Starr is touched, but also worries about Carlos losing his job. Carlos says he loves his family more than the force, and that Starr is the reason he became a cop in the first place. Starr asserts that they need good cops like him.

Carlos admits that the interview with One-Fifteen’s father made him rethink his earlier dismissal of Khalil as nothing more than a drug dealer. He is angry with himself for trying to rationalize the death of a boy he watched grow up. Whatever Khalil’s background, Carlos says, he should not have been killed for “opening a car door.” He also asserts that had he been at that traffic stop, he would not have shot Khalil.

*The use of the word “matters” again echoes the real-world Black Lives Matter movement, which seeks to rectify the lack of importance assigned to black life and death. As Starr points out, people bend over backwards to defend white men like One-Fifteen while dismissing people like Khalil without a second thought.*



*Though Starr is taken aback by Hailey’s blatant racism, Maya asserts that it is not a new phenomenon. Even small, throwaway comments can be indicative of deeper prejudice, and people of color should not have to accept casual racism as a “normal” part of life, or minimize their feelings to keep white people comfortable.*



*Starr further recognizes how silence can be a tool of oppression, and, as such, how important it is that she speak up in the face of racism. Though of different ethnic backgrounds, the fact that Maya and Starr create this “minority alliance” reflects the novel’s theme that diverse communities must bind together in the fight for racial justice.*



*Carlos’s distress hints at his own feelings of being torn between two identities—that of a cop, and that of a black man from Garden Heights. The fact that Carlos is put on leave for confronting One-Fifteen further suggests the gang-like nature of the police force, as anyone who shows disloyalty by failing to defend the “bad apples” risks their job. This points to a broken culture of policing in general, which even good cops like Carlos can’t fix on their own.*



*Carlos understands that this issue is bigger than one incident, and his words assert that black people should be allowed to be complicated human beings no matter the situation. Carlos further recognizes that individuals who cannot see past their own prejudice should not be tasked with protecting a community.*



## CHAPTER 15

The following morning Lisa takes Starr to IHOP, but Starr barely touches her food. Lisa expresses her anger about the previous night's interview, saying a grown man could not possibly be afraid of "two children." People on the internet seem to agree, Starr has noticed, and people she has never met are calling the interview "BS."

Starr starts to open up about the tension with Hailey, though she leaves out the specific details. Lisa says she never liked the way Starr always let Hailey have her way when they were children. Lisa encourages Starr to make a list of the good and bad parts of her relationship with Hailey. Bringing up Nana's alcoholism, she says she learned early on that people make mistakes, and you have to decide if your love for them outweighs that. Lisa stayed with Maverick after he cheated on her with Lesha because she decided that the good in their relationship outweighed the bad. She advises Starr to think the same way about Hailey, and decide whether the relationship is worth saving. If not, Starr should let Hailey go.

Later that day Starr meets the DA, a white woman named Karen Monroe who apologizes for taking so long to meet. The meeting is relatively quick, and Starr is grateful that she "doesn't ask any stupid questions about Khalil." While explaining the details of the shooting, however, Starr vomits.

Maverick and Starr head back to the store together. There, Maverick asks Starr what she sees in Chris—and if she has a problem with black boys. Starr wants to know if Maverick has a problem with white people. He admits that his reservations about Chris stem from insecurity: he worries that did not set a good example for his daughter about black men. Starr responds that he set a good example of what a *man* should be, and Maverick kisses the top of her head.

King pulls up to the store in his gray BMW and asks for DeVante's whereabouts. Maverick denies knowing where he is. King then says he knows Starr is the witness the news is talking about, and that she better "keep her mouth shut." Since the police know Khalil sold drugs, digging deeper into his history could lead back to King. King makes a very thinly veiled threat against Starr if she says anything incriminating.

*Much of the world appears to reject the media's treatment of Starr and Khalil, granting hope that justice may be possible after all.*



*Starr has apparently always deferred to Hailey, who here acts as a sort of stand-in for white society in general. Lisa's speech about Maverick's infidelity reflects the novel's broader theme that people are more than their mistakes. This teaching directly contradicts with the way society has treated Khalil, and suggests that, if there is to be racial justice, black people must be allowed their full humanity.*



*The late meeting suggests Khalil's case was not initially a priority for the DA. Though emboldened, Starr is still traumatized and struggles to speak up for Khalil.*



*Maverick reveals his vulnerability, something black men are not always allowed to exhibit in society. His distrust of Chris does not really have anything to do with Chris as a person, though Starr asserts that the lessons her father has taught her cross racial boundaries.*



*King again attempts to use fear and silence as a tool of oppression. Maverick's defense of DeVante is a challenge to King's power over the neighborhood.*



Starr and Maverick pick up food from Reuben's for dinner on the way home. At dinner Lisa casually mentions that she has a second interview for a job at the same hospital where Pam, Carlos's wife and a surgeon, works. Pam recommended Lisa for the job of Pediatrics Nursing Manager, and thinks it is as good as hers. The job would mean a six-figure salary. Much to Starr's surprise, Maverick says he and Lisa will look at houses near the hospital before the interview and that he is determined to get the family out of Garden Heights. After dinner, Seven tells Sekani that he won't be leaving. He will go to community college to stay near his mother and sisters.

*Lisa's new job would be a ticket out of the neighborhood, and a chance for the entire family to start over away from the dangerous day-to-day life of Garden Heights. Seven, however, risks being held back by his ties to Garden Heights and is in danger of falling into the cycle that keeps families trapped without opportunity or security.*



## CHAPTER 16

Five weeks have passed since the shooting, and April O'frah has arranged for Starr to do an interview with national news anchor Diane Carey. A limo picks the Carters up from Garden Heights, and as they drive away Starr is heartened to hear her neighbors shout words of encouragement. Lisa has made everyone dress up as if they are going to church, and instructs them on how to speak at the studio. Chris texts Starr asking what color her prom dress is, but Starr has been too distracted to think about that; Ms. O'frah has had her prep for her interview every day after school. Starr has also been helping at Just Us for Justice, and listening in on their staff meetings to learn more about police reform and protest tactics.

