

# **Paradise Study Guide**

## **Paradise by Toni Morrison**

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## Plot Summary

The story opens with the massacre of a group of women living in a place called the Convent. The murderers are all men of the nearby town of Ruby, named for Ruby Best who was the first of the town's inhabitants to die. Ruby, the town, was founded by a group of black families who were seeking to create something of a utopian society. Among those founders are Steward and Deacon Morgan who are also the owners of the bank and among the wealthiest and most powerful families in town. The Morgans have a nephew named Coffee who is called "K.D." - or "Kentucky Derby," because he won a race as a very young boy early in the town's history.

K.D. has sex with a young girl named Arnette Fleetwood who becomes pregnant. Steward and Deacon make arrangements with Arnette's family to provide financial support and Arnette, in return, will leave town in the fall prior to the baby's birth. Instead, Arnette runs to the Convent, pleading with them for help. Over the years, she isn't the only person who's sought help at the Convent.

A woman named Connie, taken in off the streets as a girl of nine by a group of nuns, has lived most of her life at the Convent, remaining even after the last of the nuns has left or died. In the following years, several women take up residence there. Mavis Albright is a mother of five who let her infant twins suffocate in a car. Gigi is looking for a meeting place described for her boyfriend but discovers that it doesn't exist. Pallas is a wealthy girl whose boyfriend had an affair with Pallas's mother. When she arrives at the Convent, she's pregnant. Seneca is fleeing a relationship with a boyfriend who is in jail. The people of Ruby begin to see signs that there is evil at the Convent and blame the women for a series of problems, including the birth of several handicapped children.

While the fabric of the town begins to unravel, the inhabitants form opinions as to the cause. Several of the elders decide that they'll take matters into their own hands and set out for the Convent, ostensibly to scare the women into leaving. But the confrontation turns into a blood bath and the women are slaughtered. However, when the undertaker returns to pick up the bodies, there's no sign of the horror and the town's people, at least for the moment, remain safe from the inquiring of a "white law" from the nearby town of Demby, Oklahoma. The book ends with several of the women visiting their homes and families though they are obviously apparitions.



# Ruby

## Ruby Summary

The story opens with the words, "They shot the white girl first" and the statement that "With the rest they can take their time." The men who arrive at the Convent to confront the women who live there are from the all-black town of Ruby, Oklahoma. The men of Ruby had come from another town, that one called Haven. They had left that town eventually, after the price of cotton bottomed out. The men, several related in various ways, split up with some going upstairs and some to the basement. The men plan to "do what you have to" to eliminate the threats from the Convent. The people of Ruby have been afflicted with a series of "catastrophes" and blame it on the women of the Convent.

The men are among the families that settled Ruby, a town that has three churches within a mile but nothing to attract the traveler. There is no diner or hotel and there is no need for police. If there is a problem in Ruby, the people of Ruby tend to it. Those who founded Ruby had been among the founding families of their previous home, Haven. In 1924 in Haven, a set of twins were born to the Morgan family. The twins had returned from the war with the conviction that they couldn't make a life for themselves in Haven and they had packed up and moved to Ruby to establish a new town. One of the twins is downstairs in the Convent with his nephew and the two smash in a cellar door to find "the devil's bedroom."

The twins are Steward and Deek Morgan and their nephew is K.D. The twins had been among those who made the decision near a community oven in Ruby who decided that the Convent had to be shut down. After the group of men had eaten together, they'd told K.D. to get his rifle and come along.

## Ruby Analysis

The men who go to the Convent and confront the women there note that there are jars in the pantry, still unwashed though it's past time for the women to have "washed and sorted" them in preparation for canning the vegetables from the garden. It's noted that there were no "slack" women in Ruby.

There's an interesting note early in the story as it's noted that there's "a story that explained why neither the founders of Haven nor their descendants could tolerate anybody but themselves. This will eventually become clearer but at this stage it's confusing. Later, the reader will learn that the men who go to the Convent and kill the women there were descended from a group of settlers who had built up a town called Haven. When that town fell to ruin with little hope of recovery, a few of the families packed up and traveled to Oklahoma to found a new town. That town would become Ruby. The people of Ruby at this point believe they are above the "white law" and that they can take whatever steps they deem necessary for their town. What's interesting is



that the book begins with the arrival of the men at the Convent, and then flashes back to the lives of those who live in Ruby before returning to the scene in Ruby as the book's conclusion. But the story of what's happening in this first part of the book differs greatly from the story that's told as the book wraps up.

An interesting point about this chapter is that the story focuses on the events of the men at the Convent rather than giving anything from Ruby's perspective. Ruby is the wife of Roger Best who is the town's undertaker - though he's had a very limited amount of business over the years. After the families settled the town, there is discussion about what to name it and some suggest New Haven. However, Ruby dies soon after their arrival in town and the decision is made to name the town for her. She would be the only death in the town for more than two decades.



