Small Great Things

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JODI PICOULT

Picoult is the oldest of two children. When she was 13, her parents moved the family from Long Island to New Hampshire. Both Picoult's mother and grandmother were teachers, and she credits them with influencing her to become a writer. She received a degree in creative writing from Princeton in 1987 and later earned a master's degree in education from Harvard. In between her degrees she held a number of jobs, including teaching English at the middle school level. Her first novel, *Songs of the Humpback Whale*, was published in 1992, and she's published nearly one per year since then. Her 2007 novel *Nineteen Minutes*, which follows the events of a fictional school shooting, was her first novel to make the *New York Times* Bestseller list. Throughout her career, Picoult has worked with a number of organizations and causes that work to empower and educate young people, as well as literary organizations like Vida: Women in Literary Arts that seek to raise the visibility of marginalized voices in the literary world. She lives in New Hampshire with her husband and three children.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Small Great Things, which takes place in the fall of 2015 through the spring of 2016, makes a number of references to current events. It notes the upcoming 2016 presidential election and the end of Barack Obama's time as president, as well as the Black Lives Matter movement. In talking about her fears for Edison as a young black man, Ruth names a number of black men and boys who were killed by police officers or by white men (Trayvon Martin, Freddie Gray, Michael Brown, Eric Garner). The novel also closely tracks the transition of white supremacist groups like the KKK, skinheads, the Christian Identity movement, and other neo-Nazi organizations as they moved underground starting in the mid-1990s. This was due both to the rise of the internet as well as government crackdowns on overtly and violently racist groups. Though organizations that monitor hate groups believed that the number of groups and members were diminishing in the decade after, hateful rhetoric and hate group membership began to skyrocket in the months leading up to the 2016 election.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Just as *Small Great Things* tackles the issue of race in contemporary America, a number of Picoult's novels deal with ethical questions surrounding current science or social issues in the United States. These include *My Sister's Keeper* (which tackles genetic engineering and "designer babies") and *Nineteen Minutes* (which is about an active school shooter situation). Because of the courtroom aspects of *Small Great Things*, it shares similarities with Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* as well as the nonfiction book *Crook County: Racism and Injustice in America's Largest Criminal Court* by Nicole Gonzalez Van Cleve. Though Picoult has written that she intends *Small Great Things* to function as a primer on racism for a mostly white audience, she encourages readers to seek out fiction and nonfiction written by authors of color for a more nuanced look at race and how it functions in contemporary American society. To this end, she recommends books such as Ta-Nehisi Coates's *Between the World and Me* and *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas. Picoult has cited Toni Morrison's novels (*Beloved*; *Song of Solomon*) in particular as being important to her development as a writer and to her ability to write about race.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Small Great Things
- **When Written:** 2013-2015
- **Where Written:** Hanover, New Hampshire
- **When Published:** 2016
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Novel
- **Setting:** Connecticut and New York, 2015-2016
- **Climax:** Judge Thunder dismisses the case, essentially acquitting Ruth
- **Antagonist:** Turk Bauer and the other white supremacists; racism more broadly
- **Point of View:** First person, narrated by Turk, Kennedy, and Ruth

EXTRA CREDIT

Wonder Woman. In 2007, Picoult spent several months writing the Wonder Woman series for DC Comics.

Research. Jodi Picoult is meticulous about researching for her novels and at any given time during her writing process, she has several professionals on call to answer questions. For *Small Great Things*, she interviewed two former skinheads. Everything that Turk experiences in the novel actually happened to one of her two interview subjects.

PLOT SUMMARY

Turk is 11 when his brother Tanner is killed in a car crash. After the other driver involved in the accident, a Black man, is acquitted, Turk's family falls apart: his parents separate, and Turk's mother begins drinking excessively. Turk, angry and resentful about Tanner's death, is drawn into the white supremacy movement. A white power leader named Francis Mitchum reaches out to him, and he falls in love with Francis's daughter, Brit. They get married two years later and have a son, Davis, at the Mercy-West Haven hospital.

Meanwhile, Ruth is the only Black labor and delivery nurse at Mercy-West Haven. She was raised by a single mother, Mama, who was a domestic servant for a wealthy white family. As an adult, Ruth feels like she's a respected member of her mostly white community. One October morning, Ruth is assigned to care for Brit and Davis. She performs the newborn exam, but Turk demands that not be allowed to touch his son, which angers Ruth. The next morning, Davis's nurse asks Ruth to watch him. Davis stops breathing, so Ruth tries to help him—but Ruth isn't supposed to touch him per Turk's request, so she stops herself. Just then, the charge nurse arrives, and a team tries to revive Davis. Ruth performs CPR, but Davis dies.

Two weeks later, Turk files a complaint against Ruth, claiming that she killed Davis. The state of Connecticut takes away Ruth's nursing license, and she's arrested. At Ruth's arraignment hearing the next day, her public defender is Kennedy McQuarrie. During the hearing, Turk sits in the gallery and spits on Ruth's face. Ruth goes to jail, though her teenage son Edison is able to bail her out that night. A couple of days later, Kennedy convinces her boss to let her take Ruth's case.

Near the end of January, Ruth is having dinner at Kennedy's house when she gets a phone call with the news that Mama had a stroke and died. Days later, at the funeral, Ruth realizes that Mama tried to make Ruth understand that the Black church community would always be there for her. At the lunch afterwards, Kennedy and her mother, Ava, offer their condolences. Ava, who was raised in the South by a Black nanny, tells Ruth that Mama didn't waste her life and shows Ruth a **photograph** of herself and her own maid, Beattie.

As Ruth's court date approaches, Kennedy learns that Ruth's case will be tried by Judge Thunder, an irritable judge who doesn't like Kennedy. Howard, a young lawyer in the office, is able to weed out potentially racist jurors during the selection process. That weekend, Kennedy meets with Ivan Kelly-Garcia, a neonatologist. He looks through Davis's lab results and notices that Davis has MCADD, a condition that could have killed him if his blood sugar dropped.

On the first day of the trial, the prosecutor Odette's opening statement casts Turk's request that Ruth not touch Davis as a personal preference. Kennedy insists that Davis had a medical condition and may have died regardless of who cared for him or what treatment he received. After lunch, several doctors, including the pediatrician, Dr. Atkins, testify. Dr. Atikins reviews Davis's newborn screening, telling the court that the results suggest nobody could've saved him.

The medical examiner, Dr. Binnie, testifies the next morning. She says that the bruises on Davis's body could've been the result of medically necessary CPR, and that Davis was already at risk because of MCADD. Then, Turk testifies and ends up screaming and cursing at Kennedy. Kennedy sees this as a win, and during a meeting with Judge Thunder and Odette, Judge Thunder agrees to throw out the murder charge against Ruth and consider her movement for acquittal. Ruth, however, still insists on testifying and tells Kennedy that she lied: she did actually touch Davis. But Kennedy knows that if Ruth speaks, they'll lose.

The next morning, Ruth testifies and tells the truth. Odette yells at Ruth, working her up, and Ruth snaps and says that Davis was better off dead than raised by Turk. Though Kennedy is upset, Ruth feels like she's finally had the chance to speak, and she fires Kennedy . When Kennedy gets home, she decides to walk through a poor Black neighborhood to feel how Ruth feels. She thinks that if she were braver, she'd bring up race in the courtroom and do her part to fix the system. That night, unable to sleep, Kennedy looks over Davis's screening results again and notices that he was a carrier for sickle cell anemia. She contacts Black television personality Wallace Mercy and has him look for Brit's birth certificate.

That Monday, during closing arguments, Kennedy speaks about how racism is largely invisible to white people. Odette maintains her stance that Ruth didn't do her job. As everyone leaves the courtroom, Wallace Mercy and a Black woman approach Turk and Brit. The woman says that she's Brit's mother. Turk is flabbergasted and looks to Francis, who looks shocked and calls the woman Adele. Brit runs off. As Turk and Francis look for her, Francis explains that he and Adele were in love, but she left him. Francis became a white supremacist after this, and he never told anyone that Adele was Black. Francis and Turk eventually find Brit at Davis's grave, cutting her arms in an attempt to get her mother's blood out of her body. They take her to a hospital, and Turk tries to reconcile his racism with his love for his wife and son, who he now knows were part Black.

Two days later, the jury is split on their verdict. The next morning, Judge Thunder tells Kennedy and Odette that it's a hung jury, 11 to one. Back in the courtroom, Judge Thunder dismisses the jury and rules in favor of Ruth's motion of acquittal. She's free to go.

Six years later, Turk is at the doctor's office with his daughter, Carys. He explains that Brit committed suicide as he was filing for divorce, and since then, he's reformed his views and

remarried a woman named Deborah. He now speaks about his experiences for the Anti-Defamation League. When the nurse comes in, Turk recognizes her as Ruth. She diagnoses Carys's strep throat, and as she leaves the room, Turk thanks her. He can't tell if she recognizes him or not.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Ruth Jefferson – The protagonist of the novel; a labor and delivery nurse at the Mercy-West Haven hospital. Ruth was raised by Mama, a single mother who worked her entire life as a domestic servant for a wealthy white family. Though Ruth grew up resenting the Hallowells for employing Mama, they helped her enroll in a prestigious high school, which later allowed her to earn her nursing degree from Yale and buy a house in a white neighborhood. Ruth is a widow; her husband, Wesley, died when her son, Edison, was seven. Ruth tries to think the best of others and impress upon Edison that he can do anything if he works hard enough. This view becomes harder to live with after white supremacists Turk and Brit request that Ruth not touch their baby, Davis. This request means that when Davis stops breathing, Ruth hesitates to provide care and later, lies that she didn't touch him. Her life is turned upside down after this: the state takes away her nursing license and charges her with murder. She applies for welfare and gets a job at McDonald's. Ruth dislikes her public defender, Kennedy, a white lawyer who insists she doesn't see race. Ruth is upset when Kennedy insists that they can't bring up race in the courtroom or they'll lose, but realizing she has little choice, Ruth allows Kennedy to represent her. She does, however, do what she can to make Kennedy notice how racism affects Ruth's life. As the trial progresses, Ruth becomes more and more hopeless, especially as Edison starts to misbehave and, in Ruth's opinion, act like her sister Adisa. Ruth's relationship with Adisa is strained, as she believes Adisa embraces every bad stereotype about black people. Following Mama's death, however, Ruth begins to see that her black church community will always be there for her. Ultimately, Ruth insists on testifying and telling her truth, even though doing so will cause her to lose the case. Ruth is acquitted when Judge Thunder throws out the case, and she goes on to open her own practice and remain friends with Kennedy.

Turk Bauer – Turk is one of the most powerful white supremacists on the east coast. He learned to hate black people when his older brother, Tanner, died in a car crash with a black man. This experience becomes the root of Turk's hate for black people and means that when his friend Raine introduces him to the white supremacist scene, Turk is happy to join. Though Turk does wonder whether these beliefs are correct, he stops asking questions when he realizes that his father is gay, and beats him up as his formal initiation. Turk goes to jail briefly and befriends a black man named Twinkie, but reasons that jail is different from the outside world. In the years after his release, Turk starts the website lonewolf.org with Francis Mitchum and marries Francis's daughter, Brit. The two have a baby two years later at Ruth's hospital. At the time of Davis's birth, Turk is still angry at all black people. He threatens Marie and asks that Ruth not be allowed to touch Davis. When Davis dies two days later, Turk blames Ruth and files a complaint against her. In the aftermath of Davis's death, Turk struggles to care for Brit. He fears that he lost her as well as his son and feels impotent when he learns that he can't bring charges against Ruth until after the state finishes its lawsuit. Turk instead turns to the internet to try to round up white supremacists to commit an act of vandalism to honor Davis, but this attempt is also unsuccessful. Turk's anger and fear continue to grow throughout the trial. When he learns that Davis had a disorder that made him more susceptible to death, and that Davis's death was entirely random, Turk begins to question if his racist beliefs inadvertently killed his son. When he learns that Brit and Davis have African American blood, Turk is shocked, but he discovers that he still loves them and wishes Davis were alive. In the epilogue, six years later, Turk reforms his beliefs, remarries, and speaks out against hate for the Anti-Defamation League.

Kennedy McQuarrie – The white public defender who represents Ruth. Kennedy lives a privileged life; her husband Micah is an eye surgeon and makes enough money for Kennedy to work her low-paying job as a public defender. She adores her four-year-old daughter, Violet, but has a strained relationship with her mother, Ava. Kennedy believes that she's not racist, as most of her clients are black. However, she's forced to confront the truth when she first represents Ruth at Ruth's arraignment trial. The women's relationship starts out rocky, especially when Kennedy insists that they can't bring up race during Ruth's trial. Though she admits that there's absolutely a racial element to the charges, she knows that bringing up race is a surefire way to lose. She gradually earns Ruth's trust and Ruth begins to expose Kennedy to small ways that racism affects her life, such as showing her how store employees treat her and pointing out that Band-Aids are never the right color. Kennedy starts to understand that she doesn't have enough knowledge to win Ruth's case alone, so she enlists the help of Howard, a young black lawyer. Together, they assemble a jury for Ruth's case that they hope will rule in her favor, and working with Howard exposes Kennedy to more instances of everyday racism that black people experience. Though things look good for Kennedy and Ruth in the final days of the trial, Kennedy is blindsided by Ruth's admission that she lied and actually did touch Davis. Ruth forces Kennedy to let her testify and afterwards, when Kennedy insists that Ruth's testimony will make them lose the case, Ruth fires Kennedy as her lawyer. Kennedy decides to walk around a black neighborhood to try to see how Ruth feels, and she comes to the realization that if she doesn't bring up race in the courtroom, the system will never

change. Because of this, Kennedy's closing argument is entirely about institutional racism. The novel implies that Ruth and Kennedy go on to be friends after Ruth is acquitted.

Brit Bauer – Turk's wife. Brit is Francis Mitchum's daughter and is therefore considered the princess of the white power movement. Francis raised her by himself and raised her to believe that her mother, Adele, abandoned Brit when she was six months old. Because she was raised entrenched in the white power movement, Brit is ruthless and cruel. Her first "date" with Turk consists of beating up gay men, and while she's pregnant with Davis, she poisons their Hispanic neighbor's dog when it won't stop barking. She and Turk are thrilled when Davis is born, and Brit especially is devastated when he dies. Brit abuses sleeping pills and painkillers so she can spend most of her time asleep, and Turk fears that he's lost Brit as well as Davis. As the months go by, Brit starts to get her fire back but also starts pressuring Turk to do something tangible to honor their son. At several points throughout the trial, Brit starts crying or yelling racist slurs at Ruth. This culminates in Odette's decision to not allow Brit to testify. Though Turk begins to doubt his beliefs and whether he was complicit in Davis's death, Brit continues to believe in what the white power movement taught her about racism and blame Ruth. She experiences a mental break, however, when Brit discovers that Adele is actually black and that she herself is half black. Francis and Turk find her at Davis's grave, cutting her arm to try to get her mother's blood out of her veins. Turk explains that as he was preparing to file for divorce in the months after, Brit committed suicide—she wasn't able to live with herself knowing that she was half black.

Edison – Ruth's seventeen-year-old son. Prior to Davis's death, Edison is an honor student on the fast track to college. He attends a prestigious school and Ruth is extremely proud of him. However, around the time of Davis's death, Edison starts seeing that the world is more racist than Ruth previously let on. Feeling disillusioned, he starts to act out, especially after Ruth spends the night in jail. Edison starts skipping school and spending time with one of Adisa's sons, drinking and smoking marijuana. He gets suspended twice. Though he worries for Ruth, he has no faith in the justice system to make the right call, and he resents his teachers and classmates for either making fun of him or wanting to help. His frustration and sense of helplessness reaches a breaking point the night before closing arguments. Hoping to frame Turk and help Ruth, Edison spray-paints a swastika and a racist slur on the hospital. Odette gets Edison's case dismissed and his brush with the law, combined with Ruth's acquittal, spurs him to turn his life around. He reaffirms his commitment to school, expresses interest in becoming a lawyer, and when Turk visits Ruth's medical center six years later, Turk notices a photograph of Edison graduating from Yale.

Mama – Ruth's mother. She raised Rachel and Ruth by herself while working six days per week for the Hallowell family as a domestic servant. She delivered Ms. Mina's second baby, and Ruth notes that most of what Mama did for the Hallowells was invisible. When Mama started to bring her daughters to work with her on the pretense that they'd learn practical skills, Ruth initially thought she was raising them to work similar jobs. However, she eventually realized that Mama wanted to teach them to be self-sufficient, unlike Ms. Mina and Christina. Throughout Ruth's life, Mama has been a guiding presence and force. She was there for Edison's birth and she supports Ruth through the early stages of the trial. Mama always encouraged Ruth to do her best, though she also tried to make Ruth understand that she'd always be welcome in the black church community. Ruth doesn't internalize this until Mama dies right before the trial begins. After her death, Ruth feels as though Mama remains with her in spirit in the form of **Mama's scarf**, which she's had for years.

Francis Mitchum – Brit's father, a former skinhead and a prominent figure in the white power movement. He raised Brit by himself after his girlfriend, Adele, cheated on him with a black man and, as he tells it, abandoned Brit. Around the time that Turk met Francis, the government was starting to crack down on overt white supremacy and Francis understood that the only way forward was to move online. He and Turk started the website lonewolf.org, a site that offers white supremacists an anonymous place to band together. Francis is a guiding force in Turk's life and a voice of reason throughout the trial. However, on the final day of trial, Wallace Mercy confronts Francis, Turk, and Brit with Adele, who is revealed to be black. Later, Francis confides in Turk that he and Adele were madly in love, but he was jealous and afraid of losing her. After beating her, she ran to her black choir director and Francis was picked up by Tom Metzger, a leader in the white supremacist movement. Following this revelation, both Francis and Turk are beaten and kicked out of the movement.

Rachel / Adisa – Ruth's sister. She was born as Rachel but in her late teens and early twenties, she decided she wanted to connect to her African roots and changed her name to Adisa. She and Ruth have always had a strained relationship, as Adisa loved their black Harlem neighborhood, spoke in Ebonics, and didn't care about education. Ruth believes that Adisa embraced every single negative stereotype of black people through her life choices: Adisa has five children, isn't married, and can barely keep minimum wage jobs. She also, in Ruth's estimation, sees prejudice and racism everywhere. Despite their rocky relationship, Adisa comes to Ruth's aid when she loses her job. Adisa helps Ruth apply for welfare and tries to convince her to accept Wallace Mercy's offer of help. She eventually decides to follow Ruth's lead and trust Kennedy, though Adisa is rude to Kennedy throughout the trial. The night before the last day of trial, Adisa admits that she stole Mama's **scarf** after Mama died so that Ruth wouldn't bury Mama in it. She gives the scarf to

Ruth for good luck.

Christina – Christina is Ms. Mina's daughter. She's a year older than Ruth and growing up, the two were close friends. However, Christina led a life of privilege and never fully understood what Ruth's life was like, which led Ruth to distance herself just in case Christina started to exclude her. Christina was also traumatized by watching her mother give birth, which led her to choose to have her son via surrogate. In the present, Christina is married to a man named Larry and is struggling with his decision to run for Congress. As Ruth is charged with murder, Christina explains that the two can't be seen together, as it'd be damaging for Larry's campaign to be involved with such a scandal. Ruth sees this as proof that Christina is biased, racist, and privileged. However, in the final days of the trial, Christina shows up at Ruth's house and explains that she's been in court in disguise. She apologizes for her behavior and her ignorance, and it's implied that she and Ruth start to repair their relationship and be more honest with each other after the case ends.

Ava – Kennedy's mother. Ava is very proper and the epitome of feminine womanhood, having been raised on the debutante circuit in the South. Though both Kennedy and Micah find this tiring, Violet loves it: it means that Ava throws wonderful tea parties for her granddaughter, complete with her good wedding china. Ava babysits Violet often and though she usually follows Kennedy's wishes as to what television Violet can watch, she does occasionally watch Fox News around Violet. While Ava doesn't see herself as racist or hateful, she does object to Violet's desire to be Princess Tiana (who's black) for Halloween, and Kennedy believes that her television viewing habits betray latent racism and conservatism that she doesn't appreciate. Ava, on the other hand, insists she's not racist since she loved her childhood black maid, Beattie, like family. Kennedy usually rolls her eyes when Ava brings this up, but when Ava attends Mama's funeral and shows Ruth a **photograph** of herself and Beattie, Ruth sees that there was genuine love between the two.

Howard – Howard is a young black lawyer who is hired in Kennedy's office. Kennedy goes out of her way to be nice to him when Ed spouts off that Howard was a diversity hire, but realizes she misjudged Howard when she learns that he's from a wealthy town. Not long before jury selection, Kennedy asks to have Howard join her on the case. Though Howard is enthusiastic about the fieldwork she asks him to do to learn about potential jurors, he's unable to do as much sleuthing as she'd like because he's afraid that someone will call the cops on him. He instead takes over the online research, using Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter to find out how potential jurors feel about racism, law enforcement, and white supremacy. Howard is vocal that Kennedy should use one of her strikes against juror number 12. During the trial, Howard mostly helps protect Ruth from the press. He's awestruck when Kennedy brings up race in her questioning and seems beside himself after her closing arguments.

Raine Tesco – A white supremacist in his early twenties who takes an interest in the teenaged Turk. He introduces Turk to the central tenets of white supremacy, takes him to several festivals, and eventually, initiates Turk into the North American Death Squad by taking him to beat up Turk's father outside of a gay bar. The two are close friends during that time, though they lose contact in the following years when both of them get married. Following Davis's death, Turk reconnects with Raine to ask him for help in "memorializing" Davis through a hate crime. However, Turk is shocked when Raine admits that he's no longer active in the movement for the sake of his children. After his toddler daughter used a racist slur in public, fellow shoppers made Raine feel terrible enough to make him decide that it wasn't fair to his daughter to raise her with that hate, knowing that she'd be ostracized for it.

Wallace Mercy – A black television personality and preacher. Most of his work consists of activism to raise awareness for black people who are either wrongfully convicted of crimes or are murdered by police. Ruth finds him too angry, while Adisa thinks that he's the only person capable of making sure white people hear how angry black people really are. As Ruth's trial begins to move forward, Mercy offers to help her. He and Adisa organize one march but Ruth ultimately declines his help after Kennedy points out that the media attention won't do them any good. Despite this, Mercy and his followers still assemble daily outside the courthouse during Ruth's trial. Kennedy contacts him for help when she discovers that Davis was a carrier for sickle cell anemia, a disorder that mostly affects African Americans. With this information Mercy is able to find Adele, Brit's mother, and subsequently shatter Turk's conceptions about Brit, Francis, and love itself.

Davis Bauer – Turk and Brit's baby. He dies at three days old after his circumcision and Ruth is blamed for his death. Over the course of the ensuing trial, it comes out that Davis had a disorder called MCADD, which put him at risk of experiencing respiratory failure if his blood sugar dropped—which it did due to fasting before his circumcision. Because of this, it's likely he would've died no matter what a nurse did or didn't do. Doctors also point out that he might've lived had he been born earlier in the week, as his disorder would've been identified in time to intervene and save his life. In the final days of the trial, Turk learns that Davis has African-American ancestry thanks to Adele, Davis's black grandmother. Despite hating black people, Turk realizes that he still loved his son and wishes he were still alive.

Violet – Kennedy and Micah's four-year-old daughter. Thanks to Kennedy's unwillingness to watch her language around her daughter, Violet sometimes curses. Violet adores Disney princesses and her grandmother, Ava, who throws lavish tea parties when they spend time together. Being so young, Violet

doesn't have a firm grasp of how race functions in society: she desperately wants to be Princess Tiana for Halloween, even though Tiana is black, and she and Ruth have a frank and honest discussion about slavery when Ruth comes for dinner one night. Both Ruth and Ava see Violet as proof that hate and racism are learned things: Violet's questions about slavery are innocent and unassuming, and Ava points to Violet's games with a black girl at the playground as evidence of how far the United States has come in terms of race relations.

Odette Lawton – The black prosecutor who represents the state of Connecticut in Ruth's trial. She's sleek and professional, and Kennedy knows her to be ruthless and unfriendly. Odette makes sure that Turk and Brit can sit in the gallery during the trial and coaches the two of them on how to best play the parts of grieving parents. Though she's open about finding Turk's beliefs abhorrent, she makes the case that his beliefs didn't give Ruth the right to neglect Davis's care. She appears to be a villainous character for much of the novel, but begins to show that she has a soft and understanding side near the end of the trial. She gets Edison's case excused and also admits that she too used to work at McDonald's.

Judge Thunder – The judge who hears Ruth's case. Kennedy has had past experience with him and knows that he's a difficult judge who pre-judges cases and likes to make examples of people who step out of line. He also dislikes Kennedy personally, as she once was very rude to him, so she feels as though Ruth is bound to lose. During the trial, Judge Thunder's insistence on order keeps the white supremacists in the gallery in line. Prior to Ruth's testimony, he seems like he might be on Ruth's side when he agrees to throw out her murder charges. When the jury can't come to a conclusion, he decides to throw out the case, which frees Ruth.

Ms. Mina – Mama's employer. She's a wealthy lady who lives in a Manhattan brownstone. When Ruth was a child, she watched Ms. Mina give birth to her son and the experience made her want to be a nurse. In the present, Ruth understands that Ms. Mina still employs Mama because she doesn't know how to take care of herself or her home. Though Ruth resents Ms. Mina for continuing to employ Mama into her old age, Ms. Mina also pays for some of Mama's surgeries and after Mama's death, pays for the lavish funeral. Ms. Mina insists throughout her life that Mama is part of the family, but Ruth believes that family shouldn't earn a paycheck.

Marie – The charge nurse in the labor and delivery department of the Mercy-West Haven hospital. She's only been at the hospital for ten years and she and Ruth were both in the running for the charge nurse position, but Ruth doesn't resent her for getting it. Ruth implies that Marie is kind and normally a good friend, but Marie chooses to honor Turk's request that Ruth not touch Davis. Ruth fixates on Marie's sticky note saying that no African American staff are to care for Davis and believes that Marie kept her from doing her job. When Marie testifies during Ruth's trial, Ruth realizes that the two weren't actually true friends.

Corinne – A fellow nurse at Mercy-West Haven in the labor and delivery department. Though she's a good nurse, Corinne is chronically late and blames her lateness on everything from the weather to her boyfriend. She and Ruth are friends at the start of the novel and often get drinks together, but Corinne struggles to believe that Marie would be racist when Ruth is taken off Davis's case. Ruth doesn't see her at all between losing her job and the trial and while Corinne testifies, Ruth realizes that the two were never actually friends: their relationship was one of convenience.

Micah – Kennedy's husband. He's an eye surgeon, and his paycheck allows Kennedy to keep her job as a public defender without experiencing financial hardship. Micah is very supportive of Kennedy and her career, though he teases her often about her habit of "lawyering" him in every argument. When Kennedy takes on Ruth's case and struggles to understand why Ruth wants to testify, even though it might make things worse, Micah encourages Kennedy to understand that sometimes having the opportunity to speak is more important than winning.

Juror Number 12 – A white, inner city schoolteacher called for jury duty during Ruth's trial. During jury selection, both Kennedy and Howard have reservations about her—Kennedy's questions reveal that while she says she's not racist, she holds implicit biases against people of color—but they allow her to move through and sit with the jury. It's implied that she's the one juror who won't agree to acquit Ruth of the charges brought against her by the state.

Sam Hallowell – Ms. Mina's husband; he's deceased in the novel's present but appears in Ruth's flashbacks. He used to work for NBC and announced when shows were presented in color. Though Ruth didn't see him much, when he did appear, he acted as a voice of reason and encouragement for her. When Ruth skipped school with a stomachache right after starting at Dalton, Mr. Hallowell understood that Ruth felt like an imposter and assured her that she belonged at Dalton.

Adele – Adele, a middle-aged black woman, appears with Wallace Mercy on the final day of trial and reveals that she is Brit's mother. Francis later explains that he and Adele were young and in love when they had Brit, but Francis's jealousy drove Adele to begin a relationship with her black choral director at church. After Francis beat her, she left him and Brit.

Turk's Mother – Though not a member of any white supremacist group, Turk's mother is nonetheless a racist and hateful woman: she spits on the black man who she believed killed her eldest son, Tanner. Following his death and the split with her husband, Turk's father, she turns to alcohol, loses her job, and moves into Gramps's house with Turk. She dies of liver failure when Turk is in his early twenties.

Tanner – Turk's older brother; he died in a car accident a few months after he turned sixteen. Though Turk grew up believing that Tanner died in a racially motivated murder at the hands of a black man, he learns as an adult that Tanner was actually high and swerved into the black man's lane of traffic. Tanner's death represents a turning point for the Bauer family, as it instigates Turk's parents' divorce and primes Turk to accept Raine Tesco's invitation into the North American Death Squad a few years later.

Gramps – Turk's maternal grandfather. He was a hardened war veteran who never liked Turk's father and believed that Turk's parents were raising him to be soft. When Turk and Turk's mother moved in with him not long after Tanner's death, Gramps took it upon himself to "harden" Turk, stoke his anger, and teach him to fight. He died suddenly when Turk was fifteen.

Dr. Atkins – A pediatrician at Mercy-West Haven. She's a friendly doctor who's highly qualified and well respected. She performed Davis's circumcision, was called to the nursery when Davis started to code, and later testifies during the trial. She's shocked to see the results of Davis's newborn screening, which shows that he had MCADD.

Tom Metzger – The leader of a white supremacist organization and one of Francis's friends. When Brit was little, he was an uncle to her. After it comes out that Brit's mother, Adele, is black, Francis tells Turk that Tom was the one who introduced him to organized white supremacy and insisted he stop drinking for Brit's sake.

Turk's Father – Turk doesn't say much about his father except that Turk's mother's dad, Gramps, didn't like him. Turk's parents split up after Tanner dies and several years later, Turk discovers that his father is gay. Part of Turk's initiation into the North American Death Squad is beating up his father outside a gay bar.

Bryce – Edison's longtime best friend who, when Edison expresses interest in dating his younger sister, tells Edison that his parents would go crazy if Whitney dated a black boy. This comes as a surprise to both Edison and Ruth, as Bryce's family has taken Edison on vacation with them to Greece on several occasions.