*Starr, who initially felt invisible in Garden Heights, is finally seen by her neighborhood. The family still must engage in code switching as they head to the interview, ensuring they present themselves in a way that will be taken seriously by white society. Starr's work at Just Us for Justice evidences her growing commitment to the fight for racial justice and suggests her future as an activist.*



The Carters arrive at the studio, and the producers film some clips of Starr walking and talking with Diane Carey. Starr feels odd, remembering watching Carey on the news every night as a child. The interview itself takes place in a large, fancy suite. Carey asks Starr about the Khalil she knew, and Starr gives a heartfelt account of Khalil as a big-hearted, normal kid.

*Starr has been given her biggest platform yet to use her voice to help Khalil. The intimidating, polished setting contrasts with the brutal story Starr knows she must tell.*



Though Ms. O'frah had warned Starr not to go into too many details, and in spite of King's threats, Starr hears Kenya's voice in her head and decides to tell the world why Khalil sold drugs. She brings up Brenda's drug addiction, and says Khalil only dealt to get his mother out of debt with the most powerful drug dealer in Garden Heights. To the shock of her parents and Ms. O'frah, she has dry snitched on King; anyone watching from Garden Heights will know exactly who she means.

*Starr wants the world to understand why Khalil sold drugs, so that people will be less quick to dismiss the value of his life. She dry snitches on King despite knowing full well the danger she has put herself in, because she believes Khalil's life and the truth to be more important than her own safety.*



Starr continues, telling the world that Khalil was not in a gang. Thinking of DeVante, Starr asserts that even if he were, that does not make his killing acceptable. The media has been treating him unfairly, she says, effectively putting him on trial for his own murder. Starr goes on to detail the night of Khalil's death, asserting that there was no gun in the car, that she and Khalil posed no threat to One-Fifteen, and that the officer pointed his gun at her after killing Khalil. She says she does not hate cops, but is tired of them assuming black people are dangerous. These assumptions are what killed Khalil. Remembering Ms. O'Frah's words that speaking out is the way Starr can fight for justice, she ends the interview by wondering whether One-Fifteen wishes he had shot her too.

*Starr grows bolder throughout the interview, expressing her frank anger about the way she and Khalil have been portrayed by the media and effectively refuting claims that One-Fifteen acted out of fear for his life. Starr has spent much of the novel concerned with how the rest of the world will perceive her, but here she asserts her power to take control of the narrative. Starr considers this final line to be her strongest blow yet, as she basically tells One-Fifteen that he cannot silence her.*



## CHAPTER 17

The interview proves one of the most watched in the network's history, and there is an outpouring of support for Starr online. Kenya texts her approval, but also says King is angry that Starr effectively snitched on him.

*Because Kenya is from Garden Heights and also knew Khalil, her approval means a lot to Starr. Kenya's warning about King casts a cloud over the positive response to Starr's interview, however.*



The Saturday of prom arrives, and Starr is sitting in a Rolls Royce with Chris. He behaves coldly towards Starr, answering her questions "robotically" and barely looking at her. Loud music greets them as they arrive at the ballroom, and Starr notes how different Williamson and Garden Heights parties are. For one thing, the people at Williamson can't dance like those at Big D's. Starr feels less hesitant here, however, because being black makes her "cool by default." She could make up a dance and everyone would think it was a new trend.

*This is the second time Starr has noted how her classmates at Williamson fetishize her blackness, assuming her to be an arbiter of new trends. This is still a form of prejudice, as it denies black people the right to robust, diverse identities. Furthermore, associating being black with being edgy comes from the same thinking that associates blackness with innate criminality.*



Maya finds Starr and says that she asked Hailey about the "cat" comment, but Hailey refused to apologize. Hailey has stopped speaking to both of them, in fact, and both Maya and Starr express anger at themselves for letting Hailey get away with her comments in the first place. Starr is thankful to have Maya in her life, and they dance with their other friends from the basketball team.

*Starr and Maya remain committed to speaking up against casual racism in their everyday lives. Hailey clearly places her own pride and comfort over her friendships and willingness to take constructive criticism.*



Chris continues to behave coldly towards Starr all evening, however, to the point that Starr storms out of the ballroom and back to the Rolls Royce. Chris runs after her and tells her he watched the interview and recognized her voice; he knows she is the witness. He is heartbroken that she kept that, and so much more about her past, from him. Starr explains that she feels she can't share that part of herself with his world because people "use it against her," treating her like a charity case from "the ghetto." Chris begs Starr to open up to him. Unable to keep up the charade of bouncing between her two different personas, Starr relents.

*Chris cannot understand the specific pressures and expectations black people like Starr face—especially when it comes to issues like police brutality. Starr realizes that she has been hiding, engaging in subtle code switching around Chris out of fear he would pity and think less of her. Starr has felt guilty for dating Chris ever since Khalil's death, and has been trying to navigate how to be with someone from such a different world.*



Still in the car, Starr opens up about her life in Garden Heights, as well as witnessing Natasha's death and later Khalil's. She tells Chris about living in a smoky, rat- and roach-infested apartment in the projects. Maverick, who struggled to get a job as an ex-con, had to use food stamps to buy clothes. She admits her guilt over not being there for Khalil. She calls Chris her "normal." They say "I love you" to each other.

*This act reflects not only a turning point in their romantic relationship, but also Starr's growing acceptance of where she came from and comfort with who she is. Only after having truly been herself in front of Chris does Starr feel comfortable saying that she loves him.*



Seven and Layla tap on the car door, and the four go back inside the prom. Chris gets up in front of the crowd and raps *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* theme song for Starr. They dance the night away, and Starr doesn't think about Khalil or Natasha. She calls it "one of the best nights of her life."

*The recurrence of the Fresh Prince theme song again suggests hip hop as a tool for catharsis. Far from the violence of Garden Heights, Starr is here able to feel like a "normal" teenager.*



## CHAPTER 18

Maverick and Lisa take Starr and her brothers on a "trip." At first they think they are going to Carlos's house, but they pass his neighborhood. They eventually stop in a similar neighborhood, though there is no gate and there are more people of color. They stop in front of a brick house. Inside smells of fresh paint. The kitchen has granite countertops and stainless-steel appliances. As Starr, Seven, and Sekani look around with wonder and confusion, Lisa announces that she got the job at the hospital and that this will be their new home. Though Maverick has complained about the fakeness of life in the suburbs, he says the realest thing he can do is protect his family.