# Mavis

## Mavis Summary

Mavis Albright is being interviewed by a reporter and relates the story of the deaths of her infant twins. Mavis says that she'd gone to the market to buy wieners for her family's dinner and that she'd been inside for less than five minutes but when she returned to the car, the twins were dead. While the interview is taking place, Mavis is sitting beside her three surviving children. She feels the pain of the fingernails of her daughter, Sal, digging into her flesh. Later, she knows that the children and her husband, Frank, are planning a trap and that they are planning her murder. That night, Mavis is awakened when her husband, Frank, gets into bed. She remains still, hoping to avoid any confrontation with him and is relieved when he goes to sleep.

Late that night, Mavis gets out of bed and slips to the front door. She takes Sal's rain boots - the only shoes she can find - and the keys to Frank's Cadillac. She fears being caught but manages to make it to the door and out. She goes to Paterson where her mother lives. Her mother isn't supportive and tells Mavis that she has three other children who need her. Mavis tells her mother that the other children and Frank are planning her murder and her mother finally agrees that Mavis can stay with her for a few days, but only if she doesn't mention the murder plot again. Mavis stays only a short time before slipping away, traveling to Newark where she has the Cadillac painted. Mavis plans to go to California and sets out in that direction but gets confused after seeing a man she believes is Frank and trying to run from him. She runs out of gas and sets out walking cross country. She finds the Convent and a woman who lives there, Connie, welcomes Mavis without judging or questioning.

Connie tends an old woman who is all but bedridden and discovers that Connie grows a vegetable garden and earns money by selling hot peppers, homemade pies and the vegetables. She also rents a section of the ground to a man from Ruby. A woman from Ruby, Soane Morgan, arrives and takes Mavis to get gas for the car. Mavis is driven back to the car by a young black man from Ruby. Mavis returns to the Convent in the Cadillac, which was green when she left her family but is now "blood red." She parks it and remains for the next two years. As time passes, she leaves occasionally, but only for short periods of time, always returning to Connie and the Convent.

## Mavis Analysis

This is the first time Soane Morgan is introduced by name. In fact, Soane is married to one of the "Morgan twins" who are basically credited with being the founding fathers of Ruby. These twins, Deacon, also known as Deek, and Steward, are among the men who arrived at the convent as the book opens. They believe that anything they do or say is right and don't expect anyone to question them about any aspect of their lives. The two are said to be very much alike as young men but they begin to grow apart here and



will eventually come to be very different. The friendship between Soane Morgan and Connie is interesting because Connie had an affair with Soane's husband, Deacon. All this and the development of the friendship between Connie and Soane will be explained in the chapter about Connie.

Connie is tending an old woman who will later be introduced as having adopted Connie off the streets as a youngster of nine. This old woman is, by the time Mavis arrives, bedridden and Mavis interacts with her very little.



# Grace

## Grace Summary

K.D. Morgan is at the ranch belonging to his uncle, Steward Morgan, where he is brushing one of Steward's dogs. K.D. knows that there will be a meeting later that evening because of a situation that has arisen with his sometimes-girlfriend, Arnette. Arnette is pregnant and K.D. is indignant, telling himself that it's not his fault because Arnette led him on and has followed him around, urging him to have sex. K.D. knows that Arnette wants to go away to college the following year and that she wants something to be done about the pregnancy. K.D. knows that his uncles are probably angry but that there's another angle to be considered because K.D. is the only surviving son of his family and his child - if it were a boy - would ensure that the line survives. K.D. gives up trying to figure out what's going to happen and turns his thoughts to a girl who just arrived in Ruby. She is called Gigi though her name is Grace.

Later at Arnette's house, K.D.'s uncles smooth things over to a degree through the use of their money. The conversation is subtle though the men seem to all understand the details - that Arnette will want to go away to college in August and that there could be financial arrangements.

Gigi puts on a show of being extremely wild and attracts the attention of all the young men in town upon her arrival. Gigi is looking for a mountain that looks like a pair of lovers locked in an embrace. It was described to her by her boyfriend, a man named Mikey who is now in jail but who told Gigi about the mountain and promised to meet her there after his release. It doesn't take Gigi very long to figure out that Mikey had been lying to her and she's faced with several options, including returning to the city near the jail where she'd lived and worked and there to wait for Mikey's release. As she's trying to make up her mind what to do, she discovers that there's no hotel in Ruby and begins looking for a ride to a town where she can catch some form of public transportation. Roger Best offers to give her a ride in his van and she accepts. It's only after they're on their way that she discovers that the van is a hearse and that he's going to pick up a body at the Convent. The old woman there has died and he warns Gigi that he's going to stop only for the few minutes it takes to load the body. He says that he has to meet a train to transport the body and that he'll therefore be in a hurry. Gigi says she understands and tries to convince herself that riding in the van with a dead body won't be a problem, though she's obviously upset by the thought.