Yorkey – Turk's first recruit to the North American Death Squad at a community college in Hartford. He's an integral member of the crew until he and Turk get pulled over one night and the police discover that Yorkey was carrying drugs. Because Turk was driving, he goes to jail for it and when he's released, he finds and beats Yorkey.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Carla Luongo – The Hispanic Risk Management lawyer at Mercy-New Haven hospital. She speaks with Turk and Brit about Davis's death, and though she's initially put off by Turk's swastika tattoo, she appears sympathetic to their version of events that places all the blame on Ruth.

Ed Gourakis – One of Kennedy's coworkers. Kennedy notes that Ed became a public defender because he has a trust fund and can afford to work for nearly nothing. He's caustic, self-important, and racist—he insists to Kennedy that Howard was only hired to meet a diversity requirement.

Twinkie – A young black man that Turk befriended when he was in jail. Turk managed to humanize Twinkie enough that when Twinkie took offense to Turk's use of racist slurs, Turk started to question whether or not he should use the language. =

Jessie – One of Ruth's patients. She's a stylish woman and her husband has never seen her without makeup on, so Ruth procures her lipstick in the hours after her daughter's birth.

Eliza – One of Ruth's patients. She confides in Ruth during labor that she believes she became pregnant after being raped on a business trip. Her husband doesn't know. Eliza relaxes as soon as she sees that her daughter looks just like her husband.

Larry – Christina's husband. He decides to run for Congress a few weeks after Davis dies. As Ruth's court case progresses, he tries to forbid Christina from seeing Ruth.

Roarke Matthews – The lawyer Turk speaks to about his proposed civil suit against Ruth. He insists they need to wait to file the civil suit until the State's criminal suit is over.

Lucille – The night nurse who helped Brit deliver Davis. She warns Ruth that there's something off about Turk, but she has no idea that he's a white supremacist.

Wesley Jefferson – Ruth's late husband; he died in Afghanistan about ten years before the start of the novel. Edison looks just like him.

Detective MacDougall – A hulking police officer who process Turk's complaint against Ruth and later interrogates her.

Virginia – A white nursing student in her thirties. She shadows Ruth one day and a patient initially believes that Virginia, rather than Ruth, is the nurse in charge.

Detective Leong – An Asian-American police officer who plays "good cop" when the police interrogate Ruth.

Liza Lott – A black transwoman who's transported to jail with Ruth. It's implied that she's there on prostitution charges, and this isn't her first time going to jail.

Deborah – Turk's second wife; they marry several years after Davis's death. She works while Turk cares for their daughter, Carys, and Turk took her name when they married.

Jiao – A former patient of Ruth's who didn't want to hold her deceased baby, who died in utero.

Carys – Turk's three-year-old daughter with Deborah. Her name means "love" in Welsh.

Ivan Kelly-Garcia – The neonatologist who explains Davis's

heel stick results to Kennedy.

Isaac Hager – The anesthesiologist who was part of the crash team to save Davis. He testifies in court.

Dr. Bill Binnie – A young and handsome medical examiner who performed Davis's autopsy.

Wanda – Ruth's white cellmate in jail.

Beattie – Ava's African-American childhood maid.

Nahndi – The young woman who trains Ruth at McDonald's.

Harry – Kennedy's boss; an irritable and harried man.

Officer Ramirez – Ruth's counselor while she's in jail.

Jack DeNardi – A paper pusher in the office at Mercy-West Haven Hospital.

Uncle Leon – Kennedy's racist great-uncle.

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: HATE, FEAR, AND GRIEF

Small Great Things follows Ruth, a black labor and delivery nurse; Turk, an angry white supremacist whose baby is born—and dies—in Ruth's hospital; and Kennedy, a white public defender who represents Ruth during her ensuing trial for murder. Ruth is put in a difficult position when Turk requests that no black staff touch his son, Davis. However, during a busy morning in which Davis's white nurse is called away to an emergency C-section, leaving Ruth temporarily to watch over the baby, Davis suddenly stops breathing, testing Ruth's commitment to her superior's orders as well as to her duties as a nurse. Following Davis's death, the state of Connecticut takes away Ruth's nursing license, suspends her from her job, and alleges that she's solely responsible for Davis's death. As the court case unfolds and as Turk tells his life story through flashbacks, the novel makes the case that racist hate like Turk's isn't something that a person is born with. Rather, hate is something learned, and it's easiest to learn to hate in the wake of an experience of intense fear, loneliness, or grief.

Turk's story begins in a court of law where a black man is being tried for killing Tanner, Turk's older brother, in a car accident. While Turk isn't yet an official skinhead or white nationalist, it's clear that he's been taught to hate black people from a young age: Turk's mother spits on the black man when he's found not guilty, and the family blames that man for the death of their son. This experience effectively destroys Turk's family. With their oldest son dead, Turk's parents split up and Turk, blinded by grief, begins experimenting with crime. As a teen, he attracts the attention of Raine Tesco, a white supremacist in his early twenties who sees in Turk the opportunity to channel Turk's hate and make him feel like he's part of a community. Turk, still haunted by Tanner's death and still blaming the black man for it, eagerly attends a white supremacist music festival with Raine and not long after, participates in his formal initiation into the group: an outing to beat up gay men outside of a gay bar. During this outing, Turk learns several things. First, he discovers that hurting others offers him relief from the pain he feels at seeing his family destroyed. This suggests that a person like Turk, who is already angry and hurting, is far more likely to turn to violence when given the opportunity. Then, Turk learns that his now-absent father is gay and at the bar that night. After beating up his own father, Turk affirms his relationship with Raine's crew, pledges to act as a "race warrior" to promote the white race, and effectively disowns his blood family.

The high emotion, the anger, and the echo chamber of white supremacist ideas that Turk then spends all of his time around do lasting damage to his critical thinking skills and his capacity for kindness and empathy. When Turk's mother dies and he goes through her belongings, he finds the transcripts from Tanner's court case and reads through them. In doing so, he discovers that Tanner was actually high and swerved into the black man's lane of traffic, complicating Turk's understanding of his brother's death as a simple racially motivated murder. However, because of Turk's involvement with white supremacist organizations, he's unable to even consider that Tanner's death may have been an accident caused by Tanner himself. With this, the novel illustrates how being immersed in hateful rhetoric makes it nearly impossible to ask difficult or nuanced questions about race and how it functions in society—because Turk both believes in the inherent superiority of white people, and because asking those questions could mean expulsion from the community or even death.

When Davis dies, surrounded by a team of medical professionals that includes Ruth, Turk's pent-up hate makes it easy for him to lay all the blame on her. However, as the court case progresses, Turk learns several things that shake his beliefs to the core. His first revelation is that his wife Brit, the daughter of one of the most powerful white supremacists on the east coast, is actually the light-skinned daughter of a black woman—and that Brit's father, Francis, was encouraged to join by people who preyed on his grief and anger at losing his girlfriend to a black man (Francis conveniently left out that his girlfriend was black as well).

With this comes the twin realization that, because of Turk's beliefs regarding what makes a person black, both Brit and Davis are black—and yet, Turk still loves his wife and still wishes his son were alive. In the epilogue, Brit and Turk come to represent the two extremes of what this kind of racism can do.

Unable to come to terms with her identity, Brit commits suicide—her hate, anger, and belief in the inferiority of black people meant that she was unable to live with herself knowing that she was black. Turk, on the other hand, reforms his belief, remarries and has a daughter, and speaks regularly to students about the danger of giving oneself over to hate, racism, and the draw of a community founded on violence. With this, *Small Great Things* ultimately suggests that personal, emotional racism can be fought through personal empathy, critical thinking, and love for individuals that are unlike oneself.

INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

In contrast to the overt, purposeful racism as espoused by Turk Bauer and the white supremacists he works with, *Small Great Things* also explores how racism functions in society among white people who don't believe themselves to be racist. Kennedy brightly quips in her first meeting with Ruth that she "doesn't see race" and that "the human race is what matters," statements that make Ruth—a black woman who experiences prejudice every day at the hands of well-meaning but unwittingly racist white people—feel as though Kennedy is woefully ignorant, naïve, and sees herself as a white savior. In particular, *Small Great Things* pays close attention to how this brand of racism is baked into everyday life, normalized, and is subsequently made invisible to people like Kennedy.

The novel first shows how institutional racism functions by following Ruth through several normal shifts at the hospital. When accompanied by a white nursing student who's ten years younger than Ruth, a patient speaks to the nursing student as though she's the one in charge; a white woman in the cafeteria grabs her purse to hold it closer when Ruth approaches to help her at the coffee station; and Ruth's coworkers brush off Marie's sticky note that no African-American staff are to care for Davis as a valid request on the part of Davis's parents, likening it to a patient's request for a female doctor. For the white employees at the hospital, all of these occurrences can be explained away as simple misunderstandings with no malice behind them. They're able to do this because they don't believe they're racist and therefore, don't understand the very real negative effects that these actions have on Ruth, even if those effects are unintended. For Ruth, these experiences make her question her own sanity and whether or not she's seeing racism where there is none. Like her coworkers, Ruth wants to think the best of people, but she finds it hard to do so when white people like the old woman inadvertently show Ruth that they think she's more likely to steal than a white person, or when Corinne and Marie (and therefore the hospital system as a whole) end up siding with a white supremacist despite insisting they're not racist.

Kennedy is one of the novel's worst offenders when it comes to this entrenched and, in the eyes of white people, invisible racism, which makes it much harder for her to connect with Ruth and effectively represent her in the courtroom. Recognizing that she has little choice in a lawyer, Ruth takes it upon herself to expose Kennedy to things that make her see that, even though she doesn't think of herself as racist, she still has no idea what it's like to move through the world as a black person. When the two women go shopping together, Kennedy soon becomes annoyed at the clerk who keeps checking up on her and Ruth. It takes her several minutes to realize that the clerk is afraid that Ruth is going to shoplift. She also notices that, when they leave the store with a group of other shoppers, Ruth—the only black person in the group—is also the only person to have her bag checked. While these are considered "microaggressions" on a daily level, they also reflect the fact that black people are more likely to be arrested and serve longer sentences than white people for the same offense.

The night before the last day of trial, Kennedy takes these exercises a step further by walking around a low-income and predominately black neighborhood. Kennedy notices that the residents on the street seem afraid of her and refuse to speak to her, while she also recognizes that, because she's the only white person on the streets, she feels alone and as though she's in danger. While Kennedy understands the limits of this exercise (it's only one day, not a lifetime), it does increase her capacity to empathize with Ruth—and in doing so, suggests that one of the most effective ways to tackle one's inherent biases is to experience situations that place one in a minority role.

With this knowledge in place, Kennedy approaches the jury on the final day of court with a real-life analogy to help them visualize this kind of racism: Davis was born on a Thursday, which meant that a state-mandated blood test identifying the genetic problem that likely contributed to his death wasn't run until well after his death on Saturday. Had Davis been born on a Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday, next-day or two-day lab results could've prevented his death—in other words, he was at an unfair advantage, simply because he was born late in the week. While this analogy is a powerful motivator for a majority of the jury and eleven of the twelve jurors find Ruth innocent, juror number 12—a white teacher who teaches in an integrated classroom and therefore believes she's not racist—is the only one who refuses to agree to acquit Ruth of the crimes brought against her by the state.

Juror number 12's unwillingness to be swayed by Kennedy's analogy, while also insisting she's not racist, reminds the reader that not everyone is ready or willing to accept the existence of institutional racism as fact—and further, that those people have an outsize amount of power in society to continue to promote a racist system of doing things. In other words, while Turk may have been able to reform his own personally racist beliefs through empathy and love, institutional racism requires *everyone* to think critically about how power systems empower some people, while hurting others. In this way, Kennedy's shift

to becoming aware of institutional racism acts as a powerful example of what's possible when a white person recognizes that people of color are at an unfair advantage, not just in the courts but in every aspect of their lives. With this, the novel acts as a wakeup call to white readers to think critically about the systems around them and, most importantly, to listen to people like Ruth when they say that things aren't fair.

BELONGING AND COMMUNITY

At the beginning of the novel, both Ruth and Turk are happy and fulfilled in their respective communities. Turk is a well-respected webmaster of lonewolf.org, a website that offers people interested in white supremacy a place to find camaraderie and others who think like them, and is married to the daughter of one of the most powerful men in the movement. Ruth, on the other hand, is an experienced labor and delivery nurse who feels as though she's a valued member of the hospital staff and also feels valued within her greater community. Davis Bauer's death, however, calls both Turk and Ruth's sense of belonging into question, suggesting that there's more to belonging than simply being an official member of one's chosen organization. Instead, *Small Great Things* suggests that strong communities are made up of people who don't abandon each other when things get tough or when things change, and that trust, empathy, and understanding are more powerful unifying forces than hate or fear.

The camaraderie and friendship that Ruth experiences with her coworkers, namely the charge nurse Marie and fellow nurse Corinne, is evident from the novel's beginning. Marie and Ruth have a running bet on what Corinne's latest excuse will be for arriving late, while Corinne and Ruth often have dinner or drinks after a long shift. Marie expresses interest in Ruth's son, Edison, while Ruth listens to Corinne's latest tales about her current boyfriend. All of these exchanges work together to create the sense that Ruth is a valued member of the labor and delivery team, and Ruth believes that this is true until Marie chooses to honor Turk's request that Ruth not be allowed to care for Davis. Even more painfully, Corinne backs up Marie's choice, and following Davis's death, the hospital itself revokes Ruth's license and takes away her job. These actions impress upon Ruth that though she thought she was valued, she was only valued until she pushed back on her supervisor's implicit biases—and a baby died because Marie chose to act in a way that was racist and alienating to Ruth.

However, the predominately white hospital team isn't the first community that Ruth has been a part of. Ruth was raised by a single mother, Mama, and was a regular member of her exclusively black childhood church community before she was admitted to nursing school and began her rise out of poverty. After Mama's untimely death a few months after Davis dies, Ruth is once again thrust into the church community she sought to distance herself from as a young adult. The funeral impresses upon Ruth that, regardless of her youthful desire to distance herself from her black community in favor of assimilation into white society, her black church community is the one that will always be there for her. This is then reinforced when a number of the church ladies who attend Mama's funeral later attend the trial in support of Ruth, while none of Ruth's white friends do. Ruth's case also attracts the attention of Wallace Mercy, a black television personality and preacher who champions defendants in civil rights cases. He makes it very clear to Ruth that the nationwide black community has her back and wants to support her, regardless of her desire for distance.

Turk also experiences the benefits of community when he begins attending skinhead music festivals and assembles his own "crew" of white nationalists. His new friends make him feel justified in his hate of black people and show him that he's not alone in this hatred. For Turk, he gains a sense of inclusion and possibly more importantly for him, a sense of dominance over others. After Davis's death, Turk seeks to use his son as a means to mobilize the anonymous community he built up on lonewolf.org. Though the online community is more than willing to rally and attend court proceedings as an attempt to intimidate Ruth, when Wallace Mercy reveals that Brit's mother is black, the community reacts in much the same way that Ruth's friends at the hospital did after Davis's death. While Brit commits suicide and effectively removes herself from the group that way, Turk and Francis become targets for white nationalists who feel angry and betrayed when their leaders turn out to not be the people they thought they were. Francis and Turk are beaten and ostracized, and while the novel offers no closure for Francis, Turk chooses to speak out and work against the white supremacist groups that once sheltered him by joining the Anti-Defamation League and a hockey team.

What both Turk and Ruth learn through their experiences with their respective communities is that the communities that are built on posturing, pretending, or hate are by design less welcoming and less forgiving than those that are based on love, respect, and understanding. In this way, *Small Great Things* suggests that belonging isn't something that someone feels just because they're a card-carrying member of a group, whether that group is a team of nurses or a crew of white supremacists. Instead, what binds people together and creates the strongest communities are love, a shared sense of purpose, and the willingness to accept people for who they are.

FAMILY AND SHARED HUMANITY

One of the effects of having three narrators with wildly different backgrounds (Ruth, Turk, and Kennedy) is that, through their stories, the reader is forced to recognize that there are some things that remain the same between them, despite the differences in their skin

color, their jobs, and their beliefs. This is most apparent in the way that the novel portrays intimate moments between family members, especially when it comes to the relationships between parents and their children. By exploring these relationships, *Small Great Things* suggests that building a family through raising children is one of the most important elements that creates a shared sense of humanity among all people.

The novel opens with Ruth telling the reader about "the miracle": seeing Mama's employer, Ms. Mina, give birth to her son, assisted by Mama and watched by Ruth, her sister Rachel, and Ms. Mina's daughter, Christina. Ruth is careful to note that the miracle wasn't watching Ms. Mina give birth, per se; the miracle was seeing the boundaries that separated Ms. Mina from Mama dissolve, turning the experience into one of watching one woman help another woman. This is what inspires Ruth to become a labor and delivery nurse in the first place, and what she draws on to connect with patients through the course of her work. She discovers that laboring women are often in desperate need of a friend and confidante with whom to share stories of rape, abuse, or fear that they feel unable to tell anyone else—and, because Ruth is both a complete stranger and their nurse, she's able to use her anonymity and ability to direct how a patient is cared for to soothe these fears.

While the novel in no way excuses the racist beliefs espoused by Turk and Brit Bauer, it also invites the reader to see them and their way of life as human and, in many ways, not dissimilar to that of anyone else. Turk and Brit meet at a child's birthday party that bears all the hallmarks of a normal birthday party: cake, ice cream, and lawn games. They attend music festivals where entire families gather, babies and all, and Turk's marriage proposal (spelling out "will you marry me" in vegetables) is heartwarming and almost allows the reader to forget that the two came together in the first place because of a shared hatred of people of color. They are also just as excited as Ruth's other patients to become parents, and just as devastated as anyone else when Davis suddenly dies. However, all of these normal events are decidedly not normal in important ways. The piñata at the birthday party is of a black man hanging from a noose, the music festivals feature white power bands, and Turk unfairly blames Davis's death on the only black nurse on the labor and delivery unit. Together, these differences illustrate how white supremacists use the family unit—which Ruth insists is a unifying force among all people—to corrupt and divert the joy and emotion of a birthday party or of a child's birth and instead force these events to symbolize hatred and promote a system predicated on dehumanizing others first and foremost.

Though Ruth's family relationships aren't tainted by overt racism in the same way that Turk's are, she nonetheless struggles to take pride in her family and the ways in which her family members have created their own identities. Ruth's older sister, Rachel, experienced an identity crisis in her late teens, which culminated in her changing her name to Adisa to connect with her African roots in her early twenties. Ruth struggles to understand Adisa's motives and desires, especially when it seems as though Adisa is playing into every negative stereotype of black people that Ruth can think of: having multiple children starting in her teens, not marrying, and not policing her children's involvement with drugs and gangs. Even harder for Ruth to reckon with is Mama's relationship with the Hallowells, the extremely wealthy white family she works for as a maid. Though Christina and Ms. Mina talk about Mama as though she's part of the family, and despite the obvious pride that Mama takes in her work, Ruth believes that real family shouldn't earn paychecks. To make Mama's relationship with the Hallowells sting even more, Ruth also feels as though caring for the Hallowells meant that Mama was kept from properly caring for her own blood family when Ruth was a child, thereby depriving her of precious time with her mother.

Ruth is well aware of the racial undertones that affect both her thoughts on Adisa's family as well as Mama's relationship with the Hallowells. Especially when considered next to ways that racism corrupts families within the white supremacist communities, this indicates that hatred, racism, and racially motivated power dynamics have the power to poison families, just as they can poison anything else. Instead, choosing to accept that family members can make their own choices, hold their own beliefs, and aren't any less human because of who they are is the only way to effectively be a part of a family.

THE JUSTICE SYSTEM AND THE POLITICS OF SPEECH

As the question of how and why Davis Bauer died moves into the courts, Ruth is shocked and hurt when Kennedy tells her that it's impossible to bring up race in a court of law. Doing so, Kennedy insists, will only hurt Ruth by making her look like an "angry black woman" on a mission to blame Turk and Brit for holding racist beliefs, rather than sticking to the facts of the case that can be considered separately from the skin color or beliefs of any party in question. With this, *Small Great Things* explores the power dynamics of the court system and proposes ultimately that *who* says something is oftentimes more important than the substance of what's said.

Though the American justice system is supposed to allow people to dismantle racist policies and right wrongs committed because of a person's race, it's important to look at the ways in which the court system is actually set up in such a way as to promote racism and make race impossible to talk about. Kennedy explains to Ruth and the reader in their first meeting that bringing up race—even when a case has clear racial undertones—is a surefire way to lose. She says that it's impossible to be sure of what a judge or jury is thinking and instead, it's more important to focus on anything else that might clear a defendant of blame. Doing so turns race into the

proverbial elephant in the room, making it impossible to talk about—and, as Kennedy comes to realize, ignoring race and refusing to talk about it means that it's impossible to do anything to actually fix it. In this way, *Small Great Things* draws a direct link between silence and the possibility for racism to continue. Kennedy notes that not mentioning race allows the jury to "go home still pretending the world we live in is an equal one," while implying that no matter who wins the case, the silence still allows racism—whether overt like Turk's, or less obvious like Corinne and Marie's—to continue.

As different people testify during the court proceedings, it becomes increasingly clear that who says something and how they say it can have a much bigger impact on the jury than what's actually said. The state of Connecticut (and by extension, the Bauers) is represented by Odette Lawton, a black female lawyer. Though Turk hates Odette just like he hates all black people, he recognizes that she can couch his beliefs in language that turns his racist request into a matter of race-blind "patient's rights," since nobody expects that a black person will ever say something truly racist about black people.

Similarly, Kennedy finds that during closing arguments, her status as a white woman means that she has the power to call out Turk's racism as she sees it and essentially berate the jury for their own unexamined racism, even though she admits that doing this goes against every guideline for how to handle race in the courtroom, and she's effectively dooming Ruth by doing so. In contrast, when Ruth takes the stand and makes the case that the racism of Davis's parents is what's to blame for Davis's death, she is received exactly as Kennedy said she would be: as a stereotypical "angry black woman" who retaliated against the Bauers after they and the hospital discriminated against her. However, by this point, Ruth is done tiptoeing around the issue of race and wants to tell her truth. In doing so, she chooses to believe that it's more important to speak and tell the truth than it is to continue ignoring the real problems that impact her and other black people every day—and that often either land them in court or kill them.

To this end, *Small Great Things* also makes it very clear that it's a novel that reflects its contemporary moment: a world in which black people are regularly killed for no reason other than the color of their skin, and in which most of Kennedy's other clients are black and have little hope of winning their cases, given how the justice system is stacked against them. With Ruth's win in court, despite breaking the rules regarding how one is supposed to handle race in a courtroom, *Small Great Things* makes the case that things can only change when people in power—namely, white lawyers and judges—decide to bring these issues to the forefront, insist that racism and prejudice are guiding forces in the courtroom, and allow these truths to be spoken in court.

SYMBOLS

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

RAIN

Instances of rainy weather, especially when characters actually get wet, are unifying or community-building moments throughout the novel. Storms bring women to the hospital to deliver early, resulting in the close and trusting relationships Ruth describes with most of her patients. Particularly between Ruth and Kennedy, the few times they go out together (which is often in the rain) result in both of them getting soaking wet. Through their laughter about the weather, both Ruth and Kennedy are able to come to the realization that despite their differences in lifestyle, profession, age, and skin color, they both get wet just the same—in this one way, they're equal.

THE PHOTOGRAPH

When Ava attends Mama's funeral with Kennedy, she offers Ruth a photograph of her as a child with her black maid, Beattie. Ruth spends much of the novel bitter and angry at the way the Hallowells speak about Mama like she's family, while they, in her estimation, continue to abuse her willingness to work until her death. The photograph, however—which shows Ava tenderly putting her hand on Beattie's cheek—very clearly indicates that while one's definition of family may differ, love can transcend skin color or employment status, and can exist in spite of all manner of boundaries. In this way, the photograph represents the possibility for love and familial relationships to flourish even in unexpected places.

MAMA'S SCARF

Mama's favorite scarf—a red one that Ruth describes as being soft like a rabbit, and which Ruth and Adisa have coveted since childhood—initially acts as a symbol for Mama herself. Ruth often strokes the scarf when she visits her mother, as it makes her think of Mama and the warmth and support she gets from her. After Mama's death, the scarf begins to take on a broader meaning. When it disappears right after Mama's death, Ruth initially has to rely on Mama's church friends to give her the same sense of comfort and support that the scarf once brought her on its own. Later, during Ruth's trial, she begins to see the scarf (which Adisa finds) as a more wide-reaching representation of her black community and the support that the community is willing to provide: though it's unclear if the turnout of church ladies in the gallery influenced the jury or not, their presence—and

Mama's symbolic presence, in the form of the scarf—impress upon Ruth that she's not alone and will always have a community to call on.

WINE

Many of the novel's female characters drink wine and in most cases, their drink of choice can be read as an indicator of their whiteness or an attempt to be more "white." Kennedy notes that Ava has had a glass of white wine every night for as long as she can remember; the wine is a part of Ava and contributes to her image as a well-to-do white woman. Ruth, on the other hand, often drinks wine with other white women, like Corinne, as a means of building community and trying to fit in in her white, mostly assimilated world. Though Ruth often seems to enjoy her wine, there are times when her reaction to her drink betrays her discomfort in the mostly white world she inhabits. In particular, the wine she drinks the night that Davis dies—which was a gift from Marie—is sour and unpleasant, and is something she has to choke down to convince herself that things will continue to be normal.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Random House edition of *Small Great Things* published in 2016.

Chapter 1, Ruth Quotes

❝ As Christina held my hand and Ms. Mina held Mama's, there was a moment—one heartbeat, one breath—where all the differences in schooling and money and skin color evaporated like mirages in a desert. Where everyone was equal, and it was just one woman, helping another.

Related Characters: Ruth Jefferson (speaker), Christina, Mama, Rachel / Adisa

Related Themes:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

Ruth begins by describing "the miracle" for the reader, which was watching Ms. Mina give birth to her son, assisted by Mama. Ruth's observations about Mama's relationship with the Hallowells up to this point paint a picture of a relationship that's warm, but still very delineated by class and skin color—she mentions, for example, that she and Rachel have to put their coats in the kitchen rather than in the front hall when they visit. With this, Ruth begins to set up the experience of giving birth and having a family as one that can dissolve these barriers and strip away differences between people, exposing them as human before showing that they're anything else.

Chapter 3, Turk Quotes

❝ They were all wearing black shirts with a logo over the chest: NADS. "What's that stand for?" I asked.

"North American Death Squad," Raine said. "It's kind of our thing."

I wanted one of those T-shirts so bad. "So, like, how do you get to be a part of it?" I asked, as casually as I could manage.

One of the other guys laughed. "You get asked," he said.

I decided at that moment I was going to do whatever it took to get an invitation.

Related Characters: Raine Tesco, Turk Bauer (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis

When Raine takes Turk to his first white supremacy festival, Turk immediately latches onto Raine's friends' tee shirts and wants to be part of the group. Turk's desire to join speaks to several things. It first shows that at this point in his life, Turk is vulnerable and lonely—for him, the possibility of community is a major draw, no matter what that community might be. To this end, it's telling that Turk so easily buys into Raine's teachings about white supremacy. Turk says several times that the ideas and the rhetoric made him stop and think, but his desire to join the group regardless suggests that for someone like Turk who's lonely and vulnerable, the possibility of feeling accepted and strong is a much stronger drug than love or kindness, which Turk might have found in another group.

Chapter 4, Ruth Quotes

❝ I enrolled Edison in preschool there, so that he started at the same time as all the other kids, and no one could see him as an outsider. He was one of them, from the start. When he wanted to have his friends over for a sleepover, no parent could say it was too dangerous an area for their kid to visit. It was, after all, their neighborhood, too.

Related Characters: Ruth Jefferson (speaker), Edison, Wesley Jefferson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

Ruth describes how she and Wesley did their best to make sure Edison was just like every other kid in his class and give him a better school experience than Ruth had—friends never visited her because she grew up in a poor Harlem neighborhood. This points to how important Ruth believes it is to be part of a community—and in particular, for her family to be part of the white community that encompasses their neighborhood and Edison's school. Ruth understands that if Edison is, for all intents and purposes, one of the neighborhood kids, it's possible that he may face less discrimination and less racism.

Unfortunately for Ruth, she later discovers that her attempts weren't entirely successful and realizes that her feelings of being part of the community weren't real. With this, the novel starts to suggest that Ruth and Edison's community wasn't actually there for them the way that, for example, Ruth's childhood church community was—they show up for Ruth's trial, while Ruth and Edison's friends in their neighborhood are never heard from again.

Babies are such blank slates. They don't come into the world with the assumptions their parents have made, or the promises their church will give, or the ability to sort people into groups they like and don't like.

Related Characters: Ruth Jefferson (speaker), Davis Bauer

Related Themes:

Page Number: 62

Explanation and Analysis

After Corinne leaves Ruth to supervise Davis after his circumcision, Ruth muses that babies can grow up to be and think anything; there's very little that they do without being taught. This introduces the idea that hate in particular is something that people learn, rather than being something inherent to all people. Ruth recognizes, in other words, that while Davis will surely (considering his parents) grow up to learn to hate people who are different from him, at three days old he still has the capacity and the willingness to accept love and comfort from anyone.

While Ruth remains firm in her belief that having children is one of the best ways to create a family and connect with one's humanity, she also recognizes here that this crossroads in a family's life is one that can set them on a path towards love and kindness, or teach them to hate.

Chapter 6, Turk Quotes

It's not like I stopped using that word. But I'll admit, sometimes when I said it, it stuck in my throat like a fish bone before I could cough it free.

Related Characters: Turk Bauer (speaker), Twinkie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

Turk explains how, while he was in jail, he became friends with a black man named Twinkie. Twinkie became upset once when Turk used a racist slur, which made Turk reconsider his word choice thereafter. The fact that Turk was compelled to think about his word choice and how his language affects others indicates that, as angry and as racist as Turk is, he does have the capacity to humanize others who are different than him. This in turn foreshadows Turk's later reformation and willingness to question the truth of what the white supremacist movement tells him is true.