*The new house and Lisa's new job represent new opportunities for the Carters to escape the crime and violence of Garden Heights. Starr notes that the new neighborhood is safer than Garden Heights, but more diverse than Carlos's suburb, meaning she and her family won't feel out of place or be gawked at. Maverick recognizes that caring for his family is its own form of racial justice.*



Lisa says they hope to get settled before Seven goes off to college, so that he has time to make his room his own. Seven reveals that he wants to go to Central Community, a junior college in Garden Heights, to stay close to his mother and sisters. Maverick and Lisa think he can't be serious; Central Community is "Garden Heights High 2.0" and lacks many of the opportunities of the other schools Seven applied to. Maverick insists Seven is not responsible for his sisters, and deserves to take advantage of the chance to go to school wherever he wants.

*Maverick and Lisa reiterate the importance of education as a tool to better one's circumstances. Seven will be able to fulfill his potential only by leaving Garden Heights, it's suggested. The crime and violence of the neighborhood have already taken over Seven's family, and now they threaten to hold him back.*



That night—the night before Starr testifies in front of the grand jury—the Carters watch a basketball game together back at the house in Garden Heights. They tease each other over competing alliances and superstitious game-day traditions. Then the happy atmosphere is abruptly destroyed by gunshots and a brick shattering the living room window. Maverick screams for everyone to get down, and Lisa throws her body on top of her children. Maverick grabs his own gun and shoots at the attackers' car as it screeches away from the house.

*That the scene begins as a rare moment of genuine, carefree happiness for the Carters makes the sudden violence all the more frightening. A brick literally shatters the Carters' home and reminds them of the inescapability of violence in the world they live in.*





Lisa calls Carlos, who rushes over and insists they call the police. Maverick refuses, fearing crooked cops could be behind the attack; he believes it is no coincidence that it took place the night before Starr's testimony. He argues with Carlos, who defends the police and says many want justice in Khalil's case. Maverick angrily says he is not a fool and won't pretend that some cops don't do "dirty shit"—like the ones who made him get down on the ground just because they could.

Starr shouts that she refuses to testify anymore. In response, Maverick makes her, Sekani, and Seven recite lines from the Black Panthers' Ten-Point Program that call for an end to police brutality "by any means necessary." Given these teachings, he asks Starr how she can be quiet. Starr mentally notes that speaking up didn't end well for Black Panther leaders Huey Newton and Malcom X.

Soon a group of King Lords, led by Goon, arrive at the Carters' door. They are "Cedar Grove" King Lords, signifying that they are part of a different "set" than King is. Maverick says they will be providing security for the evening.

Carlos is outraged at the invitation of gangbangers to the house, saying King Lords may have been behind the attack in the first place. Maverick accuses him of not wanting to protect Starr because he is scared about how working with gangbangers will look to his fellow cops. Carlos screams at Maverick, pointing out all he did to raise Starr and Seven while Maverick was in prison. Every time Ilesha dropped Seven off, often for weeks, he bought clothes and food, and provided shelter. He says Maverick must not ever insinuate he doesn't care about the children. Maverick goes silent.

## CHAPTER 19

The next morning Starr wakes up to the smell of bacon. Lisa and Pam have cooked breakfast for the King Lords, who gobble everything up quickly. Lisa tells Starr to bring a plate to her father and uncle outside, and finds them sitting on the back of Maverick's truck. Carlos motions for Starr to sit in between them, and much to her surprise, they appear to be getting along—joking with one another about the characters of Garden Heights. Carlos insinuates that they worked through their issues, their shared love of Starr being much more important than any qualms they had with each other.

*This scene further evidences the depth of mistrust Maverick has for the police. Not all cops are bad, Maverick suggests, but the justice system enables violence against black communities by protecting those who are and punishing those who aren't. Carlos's conflicting identities once again pull at him, as he must defend both his job and his commitment to helping Starr.*



*Maverick does not want Starr to be scared into silent submission, but Starr now questions the power of language; speaking up has not always worked in activists' favor.*



*Unable to trust the police, Maverick turns to the sort of justice that reigns supreme in Garden Heights: gangs.*



*Maverick has positioned himself in opposition to Carlos throughout the novel, suggesting that the latter abandoned Garden Heights, is ashamed of his blackness, and contributes to the oppression of black communities. Carlos's retort reaffirms that he has found his own way to reconcile his identities as a black man and a cop, and that only by being on the other side of the law was he able to care for Maverick's children.*



*The fact that a former felon and a cop finally come together to support Starr reflects the novel's theme that boundaries must dissolve in the fight for justice. There are really only two sides: those upholding oppression and those working to end it.*



The King Lords drive the Carters to the courthouse. Starr flashes back to many years earlier, when Carlos drove her, Seven, and a sobbing Lisa to the courthouse to say goodbye to Maverick before he was taken to prison. He came outside in his orange jumpsuit, but could not hug her because he was handcuffed. For the next three years Starr hated the courthouse because it took her father away from her.

In the present, a media circus has surrounded the courthouse. A security guard leads the Carters through, but Starr must go into the courtroom alone. Before she does so, Lisa tells Starr how proud she is of her and that she is brave. Starr bristles at this word, but Lisa asserts that being brave doesn't mean she is not scared. Maverick hugs Starr in support. Though Starr has to go into the room alone, she feels as though her parents are with her.

Starr is sworn in and begins her testimony in front of the grand jury. She gets off to a halting start, and the judge tells her she must speak up so everyone can hear what she says. The judge says they are going to discuss the details of the night of Khalil's death. Part of Starr is terrified, but another part of her remembers that her parents are watching her, and that Khalil needs her. Strengthened by this thought, she says she is ready to speak.

## CHAPTER 20

It has been two weeks since Starr talked to the grand jury and eight weeks since Khalil's death. Seven drives Starr to school, and appears on guard even at Williamson; he has grown more protective of Starr following her dry-snitching on King, whom Carlos has said the police are watching closely.

Starr sees Maya and Hailey talking outside Hailey's locker. Hailey has a smug expression on her face and calls Starr a "liar" when she approaches. Hailey then hands Starr two photographs of Khalil. The first, said to be the image the news has shared, is what Maverick calls Khalil's "thugshot," in which he holds a bunch of money to the camera. The second is from Starr's twelfth birthday party, and shows her, Khalil, and Hailey eating cake. Starr recognizes what the photos don't show: a poor kid happy to finally have some money in his hands, and eagerly eating cake because there was no food at his home.