At the Convent, Roger loads the body and tells Gigi that he's leaving but Gigi sees a woman who is sitting on the floor and is obviously very upset. The woman is Connie and Gigi tries to decide whether it would be alright to just leave the woman and go on with Roger. She hesitates and Roger leaves without her. As Gigi and Connie begin to become acquainted, Gigi tells Connie that her real name is Grace and that she was named for her mother.





Mavis arrives at the Convent and slams on the brakes when she sees Gigi for the first time, sprawled in the yard, naked. Mavis has been away for a month and has returned with medicine for the old woman who is cared for by Connie, unknowing that the woman died while Mavis was gone. There's an instant animosity between Mavis and Gigi but Connie seeks to smooth it over, telling Mavis that she'll come to like Gigi and telling Gigi to appease Mavis by putting on some clothes. Mavis, having been at the Convent now for three years, spends some time in a reunion that is interrupted by the appearance of a young girl knocking at the screen door. The girl says that she needs help, says that it's "almost August" and that she's been raped. It's noted that "only part of that was true."

## Grace Analysis

The old woman Connie tends up to her death is a former nun who found Connie on the streets as a child and took her in. Connie's devotion to this woman is almost complete with only a brief affair vying for importance in Connie's heart. That story will be told in more depth in the chapter titled "Consolata."

It's noted that K.D.'s uncles are the wealthiest people in the town and that they own the bank. It's also noted that many families, including Arnette's, are in debt or indebted in one form or another. When Steward and Deacon are trying to smooth over the situation of Arnette's pregnancy, it's noted that she should be ready to go away to school in August. This is clearly a plan to send her away from the community to give birth to the child. When Arnette arrives at the Convent, she's obviously looking for a way to avoid that, though it's never really clear why she is so opposed to leaving Ruby.

There's a subtle piece of information offered that indicates a sexual encounter though it isn't fully explained. When Mavis arrives at the Convent after being away for a month, she finds Gigi sunbathing in the nude. Mavis objects and Connie urges Gigi to get dressed and tells Mavis that she'll come to like Gigi. Mavis denies it, though apparently not aloud. Then Mavis thinks about the fact that she's been at the Convent for three years and excludes Gigi from "us." This seems to indicate that she's interacting with Connie. The author then writes that, "They did everything but slap each other, and finally they did that. What postponed the inevitable" was the arrival of Arnette. It seems that the author is talking about a sexual encounter between Connie and Mavis but she may also have been referring to something between Mavis and Gigi because the relationship between the two later becomes often-violent with the two of them sometimes engaging in outright physical fights. It's left to the reader to decide the meaning and the significance.

# Seneca

## Seneca Summary

Dovey Morgan, wife of Steward Morgan, thinks about the current dissention happening in the town. She knows that Arnette has returned from college but won't get out of bed and that there's a young man in the town named Menus who is the son of Harper Jury who is drinking to excess. Another young girl named Billie Delia has essentially disappeared and Jeff's wife Sweetie is showing the strain of constantly caring for invalid children. There's also the "mess" of K.D. and Gigi. In addition, there's an ongoing and escalating argument over the oven as some want to redefine the words written on the oven by the founding fathers of Haven and others want to rename the oven. A minister named Richard Misner, who preaches at the Mount Calvary Church, supports the young people, urging that they be heard in situations that traditionally included only the older men.

Dovey and Steward have a ranch located outside of town but there is also a house on St. Matthew Street that is owned by the twins. Steward prefers the ranch but Dovey prefers to stay in town and they often spend time apart. The house belonged to Menus who lost it to foreclosure when he began drinking so much.

Steward goes to the ranch alone and remembers a story told by his brother, Elder, who had seen white men beating a prostitute. Elder had interrupted and been bloodied in the fight, and had known to run before he was arrested for fighting with the whites. Steward thinks of other things, including the way Dovey had "turned inward" each time she'd miscarried as though focusing all her attention on the child inside her. Steward also thinks about the journey undertaken by his ancestors, his grandfather and great-grandfather, who set out walking with their families in search of a place to settle. They'd been lost when they saw a man - an apparition - who led them to their destination. The land had eventually been acquired and the men had built the oven there to provide a place for the women to cook and the community to gather.