Twinkie himself acts as a symbolic character, as he's one of the few black characters that Turk is actually willing to name and the only one that Turk befriends. Twinkie then becomes a symbol for what's possible when someone like Turk ends up in a situation where his teachings don't serve him (jail) and instead, decides to open himself up and make friends with new people.

Chapter 7, Ruth Quotes

"I'm sure the lady didn't mean anything by it," Mama pronounces.

But it didn't make me feel any less small.

Related Characters: Ruth Jefferson, Mama (speaker), Rachel / Adisa, Virginia

Related Themes:

Page Number: 114

Explanation and Analysis

When Ruth visits Mama not long after Davis dies, she tells Mama about the other microaggressions she experienced at work—including a patient thinking that Virginia was the nurse, not the student—instead of about Turk's overt racism. By choosing to focus on these small things and noting that these small acts of racism still hurt, Ruth begins to vocalize the weight and the difficulty of being black in the United States. Even among people who don't intend to hurt Ruth's feelings or be rude, these microaggressions do just that—but because Ruth is intent on not looking like an "angry black woman," out to see racism and rudeness wherever she goes, she feels unable to actually address these situations when they happen. Taken together, these microaggressions, Ruth's feelings about them, and Mama's insistence that they were unintentional work together to make Ruth feel crazy and unhinged, which in turn keeps her from ever being able to say anything about her experiences.

Chapter 8, Kennedy Quotes

In that moment, we're not black and white, or attorney and accused. We're not separated by what I know about the legal system and what she has yet to learn. We are just two mothers, sitting side by side.

Related Characters: Kennedy McQuarrie (speaker), Violet, Edison, Ruth Jefferson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 146

Explanation and Analysis

After Ruth and Kennedy's conversation during the recess of Ruth's arraignment trial, Kennedy feels a sense of camaraderie with Ruth after Ruth points out Edison in the gallery. Kennedy's sense that she and Ruth are just two mothers again speaks to the power of family and specifically, to the power of having children to bring people's shared humanity to the forefront. Though Kennedy believes that she and Ruth are very different people, when she's forced to look at Edison and see Ruth as a mother, it impresses upon her that motherhood is surprisingly similar and transcends boundaries of race and class. With this, the novel continues Ruth's project of illustrating how the process of building a family, and how simply being part of one can help people connect and acknowledge the things they have in common with each other.

I think about Ruth walking down the street in East End and wonder how many other residents questioned what she was doing there, even if they never said it to her face. *How incredibly easy it is to hide behind white skin*, I think, looking at these probable supremacists. The benefit of the doubt is in your favor. You're not suspicious.

Related Characters: Kennedy McQuarrie (speaker), Brit Bauer, Turk Bauer, Ruth Jefferson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 147

Explanation and Analysis

After the recess at Ruth's arraignment trial, Kennedy takes a closer look at the white people in the gallery and realizes that many of them are probably white supremacists there in support of the Bauers. In her musing, Kennedy is able to pinpoint the major difference between being black and white in the United States: black people are considered as suspicious wherever they go, while white people who are actually suspicious are given the benefit of the doubt. Her ability to recognize this foreshadows Kennedy's eventual leap to understanding better how racism affects black people and specifically, how institutional racism (rather than overt racism) functions. This early observation shows her that the power dynamics of racism function by simply making it so white people can move freely, while black people move through the world as suspects.

Chapter 11, Kennedy Quotes

In fact, the easiest way to lose a case that has a racially motivated incident at its core is to actually call it what it is. Instead, you find something else for the jury to hang their hat on. Some shred of evidence that can clear your client of blame, and allow those twelve men and women to go home still pretending that the world we live in is an equal one.

Related Characters: Kennedy McQuarrie (speaker), Ruth Jefferson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 196

Explanation and Analysis

During her first meeting with Ruth, Kennedy explains to the reader that it's impossible to bring up race during a trial, even if the incident in question is clearly motivated by race. With this, Kennedy shows the reader that she has a

nuanced grasp of how the American legal system works and how it handles racism—essentially, it doesn't. The purpose of the legal system as she sees it is to exonerate innocent people while tiptoeing around the truth that many people end up in court simply because of the color of their skin, just like Ruth did. She's also aware that the jury has an inordinate amount of power and, along with that, will almost always be uncomfortable talking about race. By laying this out for the reader, Kennedy unwittingly gives a perfect example of how institutional racism functions, as well as how the justice system is steeped in racial overtones but works hard to keep anyone from ever calling it out.

Chapter 12, Ruth Quotes

❝ Suddenly I realize that Kennedy's refusal to mention race in court may not be ignorant. It's the very opposite. It's because she is aware of exactly what I have to do in order to get what I deserve.

I might as well be blind and lost, and Kennedy McQuarrie is the only one with a map.

Related Characters: Ruth Jefferson (speaker), Kennedy McQuarrie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 204

Explanation and Analysis

When Ruth narrates her first meeting with Kennedy, she starts to understand that trusting Kennedy's assessment of the wisdom of bringing up race is her only chance to win her case. Though trusting Kennedy is certainly a good thing—the women go on to become close and form an open, honest friendship with each other—Ruth's willingness to go along with Kennedy shows how much more power Kennedy has, as a white woman. Kennedy is, in other words, able to tell Ruth to ignore what she knows to be true (that the case is entirely about racism) and instead, make sure the jury feels comfortable and as though they live in a just world. This offers another example of how black people are told that their experiences of racism aren't as important as making white people feel comfortable—and how, because of the power dynamics inherent to the attorney-client relationship, Ruth is encouraged to accept the racism she experienced and never call it out.

Chapter 14, Ruth Quotes

❝ "The fact that I'm Black was never an issue in my relationship with my colleagues."

"Not until they needed a scapegoat. What I am trying to say, Ruth—may I call you that?—is that *we* will stand with you. Your Black brothers and sisters *will* go to bat for you. They *will* risk their jobs for you. They will march on your behalf and they will create a roar that cannot be ignored."

Related Characters: Wallace Mercy, Ruth Jefferson (speaker), Mama, Marie, Corinne

Related Themes:

Page Number: 226

Explanation and Analysis

When Wallace Mercy approaches Ruth and offers to speak on her behalf, they discuss how Ruth's coworkers failed her. Mercy then tries to show Ruth that her black community will always be there for her. Ruth's willingness to defend Corinne and Marie when she's fully willing to admit privately to herself that they threw her under the bus speaks to the power of being part of her white community, even if her inclusion in the group is tenuous. In other words, Ruth doesn't want to admit that her coworkers let her down and sided with a racist, even when that's exactly what they did.

Mercy, on the other hand, encourages Ruth to see that because of the color of her skin, there are a number of other people out there who understand her lived experience and will fight for her right to tell her story. Though Ruth isn't yet willing to listen to Mercy, it's important to note that Mama tells Ruth much the same thing, though Ruth doesn't fully understand this until after Mama's death. This suggests that because Ruth tries so hard to assimilate into her white community, she loses touch with her black community and what that community can do for her—most importantly, they can validate her experience in a way her white colleagues and even Kennedy cannot.

❝ "You are not an imposter," Sam Hallowell told me. "You are not here because of luck, or because you happened to be in the right place at the right moment, or because someone like me had connections. You are there because you are *you*, and that is a remarkable accomplishment in itself."

Related Characters: Sam Hallowell (speaker), Ruth

Jefferson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 232

Explanation and Analysis

In a flashback, Ruth explains how she became ill a week after starting at Dalton and Sam Hallowell encouraged her to believe that she actually did belong at that school. Though Mr. Hallowell's pep talk is kind and appears to have had the desired effect on Ruth, it's also worth noting that Mr. Hallowell's words only tell half the story. Ruth is an amazingly accomplished person in her own right—her credentials would be impressive on anybody—but Mr. Hallowell also attempts to downplay the fact that Ruth, a black girl from Harlem, is disadvantaged because of who she is. The Hallowells' decision to help Ruth get into Dalton does indicate that Ruth can experience the positive effects of having powerful friends and family, just like Christina can, but Mr. Hallowell also seems blind to the fact that this is one of the hidden privileges most often afforded to white people.

"You say you don't see color...but that's *all* you see. You're so hyperaware of it, and of trying to look like you aren't prejudiced, you can't even understand that when you say *race doesn't matter* all I hear is you dismissing what *I've* felt, what *I've* lived, what it's like to be put down because of the color of my skin."

Related Characters: Ruth Jefferson (speaker), Kennedy McQuarrie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 238

Explanation and Analysis

When Kennedy continues to insist that they can't bring up race during Ruth's trial, Ruth angrily tells Kennedy exactly what's wrong with her brand of anti-racism. Kennedy, as a wealthy white woman who helps a mostly black population through her work, has the luxury of thinking that she's not racist exactly because most of her clients are black. However, Kennedy also doesn't question why most of her clients are black until much later in the novel. At this point, she hasn't had to—none of them have told her outright, like Ruth does here, that she's being rude and condescending by insisting that racism isn't important and doesn't have a place in the courtroom. Instead, Kennedy is actually contributing to a system that continues to disadvantage black people by refusing to call out racism and listen to people like Ruth when they say things like this.

Chapter 15, Turk Quotes

"They promised us we'd be part of something bigger than us. That we'd be proud of our heritage and our race. And maybe that's, like, ten percent of the whole deal. The rest is just hating everyone else for existing. Once I started thinking that, I couldn't stop. Maybe that's why I felt like shit all the time, like I wanted to fucking bust someone's face in constantly, just to remind myself that I could. That's okay for me. But that's not how I want my kid to grow up."

Related Characters: Raine Tesco (speaker), Turk Bauer

Related Themes:

Page Number: 248

Explanation and Analysis

During Turk's visit with Raine, Raine explains how and why he left the white power movement. When Raine specifically cites that his children were a major motivator in his choice to leave, it reinforces Ruth's earlier assertion that having a family is one of the most powerful ways for people to connect and understand that everyone is human. His daughter made him see that ignoring that and focusing on hate instead makes for a miserable life—and that knowledge and the desire to give his daughter a better life is powerful enough to make him want to leave the movement. Then, Raine draws a direct connection between hating others and hating himself. Most importantly, he suggests that living this way isn't tenable in the long run, which foreshadows both Turk and Brit's exit from the movement. Especially when compared with Brit's choice to leave the movement by committing suicide and removing herself from the world entirely, Raine's statement becomes a warning that leaning so heavily on hate is dangerous and potentially deadly.

Chapter 17, Ruth Quotes

She looks at me, and we both laugh, and in that instant we are merely two women, standing over a lasagne, telling the truth. In that instant, with our flaws and confessions trailing like a slip from a dress, we have more in common than we have differences.

Related Characters: Ruth Jefferson (speaker), Kennedy McQuarrie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 283

Explanation and Analysis

After joking about race before dinner, Ruth feels like she and Kennedy actually have more in common than she previously thought. The fact that this revelation comes about after the two have a frank talk about race (and after Ruth explains slavery to Violet) suggests that one of the best ways to form relationships with people who are very different from oneself is to be open, honest, and curious about other people's lived experiences.

Though it takes Kennedy much longer to realize it, this also suggests that one of the most successful ways to move forward from racism and assumptions is to talk about it. Because of this, this moment can be read as one in which Kennedy is primed to later bring up race in the courtroom, as she then understands that the only way to start fixing the system is to admit that there's a problem.

When you're ready for us, we'll be waiting for you. At that moment, I feel another presence I haven't felt before...It's a community of people who know my name, even when I don't always remember theirs. It's a congregation that never stopped praying for me, even when I flew from the nest.

Related Characters: Ruth Jefferson (speaker), Rachel / Adisa, Mama

Related Themes:

Page Number: 290

Explanation and Analysis

As Ruth speaks at Mama's funeral, she thinks back to something Mama said when Ruth was a teenager and realizes that Mama wanted Ruth to know that her black community—and specifically, her church community—would always be there for her. With this, Ruth reaffirms her connection to the black community that she's spent much of her life trying to leave behind. While Ruth believed, prior to Davis's death, that her white community consisting of her neighbors and coworkers would always be there for her, Davis's death makes her see that she was merely tolerated by her coworkers and friends. This community, on the other hand, will always be willing to welcome Ruth back and give her the support she needs. Tellingly, during the trial, it's these church ladies who show up in support of Ruth rather than her white friends.

It is a picture of a Black woman wearing a maid's uniform, holding a little girl in her arms. The girl has hair as light as snow, and her hand is pressed against her caregiver's cheek in shocking contrast. There's more than just duty between them. There's pride. There's love. "I didn't know your mother. But, Ruth—she didn't waste her life."

Related Characters: Ava, Ruth Jefferson (speaker), Beattie, Mama, Kennedy McQuarrie

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 292

Explanation and Analysis

After Mama's funeral, Ava shows Ruth a photograph of herself as a child with her black maid, Beattie. Ava seeks to impress upon Ruth that family, employment status, and love can transcend class and skin color by showing her this photo. Though Kennedy often scoffs at Ava when she talks about Beattie, and Ruth scoffs at the Hallowells for calling Mama family—and the reader is encouraged to agree with them—Ava's statement is an attempt to add more nuance to family situations in which a black maid works closely with a white family. As an outsider as far as Ruth is concerned, Ava has more power to speak about her experience growing up with a woman like Mama as her caregiver. Essentially, Ruth can listen to Ava because, unlike Christina, Ruth doesn't know Ava. While she knows that Christina is spoiled, wealthy, and took Mama for granted, Ruth is forced to look beyond that when Ava shows her the photograph.

Chapter 18, Kennedy Quotes

I've always thought of her as an uptight piece of work. But now I'm wondering: when she goes shopping, is she, like Ruth, asked to show her receipts before exiting the store? Does she mutely hand them over? Or does she ever snap and say she is the one who puts shoplifters on trial?

Related Characters: Kennedy McQuarrie (speaker), Ruth Jefferson, Odette Lawton

Related Themes:

Page Number: 303

Explanation and Analysis

During Kennedy's meeting with Odette to discuss jury selection, Kennedy begins to reevaluate how she thinks about Odette. Kennedy's willingness to think more critically about the life that Odette leads as a professional black woman shows that, through her conversations with Ruth, Kennedy is gradually becoming more aware of how everyday racism affects black people. Though Kennedy only sees Odette when Odette is powerful in court, she's now able to understand that Odette is, potentially, *only* powerful when she's in court.

As Kennedy realizes that Odette likely experiences racism, she also begins to understand that Odette, like Ruth, is unable to talk about it in the courtroom. This illustrates how the legal system ignores race and in doing so, makes it impossible for anyone of color to bring it up and effect change. Were Odette to bring up race, she'd likely be called an "angry black woman," just like Ruth. This shows, ultimately, that black people—whether they're powerful, successful, or not—are still subject to the same kinds of racism that keep them from comfortably moving through the world without experiencing microaggressions.

Chapter 22, Ruth Quotes

She falters, then gathers up the weeds of her thoughts and offers me the saddest, truest bouquet. "I didn't know."

"Why *would* you?" I reply—not angry, not hurt, just stating a fact. "You'll never have to."

Related Characters: Ruth Jefferson, Christina (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 366

Explanation and Analysis

A few days into Ruth's trial, Christina shows up outside Ruth's house to apologize for her absence and for not understanding what Ruth's life is like as a black woman. Christina's honest apology, and the fact that Ruth accepts it, suggests that one of the best ways to begin to dismantle racist systems is for white people like Christina to listen to their black friends when they say things aren't equitable. When Ruth mentions that Christina would never have to know what it's like to be black, she points to the fact that Christina has the privilege of, if she so chooses, never wondering what life is like for a person of color. In order to understand what life is like for Ruth, Christina has to be willing to step outside her own experience and listen.

Chapter 23, Turk Quotes

What would happen if I ran into him on the street? At a Starbucks? Would we do the man hug thing? Or would we pretend we didn't know each other? He knew what I was, on the outside, just like I knew what he was. But in jail, things were different, and what I'd been taught to believe didn't hold true. If we crossed paths now, would he still be Twinkie to me? Or would he just be another nigger?

Related Characters: Turk Bauer (speaker), Twinkie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 382

Explanation and Analysis

While he's being sworn in, Turk admits to the reader that he's been thinking a lot about Twinkie and wondering how they'd interact if they ran into each other on the street. The simple fact that Turk is wondering this at all suggests that his willingness to believe white supremacist rhetoric is waning—it suggests that Twinkie is actually a person to Turk, not just another faceless member of a group that Turk hates. His ability to humanize Twinkie stands as evidence that what Turk has been taught to believe isn't actually true, and that black people are just as deserving of love and friendship as the white people Turk calls friends now.

I have been thinking about what Odette Lawton said: if I hadn't spoken out against the black nurse, would this have ended differently? Would she have tried to save Davis the minute she realized he wasn't breathing? Would she have treated him like any other critical patient, instead of wanting to hurt me like I'd hurt her?

Related Characters: Turk Bauer (speaker), Davis Bauer, Ruth Jefferson, Odette Lawton

Related Themes:

Page Number: 382

Explanation and Analysis

During one recess, Turk starts to wonder if he's actually responsible for Davis's death. By this point, Turk has learned that Davis had MCADD, a condition that left him susceptible to death and potentially made it so he would've died anyway, no matter who did or didn't try to help him. This impresses upon Turk that Davis's death was potentially random and not actually a murder, and in turn, enables him to start humanizing Ruth to a degree. Though Turk's belief that Ruth wanted to hurt Turk indicates that he still believes that she was out to get him, his ability to understand that his racism hurt her and by extension, hurt his son suggests that Turk is starting to come around and realize that his racism isn't serving him or his family.

Chapter 24, Kennedy Quotes

"You think you're a respected member of a community—the hospital where you work, the town where you live. I had a wonderful job. I had colleagues who were friends. I lived in a home I was proud of. But it was just an optical illusion. I was never a member of any of those communities. I was tolerated, but not welcomed. I was, and will always be, different from them."

Related Characters: Ruth Jefferson (speaker), Davis Bauer, Turk Bauer, Howard, Kennedy McQuarrie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 404

Explanation and Analysis

During Ruth's testimony, she points out that because of the color of her skin, she wasn't actually an accepted or valued part of her community. Though Ruth says this softly and without anger, it has the effect on the jury that Kennedy said it would: it makes them uncomfortable and destroys any chance that Ruth had of going free. With this, the novel suggests that people like Ruth who actually experience this kind of institutional racism are, unfortunately, the last people who will be listened to if they talk about it. Because the jury wants to believe that the world is an equal one, as Kennedy pointed out earlier in the novel, having it pointed out to them by a black woman that things aren't equal puts the jury on the defensive and makes them feel threatened, which in turn makes them less sympathetic towards Ruth.

Ruth's statement also shows that her experience of being on trial has had one positive effect on her life, as she's now reaffirmed her connection to her childhood church community and her greater black community. She understands now that because those people understand what life is like for her, they're the ones who will listen to her and be there for her when the going gets rough—unlike Marie and Corinne, who are entirely absent between when Ruth is fired and when they testify in court months later.

Maybe if there were lawyers more courageous than I am, we wouldn't be so scared to talk about race in places where it matters the most.

Related Characters: Kennedy McQuarrie (speaker), Ruth Jefferson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 415

Explanation and Analysis

As Kennedy wallows in Micah's office, she thinks that if she were braver, she'd bring up race and actually do something to change the system that overwhelmingly disadvantages black people. With this, Kennedy shows the reader that she finally realizes that the issue isn't just that people are racist—the very institutions that are supposed to protect people from racism refuse to admit that racism exists and in doing so, only continue to promote it. Kennedy also recognizes that, as a white person, she has the power to speak about racism. Unlike Ruth, she won't be labeled an "angry black woman" just out to make a point. Her privileged status as a white woman means that a white jury would be more likely to listen to her and other white lawyers like her, if only they choose to speak out and call out racism when they see it.

Chapter 27, Ruth Quotes

What Kennedy said to all those strangers, it's been the narrative of my life, the outline inside of which I have lived. But I could have screamed it from the rooftops, and it wouldn't have done any good. For the jurors to hear it, *really* hear it, it had to be said by one of their own.

Related Characters: Ruth Jefferson (speaker), Kennedy McQuarrie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 432

Explanation and Analysis

After Kennedy makes her closing statement, which is entirely about institutional racism, Ruth realizes that Kennedy was the only person who was capable of making the jury hear what she was saying. In coming to this understanding, Ruth also realizes that the impetus is on white people like Kennedy to speak out as, thanks to the racist society they live in, their voices are more likely to be listened to. This brings the politics of speech to the forefront of the novel, as it makes it clear that who says something is just as important as the message itself, if not more so. In the same vein, Turk realized earlier in the trial that Odette would be an asset to his case, since nobody would expect a black woman to represent a white supremacist and support his racist beliefs.

Chapter 28, Turk Quotes

❝ My head actually aches from holding three incompatible truths in it: *1. Black people are inferior. 2. Brit is half black. 3. I love Brit with all my heart.*

Shouldn't numbers one and two make number three impossible? Or is she the exception to the rule? Was Adele one, too?

I think of me and Twinkie dreaming of the food we craved behind bars.

How many exceptions do there have to be before you start to realize that maybe the truths you've been told aren't actually true?

Related Characters: Turk Bauer (speaker), Adele , Twinkie, Brit Bauer

Related Themes:

Page Number: 443

Explanation and Analysis

While Brit is in the hospital after learning that her mother is black, Turk struggles to reconcile his feelings for his wife with what white supremacist rhetoric says about black people. When Turk realizes that Brit has more in common with Twinkie than he ever thought possible, he's forced to realize that both Twinkie and Brit are people worthy of his love, respect, and friendship—no matter what the color of their skin, or who their parents are. This suggests that love and being able to think critically are the most powerful ways to overcome racist ideas. Now that Turk has enough exceptions that he has no choice but to actually evaluate the white power rhetoric, he's able to see that love is more powerful, more fulfilling, and makes more sense than hate does.

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, RUTH

Ruth tells the reader that the "miracle" happened in the big brownstone where Mama worked for Sam Hallowell. It was a snow day, so Ruth and her big sister Rachel went with Mama to work instead of going to school. Mama never missed work for anything, so Ruth always reasoned that Ms. Mina (Sam Hallowell's wife) and her daughter Christina just needed Mama more than she and Rachel did. Ruth and Rachel put their coats in the kitchen closet instead of in the entryway while Mama promised to make hot chocolate. Ruth began to draw as Rachel asked if they could play with Christina.

Ruth's description of Mama's workplace and in particular, where she and Rachel put their coats shows that even architecture can reinforce race and class differences. Ruth and Rachel put their coats in the kitchen because they're black; though they're guests in the house, they're not afforded the same privileges that a white guest would be given.

Suddenly a piercing scream rang through the house. Mama told Rachel and Ruth to stay in the kitchen, but they followed her to Ms. Mina's room anyway. Ms. Mina was on her bed and told Mama that it was too early for the baby to come. Mama assured Ms. Mina that the ambulance would arrive soon and told Rachel, Ruth, and Christina, all standing in the door, to go play. The girls, however, stayed rooted to the spot and watched Mama deliver Ms. Mina's baby. The doorbell rang right after, so Rachel went to go let the medics in. Christina, terrified, huddled next to Ruth.

Mama's willingness to jump right in—and Ms. Mina's willingness to let her—suggests that though the two women are primarily connected thanks to Mama's employment, there's also a degree of trust between them that makes Ms. Mina feel safe accepting Mama's help. This suggests that friendship can transcend race and class.

The experience of watching the birth affected everyone differently: Rachel had five children; Christina had one child via surrogate; and Ruth is now a labor and delivery nurse. The miracle she referred to, however, wasn't the birth. The miracle is that for a moment, race and class evaporated and as Mama helped Ms. Mina and Ruth held Christina's hand, there were only women helping women.

"The miracle" showed Ruth that the most powerful common denominator among all people is building families through having children. By becoming a labor and delivery nurse, Ruth sees every day that people aren't all that different: all babies, regardless of class or color, are born the same way.

CHAPTER 2, RUTH

Ruth says that the most beautiful baby she's ever seen was born without a face. The student nurse shadowing Ruth screamed, so Ruth sent her away. The doctor explained to the parents that there was something seriously wrong while Ruth cleaned and swaddled the newborn. The mother cried as she held her baby while the father bolted. Ruth went after him and convinced the father to return and hold his baby.

By introducing the reader to her work in this way, Ruth demonstrates that she's remarkably open when it comes to race and difference. What she sees is love, which suggests that she's optimistic, willing to see the good in others, and likely tries to ignore racism.

Ruth explains that she knew that if the father didn't acknowledge what had happened, he'd slowly become hollow. The parents held their son for ten hours before he died, and Ruth was struck by the remarkable amount of love in the room. Ruth even brought the nursing student back in to make her see that love doesn't have anything to do with looks. Two years later, the couple had a healthy daughter.

The fact that this couple returns and has another baby speaks to the resilience of the couple, as well as the enduring desire to have children and a family. In this way, Ruth provides a compelling example of the power of love and family to see a tragic situation in a positive light.

Ruth says that when she had her son Edison, she was mostly worried about her hair. She says that it's perfectly normal for new mothers to worry about their appearance. Because of this, when she arrives for her shift at 6:40 am, she heads right for the room of her patient, Jessie. Jessie came to the hospital with her hair and makeup done, as well as stylish maternity clothes. She delivered a baby girl overnight. Jessie stirs and Ruth motions for her to be quiet as she offers her a mirror and lipstick. Last night, Jessie confessed to Ruth that her husband has never seen her without mascara. Jessie thanks Ruth and accepts the lipstick.

Offering Jessie the lipstick shows that Ruth is an exceptional nurse who is willing to go above and beyond for her patients. The fact that Jessie shared her insecurities with Ruth speaks to the power of the bond between nurse and laboring women in Ruth's profession; just as with Mama and Ms. Mina, women like Jessie have little choice but to trust the people around them to get them safely through the experience.

Ruth notes that there are three occupied rooms in the birthing pavilion. She meets Marie, the charge nurse, for their morning meeting and the two take bets on why Corinne, the second nurse, will be late today. They discuss their children and Ruth modestly refuses to take credit for Edison's good grades. She ignores Marie's comment that Ruth should be proud that "a boy like Edison" is doing so well, which Ruth knows refers to the fact that Edison is black. Corinne bursts in and explains that her tire had a slow leak. Ruth laughs as Marie throws a dollar at her. Then, Marie assigns patients: Corinne takes a woman in active labor, while Ruth gets Jessie and Brit Bauer, who delivered a boy earlier in the morning.

Marie's comment about Edison is a microaggression, which is commonly defined as daily behaviors or speech, intentional or not, that communicates prejudice. In this case, Marie's comment suggests that she doesn't believe that a black boy like Edison is capable of doing so well; in other words, he's the exception, not the rule. When Ruth brushes off the comment, it again speaks to her desire to see the best in people.

Ruth finds Lucille, the nurse who was with Brit Bauer during labor, in the staff restroom. Lucille gives Ruth the rundown on Brit and the baby, Davis, who has low blood sugar due to his mother's gestational diabetes. She then warns Ruth that there's something off about the dad, Turk.

Lucille's warning indicates that there's a sense of camaraderie and community among the nurses. Lucille doesn't want Ruth to go into the room blind and instead, wants to prepare her for whatever she'll find.

As Ruth walks into the room, she introduces herself to Brit and asks the baby's name to start a conversation. Turk is hulking and seems on edge, and Brit looks to him before she answers Ruth's question. Ruth notices that Brit looks almost afraid as Ruth listens to Davis's lungs and heart. Turk stands up and towers over Ruth as she delicately explains that Davis might have a heart murmur. She checks his blood sugar, which has improved, and then scoops him up to bathe him. As Ruth bathes Davis, she inspects his body for any abnormalities and Brit and Turk whisper fiercely. They're strangely silent by the time Ruth wraps Davis up and puts on his ID band and security bracelet.

Though Ruth is aware of both Brit and Turk's body language, it's telling that Ruth is more tuned in to how Brit reacts—her fear could suggest abuse. Notably, however, Ruth doesn't wonder if Turk might be upset with her. This shows that at this point, Ruth feels protected by her position as a nurse, which keeps her somewhat removed from her patients' lives and personal beliefs. In other words, she feels safe enough in her position to think only about others.

Ruth makes sure to smile as she hands Davis back to Brit and tries to help her position Davis to nurse. Brit flinches while Turk tells Ruth to back off and that he'd like to speak to her boss. Ruth nervously goes to Marie and explains that she did nothing wrong. Back in the room, Turk tells Marie that he doesn't want "that nurse" or anyone who looks like her touching Brit or Davis. As he says this, he pushes up his sleeves, revealing a tattoo of a Confederate flag.

Turk's behavior shows Ruth immediately that there's nothing wrong between Brit and Turk—his issue is with her. At this point his tattoo marks him as a racist, but it's unclear if that's something that's personal or if Turk is part of organized white supremacy, which could mean that there are people to help him get his way.

CHAPTER 3, TURK

Turk tells the reader that the first black person he ever met killed his older brother, Tanner. Tanner died in a car accident two months after getting his driver's license, and the jury couldn't reach a decision, so the black man went free. Turk's mother shrieked and when the man offered condolences, she spit on him.

Though there's no indication that Turk's mother was a card-carrying white supremacist, her behavior shows that Turk has been taught to hate black people from a young age. Conveniently, he can also blame them for Tanner's death (though only based on the actions of one man, of course).

In the present, Turk drives Brit to the hospital. She's in labor and trying not to show that she's in pain. Turk comforts her that their baby will be a strong warrior, just like her—Turk believes that God needs soldiers to fight his race war. He tries to distract Brit with baby names, but she won't hear of naming the baby Thor.

Though the way that Turk tries to comfort Brit shows that he's a white supremacist, his behavior on the whole encourages the reader to see him also as a nervous father-to-be.

Stepping into the past again, Turk says that everything fell apart after Tanner died. Turk's father moved out and Turk's mother turned to alcohol. Not long after she lost her job, they moved in with Gramps. Gramps was a veteran who thought that Turk's parents were raising him to be soft, so he took it upon himself to toughen Turk up. He took Turk camping in six-degree weather one weekend. While Turk used the restroom, Gramps left without him. Turk spent the next five hours tracking Gramps's truck, growing angrier the entire time. When he finally found Gramps, Gramps encouraged Turk's anger and taught him how to throw a proper punch. Turk made Gramps's nose bleed.