*This scene echoes the power the court maintains over black lives. It is a force that splits up families and disrupts communities, further entrenching them in a cycle of crime. Though the court is the only way to get justice for Khalil, Starr knows all too well that it is not as impartial as it pretends to be.*



*Family remains the most important form of community in Starr's world, as her parents once again give her the strength she needs to speak up for Khalil. As Lisa suggests here, being brave doesn't mean being unafraid—it means acting even in the face of one's fear.*



*Starr being told to speak louder explicitly reflects the novel's theme of the power of language. This is Starr's moment to use her voice to help Khalil; whereas in the DA's office she threw up when trying to talk about the details of his death, now she finally feels ready to do what she has to.*



*Seven remains extremely protective of his sister, and fears that King is so powerful that he could reach them anywhere. The fact that the police are watching King foreshadows his later arrest, though, and suggests that he may be unwilling to take action against Starr while he's being so closely surveilled.*



*The media has chosen to share a less flattering photograph of Khalil in order to bolster the narrative that he was a thug who deserved to be shot. Khalil's pose echoes Starr's earlier note about them being Slytherins: money is hugely exciting to people who have grown up in poverty. These two images are a physical illustration of the double consciousness experienced by black characters in the novel; Starr can see Khalil both as he was and as white society sees him.*



Hailey calls Starr a liar for pretending not to know Khalil, and demands an apology for being called racist. Maya defends Starr by pointing out that Hailey has, in fact, been saying racist things—including her Thanksgiving cat comment. Hailey dismisses her concern, saying that was so long ago that she shouldn't be upset. She then says that Khalil probably would have been killed soon enough anyway, and that the cops did the world a favor by ridding them of a drug dealer and gangbanger. Starr punches Hailey in the face, and a fight ensues. Other students laugh and pull out their phones to record it. When Hailey's brother Remy gets involved, Seven jumps in. Starr notes that they both know how to fight, Maverick having often taken them to the boxing gym after school.

A school security guard breaks up the fight, and the four get suspended. They are not expelled, because the headmaster takes pity on Starr "given the circumstances." Lisa scolds Seven and Starr, saying they behaved in the way the world expected them to. Starr finally lets her anger about Khalil's death out, shouting that he didn't deserve to die and she's tired of listening to people acting like it was okay that he was murdered. Lisa rubs her back and lets Starr cry.

Later the Carters' house is filled with both King Lords and Garden Disciples. Maverick says that regardless of the indictment verdict, they can't let riots get out of hand and have people burn the neighborhood down; though people are angry, destroying their home won't fix things. Tim, Mr. Reuben's nephew, says they all need to get more organized and avoid targeting black-owned businesses. Maverick agrees, and urges the gangs to put territory wars aside together for the sake of Garden Heights; infighting has only given the cops more power to do whatever they want. Much to Starr's surprise, the different gang members slap palms.

## CHAPTER 21

Ten weeks have passed since Khalil's death. Carlos hosts a barbeque for Memorial Day at his house that also serves as a joint birthday/graduation party for Seven, who has just turned eighteen and finished high school. Maverick cried when he saw his son get a diploma. The atmosphere is joyous, as the kids play in the pool and the adults dance to old-school hip hop music. Kenya flirts with DeVante, who happily says that Carlos and Pam have agreed to let him live there for his senior year of high school. He has even bonded with Nana over their shared love of the card game spades.

*Maya adheres to the "minority alliance" she created with Starr and refuses to let Hailey get away with the "cat" comment. Hailey remains unrepentant, though, and immediately dismisses the value of Khalil's life. Unfortunately, many people think as Hailey does, and Starr is so angry that she stops caring about code switching; "Williamson Starr" disappears as she draws from the lessons of Garden Heights and unleashes her built up fury at Hailey.*



*Despite acting out of justified anger, Lisa worries that Seven and Starr behaved in a way that bolstered stereotypes of black people as violent. However unfair, Lisa understands that the world will do whatever it can to deny black people their humanity. Nevertheless, she also understands that Starr is just a teenager, has had to temper her anger and frustration for weeks, and needs a release.*



*Maverick emerges as a leader in the community's fight for justice. Marking black-owned businesses is a way to prevent people from, as Tupac would say, "fucking everybody" out of anger. The fact that the rival gangs not only agree to meet, but to work together reflects the novel's theme that people must put aside petty differences and work together to end oppression.*



*Maverick's tears at Seven's graduation underscore the importance of education as a means to improve one's life. Though Maverick fell into the same life of crime as his own father, Seven has broken the cycle. By bonding with Nana and the rest of Carlos's family, DeVante has also defied expectations. He, too, will continue his education in an effort to break out of the cycle of poverty and crime.*



When Maya and Chris arrive, Starr feels her Garden Heights and Williamson worlds colliding, and worries about acting too “black” or too “white” for either group. Things are slightly tense at first as the two groups greet each other. Chris and DeVante slap palms. Kenya introduces herself to Chris and then compliments Maya on her sneakers; Maya jokes about never running in them, and she and Kenya laugh. When Kenya asks where “blondie”—a.k.a. Hailey—is, Maya excitedly launches into the story of Starr’s fight. Kenya eats the story up, and agrees when Maya says, “minorities have to stick together.” Much to Starr’s relief, everyone is getting along.

Starr is eating in the kitchen when a call comes through from the security guard of Carlos’s gated complex: Ilesha is at the gate. She did not attend Seven’s graduation, and was not invited to the party. Seven walks to the gate, followed by Starr, her parents, and Kenya. Seven greets his grandmother and little sister Lyric. Ilesha, wearing a tight pink dress, angrily confronts Seven about not inviting her and scolds Kenya for keeping her brother’s party a secret. Starr is grateful again that Lisa, and not Ilesha, is her mother.

Seven explodes with hurt and rage, telling Ilesha he is so ashamed of her that he has never even told his Williamson friends that Lisa is not his real mother. He confronts her about never showing up to things, putting him out of the house, and for always choosing King over her son—even when King hits her. His voice cracks as he tells Ilesha that all he “ever did is love” her, and she couldn’t even love him back. Ilesha is hurt, angry, and embarrassed, and turns to leave. She asks Maverick if he’s happy for turning her son against her, and says she can’t wait for King to get back at them all; he has had it out for them ever since Starr snitched.