While Steward was thinking about his past and wishing that Dovey was sleeping beside him at the ranch rather than staying in town, Soane is in her kitchen waiting for Deacon. Deacon, angry over the erupting situations such as the arguments about the oven, is hunting quail. Soane knows that Deacon will return to the house with the birds, will drop them on her kitchen floor, and be proud of his accomplishment though it's she who will clean and cook the birds. She likens this to the days in which men hunted out of necessity and thinks it's ingrained in them to be proud of having killed the meat for a meal, whether it's efficient and necessary or not.

Soane is up before daylight brewing tea from "one of Connie's preparations." This concoction is in a "tiny cloth bag folded into a waxed paper packet. its contents representing the second time Connie has saved her." She says that the first time Connie



had saved her had been a "terrible mistake," but then revises that thought with, "No, not a mistake, a sin."

Soane recalls a day when she'd gone to the Convent and bought pecans from Connie. On that day there'd been a girl there and Soane had helped her get gas for the car. Soane is also worried about the people of the neighborhood, including K.D., Sweetie and Arnette, and she's worried about the continued dissention over the oven. Someone around this time had painted a fist on the oven, a desecration which angered most of the men though no one had claimed responsibility. Soane recalls a day when she'd gone to the Convent "for the help sin always needed," and that afterwards she'd been standing at the clothesline when a woman - obviously an apparition - appeared. The woman was carrying an empty basket as though it was full and Soane later realized that the woman was showing Soane the "emptiness" that she would carry the rest of her life.

Deacon returns with a half-dozen quail, saying that he'd given six away. The husband and wife talk for awhile, Deacon asking about her tea and her evading a real answer but making coffee for him. He says that Roger Best, the town's undertaker who had given Gigi a ride to the Convent, wasn't doing well. They also talk about the Fleetwood family who owns a store and Deacon says that the business is losing out because most of the women of Ruby shop in the nearby town of Demby.

Roger Best had handled the funerals of two of the town's young men - Easter and Scout - who were the sons of Soane and Deacon. Both were killed in the war and Deacon remembers telling Roger to be certain that all the parts in the coffins of his sons were black - knowing that it was often impossible in times of war to put men back together - and instructing him to throw away any that were white. Deacon thinks about the fact that the deaths of his sons and the miscarriage of their third and final child combined with the fact that Steward has no children means that the Morgans are "at the end of the line" with the exception of the children of his brother, Elder. Those children include K.D. and Deacon briefly considers that perhaps he and Steward should have encouraged K.D. to marry Arnette and acknowledge that child. However, Deacon and Steward had been worried because of the invalid children of Arnette's brother, Jeff, and Deacon reassures himself that there are other young women who are "suitable candidates" for K.D. to marry.

Deacon always drives to the bank though it's a very short distance. As he makes the drive one morning, Anna Flood watches and comments to Richard Misner - the preacher - that Deacon "hovers." Richard says that Deacon's interest in proprietary because he and Steward were founders, a word that angers Anna who says that her family was among the "founders" and that all the families contributed to the establishment. Anna's father has died and she owns a small store near the oven. She sells sodas and other items that attract the young people, seeking to make a living. Richard is single and the two have been seeing each other, though they are careful to do nothing that would cause people to talk about the preacher.

As Anna and Richard are talking, a young man walks in the store in search of directions and medicine for their infant, who has stayed in the car with the man's wife. The



weather is turning bad and some are predicting a blizzard. The man is urged to make it back to a specific point and there seek shelter. Meanwhile, Sweetie Fleetwood tells the woman who helps out at the Fleetwood home that she'll "be back directly" and walks out of the house, wearing clothing much too light for the weather. Sweetie never goes outside but remains diligently at her children's sides, watching over them. She gives up that responsibility occasionally to her mother-in-law, but turns down outside offers of help. On this particular day, several people see her and note that it's a rare occurrence for her to be outside, but no one stops her.

A man driving a truck stops to ask Sweetie if she needs a ride but Sweetie doesn't respond. A young woman who is in the back of the truck sees Sweetie and something attracts her attention. The driver hadn't known she was there until she jumps out and sets off walking beside Sweetie. The young woman, named Seneca, is twenty years old. When she was five, she'd gone through her apartment building in a futile search for her sister and had lived on her own for a time until child services discovered her and put her into foster care. Seneca pulls a serape from her bag and manages to get it around Sweetie's shoulders though Sweetie doesn't talk or otherwise note the woman's presence. They finally make their way to the Convent and are taken in.

Both Sweetie and Seneca are put to bed and cared for by the women of the Convent. Sweetie later wakes to the sound of a crying baby and the initial reaction is "rapture" until she comes fully awake and realizes where she is. She's then furious that there are crying children in this house while her own children remain completely and forever silent. When two of the women bring her a tray of food, Sweetie asks about the crying youngster but says that the two women "lie," saying that they sometimes hear laughter but never crying. She is taken back to town and returned to Jeff who says that Arnette is soon returning home.