Like Turk's mother, while Gramps likely isn't part of organized white supremacy, he still pushes Turk towards it by fueling his hate. Gramps understands that Turk's hate is powerful and if trained and pointed in the right direction, Turk will be able to use it to his advantage. However, this does mean that Turk will focus on the hate, rather than healing after Tanner's loss and learning more appropriate ways of channeling his emotions. This suggests that hate stunts one's emotional growth.

After seven hours of labor, the nurse, Lucille, finally tells Brit it's time to push. Turk notices that Brit looks afraid for the first time and tries to ignore his own fears that the baby will change everything. After an hour of pushing, Lucille pages the doctor to deliver the baby. As the baby's head crowns, Turk starts to feel angry when he sees that it's blue--he thinks the hospital has lied to them, and the baby's dead. However, his son starts to cry immediately after birth, and Turk feels like they could run the world.

Again, Turk and Brit's fears are fears that Ruth talks about seeing many first-time parents deal with--in this situation, Turk and Brit are starting a family, just like anyone else, and their beliefs are less important. Turk's anger, however, shows that his hate is powerful and exists right below the surface. That it manifests as distrust suggests that Turk feels alone.

Gramps died suddenly when Turk was fifteen, so Turk turned to crime. While working at a coffeehouse during a short stint at Turk's father's house, Turk met Raine Tesco. Raine made Turk feel seen and gave him CDs of white power bands. Raine would talk about how the Jews were in charge of the news and were conspiring against white people. Eventually, Raine invited Turk to come with him to a festival. His friends all wore North American Death Squad (NADS) shirts, and Turk vowed to do whatever it took to become a part of the squad.

Turk's willingness to go along with Raine suggests that, as a lonely and angry teenager, Turk was susceptible and vulnerable to the draw of any kind of community, no matter how awful. More than anything, Turk wanted to be a part of a group and be accepted by his peers, which indicates that Turk is getting more out of his racism than just a sense of superiority.

The festival looked like a carnival, filled with families with young children. One man invited Turk to try his hand at shooting a target, so Turk surveyed his options: exaggerated Jewish or African-American profiles. Turk felt momentarily sick, but chose a black target and shot right through the target's forehead. Raine praised Turk and then led him to the stage, where a man was speaking about how a homeless black man killed a "White Anglo" and suffered no consequences. He also insisted that killing a black person is the equivalent of shooting game. The man was Francis Mitchum, one of the most powerful men in the movement.

The moment that Turk feels sick reinforces the novel's assertion that hate and prejudice are learned things, especially since his initial reaction acknowledges how awful the target shooting is. However, when Turk goes along with it, it suggests that he'll learn to push down these feelings that something is wrong in favor of becoming part of the group. Again, this speaks to the power of community, regardless of what the community stands for.

Brit and Turk decide to name their son Davis, after the Confederate president, and then Brit sends Turk to find her a milkshake. The woman at the cafeteria is unhelpful and out of ice cream, but suggests that Turk buy chocolate. Turk inspects the bar, notices the kosher symbol—the mark of the "Jewish mafia tax"—and settles for Skittles instead.

Turk's assessment of the kosher symbol shows that he sees prejudice against white people everywhere he goes. Because he believes that everyone in the world who looks different is out to get him, Turk is therefore unable to find friendship and camaraderie with those people.

Early in the morning, a new nurse enters the room, introduces herself as Ruth, and explains that she'll be caring for Brit and Davis. Turk works hard to keep himself from shoving Ruth away, and Brit shoots him a look—she doesn't want to talk to the nurse, but knows they have to blend in. Ruth inspects Davis like she's a "witch doctor" and then scoops him up, shocking both Brit and Turk. They whisper frantically about what to do as Ruth bathes Davis and puts on a tracking bracelet, which makes Turk think that Davis is already being punished. As Ruth hands Davis back and suggests that they see if he'll nurse, Turk tells Ruth to get away from Brit.

Notice the language that Turk uses to describe Ruth: though as far as the reader knows she looks like any other nurse, just black, he chooses to describe her habits as being those of a witch doctor. This draws on racist ideas that black people are primitive and lesser than white people, and shows how Turk has learned to ignore the evidence around him (in this case, that Ruth has a license and is a nurse) in favor of his racist and untrue beliefs.

A year after the festival, Raine decided that Turk was ready to be inducted into NADS. One night when Turk was staying with his dad, Raine and two friends climbed in Turk's bedroom window and explained that they were going to "clean Vermont of its filth." They dressed Turk in black and drank in the car on the way to a gay bar. Outside the bar, Raine started tackling gay men. Turk recognized his own father coming out of the bar and finally understood that his dad was gay. Turk beat his father until Raine dragged him away. This turned Turk into a legend in the movement at the age of sixteen. His father had to be hospitalized.

The fact that Turk is so easily turned against his father just because of his father's sexuality speaks to the power of the community Turk is now a part of: it's stronger and more fulfilling than any of Turk's familial relationships. When Turk becomes a legend for beating his father, it also suggests that the white power movement is one that seeks to corrupt familial relationships and trades in hate rather than love.

In the hospital, Turk tells Marie that he wants Lucille back. Marie insists that they can't discriminate against Ruth and says this is nothing like requesting a female doctor. Turk suggests that he could get angry and he towers over Marie, who he hates because she's a "race traitor." Marie murmurs that she'll put a note in Davis's file stating Turk's wishes. Turk gathers Davis in his arms and promises to protect him forever.

Though Marie is certainly put in a difficult position here, her choice to go along with Turk's wishes is an overt act of discrimination against Ruth. This shows how white people like Marie can be easily roped into racist behavior, as going along with it is easier and safer than standing up for what's right.

A few years after Turk got involved in the White Power Movement, Turk's mother died. While going through her things, he found the transcripts from Tanner's trial. He read everything and discovered that Tanner had been high, and the black man had done everything to avoid hitting Tanner's car. Turk says that regardless, if that black man hadn't been driving that night, Tanner would be alive.

The transcripts suggest that Tanner was actually at fault, but Turk's unwillingness to accept that his brother made a mistake again speaks to the power of his racist beliefs. His indoctrination into the white supremacist community has robbed Turk of his critical thinking skills.

CHAPTER 4, RUTH

After Marie sends Ruth out of the Bauers' room, Ruth and Corinne joke about how Turk is a real winner. Ruth knows that Turk isn't just silly; he's racist, judging by his Confederate flag tattoo. Corinne suggests that Marie will be able to fix it, but Ruth thinks that she'll only be able to do that by making her white. Ruth runs to the cafeteria for coffee. She thinks about how she doesn't have a problem with the white people she lives and works with, but they're not overtly prejudiced. Ruth notices an old lady struggling with the cream pitcher. When she sees Ruth approaching she grabs her purse, even though she smiles at Ruth when Ruth helps her with the pitcher. Ruth tries to shake it off, reminding herself that it's her sister Adisa who sees the worst in everyone, not her.

Because Ruth is black, Turk's racism and his tattoo are much scarier and more dangerous for her than they are for Corinne, who is white and therefore not at as high of a risk of experiencing hate crimes or discrimination. Ruth's comment that she doesn't have a problem with her white friends suggests that she's doing her best to fit in to her community, as doing so is the easiest way to deal with the possibility that Marie might make a racist decision here.

Ruth checks Brit and Davis's charts when she gets back but finds a sticky note in Davis's folder reading that no African-American staff are to care for him. Ruth angrily finds Marie and confronts her about it. Marie encourages her to think of it like a religious preference and to be happy that she doesn't have to deal with Turk, but Ruth notes that she's the only person who's being discriminated against.

Again, Marie saw that discriminating against Ruth was easier than fighting Turk on this, which suggests that it's often more difficult to be not *racist than to be racist—the system is biased, and it's always easier to go along with the system than struggle against it. This indicates to Ruth as well that she shouldn't trust her white community as much.*

Ruth says that once, a Muslim couple came to the hospital to have their baby. The father explained that he needed to be the first one to speak to the baby. Ruth promised to try, but in an emergency, she'd need to speak to save the baby's life. The parents consented and after the baby was born, Ruth handed him to the father. The man whispered to the baby in Arabic, handed him to his wife, and the silence ended. Later, Ruth asked the man what he whispered to his son. The man explained that Islamic tradition states that the first thing a baby should hear is a prayer. Ruth thinks that the difference between the man and Turk is the difference between love and hate.

This story very clearly draws out the differences between religious preferences and overt racism—and notably, this father was willing to concede that in an emergency, his child's life was more important than his religious beliefs. This shows that this man, unlike Turk, recognizes that love, kindness, and making sure that his child can receive care is of the utmost importance. Davis will now be at risk because one of the nurses on the floor can't care for him.

As Ruth and Corinne prepare to leave that afternoon, Corinne asks what happened with the Bauers. When Ruth says that Marie took her off because she's black, Corinne insists that there must be more to it and that Marie wouldn't do that. Ruth feels as though it's unfair to be angry with Corinne, but Corinne will never understand. She turns down Corinne's invitation to get a glass of **wine** and, when the elevator opens and reveals a sea of white faces, Ruth thinks she's tired of being the only black nurse. She takes the stairs.

Corinne's unwillingness to take Ruth at her word suggests that she doesn't see herself or Marie as racist—like Marie, she's trying to make it seem like this isn't racially motivated. However, when she does this, she effectively tells Ruth that what Ruth experiences and knows to be true isn't interesting or worth listening to, which in turn alienates Ruth.

Mama taught Ruth to read before she turned five. At that point, Ruth and Rachel got accepted to a prestigious public school on the Upper West Side, but the bus ride was draining for everyone and Rachel didn't like school. The girls returned to their Harlem school for a year and then Ms. Mina got Ruth an interview at Dalton, Christina's private school. Ruth earned a full scholarship and though she did well, she didn't fit in at Dalton or in Harlem. She later got accepted to Cornell, and people whispered that it was because she was black. Ruth took the full ride to SUNY Plattsburgh because she couldn't afford Cornell, and listened to Mama's advice to show everyone that she's Ruth, not just a black girl.

The whispers that followed Ruth throughout her childhood and young adulthood show how black people are unfairly thought to be less smart or less worthy than their white counterparts. The comment about Ruth's admission to Cornell is a direct reference to Affirmative Action policies, which some white people believe unfairly give spots to minority students in the name of diversity when those students aren't actually deserving.

Ruth decided early on to try to save Edison from the troubles she faced, so she and her husband Wesley moved to an affluent white neighborhood in time to enroll Edison in preschool. Edison is now a National Merit Scholar. When Ruth gets home from work, she greets Edison and teases him about leaving his jacket lying around. Edison explodes and runs to his room. Ruth takes a deep breath and has a glass of sour **wine** from a bottle Marie gave her. She gives Edison some time to cool down, and then knocks on his door.

The fact that the wine from Marie is sour and unpleasant casts it as a symbolic representation of Ruth and Marie's relationship: supposedly positive, but actually unpleasant. Ruth and Wesley's choice to move to a white neighborhood shows they believe that Edison feeling a part of his community is extremely important.

Edison explains that he got into an argument with his best friend Bryce. Edison has been on vacation to Greece with Bryce's family; this is unusual. Ruth notices that Edison is crying. He finally explains that when he approached Bryce about helping him orchestrate an elaborate ask to homecoming for Bryce's sister, Bryce said that their parents wouldn't be pleased if she dated a black guy. Ruth tries to comfort Edison and thinks of Wesley, who died in Afghanistan.

What Edison experienced is the line that black people run up against: he was accepted by Bryce's family as a friend, but if he were their daughter's boyfriend, they'd have to accept that he's actually a real person with feelings and emotions. Refusing to let him be more than a friend is a way to keep Edison down and ignore his humanity.

Ruth asks Edison if he remembers a preschool classmate who insisted that Edison looked like black toast. Then, she'd told him that he just has more melanin, which means he's better protected against sun damage. She reminds Edison of this, but Edison says he doesn't feel lucky.

Ruth's pep talk tries to convince Edison that racism doesn't hurt as much as it clearly does, but Edison's answer suggests that he's becoming aware that the world isn't as welcoming to him as Ruth wants him to think.

Ruth says that she and her sister look nothing alike. Rachel is dark like Mama, but Ruth is much lighter. This meant that strangers were nicer to her, which drove Rachel crazy. Rachel once tried to convince Ruth that her father was white, which isn't true. In her twenties, Rachel embraced her "ethnic roots," and changed her name to Adisa. She now lives in a shady neighborhood in New Haven, has five kids, and works a minimum wage job. Ruth can't understand Adisa's choices and wonders if Rachel turned herself into Adisa to feel as though she had a chance.

While Ruth's proverbial chance came thanks to her education, she implies that Rachel's chance came to her when she decided to embrace her identity as an African-American woman of slave descent. When Ruth insists that Adisa chose to embrace these stereotypes, it suggests that she doesn't fully appreciate how black people who aren't so focused on academics aren't afforded advantages like Ruth was.

Friday is Ruth's day off, so she meets Adisa at the nail salon. Adisa gives Ruth a hard time for choosing the "whitest" color, an orange called Juice Bar Hopping. She insists that being taken off of Davis's case is what black people deal with every day and says that Ruth's forgotten that she's black. Adisa surprises Ruth by saying that what happened wasn't her fault, but says that white people still rule the world. Ruth lists several successful black people and then names Clarence Thomas, whose skin is darker than Adisa's. Adisa jokes that he probably bleeds white, given how conservative he is.

Though Ruth is able to list several successful black people, the number of successful and well-known movie stars, politicians, and singers who are black still doesn't come to close to the number of white people filling similar roles. To take the example of Clarence Thomas, though he's a successful Supreme Court justice, at the time of the novel's writing he's still the only black man to hold such a high position.

Ruth gets a phone call from Lucille, asking if she'd trade shifts with her and work a double shift tonight rather than working all day Saturday. Ruth agrees, excited to have Saturday to spend with Edison. Adisa insists that they shouldn't be asking Ruth for favors, but the nail technician interrupts.

Adisa's desire to see that Lucille is taking advantage of Ruth suggests that she is on high alert for instances of racism, though Ruth's narration doesn't betray any overt racism in their exchange.

Ruth is sorry she switched with Lucille within minutes of getting to work. A storm means that women are going into labor early, and the hospital is busy. Ruth does check Davis's chart to make sure that he's going to see the pediatric cardiologist and then gets whisked away to a new patient, Eliza. Ruth gets her settled and as she begins an exam, notices that Eliza seems afraid to be touched. Ruth sends Eliza's husband on an errand and throughout the night, Eliza confides in Ruth that she's pregnant because she was raped. Her husband doesn't know. Hours later, Eliza gives birth to a tiny girl. Eliza cries and won't look at the baby until Ruth makes her. The baby looks like a clone of Eliza's husband, and Eliza visibly relaxes.

Eliza's history shows that building a family isn't always something positive and desired—in her case, she believes it was forced upon her. This shows that there are many ways to corrupt Ruth's initial assertion that family and childbirth exposes everyone's shared humanity; Turk's racism isn't the only way. Eliza's willingness to accept her daughter when her paternity seems confirmed offers hope that, despite rough starts, it is possible to recover from this kind of corruption.

Ruth is so busy that she doesn't see Corinne until nine the next morning. Ruth is in the nursery eating a snack when Corinne wheels in Davis for his circumcision. She says that his sugar is still low, but he hasn't nursed in preparation for his procedure. Dr. Atkins, the pediatrician, arrives and asks Ruth if she prepped Davis. Ruth stiffly says she isn't caring for him anymore. Dr. Atkins notices the note in Davis's file and gives Ruth a sympathetic look. Ruth jokes that Dr. Atkins could sterilize Davis as well.

As Davis's file makes the rounds and is seen by more staff, Ruth is made increasingly aware of her liminal position as the only black nurse on the labor and delivery floor. That her discomfort manifests as her sterilization comment is understandable, but it will come back to haunt her later.

Twenty minutes later, Corinne is called away from monitoring Davis to go with another patient for an emergency C-section. She asks Ruth to watch him while she's gone, which should only be 20 minutes. Ruth stares at Davis, thinking that babies are blank slates and will take comfort from anyone. Ruth looks up and when she looks back, Davis isn't breathing. Ruth tries to wake him up before remembering that she's not supposed to touch him. She wonders if she'll lose her job, and if it'll even matter if he starts breathing again.

Ruth's thought process shows that with the sticky note, Marie put Ruth in a difficult position: her job and her livelihood are at risk on one hand, while Davis's life is at risk on the other. Her fears of being fired show the ability of racism to sow fear and make Ruth question everything she knows about herself and her job, as it's implied that Ruth wouldn't have hesitated had she not been afraid.

Davis doesn't start breathing. Ruth hastily wraps him up and seconds later Marie comes up behind Ruth. Marie tells Ruth to get an Ambu bag (a breathing aid), call the code, and start chest compressions. Other doctors rush into the nursery and try to resuscitate Davis. Ruth is asked to stop and restart compressions several times. Suddenly, Brit screams—she and Turk are in the nursery, watching. Dr. Atkins arrives and within seconds, Davis's heart stops. As she calls time of death, Turk desperately tries to pull the Ambu bag out of the trash. Corinne arrives as Marie hands Davis's body to Brit. Ruth rushes to the bathroom, vomits, and thinks that if she hadn't hesitated, Davis might still be alive.

It's important to note that when Ruth is told to do her job and join the crash team, she does so without question. She follows orders and is no less invested in saving Davis's life than the other doctors are. When compared with her hesitation minutes ago, this shows how dangerous it can be to tell a nurse like Ruth to not do their job. Racism aside, it means that Ruth's patients are at risk. Davis's death then becomes representative of what can happen when one's racism keeps someone else from doing their job.

Ruth recalls a teenage patient whose baby was stillborn. The mother nearly died too. Twelve hours later, the patient's grandmother arrived and wanted to hold the baby. Ruth went to the morgue to get the body, but couldn't bear the thought of giving the grandmother an ice-cold baby. She warmed the baby up with heated blankets, swaddled him, and the grandmother held him for an afternoon. When she was finished, Ruth took the baby back to the morgue. She says the hardest part is removing the swaddling and putting the baby back in the refrigerator.

The description of this great-grandmother and the baby drives home for the reader how compassionate Ruth is, especially when it comes to infant loss. She understands that this can be the worst time of a parent or grandparent's life, and it's her job to ease the pain as much as she can. This then offers a counterpoint to how Ruth would've behaved had she been able to touch Davis.

An hour later, as Ruth prepares to leave, Marie catches her in the staff room. Marie asks for Ruth's version of events for hospital protocol. Ruth says she was covering for Corinne and lies that she noticed Davis wasn't breathing right before Marie arrived. When Marie notes that Ruth wasn't doing anything, Ruth spits that she was doing exactly what she was told to do. Ruth goes to the morgue before she leaves. She holds Davis, prays for him, and says goodbye.

Ruth's decision to go to the morgue and say goodbye to Davis again shows her humanity and her compassion, as she doesn't hold his parents' beliefs against him and believes he's still worthy of love and respect in death. Marie's incredulity suggests that she had no idea her order would have such dire consequences.


CHAPTER 5, KENNEDY

It's been a trying morning for Kennedy. Everyone overslept, her daughter Violet refused to eat cereal, and then after Kennedy's husband Micah gave Violet an egg, she screamed, "I want a fucking knife!" When she wailed again, Micah and Violet heard that she wants a *fork* and knife.

By introducing Kennedy in this harried domestic scene, Picoult encourages the reader to see that she's not so different from any of the other parents in the novel.

Things only get worse; Kennedy's boss sends her to the New Haven correctional facility to negotiate about bras—the facility has banned female lawyers because their underwire bras keep setting off metal detectors, but the lawyers aren't allowed to enter braless either. One of Kennedy's male colleagues suggests that the prison review its entire clothing policy, since he was allowed in wearing golf cleats last year. Kennedy briefly dreams about what her career would be like if she'd gone into corporate law, but she doesn't regret becoming a public defender. Micah's job as a surgeon allows her to live on the pitiful salary and she feels as though she can at least look at herself in the mirror.

The correctional facility's clothing policy is an early indicator that the justice system as a whole isn't reasonable or fair; instead, it's nonsensical and unfairly targets anyone who isn't white and male. What Ruth will later deal with in terms of racism in the justice system isn't necessarily unique to her; women as a whole experience prejudice, and black women even more so.

Kennedy reminds the Warden that their bra policy could easily be construed as discrimination, which makes the Warden agree to reconsider. She sails out of the room and discovers a text from Micah, apologizing for being a jerk earlier. They decide to go on a date to have Indian food later.

Though the novel draws out similarities between the bra policy and Ruth's case, Kennedy's ability to threaten a discrimination lawsuit without fear of losing stands in stark contrast to her coming assertion that she can't bring up race in court.

Kennedy explains that her mother, Ava, bought her a gift card for a massage last year. Kennedy feels she has better things to do, but goes to the appointment Ava made for her. As the massage therapist starts, Kennedy tries to make small talk. When the therapist doesn't respond, Kennedy starts talking to herself. Finally, the therapist says that Kennedy desperately needs a massage, but she's horrible at receiving one.

Even though Kennedy didn't buy the massage herself, it still acts as a marker of class and privilege—even if she has better things to do, she still doesn't have to spend her massage time working in order to make ends meet. This also establishes Kennedy's personality—she is stressed out, but deals with that by constantly pushing forward.

On days when both Kennedy and Micah work late, Ava stays with Violet. Being an old southern belle, Ava throws tea parties that thrill Violet. Kennedy arrives home to a happy Violet and a clean kitchen. Ava is scandalized when Kennedy says in front of Violet that her client didn't try to kill her today, and Kennedy is upset to see that Ava is wearing her coat and getting ready to leave. Rather than cancel her date with Micah, Kennedy meets him at the Indian restaurant with Violet. She orders before he arrives, and Violet is in a bad mood when he gets there. Violet asks why their waiter is wearing a towel on his head. Mortified, Kennedy explains that some Indian people wear turbans. Then she wants to disappear when Violet points out that the waiter doesn't look like Pocahontas.

On the whole, Violet's comments about race and difference illustrate that her understanding of race and racism, while rudimentary or absent, isn't malicious: she's just curious, but that curiosity can end up seeming extremely rude. Violet is able to think this way in part because she's white and affluent; she lives in a wealthy white neighborhood (the same one Ruth lives in) and per Ruth's implications, there's very little diversity there. Her affluence, in other words, can lead to ignorance and then rudeness.

CHAPTER 6, TURK

Turk and Francis Mitchum, his father-in-law, dismantle the nursery. Francis pulls down the curtains and repaints the walls while Turk takes the crib apart. He thinks of Brit, still in the hospital, who has stopped responding to anyone. Turk hasn't slept because of his anger, and it almost feels good to have the crib collapse on him. Turk explains that though Francis isn't much to look at now, he's still a true skinhead. When the government began cracking down on skinhead crews in the nineties, Francis understood how to adapt. He encouraged skinheads to grow their hair out and start white supremacist websites.

The way that Turk describes Francis is as someone who is very plugged into the world and understands almost instinctively how it works—but also understands that he needs to work with younger people like Turk if he wants to continue spreading white supremacist rhetoric via the internet. His physical description also suggests that Francis benefits from looking perfectly normal, which allows him to more effectively spread his ideas.

Turk thinks about a live baby using the crib and the baby clothes, and stands up so fast he gets dizzy. He catches sight of himself in the mirror, looking unkempt and tired with matted hair. Turk goes to the bathroom and shaves his head to reveal his swastika tattoo on the back of his head. He got it when he was 21, right after Brit agreed to marry him, and Francis called him stupid for it. When Turk walks back into the nursery, Francis softly says that he gets it; Turk is going to war.

The decision to shave and expose the swastika tattoo indicates that Turk believes Ruth killed Davis; while the other doctors may be "race traitors," Ruth is easier to blame since she was the only black person present. Turk's anger also speaks to the pain of having one's family disintegrate in an instant, showing that Turk is grieving like any other father.

That evening, Turk and Francis go to pick up Brit from the hospital. Brit recoils before getting in the car, and Turk realizes she's afraid of finding a car seat. She allows Turk to settle her in, refuses to speak to Francis, and cries. Turk thinks of Davis and thinks that he saw Ruth beating on Davis's chest before he died. He thinks she must've done something when she was alone with Davis. Turk glances back at Brit and wonders if he's lost his wife as well as his child.

When Turk wonders if he's losing Brit as well, it shows that he understands the power of grief to separate people from their loved ones—it's how his family fell apart in the aftermath of Tanner's death.

After high school, Turk briefly attended community college but couldn't stand the liberal professors. He did recruit at the college though. One day, he recruited a guy named Yorkey. The two of them recruited others and made them feel like they were worth something, just because they were white. Turk fanatically policed their drug use and personal appearance and before too long, he had created the Hartford division of NADS.

Turk's success at recruiting others suggests that there are many young people like him, who are beaten down, alone and craving community. When he's able to get them on his side, it speaks to the power of telling someone they're important—specifics matter less than the sentiment.

In the middle of the night, Turk wakes in a pool of sweat. Brit isn't in bed; he finds her standing in the doorway of what was the nursery and what's now a guest room. She asks if it was all just a nightmare and asks what'll happen if nobody remembers Davis. Turk promises that nobody will forget.

At this point, Brit's grief helps the reader to see her as a mother who's suffering, not an evil white supremacist. With this, Picoult continues to encourage the reader to look for the humanity in all the novel's characters.

The next day, Turk puts on the suit he shares with Francis in preparation for his meeting with Carla Luongo, the risk management lawyer at the hospital. Brit, however, listlessly refuses to get dressed. Turk realizes she took sleeping pills, roughly dresses her himself, and drags her to the car. At Carla's office, Turk watches her face as he takes off his hat, revealing his swastika tattoo. He insists that Ruth killed Davis, says he heard the nursing staff talking about what happened, and that he saw her "pounding on" his baby. He stands to leave and threatens to sue the hospital. As he reaches the door, Carla asks why he'd sue the hospital when evidence suggests that Ruth killed Davis.

It's worth keeping in mind that a risk management lawyer's job is mainly to keep the hospital from getting in trouble. This means that it could be in Carla's best interests to encourage Turk to go after Ruth individually, as that means the hospital won't get involved in an expensive lawsuit. Because this is undeniably racist, this does show how black people like Ruth are often the ones who end up taking blame—when the reader knows that Marie is at least partially to blame, and Ruth was in a lose-lose situation.

Going back in time, Turk recalls that within a year of starting the Hartford NADS crew, they were doing well. He was able to steal guns, which the crew then sold to black people. One night, as Turk and Yorkey were driving home from selling a gun, a cop pulled them over. Turk was calm, but Yorkey looked nervous and guilty. The cops searched the car and found meth that Yorkey had purchased, but Turk went to jail for it for six months since it was his car.

Though Turk taking the fall for Yorkey could be construed as him agreeing to care for his community, Yorkey already violated Turk's terms and conditions by continuing to use drugs. This suggests that Yorkey will have to pay for his failure when Turk gets out of jail.

Turk decided to keep his head down, spend his time plotting revenge, and hoped that the black gangs wouldn't kill him. He turned to parts of the Bible he'd never read before and decided to join the Bible study group. Turk was the only white man there. He held hands with the men on either side, said the Lord's Prayer with them, and participated in discussions. He became close with a black boy named Twinkie. They talked about food they missed and teamed up to cheat at card games. One day, when the news was broadcasting a gang shooting, Twinkie heard Turk use a racist slur to describe the black gang members. Later, during a card game, Twinkie made them lose. Turk knew he'd hurt Twinkie's feelings and after that, the slur sometimes caught in Turk's throat.

Turk's description of his time in jail suggests that jail is a situation where normal rules of play don't apply, since Turk is able to put aside his racism to befriend Twinkie. When Turk notes that he sometimes struggled to use racist slurs after hurting Twinkie's feelings, it reinforces the power of friendship and recognizing one's shared humanity—it was easy for Turk to hate black people in general, but hard to hate an individual black person who had become a friend. Turk's inability to internalize this after his release, however, suggests that he's still getting enough support from white supremacist groups to not want to give that up.

In the present, Francis watches Turk kick through the front window of the duplex. Turk insists the window was bad, but Francis seems to know that Turk is upset about his meeting earlier at the police station. Turk explains that he met with a cop named MacDougall, who wasn't sympathetic, and filed a complaint against Ruth. Turk's phone rings. It's MacDougall with news: Turk can have Davis's body to bury, and the medical examiner found evidence that Ruth may be at fault. Turk thanks MacDougall and sinks to his knees. He runs to the bedroom, holds Brit's hand, and thinks that he can now give her justice.

When Turk decides to go through these formal channels as he pursues justice for Davis, it shows that he understands that, in order for him to continue to be racist, he needs to make sure that it's formalized through the court system. To a degree, Turk can trust the court system more than Ruth can simply because he's white, even though his beliefs are exactly what the courts (in theory) exist to dismantle.

After Turk got out of jail, he discovered that Yorkey had joined a group of hulking bikers. Turk's attempts to round up the old crew failed, so he decided to take on the bikers alone. He doesn't even remember the fight, but he landed several bikers in the hospital. Turk once again became a legend.

Turk's success in this fight can be read as a direct result of the grief and hate he felt in regard to losing Yorkey. For Turk, these powerful emotions manifest themselves as extreme violence.

On the day of Davis's funeral, Turk wonders who organized it. Most of the attendees are people Turk doesn't know, but they're from the Movement. When Turk tries to reach for Brit's hand, she shrinks away and turns to Tom Metzger, the founder of the White Aryan Resistance and her stand-in uncle. Turk thinks that nobody talks about how lonely grief is as he focuses on shoveling his scoop of dirt on top of the casket. Brit finally takes Turk's hand and he starts to feel like they might survive this.

Again, Turk's emotions during the funeral and Brit's behavior encourage the reader to identify with them and their grief. Turk's beliefs aside, he still feels lonely and blindsided by his son's death, which are feelings anyone can empathize with. Similarly, the fact that the funeral is attended mostly by unknown Movement members shows that Turk is still a valued part of this community.