Back in the house, Seven is sobbing uncontrollably. Lisa comforts him, and Maverick instructs Kenya and Starr to go back outside. Starr realizes how awkward it is to be sitting with Kenya, whose father wants to kill her. Kenya apologizes on behalf of Ilesha, saying she wishes she would leave King. Starr sympathizes, saying Ilesha might be too afraid—just like Starr was too afraid to speak up until Kenya called her out for her cowardice. Though they bond over this fact, Kenya says they should go back to her brother. When Starr corrects her by saying “our brother,” Kenya walks away without responding.

*This moment represents the inevitable meeting of Starr’s competing identities, despite her efforts throughout the novel to keep them separate. The group bonds in large part due to their shared love for Starr. As she watches her friends all get along, the double consciousness that has ruled much of her experience finally quiets for a while. Starr is able to stop worrying so much about how others perceive her and simply be herself.*



*Ilesha remains a source of tension and shame for Seven, and her arrival disrupts the happy atmosphere of the party. Ilesha appears distinctly out of place in Carlos’s posh neighborhood. She is a reminder that even as they celebrate a new chapter in Seven’s life, he has not yet escaped Garden Heights.*



*Starr is apparently not the only one who has worked to keep her Garden Heights and Williamson worlds separate. Despite feeling as though he must protect his mother and sisters, Seven is still a young man who deeply resents Ilesha for not taking care of him in return. Yet Ilesha’s angry warning makes it sink in for Starr that she is in real danger because of King.*



*Kenya complicates Ilesha’s rudeness, pointing out that she, like everyone else in Garden Heights, has often done what she has to in order to survive. The real villain, Starr suggests, is King, who controls Ilesha like he does the rest of the neighborhood. Kenya’s continued refusal to say “our” brother suggests she still feels threatened by Seven’s relationship with Starr.*



## CHAPTER 22

Thirteen weeks have passed since Khalil's death. The Carters have moved into their new house, and Starr notes that in her new, safer neighborhood she can just tell her parents she is going for a walk "and leave." The house still doesn't feel like home, however, and Starr misses seeing the familiar faces of Garden Heights.

Needing to feel "normal," Starr texts Chris, who quickly picks her up in his Benz. They drive to Chris's house, which is a mansion full of statues, oil paintings, and chandeliers. There is even a separate unit for a butler. Chris's room is enormous, with a flat screen TV and leather couch.

Looking at all the finery, Starr feels more than ever that they should not be together; their backgrounds are simply too different. She says Chris should be with someone like Hailey. Chris tries to comfort Starr, but she feels he just doesn't understand and drops it. The two begin to make out, and Starr insinuates that she is ready to have sex. Chris says he does not want to take advantage of her in this moment, and instead holds her and lets her cry.

Seven calls, demanding to know where Starr is. He then says DeVante is missing. Starr's stomach drops, and she and Chris agree to help find him. Seven pulls up to Chris's house while on the phone with Kenya, who is clearly distraught. The three get into Seven's car and speed to Iesha's house.

Starr realizes this is Chris's first time seeing Garden Heights, and worries about what he thinks of it. He does not say anything, however. They arrive at Iesha's house, which is dilapidated from the outside but "five-star-hotel nice" on the inside. Shoes dangle from a utility line out front, signaling that drugs are sold there. A big group of King Lords sits drinking, smoking, and dancing with women in the backyard.

Kenya leads the group to Iesha's bedroom, where DeVante is huddled on the floor in pain. Blood is all over the carpet and drips from his mouth. He says King beat him up, and when Kenya tried to stop the fight, King pushed her. Seven immediately tries to go to the backyard to confront King, but the others hold him back. Kenya says they need to get DeVante out of the house or King will kill him. Chris and Seven try to lift DeVante, when suddenly Iesha appears in the doorway.

*Things that many people take for granted, like walking around outside one's home, are novel for Starr. The new neighborhood, however, lacks the vibrant community of Garden Heights.*



*Chris comes from an entirely different world than the Carters, who are grateful to simply have a home away from violence. Chris's home seems all the more extravagant when directly contrasted with Starr's.*



*Starr is overwhelmed by her differences from Chris. In suggesting he should be with Hailey, she devalues her own worth and suggests she is incompatible with a world of such immense privilege—and also flattens Chris into a more one-dimensional figure who is assumed to only be attracted to those as wealthy and white as he is.*



*The group knows King has it out for DeVante, and as such that he could be in serious danger. The tension builds as they rush to find him.*



*The interior versus exterior of Iesha's house symbolize the fact that King has focused on immediate gratification rather than building a solid foundation for his life and family. The presence of King Lords in the backyard add to the suspense as the group searches for DeVante.*



*No one is safe from King; he not only brutally beat a teenage boy, but also hurt his own daughter. DeVante is clearly in need of medical help, but the ever-protective Seven makes to attack King. Fighting is not the answer; instead, they must escape the house—and, by proxy, Garden Heights.*





Ilesha smirks when Seven asks her for help, and scoffs at his calling her “momma.” Starr knows that if she calls for King, they are in deep trouble. Her eyes flick to the door, and she angrily tells Seven to grab his sisters and get everyone out of the house, so she can “party.” Kenya grabs Lyric, and Ilesha tells them to hurry up because she is “tired of looking at” them.

*Ilesha’s actions betray that she wants her son and daughters safely out of the house. Whether too proud to admit what she is doing or feeling unworthy of Seven’s gratefulness, Ilesha refuses to acknowledge the sacrifice she is making.*



As the group rushes out, Starr notices Ilesha dancing in King’s face and pushing him down seductively when he tries to stand. The whole time she is also looking towards them to make sure they have left, and Starr realizes she is distracting King to help them. Seven is deeply hurt until he realizes this too. Kenya points out that with everyone else gone, Ilesha knows King will take his anger out on her instead. Seven swerves to turn the car around, saying he is supposed to protect Ilesha, but Kenya reminds him that she has lasted this long, and to let her do this for them.

*Ilesha allows the group to escape, refuting Seven’s earlier claim that she never puts her children first and specifically always chooses King over her son. This is her way of being a mother, and while it is not perfect, it evidences the deep love she has for her children.*



As the group drives away, a Tupac song comes on the radio. He raps about making changes, and Starr thinks that Khalil was right about his continued relevance. When the song ends, an announcement comes on the radio stating the grand jury has decided not to indict One-Fifteen.