Seneca remembers her life prior to arriving at the Convent, and says that she'd often slept in the back of a car or on cardboard, but that she is now having trouble sleeping on the clean cot she's given. Seneca is in a relationship with a man named Eddie Tuttle. When he is jailed, she promises to go to his mother for help. She arrives in Wichita but his mother refuses to help, though Seneca hears her crying after she walks out of the house. Seneca prepares to take a bus out of Wichita when she is approached by a man in a chauffeur's uniform. He tells her that his employer is looking for someone to hire and convinces Seneca to go with him to the limo where a woman says she needs a typist for a few days and promises five hundred dollars in pay. The woman, named Norma, spends three weeks with Seneca in "pain framed with pleasure," until her husband phones that he's on his way home. Seneca is paid the five hundred, given some clothes and taken to the bus station. She likens the experience to picking up a stray puppy, playing with it for awhile, then getting rid of it. She ends up hitchhiking and that's what she was doing when she encounters Sweetie. As she wakes, finally refreshed from the walk in the snow with Sweetie, she hears a voice calling her to join the women downstairs.



## Seneca Analysis

The oven has long since lost its significance because it had once been the gathering place and a vital community service - a place to cook when most houses had nothing but an open hearth. The older generation holds to the memories of when the oven had been those things and wants the youngsters to hold to that ideal. The youngsters, spurred somewhat by ideals of their own as well as world events and the civil rights' movement, want to see changes and this oven represents traits they abhor. The founders of Haven and of Ruby had been men who wanted to create a utopian society for their families and had wanted those communities to be safely away from the prejudice and hatred of the whites and white society. The young people see this as a sign of weakness, a willingness to run away rather than fight for change.

The "tea" or "medicine" being consumed by Soane is not fully explained. It comes from Connie and Deacon seems to know that because he notes that he doesn't trust either the contents or the source. The empty basket held by the apparition Soane saw is a symbol of her emptiness after a miscarriage. That situation is more fully explained in the chapter about Connie, called Consolata.

The town of Haven had survived the Great Depression and all the other problems life had thrown at the town's inhabitants for several reasons. One is that the whites had all but shut the town's people - and the town's bank - out of investment opportunities that crashed during the Depression. That meant that people who had invested in this closed community - which was basically a closed, self-contained economy - were protected against loss. The people also took care of each other. When someone lost a crop or a barn, everyone pitched in to be certain that family did not suffer unduly. The people who had created Haven in the late 1800s were well aware that no one outside their community would take care of them, so they were careful to take care of each other. This attitude was probably easier to maintain while the town was small and was probably easy to duplicate while the new inhabitants of Ruby were a close-knit community with memories of the eventual downfall of their town interwoven with memories of how their town had been. But Ruby is bound to face the same situation which can be described as "growing pains." The next generation naturally doesn't embrace the ideals promoted by their fathers and a clash is inevitable. What's also inevitable is that external factors be blamed. Rather than believing that their children might simply want different things and that different ideals will reign with the new generation, the older members of the community look for someone else to blame and they eventually settle on the women of the Convent.

Sweetie refers to a demon and could be referring to Seneca when she says it. She talks about the fact that she "slogged" up the drive to the Convent but that she "let the demon do the rest." It's unclear whether she believes that Seneca is a demon or if there's an unseen demon with her and it is left to the reader to decide. The baby's cry that wakes Sweetie is significant and is the first concrete reference to the fact that the Convent is haunted by the children. Among them are the twins that Mavis Albright allowed to suffocate in her car but it seems likely that Arnette's child is also there. There may be



other spirits in the Convent as well and it seems possible that Connie's supernatural ability to heal - a fact that has yet to be fully described - could play a role in this. Mavis will later talk about the presence of the twins and say that she was desperate to keep up with them as they grew over the years.



# Divine

## Divine Summary

K.D. and Arnette are getting married and two preachers, Reverend Senior Pulliam and Richard Misner, are presiding. Pulliam begins with some seriously accusatory statements though the guests are not certain to whom the barbs are aimed. Some believe it's Richard because most people know he's talking with the young people and is stirring up sentiment among the "disobedients." Richard and Anna are talking about marriage though Anna isn't certain she could be the wife of a preacher in this small town. Their ceremony is turning ugly with Richard picking up where Pulliam left off. K.D. is angry over the situation, wishing that the service could be concluded so that he could move on with his life. By now, there is open animosity between the two families - the Morgans and the Fleetwoods - and Jeff has begun openly carrying a gun.