A few weeks after Turk's fight with the bikers, he got a handwritten note from Francis asking him to come meet him in New Haven. Turk drove to a house in the subdivision and let himself into the backyard, unwittingly walking into a child's birthday party. Five-year-olds hit a piñata of a black man hanging from a noose, while a young woman (Brit) held paper stars for Pin the Star on the Jew. Brit showed Turk inside and they watched for a minute as Francis lectured preteens on Christian Identity theology, which holds that the white race are God's chosen ones, not the Jews. Turk was shocked when Brit called Francis "Daddy" and introduced them.

Just as Turk and Brit's grief humanizes them, this birthday party seems to humanize the family life of the white supremacists in attendance. At the same time, however, the piñata and the paper stars illustrate how they've corrupted the wonder and the fun of a child's birthday party and turned it into a vehicle to manufacture and teach hate to the next generation.

Francis and Turk walked through the backyard, where Francis admitted that he likes talking to young people so he can feel relevant. He commented on Turk's reputation and on Turk's father, assuring Turk that nobody can choose their parents. They discussed how, in Francis's estimation, the current generation of Aryan boys are teaming up with Native Americans to make meth, while Turk understands that they're working together against common allies. Francis suggested that, in the same way, the two of them could team up: Francis is old guard, while Turk knows technology.

Francis's desire to speak to young people and work with Turk suggests that even though he's a white supremacist, he still has the capacity to see that people who are different than him have things to offer. Though he still looks like a powerful villain here, this suggests that he may have a better capacity for understanding, empathy, and humanization than Turk gives him credit for.

After the funeral, everyone comes back to the duplex. As things start to wind down, MacDougall arrives to pay his respects. Brit isn't charmed; she goes inside and starts throwing casserole dishes. Turk tries to comfort her, but Brit spits that this would all be over if Turk would act like a real man. Francis ushers Brit upstairs while Turk grabs car keys and drives. He considers finding Ruth's house, but knows he'll be blamed. Instead, he finds a homeless man and beats him until Turk remembers who he is.

When Turk has to beat someone to remember who he is, it indicates that he is missing an outlet in his life that would allow him to feel human without hurting others. By hurting others, Turk actually becomes less human and it becomes more difficult for the reader to identify with him.

CHAPTER 7, RUTH

For Ruth, life proceeds as normal until Carla Luongo asks her to come talk, two weeks after Davis's death. Ruth has been reliving Davis's death the entire time, making sure that the story she believes is the story she's told others—that she didn't touch Davis. When she gets off the phone with Carla, Edison asks if she was talking to someone white, since she was speaking differently. When Ruth meets Carla, she can tell that Carla isn't on her side. Ruth recounts her story several times, insists she wasn't angry with Turk and Brit, and is shocked when Carla asks about Ruth's offhand sterilization comment.

Edison's comment about Ruth changing how she speaks introduces the idea of code switching, which is where a person speaks or behaves differently depending on who they're talking to. In this situation, it suggests that Ruth acts differently around her white colleagues, which in turn implies that she might not feel as comfortable or as accepted around them as she'd like the reader to believe.

Carla asks when Ruth touched Davis. Ruth knows that her answer can save her or damn her, and she says that she didn't touch him until instructed to by Marie. Ruth notes that the note in Davis's file could be construed as biased, but Carla smoothly threatens Ruth's career if she continues to threaten to sue for discrimination.

The exchange between Carla and Ruth shows that they both understand that the legal system and hospital protocol give them some power here: Ruth can file a discrimination lawsuit, while Carla can fire Ruth and (seemingly) make the problem go away.

Ruth's shift begins with Marie assigning Virginia, a white nursing student, to shadow Ruth. Ruth leads Virginia to the room of their first patient, a woman in labor. Ruth leads the conversation, but the woman speaks to Virginia when she talks about her birth plan and her wishes for after the birth. As Ruth puts on gloves to examine the woman, the woman asks Virginia if this is a good idea. Ruth explains that Virginia is a nursing student, while she's an expert. The patient turns red and Ruth lets her frustration go.

This experience with Virginia shows the reader another way in which Ruth is treated differently on a daily basis because of the color of her skin, but not in a way that the patient presumably intends to be rude or racist. Now that Ruth has been exposed to Turk's overt racism, these smaller microaggressions are more difficult to handle.

Ruth tells the reader that Mama still works for Ms. Mina. Sam Hallowell is now dead, Christina lives nearby, and their son lives in London. Mama refuses to retire, even though she's older than Ms. Mina, and still works six days per week. Ruth usually has to visit her at Ms. Mina's and delights in using the front entrance instead of the servant's entrance. Today, Mama is thrilled to see Ruth. They sit in the dining room, where Mama is cleaning the strands of crystal from the chandeliers. Mama talks about Adisa and Edison as Ruth remembers how, as a child, Mama would bring her on Saturdays so that she could work. She framed it as a privilege, but Ruth felt she was being raised to be a maid. She realized later that Mama was actually teaching her to be self-sufficient.

Now that Ruth is an adult, she's able to dictate how she moves through the Hallowells' home more than she could as a child. Ruth isn't as much of a helpless victim of racism as she once was; she now has power and a voice to insist that some white people treat her well. The way that Ruth interpreted Mama bringing her to work shows that Ruth has always chafed in situations when she felt she was being unfairly pigeonholed because of her race or gender.

Ruth helps Mama hang the crystal back on the chandelier and finally, Mama asks what's wrong. Ruth leaves out the Davis debacle, but talks about Virginia. Mama suggests that Ruth is imagining things, and Ruth wonders if Mama's right. Ruth immediately hears Adisa's voice in her head and thinks that even if the microaggressions were unintentional, they still hurt.

When Mama suggests that Ruth is imagining things, it diminishes and discredits Ruth's lived experience. However, it also speaks to the fact that Mama likely tells herself the same thing, as her satisfaction with her job probably depends on not getting her feelings hurt daily.

Ms. Mina, Christina, and Christina's four-year-old get home. Christina throws her arms around Ruth as Ms. Mina greets her warmly, and then Christina leads Ruth upstairs. Ruth inspects one of the toys, a plastic pirate ship with action figures, and notices one action figure that looks like a slave.

The slave in the pirate ship suggests that racism and slavery are neutered and normalized when it comes to kids' toys. This in turn will allow kids to think this is normal when in reality, it isn't.

Christina interrupts Ruth to say that her husband, Larry, is going to run for Congress. Ruth asks how Christina feels about this, which thrills Christina--Ruth is the first person to acknowledge that, in theory, she has a say. Christina insists she can't say no to Larry, even though she wants to, and promises to bring Ruth on as chief of staff if Larry later becomes president. They head downstairs and Christina hugs Mama, thanking her for being part of their family. Ruth thinks that family doesn't get a paycheck.

The exchange between Ruth and Christina indicates that the two care for each other and acknowledge the other's humanity, despite their differences in class and skin color. Ruth in particular sees Christina as a person who in theory has agency and decision-making power, rather than flattening her to a politician's wife.

One day when Ruth was a child, she unwittingly ended up in Sam Hallowell's study, which was off limits. He was inside, feeding film through a projector. Sam mused that Ruth has grown up with TV. He invited Ruth to sit on the couch and watch as Donald Duck stirred paint until it made black, while the narrator said that at first, man was black and stupid. Ruth noted that Sam's breath was sour as he continued to talk about how he used to be the voice of the future, announcing that programs were broadcast in color. That night, Ruth had a nightmare that she was in a gray world. She screamed that her eyes weren't working, but in the dream Mama and Ms. Mina told her that it's just the way things are.

Throughout the novel, films and cartoons illustrate how racist visual media has been—this cartoon is likely from the mid-20th century—and how racist it still is, as when Kennedy later watches The Lion King. *By using visual media like this, the novel illustrates how swamped contemporary society is in racism that often goes unexamined unless something happens to force further consideration.*

When Ruth gets home, Edison is doing homework. She's going to be late for her shift, but talks to Edison about his homework assignment: a profile on an American hero. Edison wants his to be black and he notes that it's hard finding information. Ruth feels like he's pressing on a splinter as she leaves for work. When she arrives, Marie tells Ruth she can't work; Ruth's license has been suspended. Security escorts Ruth to clear out her locker. She calls the union lawyer from the car, tells him about Turk Bauer, and then gets a call from Corinne.

The choice to immediately involve the union lawyer shows that at this point, Ruth still trusts the systems she's a part of to help and protect her. Edison's difficulty finding information on a black American hero speaks to the way in which black history isn't taught in schools in the same normalized way that white history is; he has to do way more work than his classmates because of his desire to showcase someone black.


Ruth tells her about meeting with Carla Luongo and says that the hospital is sacrificing her, but Corinne says that it probably wasn't intentional. Ruth thinks back to her time at Dalton, where she felt like she didn't fit in at the table of black kids and felt like she could blend if she sat with white kids. Ruth wants to ask Corinne how she has the right to say that, but instead hangs up and drives to Adisa's house.

Again, when Corinne suggests that Marie wasn't trying to be racist, she tells Ruth that she doesn't actually care to listen to Ruth when she says she's being discriminated against. The choice to drive to Adisa's house shows that Ruth is now ready to accept that she's experiencing discrimination.



Adisa insists that this was bound to happen. She says that Ruth should just tell Edison the truth and get a lawyer to sue the hospital. Groaning, Ruth says she wants it to go away and then starts to panic. She can't lose her house or use Edison's college fund. Adisa takes Ruth's hand and reminds her that sisters are forever.

Because Ruth doesn't have wealth like the Hallowells do, bringing a lawsuit against the hospital isn't an easy decision. In this way, Ruth is disadvantaged because of her skin color as well as her socioeconomic status.

A few hours later, Ruth returns home. Edison is concerned, but Ruth lies that shifts got mixed up, so she and Corinne went out for dinner. Edison's school project is going okay; he's decided to write about Anthony Johnson, the first black landowner, but is struggling to figure out how to deal with the fact that Johnson owned slaves. After Edison goes to bed, Ruth goes through the mail and finds the notification that her license is suspended. Not long after, the union lawyer calls back with the news that the state is holding Ruth responsible for Davis's death; they've filed criminal charges against her. The lawyer says they're targeting her because she failed as a nurse; Ruth insists they're targeting her because she's black.

The union lawyer's assessment of why the state is filing charges against Ruth shows that, like Corinne, he isn't willing to trust Ruth when she tells him about her lived experience. Though Ruth never mentions the lawyer's race, it's reasonable to assume that he's white given his reaction. Because of his race, he likely doesn't have to think about this sort of thing with any regularity, which makes it harder for him to empathize with Ruth and effectively help her.

Somehow, Ruth manages to fall asleep. She wakes up at 3 am to the sound of a jackhammer in her dream. It doesn't stop and suddenly, police break down Ruth's door and swarm into the living room, guns drawn. One officer pushes Ruth to the floor to handcuff her, while others overturn furniture. Edison calls out and Ruth screams as the police attack and handcuff him. She yells for Edison to call Adisa as the policeman drags Ruth upright and out of her house. She wonders if her neighbors, on their porches watching, will ever ask themselves why they didn't ask if they could help.

It's telling that, while Ruth has said that she feels like an accepted part of her community, she doesn't name any of her neighbors—this implies that she's not as close to them as she initially let on. Ruth tries to believe she's a valued member of the community so that it's easier to ignore that her neighbors aren't interested in helping her when push comes to shove.

Ruth has been to the police station several times, but never like this. Officers check her in, take fingerprints, and take mug shots. A young cop leads her to a holding cell. Ruth sits and wonders if Edison has called Adisa and realizes that the Hallowells will be able to get her out. She thinks that her blackness is, in this case, more powerful—and more dangerous—than her education or her professional success.

Ruth understands that because she's black, the fact that she's an educated nurse doesn't mean much. What the officers see is an angry black woman who didn't come to the door in a timely manner, which means that she's going to have to work harder to get them to take her seriously.

Finally, the young officer returns for Ruth. She flatters him and he decides she doesn't need handcuffs to walk to a room for interrogation. A hulking man enters, introduces himself as Detective MacDougall, and introduces his associate, Detective Leong. Detective Leong is Asian American, and Ruth thinks they might have something in common. Ruth agrees to tell her story, insists that CPR isn't physical abuse, and says she doesn't hate white people. MacDougall leaves the room to make a phone call and Detective Leong starts talking to Ruth. Ruth suspects she has ulterior motives, but goes along with it. Detective Leong tells Ruth that she needs to say now if this was an accident caused by her hurt feelings, but Ruth says she wants a lawyer.

Detective Leong, as an Asian American police officer, shows that even when minorities climb the ladder and manage to do well in their jobs, it doesn't mean that they have the power to change the system. Instead, Detective Leong's livelihood likely depends on playing by the rules set out by her job, which means that she's forced into complicity with the racist policies and practices of the police (and perhaps even buys in to these policies and practices).

CHAPTER 8, KENNEDY

When Kennedy gets to work, her colleague Ed Gourakis is going on at length about the new hire, Howard. Kennedy hasn't met him yet and tells Ed this. Ed says that he was just hired to meet a diversity target and is inexperienced. Kennedy cuts Ed short and he stomps off. A minute later, a young black man stands up in the cubicle next to Kennedy's and introduces himself as Howard. Kennedy introduces herself warmly, offers to take Howard to lunch, and assures him that not everyone is as rude as Ed. She says that it's great that Howard is giving back to his community, and she feels stupid when he says he's from Darien, a wealthy town.

Though Kennedy's warmth towards Howard is commendable, she reveals her own prejudices when she assumes that he's from one of the low-income neighborhoods in Connecticut. While Kennedy will later go on to say she's not racist and doesn't hold biases against black people, she absolutely does. In making this mistake with Howard, Kennedy told him that she doesn't expect that a young black man could come from an affluent family.

Kennedy briefly explains her job on arraignment day, which is when defendants are expected to enter a plea. She represents people who don't have a lawyer but need one, and she usually meets them at the defense table and has seconds to try to get them out on bail. Her third client of the day is an eighteen-year-old charged with drug trafficking. He's from a wealthy neighborhood and looks terrified. After a moment of conversation, Kennedy asks the judge to release her client. The prosecutor, Odette Lawton, insists he must be released with bail.

The way that Kennedy describes her job on arraignment day suggests that she understands that the most powerful thing she can do is get to know her clients and appeal to the judge's sense of humanity. Her description of dealing with this white young man provides a counterpoint to Ruth's hearing, which follows.

Kennedy's next client is Ruth. The police lead her in still wearing her nightgown, and Kennedy realizes the gallery is strangely packed. As Ruth states her name, a woman begins yelling "murderer" and Kennedy sees Ruth flinch—someone has spit on her face. The bailiffs drag Turk out. The clerk reads that Ruth is being charged with murder and negligent homicide, and Odette says that Ruth acted intentionally and killed a three-day-old baby. Ruth explodes and says that this is crazy, but Kennedy leads her to the defense table.

The fact that Ruth is in her nightgown still speaks to the court's desire to dehumanize Ruth and put her at even more of a disadvantage—it's harder to take someone seriously when they're not appropriately dressed for court. This shows how the justice system is unfairly stacked against people like Ruth who have the misfortune of being arrested in a compromised state.

Kennedy starts asking Ruth her usual questions, but Ruth spits that they put her in chains and handcuffed her son. Kennedy watches as Odette, a sleek black woman who looks worlds apart from Ruth, says that Ruth should be held without bail. Because she has nothing to work with, Kennedy asks the judge to set bail at $25,000. Ruth quietly points to Edison and asks Kennedy if she has kids. Kennedy thinks of Violet and tells the judge she'd like to retract her statement and have more time to speak to her client. The judge agrees that they can speak during recess.

When Ruth is able to convince Kennedy to reconsider after pointing to Edison, it reinforces Ruth's earlier assertion that parenthood and family is a common denominator among all people. This allows Kennedy to humanize Ruth in a way that will hopefully allow her to provide Ruth with proper help later.

During her break, Kennedy rushes to Ruth's holding cell, where Ruth explains she's a nurse. When Kennedy tells Ruth they need to work together if Ruth wants to get out, Ruth sizes her up uncomfortably and then answers Kennedy's questions about her job, her home, and about Edison. Kennedy is surprised that Ruth lives in her neighborhood, that Adisa lives in a difficult neighborhood, and that Ruth's Mama is a maid. She briefly scans Ruth's indictment as Ruth tells her how Davis died. Kennedy says she can get Ruth out and promises to tell Edison. For a minute, Kennedy feels like they're nothing more than two mothers.

For Kennedy, it's shocking to learn that Ruth lives in her neighborhood—it means that they have more in common than Kennedy thought was possible. Again, when Kennedy feels like they're just two mothers, she reaffirms the novel's insistence that family brings out the shared humanity in all people, and that being willing to look for a person's humanity makes one more willing to go above and beyond.

Back in the courtroom, Kennedy notices white onlookers that she suspects are white supremacists, and thinks that being white means that few people will question their intentions. She walks up to Edison, who is nervous and polite, and Adisa, who seems angry, and tells them that she can get Ruth out. Minutes later, the judge calls Ruth again. Kennedy paints Ruth as an upstanding citizen with a defendable case, and the judge accepts Ruth's house as bail.

Kennedy's observation of the white people in the gallery shows that one conversation with Ruth was enough to make her see that racism is everywhere, if only she knows where to look. This begins Kennedy's process of learning about institutional racism and how black lives are affected by it daily.

The white supremacists start booing and as they're herded out, Kennedy tells a panicked Ruth that it'll take a few days before she's released. She runs to Edison and Adisa and begins telling them what documents they need for the house. She gives Edison her card but explains that she won't actually be on Ruth's case. At this, Adisa snaps that Kennedy must believe that Ruth did it since she's black. Kennedy finds this ridiculous, as most of her clients are black.

Adisa's rudeness isn't entirely unfounded; it'll be revealed later that Adisa has had an experience with the justice system and likely experienced prejudice at the hands of white people because of her race. The suggestion that Kennedy isn't racist because she works with black clients shows how easy it can be for a white person to ignore microaggressions and institutional racism.

When Kennedy gets home, Ava is on the couch with a glass of **wine** watching Disney Junior, Violet asleep next to her. Ava explains that there was an incident at dinner: Violet is no longer obsessed with *The Little Mermaid*; she's decided she wants to be Tiana from *The Princess and the Frog* for Halloween. Kennedy is relieved as this means the costume will be warmer, but Ava suggests that Violet be Cinderella, Rapunzel, or Elsa instead. Thinking of Ruth, Kennedy asks if this is because Tiana is black. Ava, offended, agrees to sew the costume.

Ava's suggestion that Violet choose another princess shows that Ava also holds racist assumptions, even if she wouldn't use the word to describe herself. Violet's desire to be Tiana, on the other hand, speaks to children's ability to identify with anyone, regardless of color—though Violet, as a white child, has a number of television role models that look like her, while black children have comparatively few.

Ava insists she isn't prejudiced; she says she loved her childhood nanny, Beattie, like she was family. Kennedy sighs, but Ava softly recounts how, as a child, she snuck away to drink from the colored water fountain and was surprised that it was no different. Ava makes one more plea to force Violet to choose another princess but finally gives in.

The story of drinking from the water fountain speaks to how senseless racism and prejudice is—but Ava's surprise to find that the fountains are the same shows that what she'd been taught to believe (that black people were fundamentally different) was also very powerful.

Kennedy falls asleep on the couch with Violet and wakes up in time to see Mufasa's death scene in *The Lion King*. Micah gets home and they talk briefly about their days. He's very interested in hearing about Ruth's case and the skinheads and asks if they all were wearing combat boots. Kennedy replies that, even more terrifying, the skinheads looked normal. As Micah puts Violet to bed, Kennedy notes that Ruth lives in their neighborhood and mentions that the hyenas in *The Lion King* all speak in black or Latino slang. When Micah accuses her of overthinking, Kennedy vows to do anything to get Ruth's case.

Kennedy's observation about the hyenas in The Lion King *shows that racism is baked into society in every way imaginable: even though the hyenas don't look black or Latino, viewers will still associate the dialect with the villains in the movie. By making these casting decisions, companies like Disney can reinforce stereotypes in a way that many won't even notice (like Micah) but that are glaring once they're pointed out.*

CHAPTER 9, TURK

Turk looks around at his lawyer's swanky office. The lawyer, Roarke Matthews, leads him back to an even fancier office, offers condolences, and says that this will be more complicated than just getting Ruth to pay for killing Davis. He explains that the State is currently pursuing criminal charges against her, which means that if Turk files a civil suit simultaneously, Turk will look like he's just out to get money. Roarke suggests that Turk sues the hospital, which has more money to pay, and says they need to wait until the criminal suit is over to move forward.

Though Roarke Matthews doesn't show up again, from this one appearance he seems to be someone who is more interested in taking cases that will yield money than fighting personal and racial vendettas. However, he also understands that appearances matter in the legal system, and Turk will need to tread carefully so that he's taken seriously.

Stepping back in time again, Turk says that he didn't believe Francis that the new wave of white supremacy would be fought on the internet. Francis, however, was powerful, and Turk was in love with Brit. He visited often, but was too afraid to make a move. One day, Brit asked him about the rumors of Turk's fighting prowess. She asked Turk to take her out with his crew, and when he refused on the grounds that she was Francis's daughter, she put her hand in the path of the ax Turk was using. He agreed to take her.

Notice that though Turk is forming a relationship with Francis and they're part of the same community, Turk still approaches Francis with caution. His inability to move freely within the group suggests that the community isn't as warm as Turk thinks it is. Because it is based on hatred of an "other," if someone leaves the group, it's easy to become hated themselves.

In the present, Turk spends every night listening to Davis's ghost cry. One night, Turk gets up to drink. Francis lets himself in, throws a laptop at Turk, and tells him to get even. Turk pulls up his and Francis's website, LONEWOLF, which soon after its inception became the young and hip alternative to going to jail. It's been anonymous up to this point, but Turk decides to tell his story using his real name. He sits up all night watching the views rack up; 13,000 by dawn.

moving the white supremacist movement underground and making it anonymous on the internet does cause the community to experience fractures. By using his real name when he talks about Davis, Turk seeks to reinvigorate the movement with a human and personal touch.

On the night that Turk took Brit out, they had dinner with Francis first. Brit talked about hitting a black man with her car and told Francis that she and Turk were seeing a movie. In the car, Turk explained that he didn't have a crew anymore, which is how the rumors of him fighting alone started. Brit admitted that her mother, Adele, left Francis for a black man. Turk drove them to a hot dog stand popular with gay men and the two of them attacked a couple eating their hot dogs. Brit was vicious and Turk had to drag her off of her victim. They drove away to a secluded hill and had sex.

Brit's viciousness speaks to the amount of hate that she holds inside herself, which likely began when she first heard that her mother left Francis for a black man. This shows that both she and Turk lack the capacity to think critically about the tragedies their families have experienced, and instead take the easy route and blame people different than themselves. Brit never considers, for example, if Francis might've been at fault (or that one black man's actions might not be representative of black people as a whole).

When Turk arrives at the courthouse for the arraignment, they find a bunch of friends from LONEWOLF there too. A black woman approaches Turk and starts to talk to him. He almost pushes her away before he recognizes her voice—she's Odette Lawton, the prosecutor, and she didn't sound black on the phone. Turk reasons that this might work to his advantage. When Ruth is called, Turk spits on her face. He knows that Ruth will see his swastika tattoo as he's led out of the room.

Turk's initial sense of betrayal in learning that Odette is black speaks to the power of his hatred—he doesn't think before he acts, which means that he's judging people on first sight and is therefore at risk of missing many things. His understanding that Odette is the perfect person to represent him, however, shows that he understands that her blackness will at least be able to make him seem more sympathetic.

Outside, Turk notices media vans. He calls Francis and tells him to get Brit up and make her watch Channel Four. Turk puts his hat back on and approaches one of the newscasters. Though the woman isn't initially thrilled to speak to him, by the time he's done telling his story, a bunch of reporters are trying to speak to him. Odette comes out and makes a statement while Turk walks to the back of the building to watch Ruth be carted off to jail.

The media is after a sensational story, but they're also interested in humanizing "both sides"—so they emphasize not Turk's racism but how he and Brit tragically lost their baby at three days old, which is something that people can identify with. Turk wearing his hat means that he doesn't have to share his racial biases so openly.

After Turk's first date with Brit, he started visiting regularly. He ran LONEWOLF from the living room. The site had a number of comment boards but the most popular were the ones that gave suggestions for how individuals could stir up unrest without being violent. Francis and Turk tried a number of them, including slipping flyers about how the Holocaust was a hoax under windshield wipers in the parking lot of a Jewish community center. The newspapers went wild, but had no idea that the culprits were just two guys.

By distributing the flyers, Turk and Francis can make the community feel unsafe for every minority without letting on that they're not planning on actually hurting or killing anyone—thanks to the history of racism and anti-Semitism, the victims can make the leap to fearing for their lives without experiencing physical violence.

One night, Francis asked Turk when he was going to marry Brit. It took him a while, but Turk eventually brought her to his house to cook dinner for her. He pulled foods out of the fridge with food-related puns written on them and finally showed her "will you marry me Brit" spelled out in fruits and vegetables. He offered her a blue topaz ring, she said yes, and they had sex. After, she handed him a melon and made him promise that they *cantaloupe*.

More than any other moment in Brit and Turk's relationship, his proposal allows the reader to see them as two young people in love. With this, the novel continues to suggest that they're not dissimilar from anyone else in fundamental ways, though their love is certainly corrupted by the fact that it's founded in mutual hatred of others.

When Turk returns from court, he finds Brit in front of the TV watching Odette speak. She smiles at Turk for the first time in weeks and tells him he's a star.

Brit's happiness suggests that, like Turk, she's willing to briefly put aside her racism and accept that Odette can help them.

CHAPTER 10, RUTH

Ruth thinks of slavery as, after her arraignment, she's put in chains. Even worse, Edison is watching. Ruth thinks back to how she lied that she didn't touch Davis, but she didn't trust Kennedy and so didn't tell the truth. As soon as the judge agrees to Ruth's bail, Ruth is strong-armed back to her cell. A while later, Kennedy comes and explains that Ruth will go to jail for a few days until her bail is processed. While a guard puts Ruth back in handcuffs, Kennedy tells her to not talk about her charges and to to trust nobody.

For Ruth, being handcuffed and manhandled like this represents an uncomfortable link to the history of how black people have been treated throughout American history—at this point, she's just as helpless. The handcuffs in particular enable the police to dehumanize Ruth and in turn, treat her roughly without feeling bad about it.

The guard leads Ruth to a van where another woman sits in chains. She's tall and breathtaking and introduces herself as Liza Lott. When Ruth asks if the name is her real name, Liza looks her in the eye and says it's better than Bruce. Ruth thinks she's seen it all and isn't bothered. Liza says that she's in so often that she should get a punch card and asks Ruth what she's in for. Ruth feigns ignorance, which offends Liza, but the driver says that Ruth's in for murder.

When the driver violates Ruth's privacy and shares why she's in jail, it illustrates how few rights Ruth has at the moment. Liza's answer implies that she is a trans woman who was originally assigned the male name "Bruce." Ruth clearly does whatever she can to check her own biases and treat people with equal dignity.

Ruth remembers how, when she applied to Yale for nursing school, Mama asked her pastor to say an extra prayer for her. Ruth felt undeserving. The day before classes started, Mama took Ruth out to dinner and told her that she was destined to do "small great things" and told her to not forget where she came from. This puzzled Ruth, since Mama had been pushing her to leave and be successful since birth. Every night after class, Ruth told Mama about her day but left out how people on the train to school treated her like a criminal. Eventually, Ruth bought a Yale-branded coffee mug to carry.

The question of what Mama means when she tells Ruth to remember where she came from haunts Ruth throughout much of the novel. It calls Ruth's assessment of her communities into question, as it seems to imply here that Mama doesn't want Ruth to fully integrate into her community at Yale. However, Ruth's experiences on the train show her that she couldn't integrate fully anyway, thanks to others' prejudices.

At the women's prison, Ruth and Liza are put in a holding cell with other women. Ruth asks Liza if she'll be allowed to make a phone call, but Liza haughtily says that this isn't the movies. Women are taken from the cell one by one and finally, a guard calls Ruth. When Ruth asks to make a phone call, the guard curtly tells her to save it for her counselor. The guard takes Ruth's fingerprints and then takes her to a small room and commands her to strip. As Ruth undresses, she wonders if the guard's job is to make people feel as ashamed and undignified as possible.

It's worth noting that racism is predicated on dehumanizing others, while Ruth's job as a nurse is one that requires her to humanize every patient in her care. By drawing out these comparisons, the novel encourages the reader to see the police force as fundamentally flawed and dehumanizing.

While the guard looks behind Ruth's ears, under her toes, and tells her to squat and cough, Ruth thinks of how she memorized what the width of a dilated cervix feels like. She thinks of the experiences she's had delivering babies of sexual assault survivors, and how important it is to make those women feel safe. Ruth decides she doesn't have to choose to be a victim. As she accepts her orange scrubs, she looks the guard in the eye and says her name is Ruth.

Here, Ruth is able to draw on the sense of community she initially formed while helping others give birth. Then, it was formed to give them comfort, not Ruth, but the way it shapes her thinking here suggests that it can also work in reverse: by remembering her own compassion, Ruth can make herself feel less alone.

Ruth thinks back to when she was in fifth grade. One morning she read facts out of a fact book, which annoyed Rachel. Mama shut both girls down and then told Ruth to change her shirt; she had a stain and Mama insisted that if people saw it, they'd judge her for being black. Ruth complied and read one more fact as she changed: the loneliest creature in the world is a whale whose voice is so different, it's spent twenty years calling for a mate with no response.

Ruth identifies with the lonely whale in her fact book, suggesting that she's integrated too well with her white community at Dalton to effectively communicate with her black community at home in Harlem. Mama's request that Ruth change, however, shows that Ruth also isn't accepted at school—she's lonely everywhere.

An inmate gives Ruth toiletries and a bedroll and shows her to her cell. Ruth notices that most of the inmates are black, while the guards are all white. Ruth's cellmate turns out to be a white woman named Wanda. Wanda asks if this is Ruth's first time in jail and when Ruth says she'll be leaving on bail soon, Wanda laughs: she's been waiting for her bail to clear for three weeks. Ruth won't say why she's in jail, and Wanda marvels that nobody in jail did anything illegal. She angrily says that stabbing her husband was an accident, just like him beating her was an accident. Ruth thinks of Davis and says she doesn't believe in accidents.