*Tupac’s reappearance right before the indictment verdict foreshadows the riots that are about to erupt – as the “hate” given Khalil will sow chaos and destruction throughout the neighborhood.*



## CHAPTER 23

The car is silent as Seven drives to his grandmother’s house. Starr can’t understand what went wrong, or why Khalil didn’t matter enough for his death to be considered a crime. Kids around them start chanting “Justice for Khalil.” Seven slams the steering wheel in frustration and asks Starr if she wants to “burn shit up.” Starr says she wants to protest and riot. Chris says that won’t solve anything, but Starr snaps back that talking didn’t either; if the world doesn’t care about her, then she doesn’t care about the world.

*Chris does not understand the anger Starr feels in this moment. Starr feels like she has done everything right, and it still didn’t matter. Rejecting Lisa’s earlier advice to keeping “doing right” in such situations, Starr now wants to treat the world the way it has treated her. This scene also provides some context for readers who might see riots happening on TV and not understand the anger or frustration behind them—those like Chris, who have the privilege of remaining disconnected from racial injustice and so feel like they can easily judge what will and won’t “solve anything.”*



Seven drops Kenya and Lyric at their grandmother’s house as riots erupt in Garden Heights. Seven asks if Chris wants him to drive him home, as things are about to get “wild,” but Chris says he wants to stay with Starr and for everyone to know the indictment decision was wrong.

*Chris can never fully understand what Starr has gone through, but he realizes he can be an ally. Community boundaries once again dissolve, as the only groups that matter are those fighting for justice and those fighting against it.*



The group asks DeVante why he walked off, and he tells them he wanted to visit his brother, Dalvin, in the cemetery. They arrive at Magnolia Avenue, where music blasts, horns blare, and people shout from the hoods of cars. Flames can be seen in the distance. They park at the Just Us for Justice office, which has been boarded up and had “black owned” spray painted over it so that rioters know not to target it.

Chris feels out of place in the crowd, and realizes this must be how Starr and Seven feel at Williamson. They climb atop a bus for a better view, and see King Lords and Garden Disciples protesting together on top of a police car. The crowd grows more violent, with people screaming to flip the police car and smashing its windows. Starr recognizes that her anger over the verdict is shared by her community. Someone starts playing NWA’s “Fuck tha Police” and Starr shouts along with it; despite her love for Carlos, she has realized this is not about good cops like him.

The riots reach a tipping point. People start smashing the windows of a nearby McDonalds, the same one Starr remembers eating at with her parents. She screams for them to stop, but the building bursts into flames. As flames pour out of other businesses’ windows, Starr thinks of Maverick’s store and all the memories it holds for her family. The crowd cheers for the buildings to burn, and though Starr recognizes their anger, she thinks this is not the right way to change things.

A line of police officers in riot gear arrive, telling protestors to get off the streets because this is “not a peaceful assembly.” People start throwing rocks and bottles at the cops. Someone throws a Molotov cocktail, and the group runs back to Seven’s car to drive away from the riots. While in the car, DeVante defends the rioters by saying peaceful protests haven’t worked, and echoing Starr’s words that because the world doesn’t care about them, they shouldn’t care about the world. Starr fears what will happen if the rioters reach the store.

DeVante is impressed that Chris knew NWA lyrics. The atmosphere in the car lightens as they try to “test” Chris to see if he’s black by asking him about certain elements of black culture. The group make lighthearted fun of stereotypical things white people do, but the mood becomes slightly tense when Chris asks why black people have “odd names.” Seven points out that Chris is judging things from a “white standard,” that many of these names are common in black communities, and that white people give their children strange names as well. Suddenly gunshots go off nearby, frightening everyone in the car.

*DeVante’s feelings for Dalvin again reflect that, gangbanger or not, his life mattered. It is for that reason that so many people in Garden Heights have taken to the streets. This time, however, the community has come together to protect their own.*



*Gang members protesting together is the ultimate symbol of unity in the face of oppression. Starr has come to view police brutality as an issue that goes beyond individual cops, and as such recognizes that her anger at the police has nothing to do with Carlos; it is directed at a system that allows men like One-Fifteen to get away with murder.*



*The destruction of a sentimental place makes Starr realize that violence is ultimately not the answer, and that hurting everyone will only cause more problems in the long run. Though she briefly gave into her anger, she understands that she needs to do more if she wants to bring about lasting change.*



*The arrival of the police in riot gear and use of tear gas directly echo the real-world Black Lives Matter protests that inspired Thomas’s novel, and presents the dystopian scene of a militarized police “at war” with the populace they are supposed to be protecting. Starr’s concern for the store creates a sense of foreboding, as she fears the protestors’ anger will destroy everything in its path.*



*White people do not get to define the baseline for normality. Though the specific focus of this conversation is names, this logic could easily be applied to other elements of culture that are taken as “normal” but are, in fact, part of the same white standard. For example, the language Starr uses at Williamson is no more normal than that she employs in Garden Heights; it is just more accepted by white society.*



## CHAPTER 24

Seven tries to avoid the protests, but many streets are blocked off by the police. When his car runs out of gas on an unfamiliar street, the group gets out to walk to a gas station. As they walk, Starr points out to Chris her old apartment building and the Taco Bell she used visit with her family. Chris says maybe they can go to Taco Bell together someday, which makes DeVante laugh. Chris says he wants Starr to know he will go anywhere with her, no matter what neighborhood it's in.

DeVante clutches his side, and Seven asks if King kicked him with his boots. Seven notes that he did that to Ilesha once, breaking her ribs. The group again hears police telling people to get off the streets, and realize that they have reached the street where Khalil was shot. People there are chanting “a **hairbrush** is not a gun.” This is Starr’s first time at the street since the shooting, and she sees the whole scene play out in front of her eyes again.

April O’Frah’s voice on a bullhorn snaps Starr out of her daze. She is leading the hairbrush chant as the police continue to tell people to disperse. The chant echoes all around them, and Chris, Seven, and DeVante join in. Starr eventually does too, screaming as loud as she can and putting her fist high in the air.

Ms. O’Frah steps down and approaches Starr, who begs her not to tell Lisa she was at the riots. Starr says she had only been talking and joined because she wanted to do something. Ms. O’Frah says that talking *is* doing something, and reminds Starr that her voice is her most powerful weapon.