Billie Delia, daughter of Patricia Best, is Arnette's maid of honor. Billie is considered wild and most families of the town order their children to stay away from her. Despite this reputation, Billie is actually still a virgin while Arnette had lost her virginity at age fourteen to K.D. Billie is, however, "helplessly in love" with two brothers and is unable to make herself choose between them. Billie is skeptical about the match between Arnette and K.D., noting that K.D. had kept Arnette waiting for years and that he'd come to her only after Gigi had kicked him out of her bed. Billie has had trouble with her mother and when the two of them had an argument that turned violent, Billie had gone to Anna Flood and then to the Convent. The author notes that "What she saw and learned there changed her forever." Billie had left town after that stay and returned only a couple of times, including for Arnette's wedding.

Several of the women from the Convent arrive for the reception. They move to the community area around the oven where several boys are gathered, turn up some music and begin to dance. Meanwhile, Richard is praying that he can handle his anger over the evolving situation in Ruby. He can't really figure out what causes his intense rage - the town and its people or the times in general. He thinks about the fact that the older men constantly tell stories of their ancestors' trek to find a new home but that they never tell about their own efforts, and he worries that they are defining themselves only by the actions of their fathers and grandfathers. Richard also acknowledges that he is part of the reason the town is "unraveling," though he doesn't think that his introduction of ideals and information to the young people is wrong.

One of the women from the Convent is named Pallas Truelove. She's a young girl who never talks but cries almost constantly. The women leave early and on the drive back to the Convent, Mavis and Gigi have an argument that turns physical so that both women get out of the car and are rolling around on the ground, pounding each other.

Pallas is the daughter of a wealthy family. Her parents are divorced and she lives with her father. Her mother is Dee Dee - short for Divine. Pallas is dressed expensively when



she arrives and is obviously accustomed to expensive things. She is in high school still and had run away with a handsome young artist who worked at her school. She'd taken her car and the two of them had gone to her mother's house, several states away. There, Pallas had discovered that her boyfriend and mother were having an affair and she'd run away from there too. She'd eventually left her car and found her way to the Convent, meeting Billie Delia along the way. Seneca spends a great deal of time with Pallas, trying to help her through her grief.

Connie is spending a great deal of time in the basement where there is a lot of wine stored. She drinks almost continually and almost never comes out. One evening Seneca takes Pallas to the basement where Connie talks quietly to her and Pallas responds. Connie knows immediately that Pallas is pregnant though Pallas doesn't yet know. Pallas says that she should contact her father and that it's probably time for her to return home. In the middle of the night, Arnette arrives with a piece of wedding cake. She then asks, "Where is he? Or was it a she?" Mavis says later that they should have given Arnette "a doll or something." Mavis explains that Arnette had been at the Convent years earlier, had given birth with Connie attending and that Arnette had left, refusing to even look at the infant. Pallas asks what happened to the child and Mavis says that it's "with Merle and Pearl." Gigi interjects that the baby died. Later, Mavis tells Pallas to stop and listen to the laughter of the children.

## Divine Analysis

A great deal is revealed about K.D. as he's waiting for the marriage ceremony to be over. He thinks that he wants the marriage to be concluded so that he can eliminate the on-going arguments with his uncles and with Arnette's family. Though little is mentioned, it seems that his uncles are still angry over the pregnancy several years earlier. K.D. also believes that this marriage will eliminate his yearning for Gigi. Over the years when Arnette was away at college in Langston, Oklahoma, she wrote letters to him and though K.D. apparently didn't read them, he has them. He seems to believe that marrying her will eliminate the need to ever read them. These are all examples of K.D.'s immaturity.

As the town is preparing for the wedding and reception for K.D. and Arnette, buzzards are seen and are noted as a bad omen, depending on whether they remained nearby or traveled on. Actually, the buzzards have apparently discovered the bodies just a couple of miles away of the young couple with the ill baby who had traveled through Ruby on the night of the blizzard. Their bodies are later discovered by people in their car just a mile or so from the Convent. This is one of the important contrasts seen in this story. Steward and Deacon are constantly thinking about the lives of their ancestors. At one point, an ancestor had discovered a town with a sign warning that blacks were not welcome. This seems an incredible atrocity but the men of Ruby were not welcoming or particularly helpful when the young man and woman - obviously white - were lost with a blizzard imminent. This is the reverse of what happened to the ancestors of Ruby but the men don't seem to see it as the same at all.





The situation involving Arnette's child is more fully explained later. Essentially, she'd arrived at the Convent, pleaded for help and had later given birth to a child. However, Connie will later reveal that Arnette had caused the child to come too early and that it was too small to survive. The author hints at wrong doing - that someone killed the child - but it seems more likely that it simply died of complications related to the premature delivery. In any case, the child died. Mavis says that "they" love the baby. She is referring to the fact that Merle and Pearl - her twins who are dead - love the child Arnette bore.