The observation of the racial breakdown among guards and inmates reinforces that there's more than simple "justice" at play in this system. Judging by the young male defendant that Kennedy described, it's possible that the white offenders are overwhelmingly able to either get off or get their bail settled quickly, while the black inmates are less likely to do either. The financial aspect of bail also illustrates the intersection between race and class.

During Ruth's meeting with her counselor, Officer Ramirez, Ruth is distraught to learn that it might take ten days before Edison can visit, and he might not be able to anyway—he's a minor, and Adisa can't accompany him because she has a record. When Ruth gets back to her cell, Wanda offers her a bit of her candy bar and invites her to watch *Judge Judy*. Ruth doesn't respond and prays instead of joining Wanda.

The issues Ruth experiences with visitation show how the criminal justice system continues to punish people who have brushes with the law. Adisa continues to pay the price for her misdeeds, even now when she's not doing anything wrong.

As a girl, Ruth had semi-regular sleepovers with Christina at the brownstone. Sam would run old cartoons for the girls and Mama was always there in the morning to make pancakes. As Ruth and Christina got older, their differences became more pronounced. Ruth had to work after school, while Christina played soccer. Christina wasn't unfriendly and never outright excluded Ruth, but Ruth distanced herself. She believed that Christina would eventually exclude her anyway, but she didn't have many other friends. She and Rachel, who was eighteen and pregnant, could barely speak to each other.

When Ruth had to work and Christina got to play soccer, it illustrates the advantages of having a wealthy family—while Ruth had to work to help support hers, Christina's family didn't need her to do anything but have fun and be successful. Ruth's fears that Christina would exclude her imply that she felt inferior. Ruth grew up fearing that she'd be ostracized for her differences.

One time, Ruth accepted an invitation to a slumber party with Christina and her friends. Christina invited two other sophomores and they lounged on the deck. The others slathered themselves in baby oil while Ruth put on sunscreen. They talked about one girl's sibling's trip to Europe over the summer, and Ruth thought of what a luxury that'd be. She went to the kitchen when Christina asked if she'd get them something to eat. Mama was making cookies and asked Ruth why she was here, her mouth tight. Ruth quietly said she had nowhere else to go, and Mama cryptically said that when she's ready, they'll be waiting for her. Ruth didn't know what she meant.

For Ruth, this sleepover only emphasizes the fact that she's fundamentally different than Christina and her friends. Christina's choice to send Ruth to fetch snacks is another microaggression that likely made Ruth feel like even more of an outsider than she already does—it suggests that Ruth is more of a maid like Mama than a friend. Mama's cryptic promise shows that Ruth does have a community somewhere; she just doesn't know who they are at this point.

That night, Ruth did her best to fit in. She made sure she was last in the bathroom so she wouldn't have to answer questions about why she sleeps with her hair wrapped in a scarf, and planned to get up before anyone else to fix her hair. She finally slipped into bed next to Christina, who she thought was asleep but was actually awake. Her eyes flicked to the scarf, but she just said that she was glad Ruth was there.

Christina's ability to say that she was glad for Ruth's presence suggests that she might feel just as alienated among these girls as Ruth does. Because she's white and wealthy, however, it's easier for her to hide and pretend that things are fine.

Ruth lies awake in jail, pretending to sleep. During one guard's circuit, he stops at Ruth and Wanda's cell and motions for Ruth to follow him. He leads her to a small room and hands her a bag with her clothes. Ruth changes into her nightgown, purposefully leaving her scrubs in a pile. The officer leads her outside and when Ruth says she has no money, the officer motions to a shape in the distance. It's Edison with the car.

The fact that Edison presumably did whatever he needed to do to post Ruth's bail illustrates the power of the relationship he has with his mother. As he grows and as she experiences this ordeal, he'll begin to grow up and care for his mother, just as she has cared for him.

CHAPTER 11, KENNEDY

When Kennedy dreams about Ruth for two nights straight, she knows she's in trouble. In the first dream, Ruth speaks a language Kennedy doesn't understand and in the second, they feast together in a prison cell. Kennedy snaps awake, gets a drink of water, and when she gets back to bed, Micah starts kissing her. She asks him what he'd do if she went to jail, but he asks if they can have sex first.

In particular, Kennedy's dream that she and Ruth don't speak the same language echoes a comment that Ruth will make later: that people often don't speak about race because there's no common language. The dream implies that Kennedy instinctively knows this, but is hopefully at least ready to learn.

In the morning, Kennedy tells Micah that she's going to see if her boss will give her a felony case. Micah is sarcastic; this will take even more of Kennedy's time. Kennedy admits that it's Ruth's case and she probably won't get it. Violet races into the bathroom, excited because she's dressed like Minnie Mouse.

By showing how Kennedy's work intersects with her home life, the novel makes the case that the work she'll do on this case will carry over into her family. As she learns to be less implicitly biased, she can teach her family the same thing.

That morning at the office, Ed and Kennedy watch *Good Morning America* and discuss Ed's insufferable in-laws. Their boss, Harry, bursts in and heads to his office. Kennedy follows him and asks if she can take Ruth's case. Harry initially tells her that she has to let Ed help her, but he finally agrees to let her take it herself. Kennedy is thrilled. Hours later, she drives to the women's prison. She feels extremely stupid when the guard says that Ruth was released days ago.

Harry's attempts to make Kennedy work with Ed show that Kennedy experiences sexism in the workplace. This means that she'll have at least one touchstone to use to connect with Ruth, who, as a woman, experiences sexism as well.

Kennedy sends a formal letter to Ruth's house and a few days later, Ruth arrives at her office. They go to the nearby Panera, where Kennedy buys Ruth lunch. Kennedy takes a bite just as Ruth starts to pray, and Kennedy says that Ruth's religion will help the jury like her. Kennedy assures Ruth that nothing she says can be used against her. Her first question is if Ruth prefers the term black, African American, or people of color. Ruth purses her lips as she says people of color. She answers basic questions about her background, but stops short when Kennedy explains that she has experience with "people like her"—people accused of crimes.

Kennedy doesn't understand that when she uses phrases like "people like her," she tells Ruth that she's already judging her based on what she can see. Similarly, questioning Ruth about what term she prefers is a good-faith attempt to listen, but still comes off as tone-deaf and rude. This shows how, for someone like Kennedy who doesn't think she's racist, it's actually very easy to inadvertently uphold racist systems simply by tiptoeing around the issue.

When Ruth insists that the issue is that Turk didn't want her near Davis, Kennedy pushes back. She says that the state doesn't care what color Ruth is; she still neglected a patient in her care and they'll convict her for whatever they can get. When Ruth asks if they'd still be here if she were white, Kennedy knows the answer is no, but tells the reader that justice isn't actually blind. It's impossible in a trial to bring up race, as that's the easiest way to lose a case. Kennedy tells Ruth that this isn't the place to address discrimination and tells her how to file a civil lawsuit, but says she needs to wait until after this case is over—if she's found guilty in the civil suit, she'd definitely lose this criminal one.

Kennedy's explanation of how the legal system handles race shows that she's very aware that racism exists and affects all sorts of cases, but she also knows that in order to succeed, she can't talk about it. However, this means that no one will ever change this system so long as they're only interested in staying quiet and winning their own personal cases. In other words, the novel draws a direct link between the silence of the courts and the way they promote racism.

CHAPTER 12, RUTH

On the morning after Ruth gets out of jail, she wakes up, starts coffee, and heads to Edison's room. Edison finally wakes and says he needs to get ready for school. Ruth knows that he missed class yesterday to post her bail, so she offers to call the secretary. She knows, however, that there's a difference between explaining the flu and explaining what happened to her. Edison tells Ruth that she doesn't have to do that as she starts crying. He comforts her and Ruth feels a seismic shift as, suddenly, Edison becomes an adult.

Ruth is aware that because she's black, the administration at Edison's school will look at her night in jail and not treat her with the same kind of compassion that they might another parent. Just as the courts refuse to speak about racism, Ruth is also kept silent in this situation—which means that the school system also won't change.

Later, Ruth dresses carefully and heads to Kennedy's office. Kennedy greets Ruth warmly and starts talking quickly, and Ruth thinks of how, on TV, people with public defenders usually lose their cases. Kennedy leads Ruth to Panera and Ruth lets her pay, wondering if Kennedy is just trying to build rapport. Kennedy comments when Ruth prays and when she asks what term Ruth prefers (black, African American, or people of color), Ruth thinks she'd like to be called by her name. As Kennedy insists she doesn't see color, Ruth thinks it's easy to say that when you're not the one getting hurt because of your skin color.

Here the book shows the same scene from Ruth's perspectiv, instead of Kennedy's. Ruth's desire to be called by her name is essentially a desire to be recognized as a human being, not just as a black person or representative of an entire demographic. Similarly, when Kennedy says she doesn't see color, it shows Ruth that Kennedy actually sees a lot of color and doesn't want to get it wrong—but in choosing to take that route, she also shuts herself off from listening to Ruth's lived experience of discrimination.

Ruth feels like she's taking a test as she answers Kennedy's questions. She thinks of Edison and says she can't go back to jail, but bristles when Kennedy says she's experienced in working with people like Ruth. When Ruth reminds Kennedy of Turk, she's flabbergasted at Kennedy's response: he has nothing to do with her case. As Kennedy explains that the state doesn't care about race and that it's too risky to bring up in court, Ruth realizes she doesn't stand a chance. She also thinks it seems dishonest to not talk about race. After Kennedy tells Ruth how to file her civil lawsuit, says that it might net her a generous payout, but says she needs to wait, Ruth starts to wonder if Kennedy is right and knows what they need to do to win.

It is true that as a lawyer, Kennedy possesses an understanding of the legal system that Ruth can only begin to grasp. However, it's important to keep in mind that Kennedy's understanding of the legal system has a distinctly white perspective—in other words, she understands how to navigate the system as a white person, and therefore doesn't understand what it's like to come up against it as a black person. This means that she's blind to the struggles and barriers that black people face when it comes to the American justice system.

CHAPTER 13, KENNEDY

When Kennedy gets home after meeting with Ruth, Ava and Violet have made pizza. Kennedy picks Violet up as Violet asks her to guess what shape the pizza is in. Kennedy starts to guess it's an alien, but Ava motions that it's a dinosaur from behind Violet. Violet explains that he's sick with "a reptile dysfunction." Kennedy calmly puts Violet down and asks Ava what they've been watching. She turns on the TV; it's set to Fox News and Wallace Mercy is demanding an apology from the New York City police commissioner for racial profiling. Kennedy sends Violet upstairs after Violet helpfully says they watched *The Five* and Ava calls Mercy a "ridiculous fake reverend."

Ava's word choice when she talks about Wallace Mercy, who is black, betrays that she does hold biases about black people and doesn't believe they should make such a fuss about racism. Wallace Mercy as a character mirrors the real life Reverend Al Sharpton, a black minister, civil rights leader, and television and radio host whose activism resembles Mercy's in the novel. In this way, Picoult makes it clear that her novel reflects the contemporary world around it in its concepts and characters.

Kennedy asks Ava to at least watch MSNBC if she wants to watch Wallace Mercy, but Ava insists she's not trying to watch him and thinks he's not helping Malik Thaddon, who won the U.S. Open and was grabbed by police outside of his hotel for no reason. Kennedy says that Violet doesn't need to see this and think the police might grab her. The two women watch Mercy until Ava remarks that if "they" weren't so angry, more people might listen. She insists that Violet didn't internalize anything.

Malik Thaddon too has a real-life counterpart: James Blake, a black tennis player who experienced the same thing as Thaddon does in the novel. This continues to situate the novel in the real world and reminds the reader that black people experience situations like this with shocking regularity. Ruth, in other words, isn't the only one.

Kennedy heads upstairs to read to Violet. She makes a mental note to thank Ava for bathing, feeding, and loving Violet, but also thinks of Ruth and that police will probably never grab Violet by mistake.

Because Violet is white, she has little to fear from the police—while Edison, being a black man, will be targeted just for who he is.

CHAPTER 14, RUTH

Adisa buys Ruth lunch at a bistro. They talk about how much money Ruth has saved and Adisa tries to convince Ruth to file for unemployment, since her court date could be months away. Adisa asks the bartender to change the channel so they can watch Wallace Mercy lambast a Texas school district that mistakenly thought a Muslim boy brought a bomb to school. Adisa gasps that Ruth needs Wallace Mercy on her side, but Ruth says that he's too angry all the time. Annoyed, Adisa says that Mercy is the only person capable of being angry for black people.

By comparing Adisa's assessment of Wallace Mercy with Ava's, it's clear that Mercy is doing the black community a service in the eyes of black people like Adisa. Ruth's assessment, however, suggests that she's spent enough time with her white friends and coworkers to not be able to see the value of Mercy's activism. Of course, it's possible that Mercy could be both a great help to his community and also an attention-seeking opportunist—but that doesn't undo the good work he actually does.

Christina invites Ruth to her house for lunch. A maid serves them salad and Ruth asks where Christina heard about Ruth's current debacle. Christina says that Larry filed to run for office, so they have the news on all the time now. She asks if being in jail was like *Orange Is the New Black* and then says she asked Larry to hire a lawyer. Before Ruth can refuse, Christina says that Larry refused and insisted he couldn't be involved in a scandal. They fought, but he's firm in his decision. Ruth feels stupid and asks Christina if she invited her to say that they can't be friends anymore. After a long silence, Christina says she just needed to know that Ruth was okay.

When Christina can't speak to Ruth outright about what happened, it suggests that Christina is extremely uncomfortable talking about race, even with someone she's known all her life. As far as Ruth is concerned, Christina's reaction is proof that Christina is too wealthy and too white to actually be able to connect with her, which allows Ruth to finish what she started as a teen and finally distance herself from Christina.

Bitterly, Ruth says that Christina doesn't have to care anymore. Both women apologize, and then Christina fetches her purse and shoves a wad of bills into Ruth's hand. Ruth refuses dessert and tries to refuse the money, but Christina forces Ruth to take the money as she leaves. Before Ruth takes the elevator down, she leaves the money under Christina's mat.

Ruth's unwillingness to take the money connects back to her earlier statement that family doesn't get a paycheck. What she really needs is a friend, while Christina is trying to show she cares in the only way she knows how.

Later, Adisa marches Ruth to the counter at the welfare office to apply for assistance. Ruth feels like she's dying as she starts to fill out the form and notices that the room is filled with white women. When she refuses to list her income as $0, Adisa finishes the form for her. Four hours later, a caseworker calls Ruth and Adisa back for an interview. Ruth tries to explain that she's been suspended from her job, but Adisa takes over. In Ebonics (or AAVE), she insists that Ruth has no job and no money. When the caseworker says that Ruth qualifies for Obamacare and Ruth tries to refuse, Adisa berates Ruth. The caseworker announces that Ruth qualifies for medical, food stamps, and cash assistance.

Ebonics is a (somewhat controversial) term for African-American Vernacular English (also referred to as AAVE); it's considered an English dialect or even a language in its own right and, as Ruth observes here, Adisa's use of it makes it clear that she's not trying to be white at all. While Adisa's desire to connect to her black roots suggests that she's proud of using the language, Ruth, on the other hand, sees AAVE as humiliating, as she's spent her life trying to speak in such a way as to sound more white. At the same time, Adisa's ability to code switch actually gets Ruth the money she needs.

A few weeks later, Ruth starts her first shift at McDonald's. She was asked to start immediately, so she left a note for Edison saying she has a surprise. A teen named Nahndi shows Ruth the different stations and an hour later, Ruth is independently assembling orders. Six hours in, a woman orders McNuggets. She eats her order and then returns to the counter and says her box was empty. Nahndi assures her they'll fix it and whispers to Ruth that this woman does this all the time. She advises Ruth to not let it get under her skin. As the after-school rush arrives, Ruth recognizes a voice. It's Edison and Bryce.

The experience of working at McDonald's means that Ruth will experience even more microaggressions, as she'll come into contact with even more people from all walks of life. Nahndi's advice to not let things get under her skin adds to the number of people telling Ruth to not worry about things or see racism. But by ignoring racism, people allow it to continue, which in turn means that it'll never change.

When Ruth gets home, she showers, starts dinner, and texts Edison. When he finally gets home, he grabs a big Mason jar and a checkbook and announces that there are several thousand dollars between the two. Edison saved this money from his summer jobs, so Ruth refuses. Edison starts to cry, saying that he can't let Ruth work at McDonald's. Edison admits that at school, teachers and students are whispering and offering to help. He says he failed a test because he walked out of class after a teacher was nice to him. Finally he explodes and shouts that he doesn't want to need help. Ruth assures him they don't need help and tries not to think that she lied to him.

Edison's struggle to accept Ruth's new job shows that he truly believed her when she told him that they could be whatever they wanted, if only they worked hard enough. His desire to be treated like anyone else shows that he's having a hard time suddenly being subjected to so much scrutiny and well-intentioned kindness. Like Kennedy's comment that she doesn't see race, these kindnesses just make Edison even more aware that he's different from his white peers.

A week later, Ruth is on her way out the door for her shift when Wallace Mercy appears on her doorstep. Giggling, Ruth shows him in and offers him coffee. He tells Ruth that her community is bigger than her church and he wants her to know that she's not alone. Ruth believes he just wants to use her case to get noticed. Mercy asks if any of Ruth's white colleagues defended her when she was asked to not care for Davis, says they threw her under the bus because she's black, and assures her that black people will march on her behalf. He reminds her of Trayvon Martin and says that during the trial, the white judge banned the term "racial profiling." As he leaves, Mercy leaves behind money and checks that his fans have sent on her behalf.

Wallace Mercy's advice makes it clear that he knows Ruth's case was racially motivated, and he also knows that she's going to suffer in court if she's not able to call it what it was. His assertion that her black community will march for her introduces Ruth to the possibility that accepting this community might not represent a failure to thrive and effectively assimilate in white society. Instead, it could mean that she has support that she didn't realize was there.

Ruth tells the reader about her favorite picture of her and Wesley. It's a wedding photo, and right after it was taken, Ruth used the restroom. When she came out, Wesley was holding a valet claim ticket--someone had mistaken him for a bellhop.

This is another example of white people making assumptions that in turn show black people that white society doesn't think highly of them, or that they can't be successful.

Within a month of getting the job at McDonald's, Ruth is a favorite among her managers. Her availability means that they often give her her favorite job, cashier. She learns to love the regulars and gives homeless people food when she can. One morning, a man comes in and asks for a song. Next in line is Kennedy holding Violet. Kennedy blushes and seems shocked that Ruth is working at McDonald's. When she tells Ruth that McDonald's is a treat, Ruth realizes that they both want to be the kind of parent who doesn't feed their child fast food for breakfast. When Ruth asks if there's any news, Kennedy says there isn't, but assures Ruth that this is normal.

Again, Ruth is able to see that she and Kennedy, despite the differences of skin color and economic standing, aren't all that different—they both want to raise healthy children and look like they don't rely on fast food. This allows Ruth to start to humanize Kennedy more and see her as a fellow parent, not just her public defender. The fact that Ruth loves being a cashier points to her love of people: she gets to interact with everyone as a cashier.

Ruth remembers how, a week after starting at Dalton, she came down with a stomachache. Mama brought her to work and settled her on Sam Hallowell's couch with saltines and her **scarf**. Ruth was shocked when Mr. Hallowell himself came in and started asking Ruth about school, and if her stomach pains came when she thought about school. Ruth was afraid he could read minds, but he told her that he knew what was wrong: when he first started at NBC, he got sick with fear that people would think he was an imposter. He told Ruth that she belonged at school.

Though Sam Hallowell's pep talk presumably had the desired effect, it also fails to take into account that because Ruth is one of only a few black students at Dalton, she is treated differently. That treatment may contribute to her sense (also known as "imposter syndrome") that she doesn't belong.

Ruth thinks of this as Edison's principal tells her that Edison punched Bryce. The principal agrees to not put it on Edison's permanent record, but suspends him for the rest of the week. Ruth feels humiliated; she's usually at school because Edison did something wonderful. Outside the office, Ruth scolds Edison, but she turns to head back inside when Edison admits that Bryce laughed at a mean joke about Ruth working at McDonald's. He begs her to not speak to the principal; he's already the butt of every joke. Ruth doesn't know what to say, since she feels like Edison was right but beating people up won't change a thing.

Bryce's behavior suggests that Edison is going through the same thing that Ruth is in terms of realizing who is actually a part of his community: Bryce now joins Marie and Corinne on the list of white "friends" who disregard Ruth and Edison and refuse to see the ways in which they're struggling. Ruth's sense of helplessness speaks to the fine line that she's forced to walk as a black person; she can't get angry, but it also hurts to stay silent.

When they get home, Ruth grounds Edison for one week. She extends it to two when he suggests that he should punch more white people. He storms into the house, nearly knocking over Kennedy in the process. Ruth delicately shows Kennedy in. Kennedy unpacks a box of files and asks Ruth for help interpreting Davis's medical file. Ruth looks it over and explains that his blood sugar was low and there was a possible heart murmur, but everything else was normal. Davis died before the cardiologist could look at his heart, but the medical examiner's report confirms the heart murmur. Kennedy agrees to subpoena the heel stick, the state-mandated blood test for newborns.

Davis's medical records offer up enough things that were wrong for Kennedy to reasonably make the case that Davis was already at risk, which means that she may be able to successfully ignore racism in the courtroom. However, in doing so, Kennedy would also be silencing Ruth and depriving her of her opportunity to speak out about what happened to her.

Kennedy asks if the heart murmur was life-threatening, and Ruth explains that it usually isn't. Kennedy says they can say anything they want about his health; they just have to convince the jury that his death wasn't Ruth's fault. When Ruth suggests showing the jury Marie's sticky note, Kennedy says that'll give the jury a reason to think Ruth murdered Davis. As she asks Ruth if it's more important to make a point or go free, Ruth's hand tightens on the paper and she gets a paper cut. She considers telling Kennedy that she tried to resuscitate Davis, but instead leaves to get a box of Band-Aids. Ruth explains how Edison used to ask her to take the jelly off of his peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, but that's impossible—just as it's impossible to say this case isn't about racism.

Ruth's attempts to talk to Kennedy about racism using metaphors like the peanut butter and jelly sandwich offer Kennedy multiple ways to enter into a conversation. In this way, Ruth finds ways to circumvent Kennedy's desire for silence regarding race, while still making sure that they have these conversations. When Ruth continues to keep it a secret that she tried to save Davis, it shows that she doesn't yet fully trust Kennedy with her story. Given how Kennedy treats Ruth when it comes to her concerns, this is understandable.

Primly, Kennedy says again that they can't talk about racism and this "perceived slight." Ruth dumps out the Band-Aids and asks if any of them are the color of her skin. Kennedy insists that it's not her fault, she's not a racist, and she says that she does what she can to make black men think she's not afraid of them on the street. Ruth points out that when she says that she doesn't see color, she's just dismissing Ruth's lived experience. Kennedy tightly says that she doesn't know what it's like to be black, but Ruth will lose if she brings up race. She packs up her things and leaves, and Ruth finds Wallace Mercy's business card.

The tenor of this conversation makes it clear just how difficult this subject is, especially for Kennedy—she doesn't want to be perceived as being racist, but her unwillingness to talk frankly about it with Ruth means that that's how she's perceived. When Ruth decides to reach out to Wallace Mercy, it suggests that she understands now that this is her best chance to make Kennedy take her seriously.

CHAPTER 15, TURK

Three months after Davis's funeral, Francis tells Turk to post an invitation on LONEWOLF for people to come to the house on Sunday, like they used to do. Brit stays in the bedroom while Turk and Francis host. Francis starts holding court over the young teens, while Turk walks into the kitchen. The women are passing around a fussy baby, and Turk asks to hold her. Turk comforts the infant until he realizes the women are looking behind him. He turns and sees Brit, looking betrayed. He hands back the baby and runs after her. Brit cries that there's no point anymore, and Turk wonders again if he lost his wife along with his son.

Again, Brit's inability to function normally and the grief she still feels about Davis makes her a more sympathetic character. Similarly, Turk's fears that she's beyond help are normal thoughts to be having after a tragedy like losing a baby. However, because Brit and Turk's life is so rooted in white supremacy and hate, they struggle to move on and make sense of their world now.

The next evening, Turk, Brit, and Francis are watching the news while Turk posts on LONEWOLF. After Francis goes to bed, Brit laments that there's nothing immediate anymore now that white supremacist action takes place online. She lists several instances in which Francis did things that seemed unreasonable, but were in fact in pursuit of a larger goal. When Brit says she wants Davis to be remembered by everyone, Turk knows what she means: she wants to do something in the real world.

Brit's desire to do something in the real world (presumably, vandalism or some sort of hate crime) suggests that she's much more invested in white supremacy and true hatred than Turk is. Though Turk wants justice, it appears that he pursues this more for Brit's sake than his own at this point.

When Turk reaches out to Raine, Raine is thrilled and invites Turk to his new house for lunch. It's on a cul-de-sac and Turk realizes that Raine is hiding in plain sight. Raine opens the door holding a toddler, with a young girl looking out from behind his legs. They head inside and sit down. The kids run around as Turk realizes that Raine has no idea that he and Brit had a baby. He tells his story and then says he wants a "day of vengeance" to honor Davis. Raine soberly says that he's no longer with the movement, and Turk realizes that Raine's swastika tattoos have now been turned into vines.

The fact that Raine is no longer part of the formal movement offers hope that Turk might someday be able to make the same leap. He stands as proof that it is possible to learn to love and not rely so heavily on hatred, while the presence of his young children suggests that it's their presence that led him to this decision.

Raine says that a few years ago, he and his wife took the baby to a festival, but the sexual violence freaked out his wife. Then they were called into preschool when their daughter said racist things. The final straw was when their daughter used a racist slur in the grocery store, and fellow shoppers shamed Raine for teaching his daughter that language. He started thinking that the white supremacist lifestyle wasn't going to benefit his daughter, and that the whole lifestyle is about hating people. Some guys beat Raine up, and then he was out of the movement. Turk thinks that he's looking at a loser and knows he'll never see Raine again as he drives away.

Because Turk is still so consumed with hate, it's unthinkable to him that anyone would choose to leave a movement that puts white people like them on top of the world. While Turk is still associated with the movement, he's also benefiting from white privilege to a very high degree. Because he's still focused on hating others, he doesn't see that his privilege and his beliefs are actually keeping him from recognizing others' humanity, as Raine has learned to do.

Two days later, Turk has met with squad leaders up and down the east coast. He gets home after midnight and finds Brit in front of the TV, watching *The Wizard of Oz*. She says it's about white power and that the wizard is a Jew. Turk gets her attention and says that nobody wants to go to jail for doing something illegal, and they can't do anything themselves since they're named in the lawsuit. They go to bed and try to have sex, but Turk can't maintain an erection. Brit turns red with shame. Later, when Turk reaches for her, she's not in bed.

When Brit interprets The Wizard of Oz *like this, it shows how her worldview colors everything she sees and hears. The fact that Turk can't round up enough support to take action suggests that his friends in the movement may be moving away from actively terrorizing people, though it also points to the possibility that his community isn't as close as Turk thought.*

Turk tells the reader that at first, there were all sorts of white supremacists and they were all different. Everyone came together on April 20, Hitler's birthday, at festivals. At one of these festivals, Turk and Brit got married. Turk wandered the festival and got LOVE and HATE tattooed on his knuckles. At sunset, Turk and Brit walked down a makeshift aisle together, and Francis married them. Turk felt like he and Brit were the only people on earth.

By choosing to get married at a white supremacist festival, Turk and Brit make it abundantly clear that their relationship may be based on love for each other, but that this love is also rooted in hate for people different than they are. This suggests that the foundation of their marriage is compromised.

CHAPTER 16, KENNEDY

As Micah and Kennedy wash dishes, Kennedy laments that Ruth hates her. Micah points out that Ruth is black, and white people have all the power in society. Kennedy insists that she works with black people all day and points out that she can't bring up race in a trial. She answers her phone when it rings; it's Wallace Mercy. He says that Ruth has signed a release allowing them to speak, which makes Kennedy angry—this means that Ruth will insist on bringing up race. She tells Mercy to leave them alone.

Micah acts as Kennedy's voice of reason here. He's able to make her listen to him (and by extension, Ruth) because he's white and a trusted person in her life—in other words, he can use his privileges to get through to her what Ruth couldn't. The fact that Ruth has contacted Mercy suggests that Kennedy will either have to actually engage with Ruth or lose her case.

Twenty minutes later, Kennedy is on Ruth's doorstep. Ruth lets her in, and Kennedy says that involving Wallace Mercy will cost Ruth: there will be angry mobs, her face on TV every night, and it'll drag Edison into the public eye. She'll become as famous as Trayvon Martin and never get her life back. Ruth points out that Martin didn't either. Kennedy makes one final plea to not involve Mercy, and Ruth agrees as long as Kennedy promises to let her testify.

While Wallace Mercy brought up Trayvon Martin to make a point about why Ruth shouldn't trust Kennedy, Kennedy's mention of Martin again shows that she's blind when it comes to issues of race and how race affects black people on an everyday basis.

The next day, Kennedy interviews Jack DeNardi, a paper pusher at Ruth's hospital. She discovers that Ruth has only been promoted once in 20 years and is described as "prickly" and "uppity." Marie, on the other hand, has been at the hospital ten years but has been promoted above Ruth. Kennedy asks whether Ruth was being uppity or assertive, and if it was random that Ruth was thrown under the bus.

Kennedy understands that because Ruth is black, she's more likely to be described in terms that aren't flattering in a professional setting. Similarly, Ruth is also more likely to be passed over for promotion because of her skin color, even though there's no evidence she's a poor employee. This is an example of true "institutional racism"—the entire system, not just any one individual, is biased against black people.

It **rains** that weekend. While Kennedy and Violet are coloring, Kennedy gets a call from Ruth to invite her to go shopping with her for a gift for Mama. Kennedy agrees. The two women talk about nothing but the weather as they park at T.J.Maxx. As they walk through the store, Ruth talks about Mama, Dalton, and how she met Wesley—a military wife was delivering twins while her husband was away. Wesley, who they presumed was the father, rushed in and fainted immediately. When he came to, he started hitting on Ruth. He turned out to be the father's friend.