Ms. O’Frah then tells Starr to fire her, so that what she does next are the actions of an activist rather than Starr’s attorney. Ms. O’Frah leads Starr through the crowd towards a police car and hands her a bullhorn, which Starr notes is “heavy as a gun.” Starr climbs atop the patrol car, and the crowd cheers for her to “speak.” Starr says she is the one who saw what happened to Khalil, and that she wants the world to know that his life mattered. She turns to the cops and begins a chant of “Khalil lived.”

*Despite all its problems, Garden Heights still holds many happy memories for Starr. Though she feared being herself in front of Chris, sharing this part of her world with him has strengthened their relationship.*



*King grows even more villainous through the revelation that he used boots on both a teenage boy and Ilesha. Starr’s arrival at the place of Khalil’s death is traumatic but, importantly, does not stop her from protesting. The hairbrush has become a symbol of Khalil’s innocence as well as the unfair criminalization of black communities.*



*The hairbrush chant reaffirms the power of language, as it energizes and inspires the group to join in. Starr’s raised fist reflects the common symbol for black power.*



*The novel once again affirms the power of language to create change, and that Starr does not need to riot to be a part of the fight for justice.*



*The comparison between the bullhorn and a gun asserts the weight of Starr’s voice in this moment. Standing on the same street where Khalil died, Starr is no longer afraid and finally fully embraces her power to demand justice. The focus on Khalil’s life, rather than death, further reflects the ethos of Black Lives Matter.*



Police throw tear gas at the protestors. Starr volleys it back and even more chaos erupts as everyone scatters. Starr manages to find Seven, Chris, and DeVante through the stampede, but they are all being choked by thick white smoke. They spot a gray pickup truck barreling toward them and realize it is Goon. He stops and tells Starr and her friends to climb into the back of the truck. Also in the truck are other protestors, along with a man Starr recognizes as a national news anchor with a cameraman. Starr can't stop coughing from the tear gas.

Goon drives through the neighborhood, which is thick with smoke, flames, and tanks. Many businesses have been ransacked, except those with "black owned" spray-painted across the front. They arrive at Maverick's store, and Starr gives Goon the keys. Goon directs everyone inside and starts grabbing jugs of milk from the fridge. Everyone pours it on their faces to ease the pain of the tear gas. Goon asks to grab a bottle for protestors still on the streets, and says Maverick is looking for them. He and the reporter then get back in the truck, leaving Starr, Seven, Chris, and DeVante alone in the store.

Starr checks her phone, and has a lot of worried and angry voicemails from Lisa, who says she saw her throwing tear gas on TV. Just as Starr and her friends are getting up to leave the store, someone throws a glass bottle with a flaming cloth through the door. The store goes up in flames.

## CHAPTER 25

The group tries to get out the back door, but it's locked, and Goon still has Starr's keys. Smoke fills the aisles and they struggle to breathe. Mr. Lewis sees them from outside and screams for help. Tim comes running and opens the front door, but the path to it is blocked by flames. Moments later Maverick shows up and rushes to unlock the back door. Everyone tumbles out of the store. Neighbors with buckets of water try to put out the flames, which have spread to Mr. Lewis's store as well, but the fire is too big to control. King pulls up across the street in his gray BMW. He and other King Lords laugh and point at the fire.

Maverick screams at King for starting the fire, but King keeps laughing and hides behind his King Lords. Mr. Lewis shouts that King burned down Maverick's store—loud enough that the gathered crowd hears it. The police and a firetruck arrive. As the police order the crowd to back up, Mr. Lewis tells them that they need to be focused on King because he started the fire. King calls him a liar, but to Starr's immense surprise, Maverick speaks up to confirm Mr. Lewis's story. Starr is shocked that her father has "snitched." But soon many in the crowd join in to confirm that they, too, saw King start the fire.

*Starr throwing the tear gas will later become an important symbol of the protests. Thomas describes the debilitating effects of tear gas in detail, suggesting the cruelty of its use by police. The presence of a national news anchor in the truck reveals how Khalil's story has caught the attention of the entire country.*



*A gangbanger once again proves himself to be so much more than stereotypes would suggest, as Goon becomes the savior of many choking protestors. The fact that he knows about the milk cure suggests he has been subjected to tear gas before.*



*The chapter ends on a note of suspense as the group is trapped in the store. It is not yet clear if the fire was started by rioters or was a targeted attack.*



*Tension builds as the group struggles to leave the store. The fact that so many neighbors attempt to help free the children and put out the flames reflects the good part of Garden Heights—its close-knit community. King's arrival makes it clear he is the one who started the fire.*



*Having established snitching as the ultimate betrayal in Garden Heights, Maverick's words here become all the more momentous. He is using his own voice for the good of the community. The entire neighborhood quickly rises against King, refusing to let him rule them via silence any longer.*



An ambulance arrives and tends to DeVante. Starr and Chris hold hands, and Starr is grateful that they went through the craziness of the past few hours together. The firefighters put out the flames, but it's too late: only a shell of the store remains. Starr feels like she is losing another family member.

*Starr let Chris into the darkest parts of her world, and their bond is all the stronger for it. Chris also better understands what Starr has had to endure growing up in Garden Heights. The loss of the store, which helped Maverick reestablish himself and provide for his family after prison, is a huge financial and emotional blow for the Carters.*



Maverick and Lisa ask where they've all been all night. Maverick is impressed when he hears that Starr threw tear gas, though he half-heartedly scolds her in front of Lisa. Maverick admits that Chris must be brave to have stayed with Starr all night through the riots. He tells him to meet him at the boxing ring the following weekend, because you can "learn a lot about" someone by the way they fight. Starr understands this to be a step toward Maverick accepting her boyfriend.

*Maverick finally softens towards Chris after seeing that he stood by Starr's side and fought with her against injustice. He wants to learn about Chris on his own terms.*



The police take King and his boys away in their patrol cars. DeVante asks Carlos if he is going to kick him out for walking off without telling anyone, but Carlos assures him that he will just be grounded for the rest of his life and that they love him. Carlos then says that, thanks to all the witnesses, they should be able to charge King for arson, though they won't be able to hold him for long.