# Patricia

## Patricia Summary

Patricia Best's father, Roger, has a lot of ideas for businesses but Patricia notes that his ideas are often little more than pipe dreams. Patricia, a teacher, is an avid genealogist with notebooks notes on all the major families of the town. She has a list of those who first arrived to settle Ruby. She says the group picked up several orphans, teenagers who had joined the group, and that they'd picked up a couple of babies that were in intolerable circumstances. After the group completed its journey, they were no longer a bunch of families but a cohesive group with a common goal and common memories of "the enormity of what happened to them." She goes on to say that their hatred of whites was "convulsive but abstract."

Patricia says that K.D. and Arnette, married the previous spring, are now expecting a child, according to Lone DuPres - who had been one of the "stolen babies." Lone was raised by a woman named Fairy DuPres who had been a midwife, a job now taken on by Lone. Patricia knows that the Fleetwoods blame Lone for the conditions of their grandchildren but Patricia says that Lone has delivered thirty-two children since the last of the Fleetwood children was born, and that none of them had any problem. Patricia sees discrimination in the town of Ruby, saying that in some places there are battles of blacks against whites or rich against poor. In Ruby, the darkest blacks look down on those with lighter skin as being of mixed blood and not the purity of the original founding families. An example of this is seen in the case of Menu who was forced to abandon the woman he'd brought home to Ruby from Virginia. She'd been "sandy haired" and his decision to give in to this pressure is the reason he drinks.

Patricia also writes in something of a journal, labeled with her own family name. Here it's revealed that Patricia is the daughter of Ruby, the town's first casualty, and that her father - the undertaker - had prepared her mother's body for burial. In fact, Patricia's mother was Roger's "first customer." In the journal entry on this night, Patricia writes that Billie Delia is spending too much time with two brothers, sons of Sally Blackhorse and Aaron Poole. Patricia writes as if she's writing to her mother, describing her mother's illness and the fact that no one had been willing to go for a doctor until it was too late. Her father had been away at mortuary school, arriving home just in time to tend his wife's body.

Roger Best was among those who had founded Ruby. When the Morgans announced their plan, Roger had sent for his wife and infant daughter, though Patricia says now that he was wise not to let the Morgans know his plan because Roger's wife was light-skinned and Roger wouldn't have been allowed to accompany the group if they'd been forewarned.



One day Richard Misner arrives to talk to Patricia. He asks where Billie is staying and Patricia says that she's in Demby. Richard says that "something" is tearing the Poole family apart and that Billie's name has been mentioned in connection with the trouble.

Patricia knows that Richard is teaching "militant" views to the young people and disapproves. She says that she knows nothing about Africa and doesn't want to know. She also says that his teaching is arrogance but he defends his position, saying that it's self-respect that he's teaching the young people. The two talk at the annual Christmas program. In the early years of the program, there had been nine Josephs and a Marys, one for each of the founding families that arrived in Ruby. Patricia notes that there are now only seven and Patricia knows that the Cato family has been eliminated from the elite but wonders what other family has been cut. She asks Roger but he pretends not to know what she's talking about.

## Patricia Analysis

It should be noted that K.D. is introduced as Elder Morgan's son. Elder is the brother of Steward and Deacon. However, when Patricia Best is working on her genealogy after the wedding of K.D. and Arnette, she makes a notation of "Coffee Smith, a.k.a. K.D." There follows a complicated explanation of K.D.'s parentage and it's left to the reader to figure out the connection but it seems possible that K.D.'s name is Coffee Smith Morgan. The author notes that the more Patricia learns about the people of Ruby, the more she despises them. She began the project of recording genealogies as a service to the town but it has long ago stopped being anything other than a way for Patricia to express her vindictive attitude. She makes snide suppositions in the margins of the notebooks,

Billie is considered wild by the town's people and they tout an incident when Billie as three as evidence of the kind of person she is. Billie had ridden a horse several times prior to this particular day and had loved the feel of the horse, scratchy against her skin, so much so that when she was offered another chance to ride she'd pulled off her panties. The town's people zeroed in on that, refusing to see it as an innocent action of a child.



# Consolata

## Consolata Summary

Consolata - known to the women who live with her and the people of Ruby as Connie - is spending a great deal of time in the basement in an effort to remain numb from the alcohol though she recalls with great detail how she came to live at the Convent. Connie is nine years old and living on the streets of Portugal when a group of nuns, including Sister Mary Magna, finds her. She's taken in and then taken out of the country to America. The nuns take over the building known now as the Convent. It had been built by a man who was arrested for embezzling and lost it all. A foundation took over the property and gave the use of it to the Catholic Church. Mary Magna is among those who operate the Christ the King School for Native Girls in the Convent until funding dries up. All the nuns except Mary Magna leave but she remains there with Connie.