This shopping trip allows Ruth and Kennedy to get to know each other outside of the work they do together for the case. Moving outside of the legal system will allow Kennedy to see how race affects Ruth in her everyday life without Ruth having to make a big deal out of it—she knows full well that she's bound to experience microaggressions, and that Kennedy is bound to notice.

Kennedy grabs a box of caramel corn, opens it, and starts eating. An employee interrupts them to ask Ruth if she needs help and then trails them at a distance. As the women dig through DVDs of TV shows, they discuss *The Cosby Show*. The employee trails them to the check stand, where Ruth is asked to show ID. As they leave, Ruth is the only one asked to show her receipt. Kennedy realizes that Ruth wanted her to see what it's like to be her. They run through the **rain** to Kennedy's car and when they're safe, Kennedy says she gets it. After a minute, Kennedy says her worst grade in college was in a black history course because she was afraid to speak. Ruth says they don't speak the same language about race, and both women admit they didn't like *The Cosby Show*.

Kennedy's ability to eat food in the store without paying for it speaks to her privilege as a white person—none of the employees appear afraid that she's going to steal it. Ruth, on the other hand, is treated like a suspect the entire time she's in the store, and Ruth has little power to push back on this discriminatory treatment. When Kennedy and Ruth at last speak openly and honestly with each other, it suggests that Kennedy is finally willing to listen to Ruth and take her concerns seriously.

Over the next month, Kennedy works hard on Ruth's case. When she has a spare few hours one afternoon, she heads out of the office and meets Ava and Violet at the park. She greets them and then lies down on the bench with her head in Ava's lap. They talk about being parents and then Kennedy asks why they never called out Uncle Leon, her racist uncle. At Ava's insistence that it was a different time, Kennedy points out that things might've changed had Ava or someone else called out the racism.

Now that Kennedy is listening to Ruth and more aware of how racism functions in society, she's seeing it everywhere, hence her questions about Uncle Leon. Though Ava's answer leaves a lot to be desired, the fact that Kennedy is asking the question shows that she understands that it's up to white people to accept that racism is real and call it out when they see it.

After a few minutes, Ava says that when she was nine, the court ruled that five black children would come to her school. Her dad held a meeting where the adults planned to picket at the school. Beattie served lemonade and cakes and during the meeting, Ava found Beattie crying in the kitchen. Her son was one of the kids who would go to the school. Ava says that the kids were bullied mercilessly. Pointing to Violet playing with a black girl, she says that if she takes the long view, it's amazing how far they've come.

Ava implies that Beattie was relatively powerless when it came to this meeting—she presumably needed to keep her job and so couldn't push back on the racist rhetoric of her employers. This again illustrates how black people are prevented from standing up for themselves, either because of overt intimidation or for fear of losing their jobs.

After New Year's, Kennedy checks to see what judge is assigned to Ruth's case. Her heart sinks; it's Judge Thunder, a tough judge with a vendetta against Kennedy after she, as a sick and demoralized clerk, was extremely rude to him. She's already lost two cases with him. As she leaves the courthouse, she finds a black protest singing gospel music. They carry posters with Ruth's face on them, led by Wallace Mercy and Adisa.

Kennedy's assessment of Ruth's chances shows that she's becoming better versed in all the ways that Ruth will be disadvantaged. While Judge Thunder's dislike of Kennedy has nothing to do with race, it helps Kennedy learn to identify all the myriad ways that Ruth is disadvantaged when it comes to the court system.

CHAPTER 17, RUTH

During one of Ruth's shifts in January, she thinks of Edison. He's stopped doing his homework and is sullen and moody, but Ruth doesn't know what to do. A gaggle of white girls gets to the front of the line, engrossed in a text exchange and not ready to order. When Ruth suggests the girls step aside if they're not ready, one girl uses black slang in her reply. Ruth is incredulous. A few minutes later, Ruth leaves her station and tells the girl that she didn't appreciate her attitude. Ruth's boss calls her back to work.

When Ruth chooses to not make a big deal of this teenager's racism, she finds herself in a similar position as Beattie did in Ava's story—if Ruth makes a fuss, she'll put her job on the line and she can't afford to do this. This shows how, because of Ruth's race and her economic standing, she's kept from advocating for herself.

After work, Ruth discovers six missed calls from Kennedy—Adisa apparently involved Wallace Mercy and set up a march in Ruth's honor. Ruth takes the bus to Adisa's apartment. Adisa is thrilled that Ruth heard about the march, but upset when Ruth says she doesn't need Mercy. Before their argument can escalate, one of Adisa's sons bursts in with another boy who turns out to be Edison. Both are dressed like gangsters and say they're going to see a movie, but Ruth doesn't believe it. She grabs Edison and drags him out. As they walk to the bus, Edison apologizes. He says that his cousin isn't so bad, but Ruth implies that Edison shouldn't do this again.

Adisa's decision to go around Ruth to involve Wallace Mercy herself speaks to how downtrodden and powerless she feels as a black woman. She sees that Mercy is the only person capable of raising his voice in a way that white people will listen to. When Edison notes that his cousin isn't as bad as Ruth seems to think, it does indicate that he's learning to humanize his cousins, even though they live and speak differently than he does.

Ruth remembers Edison's birth. She'd had an emergency C-section and Mama had been with her since Wesley was away. When Ruth woke up after the procedure, Mama gave Edison to her. He started to cry, and Ruth panicked. She tried to give him back to Mama, but she wouldn't take him. Ruth whispered to Edison that she was his mama and was going to give him the best life possible.

This moment with Mama and Edison reinforces the strong relationship that Ruth has with Mama. When Mama insisted that Ruth care for her own baby, she in turn prodded Ruth in the direction of independence and forming her own family.

Near the end of January, Kennedy invites Ruth and Edison to dinner. Micah answers the door with Violet in his arms, dressed in a Tiana costume. Ruth accepts a glass of **wine** and sits in the living room with Micah and Kennedy. Micah asks Edison about school and if he likes Obama, but Violet interrupts and asks Edison to color with her. She corrects Edison's choice to color Cinderella's dress green and then points to the chain around his neck and says that it means he's a slave. Both Micah and Kennedy shout.

When Violet equates Edison's chain with slavery, it hearkens back to the toy that Ruth saw when she was with Christina. Violet's comment likely stems from seeing something like that slave toy, which seems innocuous to someone with no concept of slavery. Violet will need to learn both the history of racism and how to not behave in a racist way in the present.

Ruth takes it upon herself to explain slavery to Violet. She gives a brief account of the slave trade to the Americas and says that there's also slavery in the Bible. Ruth notices that during her lesson, Edison removes his chain. She follows Kennedy into the kitchen, where Kennedy again apologizes for Violet and the flawed way they've been talking to her about race. The women laugh and Ruth feels like they have a lot in common. Edison enters the kitchen and gives Ruth her cell phone to answer a call from Ms. Mina.

Ruth makes sure that Violet doesn't just equate slavery with black people; by pointing out that there's slavery in the Bible, she insists that it's an issue that the entire world has had to deal with, not just the Americas. Ruth's sense that she and Kennedy have a lot in common again speaks to the power of parenthood to bring people together.

Ruth remembers getting a black Barbie one year for Christmas. Mama made Barbie clothes out of socks and a dream house out of shoeboxes, but Rachel teased Ruth for it. Rachel's friends teased Ruth too because Ruth didn't fit in with them in Harlem. One afternoon, Rachel's friends descended on her after school, dumped out her backpack, and dismembered her Barbie. Rachel swept in, hit her friends, and took Ruth home, saying that Ruth was her only sister.

Rachel's decision to rescue her sister instead of side with her friends again speaks to the power of family. Even though Rachel and Ruth didn't and still don't get along all the time, Rachel recognizes that their relationship to each other and to Mama is stronger than any relationships she might have with other girls.

Ruth rushes to the hospital; Mama had a stroke and died in the ambulance. Ruth lets herself into Mama's room and gently washes her mother's body. After Ruth finishes, Adisa comes in, wailing. When she finally stops crying, they fall into each other's arms. Adisa says she told Wallace Mercy to go away, and that Ruth is her only sister.

By placing Rachel's childhood insistence that Ruth is her only sister alongside a similar scene as adults, the novel suggests that family is something that endures and continues to teach people how to humanize each other and care for one another.

Mama's funeral is a lavish affair in her Harlem church. Ms. Mina has bought the fanciest casket, and people shuffle past, looking at Mama. Ruth wanted to bury Mama in her **scarf**, but she couldn't find it. When the service begins, Ruth notices that Kennedy and an older woman are there among the sea of black faces. Mama's friends speak and then Adisa speaks. Ruth speaks next and chokes back panic. Her jokes fall flat, but she talks about how the only thing Mama was truly proud of was her children. Ruth wonders if this was actually true as she starts to cry. She thinks back to Mama's words at Christina's slumber party—that they'll be waiting for her when Ruth is ready, and thinks that Mama was referring to this congregation. Adisa finally leads Ruth back to her seat.

Ruth now understands that Mama wanted Ruth to realize that this church congregation would always be there for her. Mama was aware that even if Ruth became successful and assimilated into white culture, there would still be times when Ruth wasn't truly welcome in her white community. With this, it becomes clear that Mama knew what Ruth was getting into, and she wanted to make sure Ruth had a place to go when things went south.

The group reconvenes at Mama's apartment after the graveside ceremony. Ruth takes refuge in the kitchen and looks through Mama's partially finished handwritten cookbook. Kennedy interrupts Ruth, introduces Ava, and asks about the cookbook. Bitterly, Ruth says that Mama wasted her life slaving away for someone else and was too busy to finish it. Ava takes an old **photograph** out and hands it to Ruth. It's of her as a child with Beattie, and Ruth can tell that the two loved each other. Ava says that Mama didn't waste her life as Kennedy embraces Ruth.

Ava's photograph acts as an indicator that family doesn't have to be bound by blood, and that receiving a paycheck doesn't mean that people can't love each other like family. This helps Ruth to make sense of Mama's choice to work for Ms. Mina until the day she died, as she's able to understand more fully that Mama likely loved the Hallowells, just as Ava and Beattie loved each other.

CHAPTER 18, KENNEDY

On Kennedy and Micah's wedding anniversary, Kennedy gets the stomach flu. Micah finds her asleep in the bathroom, carries her to bed, and makes her promise to not go to work. He does agree to fetch her briefcase, which spills everywhere. As he picks up the papers, Micah asks why she has a lab report that found abnormal results. When he explains that he can't interpret the results, Kennedy asks if he'll take her to see a neonatologist for their anniversary.

Micah's assertion that he can't interpret the results of a newborn screening, even though he's a doctor, again shows Kennedy that she can't make assumptions about people—not all doctors know the same information, just as Ruth is an individual, not a stereotype.

Kennedy tells the reader that being tried "by a jury of your peers" isn't entirely true, as the defense and prosecution choose people carefully from the jury pool. Knowing she needs help from a black person in making good choices, Kennedy approaches Harry and asks if she can steal Howard. Harry doesn't care. As Kennedy leads Howard out, she learns that he's only 24 and has never seen *To Kill a Mockingbird*. She says that he'll do fieldwork, research, and take notes during jury selection. He asks if Kennedy actually offered Judge Thunder a blowjob right before they enter the judge's chambers.

Kennedy's decision to ask Howard for help shows that she's already come around in this one regard: she understands that, as a white person, she cannot understand what it's actually like to be black, and she's liable to miss all manner of microaggressions. Howard, on the other hand, will be able to identify racism that Kennedy might miss.

Judge Thunder and Odette Lawton are already inside. Thunder gives half of the jury questionnaires to each lawyer, tells them to switch in a few hours, and says jury selection starts in two days. As Howard and Kennedy drive back to the office, she explains that they need to become detectives to figure out who will be the best fit. They want someone with a high social standing, but who has experienced prejudice. Howard heads out with his list of jurors while Kennedy drives to a low-income apartment building. She soon gets a call from Howard; he's outside an affluent gated community and doesn't want to get out of the car for fear of getting arrested. Embarrassed, Kennedy tells Howard to meet her at her house.

Kennedy is embarrassed because, as a white woman, it's never occurred to her that it might not be safe to get out of the car in a white neighborhood. Howard, on the other hand, is liable to be arrested thanks to the implicit racism of many white people who don't believe he has the same right as they do to exist in society. Though this is certainly awkward for Howard, working with him does allow Kennedy to learn more about what it's like to be black from someone other than Ruth.

Late that night, Kennedy and Howard have spread out over her home office. Howard spent the afternoon doing internet research while Kennedy did the fieldwork. Howard shows Ruth his three piles of jurors that he split up using what he could find on Facebook and LinkedIn. One pile has people aware of racism, while the other has conservative voters or people who are overtly racist on social media. The middle pile contains people who post questionable photos. Howard soberly says that this has been a shocking experience, and then shows Kennedy the Twitter account @WhiteMight. The profile picture is Davis.

By allowing the reader to witness how lawyers go about jury selection, it supports Kennedy's earlier assertion that juries aren't at all random: presumably, Howard and Kennedy will do what they can to make sure that the potential jurors who are overtly racist won't be part of Ruth's jury.

The next morning, Kennedy meets Odette to talk about the jurors they both want to decline. Kennedy doesn't know Odette well, but wonders if she gets her receipts checked like Ruth does. Kennedy tries to make pleasant small talk, but Odette refuses the olive branch. As she walks away, Howard rushes in to tell Kennedy about a study about racial prejudice. He explains that it found that when white people are aware that they're racist, they compensate by thinking more favorably of darker-skinned black people. Kennedy is confused, but Howard says that Ruth, as a light-skinned black person, is at risk.

This study complicates the straightforward notion of racism and colorism. Per the study's findings, Adisa would fare better in court than Ruth will, simply because Adisa's skin is darker. The one thing that gave Ruth a leg up in life early on will now make it harder for her to get through this trial in one piece.

Ruth and Kennedy meet behind the courthouse for jury selection. Ruth looks professional but very nervous. Kennedy introduces her to Howard and then they sit at the defense table together. Judge Thunder addresses the potential jurors and excuses one man who says that Odette locked up his brother. Then, the jurors are shown out and Kennedy explains that during jury selection, she and Odette will question each person individually. She and Odette each get to strike seven jurors without justification.

The description of how jury selection works continues to demystify the court system for the reader. In doing so, it offers up the tools the reader can then use to pick out instances of racism or discrimination without Kennedy or Howard having to point it out.

Odette questions the first juror, a man who runs a hardware store and has a brother who's a cop. Kennedy asks about his opinions on medical treatment and learns that his mother died during an endoscopy. The second man is an older black man and Kennedy loves him immediately. A bit later, juror number 12 takes the stand. She's a teacher in an integrated classroom and tells Kennedy that she's not biased and she doesn't have a problem with black people. Howard gives Kennedy his signal, so Kennedy fakes a coughing fit. Howard takes over questioning, which reveals that she *is* biased.

Juror number 12's insistence that she's not biased because she teaches in an integrated classroom mirrors Kennedy's earlier insistence that she's not racist because she works with black clients—simply associating with people of color in one's line of work doesn't mean someone isn't racist. With this, the novel again shows that people with biases are everywhere, but when they're white, they can move through society unnoticed.

After the individual questioning, Odette and Kennedy choose whom to excuse from the first group of fourteen jurors. Odette doesn't want to allow Kennedy to excuse juror number 12, so Kennedy and Howard huddle to discuss. Howard wants her to use a strike, but Kennedy decides to accept her and hope that she'll swing in their favor. Odette tries to excuse Kennedy's favorite juror, but Kennedy insists this is racist and calls for a trial. Odette takes the stand and Kennedy questions her on how she rated other jurors. Judge Thunder finally says that the juror can stay. Ruth passes Kennedy a note that says, "thank you."

When Kennedy chooses to not fight over juror number 12, it shows that she still thinks the best of people and is unwilling to accept this woman's unexamined racism. The fact that she's unwilling to listen to Howard also shows that Kennedy still thinks she's the expert here and is willing to disregard the actual experts in the room because of that.

When Judge Thunder dismisses them, Kennedy invites Ruth to get a glass of **wine**. She tries to raise a toast, but Ruth swirls her wine and recounts a story that Mama told about being accused of caring for someone else's baby when she was out with Ruth, since Ruth is so light-skinned. Ruth admits that black kids always made her feel worse than white kids, and Odette made her feel awful again. Kennedy realizes that she's never had this conversation with a black client before, and thinks that she and Ruth trust each other enough to explain things. Ruth thanks Kennedy for bringing up race, but Kennedy warns that she'll stop when the trial starts.

When Ruth admits that black kids always made her feel bad, it's important to note that she also implies that white kids made her feel bad. In other words, the way she talks about her childhood here points back to the fact she read about the lonely whale who couldn't speak to any of its own kind. Ruth still feels as though she's not a part of the black community, as evidenced by her poor feelings towards Odette—but Kennedy's ability to listen to Ruth makes Ruth more comfortable.

Ruth confirms that she'll still get to testify, and Kennedy says that just because the courts pretend cases don't have to do with racism, it doesn't mean racism isn't there. She says she lies for a living and could tell the jury anything. Kennedy asks if Ruth thinks racism will ever not exist. Ruth doesn't think so, but they toast to baby steps.

This frank conversation helps Kennedy and Ruth become closer to each other and trust each other more. In particular, the fact that they're finally able to talk about racism shows that what Ruth wants more than anything is for someone to take her experience seriously.

Kennedy spends all weekend preparing for opening arguments and meets the neonatologist, Ivan Kelly-Garcia, on Sunday. She asks him about Connecticut newborn screenings, which he explains look for congenital diseases like amino acid disorders and sickle cell anemia. Kennedy hands him Davis's lab results. Ivan looks through and says that Davis had MCADD, which means he was missing an enzyme that would've left him susceptible to death if his blood sugar dropped. He might have lived if doctors had caught this disorder. Ivan asks what day he was born. When he learns that Davis was born on Thursday and his heel stick was taken on Friday, he says that Davis might've had a chance if he'd been born earlier in the week—the state lab is closed over the weekend.

Ivan's assessment of Davis's results creates another metaphor for everyday racism: just as race is an arbitrary way to divide people up, Davis was at a disadvantage because of the entirely arbitrary fact that he was born late in the week. By setting up this link between the nature of Davis's death and the nature of racism, the novel seeks to impress upon the reader that these seemingly arbitrary divides can still have devastating results.

CHAPTER 19, RUTH

On the morning of the trial, Ruth knocks on Edison's door. She finds him in bed, awake, and he refuses to go. Kennedy had asked that he skip school to come, and Ruth didn't tell her that Edison has been skipping school already, drinking, and smoking. They argue about whether or not he should go, and he finally agrees when Ruth snaps that she might never come back.

For Ruth, it's important that Edison be there with her so that she can still feel connected to her family now that Mama is gone. He'll be the sole representative of Ruth's nuclear family, which will help others identify with Ruth's role as a mother.

Ruth explains that last night, Kennedy stopped by with news that Davis had MCADD. Ruth stared at the results and thought that it's not a lie anymore that Davis had a life-threatening condition. She thought about her lie that she hadn't touched Davis and felt ashamed that she'd lied in the first place. Bursting into tears, Ruth realized Kennedy was right—it didn't matter who touched Davis; he would've died anyway.

When Ruth cries after learning that Davis had MCADD, it shows that even though she resents Turk and Brit for what they did to her, her capacity to love and recognize Davis's humanity and his right to live remains strong. She is still a good and empathetic person, and a nurse who wants to care for all her patients.

As Ruth and Edison step off the bus, Ruth receives a call from Adisa. Ruth follows Adisa's instructions to head towards the front of the courthouse, where she sees Wallace Mercy preaching to a huge group of black people. Adisa promises that she didn't tell him anything as she hangs up. Ruth and Edison slip to the back of the courthouse to meet Kennedy.

Wallace Mercy shows up anyway—even if Ruth won't work with him directly, he still wants her to know that her black community will be there for her (and perhaps also wants a captive audience). Ruth's seeming acceptance of this suggests that she'll take all the help she can get.

CHAPTER 20, TURK

On the day of the trial, Turk feels empty. Brit comes out of the bathroom in her pantyhose and suggests that Turk wear a hat, but Turk instead shaves his head smooth. They drive first to the cemetery and stop at Davis's grave. Then, they head to the courthouse and see Wallace Mercy grandstanding. Turk watches, angry, until he sees a white fist rising out of the group. Two large white men introduce themselves to Brit and Turk as frequent posters on LONEWOLF and soon, a substantial group surrounds them.

Just as Ruth has her community as represented by Wallace Mercy, Turk and Brit also have their community from LONEWOLF. However, given the way that the novel has thus far implied that the white supremacist community is weak, given that it's predicated on hate for others, Brit and Turk are more alone than they think.


CHAPTER 21, KENNEDY

As Kennedy heads out the door for Ruth's trial, Micah tells her to sit and eat breakfast while Violet points out that her shoes don't match. Kennedy wolfs down her food and then leaves to meet Ruth behind the courthouse. She notices Walter Mercy out front, as well as a group holding up pictures of Davis. The white supremacists walk through Mercy's group, throwing punches, and police separate the groups. Kennedy finds Edison in the parking lot, and Ruth stands on the sidewalk watching. After a minute, Ruth admits that she's wondering how long she has to enjoy the world. Kennedy says she'll do her best.

When the white supremacists walk through Mercy's group, they do so entirely to intimidate the other protesters. This shows how they make a point to create a sense of fear, as that in turn allows them to divide and conquer.

CHAPTER 22, RUTH

Ruth can feel the stares of everyone behind her as she sits at the defense table. Judge Thunder fortunately has a zero tolerance rule for interruptions, and many people sitting in the gallery are the church ladies from Mama's funeral. Minutes later, Odette begins her opening statement. She tells the story of Turk and Brit's experience at the hospital, and their "personal preferences" that led them to ask for Ruth to be taken off of Davis's case. Odette deems this a slight that Ruth couldn't stomach. She explains how Davis died, saying that Ruth just stood there. She calls Ruth a murderer and suggests that Ruth killed Davis to get back at Turk.

Odette's opening statement casts the Bauers' racism as a simple matter of patients' rights—in other words, she's playing by the rules of the courtroom and refusing to bring up race as it pertains to Turk and Brit. However, when she says that Ruth couldn't stomach the slight and accuses Ruth of murder, she turns this around to her advantage by essentially accusing Ruth of being a racist.

Kennedy rises to make her statement. She says that Turk blamed Ruth for Davis's death, but the evidence will show that it wouldn't have made any difference who was with Davis when he died—he had a medical condition that left him susceptible anyway. She implores the jury to not make Ruth a second innocent victim.

Kennedy also plays by the court's rules, but to an even greater extent than Odette did. Given Kennedy's explanations of how race functions in the courtroom, this suggests that at this point, Kennedy and Ruth have the advantage.

Corinne takes the stand. Ruth thinks that a year ago, she would've said that she and Corinne were close. Now, she realizes they were just default acquaintances. Odette asks Corinne about her job and about the morning that she was asked to take over Davis's care from Ruth. She says that Ruth was angry and stormed off, which isn't how Ruth remembers it. Corinne talks about how Davis seemed reasonably healthy but did have some trouble breastfeeding. She explains how she left Ruth with Davis while she was called away to a C-section, and Davis was dead when she returned. She does say that Ruth is a great nurse.

Ruth's realization that she and Corinne weren't actually friends shows that, in the few months since Davis has died, she's learned that true friends stick around. It's telling that neither Marie nor Corinne, nor any of Ruth's neighbors came to her aid. Taken together, this suggests that Ruth was trying hard to look like a part of the community, when the community didn't really want anything to do with her except on a surface level.

Kennedy takes over questioning. She brings up Marie's note in Davis's file that barred Ruth from caring for Davis and suggests that Corinne actually messed up twice over: she left Davis in the care of a nurse who couldn't care for him, and she wasn't there to save Davis when he stopped breathing. Ruth thinks of a dream she had last night. She was at Mama's funeral, but the coffin was full of dead babies.

By pinning blame on Corinne and Marie, Kennedy is able to bring up racism without saying the word—essentially, she's calling out the ridiculousness of blaming Ruth, the only black caregiver in the labor and delivery unit, when there were a number of other caregivers who also messed up.

Ruth explains that when Marie was hired, they were both nurses. They both applied for the charge nurse position and Ruth wasn't upset that Marie got it. On the stand, Marie talks about her conversation with Turk about taking Ruth off the case. She says that Ruth was offended but she didn't see Ruth again until two days later, when Ruth was left alone with Davis in the nursery. As Marie talks about Turk trying to save Davis himself, Ruth flashes back to the moment and feels like she's sinking.

Talking about Turk pulling the Ambu bag out of the trash encourages the jury to identify with Turk and focus on the horror of losing a baby, rather than the other valid questions that Kennedy has raised thus far. Ruth's feeling of sinking continues to show that even though she dislikes the Bauers, she still grieves for the loss of their son.

Kennedy questions Marie about the kind of care Ruth gave to patients, and asked if she'd thought of the possibility that Ruth might have been forced to supervise Davis but not touch him. Kennedy points out that Marie never specified that Ruth was allowed to touch Davis in an emergency.

Again, Kennedy makes valid points about Marie's directive, showing that Ruth wasn't the one solely responsible for Davis's death—she's just the one taking the fall for a number of employees, all of whom happen to be white.

At the break, Kennedy offers to buy Ruth and Edison lunch. When Ruth refuses, Kennedy assures her that this was a good start. After Kennedy leaves, Edison and Ruth go get pizza. Ruth muses that a trial is just a mind game designed to make her wonder if she actually wanted to hurt Davis. Edison asks Ruth if Davis died like Marie said he did. Ruth says it was worse.

Edison's question and Ruth's answer again bring to the forefront that Edison is growing up, and his relationship with his mother is changing. Now that Edison is more of an adult, Ruth feels compelled to be more truthful with him.

Later, Isaac Hager, the anesthesiologist, testifies. Odette asks him to describe the role of chest compressions in resuscitating an infant, and to talk about how Ruth performed them on Davis. Isaac notes that saving a life can look violent and says that Ruth was trying to save Davis's life.

Hager is correct; CPR can lead to broken ribs and bruising, but that doesn't mean it's any less necessary or valuable. He essentially encourages the jury to not judge Ruth on what it looks like for anyone to perform CPR.

During recess, Kennedy and Ruth sit in a small room together. Ruth notes that if she's cleared, she's thinking about starting over. She starts to tell Kennedy her secret, but Kennedy talks over her and suggests going back to school. Softly, Kennedy says that if the worst comes to pass, she'll get Ruth's sentence as short as possible. She also points out that Odette will have a hard time keeping the jury from hating Turk. Ruth realizes that Kennedy's next goal will be to make the jury hate Turk.

As Ruth learns about how trials progress, she realizes that she and Kennedy actually have an advantage: it's likely that, because of his overt racism, Turk is less likeable than Ruth is. When Kennedy talks over Ruth, it shows that she still has a way to go before she truly takes Ruth seriously and listens properly.

When Dr. Atkins takes the stand, she smiles at Ruth before turning to Odette. Dr. Atkins mentions the heart murmur, describes Davis's circumcision, and mentions Ruth's comment to sterilize Davis. When Kennedy takes over, she asks Dr. Atkins about how Ruth behaved during Davis's emergency and then asks about the newborn screening. Dr. Atkins notes that she hasn't seen Davis's results and they wouldn't have gotten them until Tuesday, since he was born on a Thursday. Then, Kennedy asks Dr. Atkins to describe MCADD and asks if fasting before a circumcision would've exacerbated the condition. It would have, he says, and Davis's blood sugar was dangerously low when they drew blood during his emergency. Kennedy enters Davis's newborn screening as evidence, and Dr. Atkins curses when she sees Davis's results.

Dr. Atkins's reaction to seeing Davis's newborn screening reinforces the fact that he didn't actually die because of anything anyone did or didn't do—he died because he was born on a Thursday and couldn't get help in time. Though this doesn't mean the case is over, it means that the medical evidence at least leans in Ruth's favor. However, this does mean that what the case will come down to is Ruth's character against Turk's, and which of them will stir up more bias or animosity in the jury.

Kennedy is excited at the end of the day, but Ruth can't stop thinking about Dr. Atkins's face when she saw Davis's test results. Ruth thinks that she's on trial for something she didn't do, but a baby still died tragically. Ruth uses the restroom before she and Edison leave, and she runs into Odette. Odette compliments Ruth on Kennedy's day, but insists that they'll lose. Angrily, Ruth says that both she and Odette are smart, professional African American women and she doesn't understand why Odette is out to get her. When Odette says she's doing her job, Ruth points out that nobody's telling her she can't.

It's important to keep in mind that while Odette's comment is rude, it's her job to lead the jury in dehumanizing Ruth, which means that to a degree, she has to do the same thing herself. Ruth, on the other hand, sees that she and Odette have more in common than not, which is a result of her nurse's training that taught her to treat everyone with dignity and respect.

The next morning, a snowstorm means that Ruth and Edison are five minutes late. Kennedy is upset, but Judge Thunder is late too since he got rear-ended. He crankily starts the day after complaining about his back. MacDougall testifies first. He tells Odette about knocking on Ruth's door. Ruth angrily starts to rise and tells Kennedy he's lying. MacDougall says that, afraid that Ruth was fleeing, his team broke down the door and was confronted by a "large black subject." He describes Ruth's interrogation and says it ended when Ruth didn't want to keep talking. He suggests that her silence meant it wasn't an accident. Judge Thunder strikes this comment from the record, but it worries Ruth.

Though it's possible to strike comments from the record, Ruth worries because that doesn't mean the jury doesn't hear them. This illustrates how these comments—that effectively don't exist—are able to sway the jury's opinion, just like their implicit biases that they don't believe they have. Additionally, MacDougall's choice to call Edison a "large black subject" points to the fact that he doesn't think highly of black people, which certainly spills over into his tone and is picked up by the jury.

Kennedy asks MacDougall why he showed up at Ruth's house at 3 am. He says it's normal and intended to disarm the suspect. He refuses to concede that Ruth may have been asleep and insists that they searched Ruth's home in case there was a weapon. When Kennedy asks about why they tackled Edison, he says that Edison looked large, angry, and black. Kennedy asks if he was also wearing a hoodie. At this, Judge Thunder calls Kennedy up to berate her and then adjourns court for the rest of the day.