*Carlos gives DeVante the kind of support and stability he originally sought by joining a gang. The police are a force for good in this moment as they arrest King. The fact that snitching led to his arrest reasserts the power of language.*



DeVante asks if knowing where King's stash was would help them put King away for good. Carlos says it would help the whole neighborhood if King went to jail, and promises that he would protect DeVante. Remembering April O'Frah's claim that his voice is his strongest weapon, DeVante agrees to turn witness on King.

*DeVante does the opposite of Maverick to free himself from the gang: instead of taking a fall for King, he agrees to tell on him. He is using his voice to help the community and free himself from the cycle of crime.*



## CHAPTER 26

The next morning, April O'Frah calls to apologize for putting Starr in a dangerous situation, but also says she thinks Starr has a future in activism. Starr looks at the poster of Tupac on her wall, which was the first item she put up in her new bedroom because it felt like "bringing Khalil" with her. She says that all the rioting last night was because people were angry, and "it fucked all of us." She decides it is time to "un-fuck" everybody.

*Starr has grown to the point that she not only understands Tupac's quote but feels compelled to pick up where it leaves off. Starr recognizes that the previous night's chaos and destruction to have been the result of righteous anger, but also that anger is not enough to bring lasting justice for people like Khalil. Starr is no longer content with accepting the hate she has been given, and instead wants to work towards fixing a broken system.*





Hailey texts Starr to say that she is sorry—for the verdict and that Starr is upset with her. Starr understands this means she is not sorry for her actions, just for Starr’s response to them. Hailey also says she wants things to be the way they used to be, but Starr texts back that they never will be, because Hailey may never see how wrong she was. Remembering Lisa’s advice to weigh the good and the bad of a relationship, she decides to cut Hailey out of her life and deletes her phone number.

*Starr recognizes that Hailey may never change, and that she does not have to be friends with people whose words and beliefs contribute to her oppression. She no longer cares about being accepted by people who will never fully accept her.*



Starr walks down the hallway, noting that she has yet to get used to the layout of their new house. Maverick is at the kitchen counter, clipping the rosebush he brought all the way from Garden Heights. Many of the **roses** are dry and dying, but Maverick sets the bush in a new clay pot and waters it. He says they are a little damaged, but the new soil will help them “reset” and bloom once again.

*The roses again symbolize the Carter family and their new chance to bloom, free of the cycle of drugs and crime in Garden Heights. Like the roses, Starr has been damaged in the sense that seeing Khalil’s death forever changed her. Her new surroundings, however, will help her and the entire Carter family move forward.*



Maverick calls Starr “lil Black Panther” and points to the newspaper: a photo of Starr with a canister of tear gas in her hand is on the front page, along with the title “The Witness Fights Back.” Lisa says the news shows have all been discussing Starr and calling her brave. Of course, one infamous network said she put cops in danger.

*Despite being quiet at first, Starr has now become a symbol for the fight against racial injustice. She recognizes she can never please everyone, but is no longer afraid of fighting for her beliefs.*



Starr worries what people will think about them leaving Garden Heights instead of staying to fix it, but Maverick asserts they don’t have to live there to make a difference. Lisa says she will do extra shifts at the clinic. Later the family goes to see the remains of the store. Police block the entrance to Garden Heights, but when Maverick explains the situation they let them through without issue. Starr is pleased that she is able to remain calm throughout the whole encounter.

*Starr no longer feels terror upon seeing police, suggesting that she is finally healing from her trauma. Maverick and Lisa reveal their continued commitment to the community they came from.*



The streets of Garden Heights are filled with trash and broken glass, and many businesses have been reduced to “blackened frames.” They arrive at the store, which is completely destroyed. Mr. Lewis says that Maverick needs to stick around, because without a good store, more folks will leave Garden Heights. He then announces that he is retiring and wants Maverick to take over his own shop, so he can expand; the neighborhood needs more men like him.

*Despite being home to many of the rioters, Garden Heights is in shambles following the riots. Mr. Lewis’s announcement grants hope that the Carters will be able to get back on their feet. With a new, bigger store, Maverick can continue to be a role model for the community even if he isn’t living there.*



The Carters begin to clean up. Neighbors voice their support, shouting for them to keep their heads up and some, like Tim, even coming by to help pick up the rubble.

*Garden Heights remains an extremely supportive and close community, even in the face of devastation.*



Kenya arrives and says she heard her father started the fire. She also tells Starr that King beat Iesha so badly that she is in the hospital, but she will be okay. She says the police raided their house and needed to ask Iesha questions, causing Starr to realize that DeVante must have talked to the cops already.

Kenya then apologizes to Starr for always calling Seven “my” brother instead of “our” brother. She says she felt insecure about their relationship, fearing he really wanted to be with the Carters and felt ashamed of Kenya’s side of the family. She says it felt like Starr was ashamed of her too, having never introduced her to her Williamson friends. Starr seemed like she was ashamed of all of Garden Heights, in fact. Starr admits she may once have been ashamed, but is not anymore. Kenya asks what they will do next, and Starr says they will “rebuild.”

Starr says the world called Khalil a thug, but she will remember him as a hazel-eyed boy with dimples. She will never forget how he died, and will fight for a better ending. She has realized that the fight for justice is about more than Khalil. It’s about her entire family and community. She then lists the names of real-world black individuals killed at the hands of police, acknowledging there are many more. She says it’s about Emmett Till. People in communities like Garden Heights are starting to fight back. She promises she will never forget, never give up, and never be quiet.

*Kenya remains in a precarious position as the child of King and Iesha. The fact that police have searched her house suggests King will soon be locked away for years.*



*Despite her bravado in the beginning of the novel, Kenya here admits her deep insecurity surrounding her relationships with Starr and Seven. Now that Starr has proven herself no longer ashamed of Garden Heights, she and Kenya are able to connect more deeply. Starr has faith that having torn one broken neighborhood down, they can rebuild a better one.*



*In the final moments of Thomas’s novel, Starr lists the names of actual victims of police brutality whose deaths have spurred nationwide protests against racism and the criminalization of black communities. Listing these names together asserts that none of these incidents were isolated, and that they must be understood as part of a larger system of oppression. At the same time, each name represents a unique individual whose life—like Khalil’s—mattered. Starr’s mention of Emmett Till reveals the deep roots of the injustice against which she vows to fight, and also circles back to her Tumblr post at the beginning of the novel. She has grown greatly as an activist since then, speaking up not only online but in the real world, and here recommits herself to using her voice to fight for racial justice.*





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