Kennedy's comment about whether Edison was wearing a hoodie is a reference to Trayvon Martin, whose killer was concerned about his "suspicious" hoodie. The comment effectively introduces race into the courtroom, which suggests that Kennedy is beginning to take Ruth more seriously, at least when confronted with MacDougall's obvious racism.

When Edison and Ruth get home, they see a black car with a driver in front of their house. Christina steps out and explains that she's been in court for the last two days, camouflaged in ratty clothes. Ruth sends Edison inside and, with tears in her eyes, Christina says that she's Ruth's friend and she had no idea that things had happened like this. Ruth points out that Christina will never have to know. Christina says that when she was in college, she picked up a black hitchhiker on crutches. When she got home she told Mama, and was shocked when Mama angrily told her to never do that again. She knows now that Mama wasn't trying to protect Christina; she was trying to protect the black man. Ruth realizes that she's spent her life misinterpreting Christina and invites her inside.

Christina's ability to make sense of Mama's anger years ago offers the possibility that even wealthy and privileged white people like Christina can change and learn to listen. Most importantly, hearing from white people how Ruth was treated is what it took for Christina to make these leaps and decide to reaffirm her friendship with Ruth. This is a reminder that it matters a great deal who says something, since Ruth has been speaking up for months now and the white people around her haven't listened.

The next day, Dr. Bill Binnie testifies. He's a medical examiner and explains the results of his autopsy. Davis had a heart murmur and low blood sugar, which is normal for a baby born to a mother with gestational diabetes. When asked if he can say how the baby died, Dr. Binnie says the question is complicated. Odette enters the autopsy photographs of Davis's bruised body and sets one up on an easel. Before she can ask questions, Brit shrieks that Ruth killed her baby. The bailiff shows Brit out and when the furor dies down, one juror bursts into tears. Kennedy curses.

The juror bursting into tears after Brit's outburst suggests that Brit is far more compelling than medical professionals: her grief is something that the jury can identify with, while it's much harder to follow the medical jargon that Dr. Binnie uses. This will hurt Ruth, as it draws sympathy away from her.

Fifteen minutes later, Odette leads Dr. Binnie through all the photographs. Dr. Binnie explains that the cause of death was asphyxiation caused by low blood sugar. He also says he doesn't have enough information to say definitively whether the death was natural or a murder. When Kennedy takes over, she confirms that the bruising could've been the result of CPR. She then gives Dr. Binnie Davis's newborn screening results that show MCADD. He concedes that because of the undiagnosed MCADD and fasting before his circumcision, Davis was at a higher risk of death than a healthy baby.

Again, Kennedy's questioning seeks to make it clear to the jury that Davis was ill and would've died no matter what anyone did. Odette, on the other hand, is out to prove that Ruth had a motive, which means that she can use race to her advantage to garner sympathy for the Bauers. In other words, Kennedy and Ruth are at a disadvantage in part because they can't draw on emotional language to make their case.

Odette questions Dr. Binnie again. She confirms that the newborn screening doesn't actually diagnose the disorder, and it's possible Davis might not have had it. She suggests that Kennedy is just trying to make it look like Ruth didn't neglect and then intentionally harm Davis. That night, Edison heads out almost as soon as he gets home. After waiting for hours, Ruth puts her head down and thinks about the Kangaroo Suite at the hospital. It's a secluded room where the staff put parents who have lost their babies. When one of Ruth's patients loses a baby, she always takes handprints and footprints in plaster and calls a photographer.

Ruth still misses her job for the connection and the community it allowed her to form with the patients. It's also worth noting that Turk's narration never mentioned that he and Brit took home hand and footprints; this suggests that their nurse, though white, didn't care for them as well as Ruth might have.

Ruth's last patient to use the suite was Jiao. She had too much amniotic fluid throughout her pregnancy but wouldn't accept that there was a problem. Her baby was born via C-section and died soon after. Jiao refused to hold her baby, who was swollen and puffy from the fluid, for eight hours. Finally, Ruth helped her bathe the baby. Jiao held him and then gave him back to Ruth. Ruth cried all the way to the morgue.

Describing Jiao's experience again exposes the reader to the optimism of new parents—Ruth implies that it was Jiao's optimism that kept her from accepting that there was something wrong. By encouraging Jiao to hold her baby, Ruth helped Jiao find closure and accept what happened.

Edison slips into the house and is surprised that Ruth is still awake. She tells him to be careful and that she might not be around much longer to care for him. She says that if she goes to jail, he needs to thrive. Edison slams into his bedroom, and Ruth thinks she knows why the Kangaroo suite is called that: a parent carries their child forever.

Though Edison is a teenager, Ruth still feels as close to him as she did when he was an infant or in utero. This in turn helps develop her insistence that most parents are the same in fundamental ways—they all want their children to grow up healthy and happy.

CHAPTER 23, TURK

In a small conference room in the courthouse, Turk tries to calm Brit down. Odette bursts in, saying that Brit looks perfectly distraught but threatening Ruth was a bad move. Brit towers over Odette but finally agrees to go to the bathroom. Odette addresses Turk and says that she doesn't care if they hate black people, but Brit can't testify—she can't be trusted to not shout racist slurs—and they have to trust Odette if they want to win. She also says she'll still call Turk. He wonders if having his grief in control means he loved Davis less. Odette then brings up the MCADD diagnosis and says that the defense has planted the seed that the disorder killed Davis. Turk sits heavily, feeling like his son's death was random.

Turk's ability to consider the possibility that Davis's death was random and to question his love for Davis suggests that his armor of hatred is beginning to crack. When compared to Brit, Turk is remarkably composed. Odette also shows here that she understands that Brit can serve a purpose and play a role (that of a grieving mother) but she's also a liability. Because of Turk's silence and willingness to consider, he's less of a risk to allow to testify.

As Turk is sworn in, he thinks of Twinkie. He wonders if they'd say hello if they ran into each other on the street, or if they'd just be a white supremacist and a black man. He looks out at Brit and thinks of how he told her that he told Odette that it would be cruel to make Brit testify. Turk begins to sweat as questioning starts about Brit's pregnancy and delivery. He even starts to tear up as he talks about how he loved his son. Then, Odette asks him about when things started to go wrong, and Turk admits that he's a white supremacist. He points out that medical personnel are still required to treat patients when they don't agree with their beliefs, hence his request to take Ruth off of Davis's case.

The fact that Turk lied to Brit about how his conversation went with Odette suggests that he doesn't feel entirely comfortable being himself with her—he's afraid that he's going to look weak and sympathetic towards black people. However, when he thinks of Twinkie, it shows that Turk is actually beginning to privately humanize people different than himself, which suggests that he may be able to make the leap and reform his beliefs.

Then, Turk describes following the commotion to the nursery, seeing Ruth pounding on Davis's chest, and watching Dr. Atkins declare him dead. Odette offers Turk tissues as he says that he just wanted to give Davis a good life. During the recess, Odette coaches Turk and tells him to stay calm during Kennedy's questioning. As soon as Odette leaves, Brit spits that she hates her. Turk wonders out loud if Odette is right, and that if he hadn't spoken out, Davis would be alive. With a look of disgust, Brit asks when Turk became weak and walks away. Turk remembers how, in the last weeks of her pregnancy, Brit poisoned the neighbor's dog when it wouldn't stop barking.

Again, the interactions between Turk and Brit suggest that their marriage is faltering. In particular, Turk's memory of Brit poisoning the neighbor's dog suggests that Brit is more ruthless and vicious than he's given her credit for—and at this point, she's the only one of the two of them out for blood. This in turn shows that while Brit is still consumed by hatred, Turk is dealing with his grief by trying to expand his thinking and consider alternatives.

As Kennedy begins her questioning, Turk thinks that he hates people like Kennedy. She asks him if he understands the implications of the MCADD diagnosis and then, puzzlingly, asks about his Twitter handle, @WhiteMight. She asks him to read a tweet from last July that says, "we all get what's coming to us," and then suggests that both Turk and Davis got what they deserved—Turk can't deal with the fact that his perfect Aryan child had a genetic anomaly, so he's blaming Davis's death on Ruth. Full of rage, Turk leans over the rail, grabs for Kennedy, and calls her a race traitor. He comes to in a cell, and Odette tells him that he messed everything up.

Though Kennedy's line of questioning is ruthless, she also points out the holes and blind spots in Turk's beliefs of white supremacy. Because white supremacy assumes the superiority and the perfection of white people, it's impossible then to accept that a perfect child like Davis might've had a life-threatening condition. Turk's anger shows that he can't yet handle having inconsistencies pointed out to him; his critical thinking is still overshadowed by anger and hate.

CHAPTER 24, KENNEDY

Kennedy is thrilled as she meets with Odette and Judge Thunder. Odette tries to hang onto Ruth's sterilization comment as motive for murder, but Judge Thunder agrees to throw out the murder charge and consider Kennedy's motion to acquit Ruth and throw out the case. She skips into the conference room with Howard and Ruth and shares the good news. She says that tomorrow, the defense will rest and hopefully, this will all be over by the weekend.

As far as Kennedy is concerned, this case is closed—it's clear that Turk is racist and awful, while the medical evidence all points to Ruth's innocence. However, Kennedy still hasn't truly brought up race in the courtroom, which suggests that Ruth might not be willing to go along with her plan.

Ruth points out that she hasn't testified, but Kennedy says that she doesn't need to. Kennedy knows that Ruth wants to bring up race and discrimination. Their argument gets heated as Ruth points out that Kennedy has to put Ruth on the stand if Ruth insists, so Kennedy sends Howard out. She tells Ruth that they'll jeopardize their lead if she testifies, but Ruth admits that she wants to tell the truth: she did try to resuscitate Davis when he first stopped breathing. Kennedy suggests that Ruth keep this to herself, but Ruth insists that she wants to tell the jury that she's a good nurse. Kennedy knows they're going to lose.

As far as Ruth is concerned, the goal of the trial is to clear her character and make it obvious to anyone that she's a good nurse and a dedicated caregiver, no matter what her patients believe. In the same vein, Ruth wants the chance to speak because, throughout her life, she has been denied the opportunity to do so. She knows that Kennedy can't refuse to let her testify, which means that this is Ruth's one opportunity to speak.

Kennedy remembers one night when she and Ruth had been working in her kitchen, and Violet fell and ended up with a nasty head wound. Ruth calmly cared for Violet at Kennedy's house and then at the emergency room, where Violet got two stitches. After, Kennedy thanked Ruth and told her she was good at her job. Kennedy knows that this is all Ruth wants as she sits at home with a bottle of **wine**. Micah gets home and Kennedy tells him everything. She laments that Ruth is going to ruin this for her, but Micah suggests that Kennedy think about Ruth, not herself. He also suggests that maybe, it's more important to Ruth that she finally gets to speak at all.

Again, Micah says much the same thing that Ruth implies, but because he's white and is Kennedy's husband, Kennedy takes him more seriously than she took Ruth. When he points out too that Kennedy is making the case about her, he also calls out Kennedy's internalized racism: the fact that she thinks she's doing good in the world because she helps black clients, but she never questions why so many of her clients are black.

On Friday morning, Kennedy meets Ruth and Edison behind the courthouse. Ruth is still insistent on testifying. Kennedy notices Wallace Mercy outside. She begins her questioning and asks Ruth about the Florence Nightingale pledge, which is the pledge that nurses take to care for patients and do no harm. Ruth explains what happened on the morning that Turk asked she be taken off Davis's case. She then explains what happened when Davis stopped breathing: she tried to get him to perk up, but stopped when she heard people coming. Ruth says she was caught between malpractice or violating an order.

The mention of Wallace Mercy shows the reader that Ruth is still surrounded by her wider black community, even if she still feels alone. Now that Ruth is able to tell the jury what actually happened, she'll be able to live with herself. This mirrors Kennedy's earlier assertion that she can live with herself because she does good things in the world; however, Kennedy's contribution to the world is seldom questioned, while Ruth is on trial for hers.

Ruth then answers questions about the crash team's efforts, losing her nursing license, and working at McDonald's. Softly, Ruth says that she thought she was a respected member of her community, but in reality, she was just tolerated. She says that she's being blamed because of the color of her skin.

When Ruth chooses to bring up race, she doesn't raise her voice or sound angry, but she's still violating the rules Kennedy laid out.

Odette's questioning seeks to show that Ruth lied several times about not touching Davis. She suggests that Ruth was more interested in saving her job than the baby. Odette also suggests that Ruth was happy when Davis died and purposefully let him die. She yells into Ruth's face and finally, Ruth snaps: she says that she thought Davis was better off dead than raised by Turk. Howard shouts his objection and Edison runs out of the room.

Again, while Howard can object and get Ruth's comment taken off the official record, it doesn't change the fact that she said something awful. The jury still heard it, and they can still factor it into their decision to acquit or convict.

During recess, Kennedy drags Ruth to a conference room and asks if she's happy now. Ruth says she's angry and has been for years, because she spends every minute trying not to be "too black" to keep herself and Edison safe. She approaches Kennedy and asks if Kennedy has ever considered whether her good fortune is a direct result of the misfortune of her black clients. She accuses Kennedy of being a white savior, and then fires her as her lawyer. Ruth storms out and Kennedy thinks that this is how Ruth feels: judged and humiliated because of the color of her skin.

Now that Ruth has spoken up once, it's easier to speak her mind to Kennedy and accuse her of refusing to listen to her when she insisted race was an issue. She also calls out Kennedy's work as a public defender, suggesting that Kennedy isn't as good and wholesome as she'd like to think she is.

Back in the courtroom, Kennedy explains to the reader that it's time for her to raise the motion to acquit Ruth. Judge Thunder, however, looks murderous. He refuses to reconsider Odette's murder charge and says that closing arguments will take place Monday morning. Kennedy arrives home to find Ava making cookies with Violet. She ignores Ava's questions if she's okay, sits down with Violet, and starts eating cookie dough. She thinks that Violet is left-handed and asks Ava if the world is biased towards right-handed people. Ava sends Violet away and insists it's not a big deal, since lefties are supposed to be more creative.

Kennedy's willingness to wonder if the world is stacked against Violet because she's left-handed shows that Ruth has opened her eyes to the many varieties and degrees of oppression and injustice. Ava's dismissal of Kennedy's question again speaks to Ava's unexamined racism; it's easy for her to say that being left-handed or black aren't so bad, as she's never had to experience either.

Kennedy leaves Ava with Violet and takes the bus downtown. She stops at a CVS and looks at the black hair care products, thinking that she knows nothing about them. She walks past two homeless people, one black and one white, and notices that the white woman gets more change from passersby. Kennedy then wanders the streets in a black neighborhood, feeling unsettled that nobody looks like her or will make eye contact. She offers to help an old lady up the stairs, but the woman insists she doesn't speak English. A man shows Kennedy the hilt of his gun and she hurries away, feeling unsafe and like she now understands a little of how Ruth feels every day.

Though Kennedy's exercise certainly has its limits, it does allow her to experience some degree of what Ruth feels like every day. By realizing how unsettling it is to not see anyone who looks like her, and feeling unsafe because she's the only white person around, Kennedy gets a taste of what it's like to move through the world as a minority. Importantly, however, Kennedy can choose to get out of this experiment whenever she wants—while Ruth is stuck experiencing racism no matter what.

Kennedy heads for Micah's hospital and thinks about the history of racism in the U.S. She lets herself into Micah's office, marveling that she *can* let herself in, while a black person would be questioned. Kennedy muses that she's been so caught up in winning her first murder trial, she's lost sight of what Ruth wanted all along: to point out that what happened to her was racially motivated. Kennedy thinks that more courageous lawyers wouldn't be scared to talk about race and might actually fix the system. Micah finally arrives and Kennedy says she feels like she's gotten good at metaphorically catching babies that have been thrown out of windows, but she's never questioned why someone is throwing babies to begin with.

Kennedy's metaphor about the babies coming out of a window describes the ways in which the formal justice system ignores race, while also dealing with it every day. Now, Kennedy realizes that Ruth has had her chance to speak, and it's now time for Kennedy to put her privilege to good use, be courageous, and speak up about racism for Ruth's sake. Since it appears as though Ruth will lose anyway, Kennedy can do this with minimal consequences.

CHAPTER 25, RUTH

When Ruth gets home, Edison isn't there. She wonders if she's actually the villain for thinking that Davis would grow up to be a monster. She also thinks that she doesn't regret what she said to Kennedy. Adisa bursts in and brushes off Ruth's worries about Edison. Suddenly, Ruth realizes that she's lost control of her future. Adisa comforts her and then pulls Mama's **scarf** out of her pocket and gives it to Ruth.

By giving Ruth Mama's scarf, Adisa reminds Ruth of her family and her greater community. Now, Ruth can use Mama's scarf to feel close to her as she moves forward with the trial.

Edison returns after midnight, carrying a knapsack. He looks wild and locks himself in his room. Ruth falls asleep on the couch and dreams about Mama's funeral again. This time, Ruth sees herself in the coffin. She jerks awake to the sound of knocks on the door. Police flood Ruth's house and yell for Edison. They drag him to the floor to arrest him for a felony hate crime. Ruth immediately calls Kennedy.

When Ruth calls Kennedy as soon as the police leave, it suggests that her relationship with Kennedy wasn't entirely damaged by what happened in court earlier. She still trusts Kennedy enough to ask for help, especially since the two women have bonded most over being mothers.

CHAPTER 26, KENNEDY

Kennedy receives a call from Ruth around 2 am. She heads straight to the police station and explains that she's the family lawyer. The officer says that they have security footage of Edison spray-painting swastikas and racist slurs on the hospital, which makes this a hate crime. Kennedy is stunned but pays for the magistrate to come so she can get Edison out.

Just as Turk was driven to hate when his family was torn apart, Edison is also compelled to act hatefully when it seems as though he's going to lose his only living parent.

Kennedy finds Edison in his holding cell, crying. He explains that he wanted to help Ruth by framing Turk. Kennedy tells the reader that if one is willing to pay extra, it's possible to organize an arraignment at the jail. At Edison's arraignment, Kennedy explains the situation and Edison is let go. Kennedy drives Edison home and asks him why he stooped so low. He says he was angry that racism never came up during the trial. When they pull into Ruth's driveway, Ruth slaps Edison but also holds him close.

Unlike Turk, Edison's motive wasn't just to make someone else's life miserable. It's worth noting that Edison has been raised to be sensitive and aware of his emotions, so he's already in a better place to deal with grief than Turk was. Even though people may be pushed in similar directions, their family situation also influences how they ultimately behave.

It's almost 4 am by the time Kennedy gets home, so she cleans up in her office. She knocks over a stack of papers, including Davis's infant screening, and reads the rest of his results. She notices one other abnormal result—Davis is a carrier for sickle cell anemia—and looks it up on the internet. Then, she calls Wallace Mercy.

Sickle cell anemia is something that overwhelmingly shows up in African diaspora populations; it's rare in a person with no African blood. This result then raises the possibility that Davis's parents aren't as "pure blooded" as they thought they were.

On Monday morning, Judge Thunder agrees to delay closing arguments so that Kennedy can deal with Edison's formal arraignment first. Edison is released with no issues and everyone slips into Judge Thunder's courtroom. As Judge Thunder checks that everyone is ready, Ruth says she'd like to get rid of Kennedy. Judge Thunder refuses and grants another half hour so that Kennedy and Ruth can talk. They lock themselves in a bathroom and Kennedy apologizes, asks for another chance, and says that Ruth deserves to be treated fairly. Ruth agrees.

Judge Thunder's lenience suggests that he's kinder and more understanding than Kennedy gave him credit for. This continues the novel's project of encouraging readers to not judge people without getting to know them first, as Judge Thunder is proving himself to be nothing like Kennedy initially described him.

When Kennedy begins her closing argument, she feels surrounded by the stories of Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, and Trayvon Martin. Addressing the jury, she asks them to consider what life would be like if people born in the first half of the week were given special treatment, but everyone still said that things were equal. Kennedy says that she wants to know why Ruth is the only person who's taking the fall for Davis's death, when plenty of other doctors and nurses cared for him.

Kennedy's sense of being surrounded by these black victims suggests that she now understands that Ruth isn't a lone victim; what happened to her is part of a long history of racism and violence towards people of color. By asking the jury to consider the thought experiment that likely accounts for Davis's death, she puts racism in a metaphor they can easily understand.

Kennedy says it's easy to see overt racism, but it's not easy to see the small things that black people deal with every day. However, she says, even if all white supremacists were shipped to Mars, racism would exist because racism is about who has power. Kennedy goes through the differences between active racism, like Turk espouses, and passive racism, which is not noticing that, for example, the only black history that students study is slavery. In closing, Kennedy asks the jury to return to her thought experiment and see that arbitrary discrimination is a big deal.

When Kennedy talks about racism still existing without white supremacists, she shifts her conversation to focus on institutional racism rather than overt personal racism. While it's easy for people to understand that Turk is racist, it's much easier for white people to move through life without questioning microaggressions and systemic biases, as Kennedy has done up to this point.

CHAPTER 27, RUTH

When Kennedy sits down, Ruth is flabbergasted. She realizes that Kennedy is the only person who could've made the jury understand. She strokes Mama's **scarf** as Odette begins her closing argument. Odette says that, racial issues aside, Ruth didn't do her job and because of that, a baby died. She insists that Ruth is a liar and talking about race won't bring Davis back.

Ruth now understands that who *says something is very important thing in court. As a white woman, Kennedy has the privilege of already having the jury's respect and attention (although less so than if she were a white man), while the jury's preconceived notions about Ruth mean that she's still an "angry black woman."*

Once Judge Thunder and the jury leave, Howard jumps up in awe of Kennedy's statement. Kennedy soberly says she shot herself in the foot and tells Ruth that it'll cost her. Ruth thinks of her night in jail and tells Kennedy that her statement was still worth hearing. Suddenly, Odette appears in front of them. She briskly says that she's getting Edison's case dismissed and offers only that she has a fifteen-year-old daughter as explanation.

Just as Judge Thunder proved himself to be surprisingly human and understanding, Odette does the same thing here. By letting on that she understands Ruth's worries as the parent of a black teen, she offers Ruth an olive branch and lets her know that, even though they're on opposite sides, Odette does understand.

Kennedy, Howard, and Ruth leave the courtroom and try to push through the press outside. Ruth sees Wallace Mercy, a woman next to him, and his supporters behind. Rather than head for Ruth, they head for the Bauers, who are giving an interview. The woman reaches for Brit and says that she's beautiful. Brit slaps her hand away and Mercy tries to introduce them, but the woman says that she and Brit met when she gave birth to Brit. Brit throws herself at the woman and Francis yells for them to stop. His face looks ashen as he greets Adele.

The revelation that Brit's mother is black solves the mystery of Davis's sickle cell anemia: he has it because his grandmother is black. This also poses a huge quandary for the entire Bauer family, as now they'll have to come to terms with the fact that one of their own is the kind of person they've made a life hating.

CHAPTER 28, TURK

Turk is shocked when a black woman tries to touch Brit and then lies that Brit is her daughter. He looks to Francis, who says only the name of Brit's mother, Adele. Turk tells the reader that he knows little about Adele, just that she cheated on Francis with a black man and Francis told her to leave Brit or he'd kill her. Turk looks at Brit's long dark hair and thinks that he doesn't know who his wife is or who he is. He thinks that he had a baby with a black person, and that his baby was part black too.

Turk's thought process after Francis effectively confirms that Adele is Brit's mother shows how starkly divided his world is thanks to white supremacy: even though he's spent years loving Brit, this revelation is enough for her to shift in his mind from being his wife to being just another black person.

Brit runs off, and though Francis tries to get the LONEWOLF members to help look for her, they disappear. Turk doesn't care; he just wants to find Brit. As they drive around, Francis tells his story. His relationship with Adele was perfect and she got pregnant quickly. After Brit was born, Francis got scared that something was going to go wrong. Adele started spending more time with her choir director at church, so Francis accused her of cheating. He beat her and she ran to the choir director, so he gave her the ultimatum to leave Brit or die.

In telling his story, Francis becomes more human and understandable: like Turk, he ended up moving towards white supremacy because the family he created began to crumble, and fear and hate were all he could feel. When the other LONEWOLF members disappear, it shows that they feel betrayed by Francis—they still think in black and white terms.

After that, Francis started leaving Brit in the car while he got drunk at bars, and that's where he met Tom Metzger. Tom told Francis to straighten up and gave him a pamphlet when he heard Francis's story. Francis never mentioned that Adele was black, and he found that it was easier to hate black people than hate himself.

The movement provided Francis with structure and a sense of community, just as it did with Turk. Again, the fact that that community has abandoned him in this time of need suggests that it was never particularly strong to begin with. When a community is based only on hatred of an "other," it's easy for anyone, even a member of the community, to become an other and then hated as well.

Turk breaks into the graveyard and he and Francis approach Davis's grave. They find Brit there, brandishing her penknife. Francis shines his flashlight at her and they see that she has several deep cuts in her arm. She says she can't get "her" blood out as she cuts her wrist again. A few days later, Brit is relatively stable in the hospital psych ward. It's after midnight and Turk sits in the cafeteria, thinking he can only hate for so long and wondering how he can believe black people are inferior and still love Brit.

Turk's love for Brit is proof that much of what Turk has learned is true is wrong: though he's struggling now, he implies that he will get over this hurdle and be able to continue loving her. Brit, on the other hand, turns to self-harm because she's been raised to rely only on hate, and that extends to herself now that she knows she's part black.

Turk wanders the halls and ends up in the preemie NICU. He stands at the nursery window with another man, who points to his daughter. Turk, not wanting to look creepy, points to a baby in a blue blanket as if it's his own child. He can see that the baby has brown skin and thinks that, if Davis were alive, he wouldn't care what color Davis's skin was.

The realization that Turk wouldn't care if Davis had brown skin if he were still alive represents a major turning point for Turk, as it suggests that he's finally willing to consider that his innate love for individuals is more powerful than his learned hatred for specific groups.

CHAPTER 29, KENNEDY

It takes two days for the jury to return their verdict. Edison returns to school, his desire to do well renewed. Ruth appears on Wallace Mercy's show and receives donations from his viewers. Brit is in the hospital and Turk hasn't been back to court. Right after the debacle with Adele and Mercy, Ruth asked Kennedy what happened. Kennedy explains that she noticed Davis tested positive for sickle cell anemia, which is more common in African Americans. Wallace Mercy did the rest of the sleuthing and found Brit's birth certificate.

The fact that things seem to be returning to normal for Edison, Ruth, and Kennedy continues to situate Ruth's trial in the current political landscape. While it's the most important trial in her life, it's certainly not the only one that will garner media attention and raise questions about the role of racism in healthcare and in the court system.

At the end of the day, the jury is still split. The next morning, Judge Thunder calls Kennedy and Odette to his office to explain that the jury is hung, eleven to one. When Kennedy speaks to Howard after the meeting, they both know that juror number 12 is the one who won't budge. Kennedy relays the news to Ruth and says she doesn't know what will happen; there could be a retrial or Odette could drop it. In the courtroom, Judge Thunder dismisses the jury and then says he's ready to rule on Kennedy's motion of acquittal. He apologizes to Ruth, and Kennedy tells Ruth she's free to go.

When Judge Thunder effectively acquits Ruth, it speaks to Kennedy's willingness at the beginning of the novel to judge—now that she's spent these few months with Ruth, she understands that all people are complex, and it's unthinkable to believe she can know who a person is from just a few experiences.


CHAPTER 30, RUTH

Ruth walks out of the courtroom in a daze. She feels different, but also like nothing has changed. She texts Edison, calls Adisa, and gets a text from Christina. Kennedy and Howard assure Ruth that it's over, and Kennedy invites Ruth out for lunch. Ruth feels like suddenly, she and Kennedy are on equal footing.

Now that Kennedy is no longer representing Ruth, the two of them can move forward and continue to connect as parents and as friends. Ruth can do the same with Christina, now that Christina is willing to listen.


Ruth remembers that she forgot Mama's **scarf** in the courtroom. She runs back to get it and stands alone with the scarf. She thinks that Edison might one day argue a case here and feels free for the first time.

Running back for Mama's scarf mirrors how Ruth eventually returned to her black community—triumphant, and feeling like anything is possible.

CHAPTER 31, TURK

Six years later, Turk is at the doctor's office with his daughter, Carys, who's battling strep throat. He tells the reader that he married his wife, Deborah, and took her name. Deborah works nine to five while Turk stays with Carys and speaks for the Anti-Defamation League. He tells people about his hate and his racism and how it consumed Brit, who eventually committed suicide. He tells them about how white supremacists came at night and beat him and Francis, and how he shut down lonewolf.org the next day. He was filing for divorce when Brit killed herself.

Turk's life shows that he's made a number of substantial changes to his worldview: taking Deborah's last name and choosing to be a stay-at-home parent suggest that he no longer needs to feel superior and powerful like he once did. His speaking engagements allow him to try to atone for his past as well as potentially make a difference in the lives of kids who are susceptible, like he was.



Turk says he still struggles with rage, but he's a part of an ice hockey league that lets him slam into people sometimes. He's especially careful around white men with Confederate flags, since he used to be one of them. Those speaking engagements are Turk's penance for the wrongs he did.

Now, Turk understands how dangerous it is to be a part of an organization that preaches nothing but hate. While Turk still feels some of those emotions, his ice hockey league allows him to channel them in a more acceptable venue.

The nurse comes in and introduces herself as Ruth Walker. She owns the clinic and seems not to recognize Turk. Ruth examines Carys as Turk looks around the room. He sees a diploma with the name Ruth Jefferson on it, a photograph of Edison graduating from Yale, and a ring on Ruth's finger. As Ruth excuses herself to get the supplies to test Carys's throat, Turk stops her and says, "thank you." After she leaves, Carys points to the tattoo on Turk's left hand, the only one he still has. It says LOVE. Carys asks if it's her name, and Turk says that her name means the same thing in Welsh.

Especially when placed next to Turk's insistence that he avoids men with Confederate flag tattoos, Turk's two children come to symbolize two ends of the spectrum. Davis, who was named for the Confederacy, represents hate, while Carys represents love, family, and the power of those things to help someone like Turk reform their views.

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