One day Connie goes into Ruby with Mary Magna and watches the townspeople. She sees a young man riding a horse and he captures her attention. She tries not to think about him but eventually he "comes to her." By this time, Connie is thirty-three years old. The young man is four years younger. Connie is not a virgin, having been taken by men on the streets of Portugal prior to her rescue, but she hasn't experienced love of this kind. The man, who is not identified as Deacon Morgan, stops at the Convent to buy some peppers and tells her that he'll meet her the following Friday.

From the beginning, Connie knows that Deacon is married and he says that he plans to remain married. Their Friday meetings become regular until one day Deacon doesn't show up. Connie waits for a long time, then begins walking toward town, fearing that something's happened to him and that she wouldn't know what without going into town. She meets a truck on the road and the driver gives her a ride. She initially thinks it's Deacon but soon realizes that it's Steward. One day Deacon and Connie are making plans to meet at the Convent and she playfully bites at his lip, then licks off the blood. She later realizes this was a mistake but thinks nothing of it at the time. Deacon doesn't show up for their meeting at the Convent but later Soane arrives, pleading with Connie to help her get rid of the child that she's carrying. Though they don't introduce themselves or mention Deacon, Connie says she can smell him on Soane and knows who she is. Connie says that she doesn't plan to stop seeing Deacon. Soane leaves and loses the baby, a fact that Connie believes might have been caused by the fact that Soane walked all the way back to Ruby. Later, when the two women are friends, Soane says that she believes she lost the baby because of the hatred in her heart.

Over the years, Lone DuPres begins to stop in occasionally at the Convent. She hints at magic and Connie resists. One day Lone tells Connie that there's been an accident and the two of them rush to the road where they find a truck has wrecked with Scout Morgan at the wheel. He's apparently dead but Lone tells Connie that she can "go inside" Scout and save him. Connie gives in to her urging and does as she's asked. Scout is soon up



and walking and they leave. Connie then begins using that technique on Mary Magna, stepping "inside" the old woman and keeping her alive when she's very near death.

On the day Pallas goes to the cellar with Seneca, Connie immediately knows that the girl is pregnant and tells her so. When Arnette arrives the first time, Connie immediately understands that Arnette is "revolted" by the child she's carrying and telling the women at the Convent they could have it. Connie notes that the women had bought supplies for the infant and had been excited over the possibility of raising a child. Connie says that if Arnette hadn't been so dark, Connie would have realized that Arnette was hitting herself repeatedly in the stomach in an effort to miscarry. She'd then used a mop handle, poking it inside her and jabbing against the womb holding the baby so viciously that the child had come much early. The child was a boy and was breathing when he was born but Arnette had walked away without looking at the child, who was named Che by the women of the convent and who died a few days later.

Pallas returns to the Convent. She'd called her father who was relieved to hear from her and had gone home only to deal with him making demands and threatening lawsuits against the school for allowing one of their employees to kidnap Pallas. There is a scandal with Pallas wanting only to let it die out. Then she makes her way back to the Convent.

Connie knows that the women are all facing individual trials. Mavis is constantly thinking of ways to make money and has suggested a bed and breakfast. Gigi has found a box under the bathtub and is trying to get it out of its hiding place. She does finally get it out and discovers that it's full of bank certificates but they are worthless though the bank gives her fifty dollars for them for their historical value. Mavis is still very close to Connie. Mavis buys toys for Merle and Pearl every Christmas and is constantly amazed at how much they are growing. Connie's acceptance to Mavis's belief that Merle and Pearl are living in the Convent is vital to their relationship. Mavis also talks of a night visitor though he arrives less often these days. Meanwhile, Seneca spends a great deal of time cutting herself. As a child in foster homes, she'd discovered it was a way to gain favorable attention. Over the years, it has become a coping mechanism.

One night the women gather for dinner. Connie tells them that there are to be some changes in their lives. She says that anyone who has a place to go should leave now and those who stay should be willing to follow her commands. None of them leave. Connie then takes them all to the basement and has them lie on the cold floor. They position themselves however they want and then Connie draws an outline around each of them. Over the coming weeks, they fill in those outlines, drawing in details of their bodies. Pallas adds the baby she's carrying. The author notes that someone casually stopping by the Convent would notice nothing different but someone like Soane might realize that the "women were no longer haunted."



## Consolata Analysis

There's no real explanation of this magic Connie can perform. It seems that Lone is something of a supernatural being herself. She says later that she'd known as a tiny child that it was vital to be outside at a specific time and that's where Fairy DuPres found her. She is talking with Connie in the Convent on the day Scout Morgan is killed in the car wreck but Connie says that they were much too far away to have heard either the wreck or the shouts of the passengers upon discovering that Scout was dead. Connie seems to believe that it's something evil but tries to rationalize that it's something else. She says that if Mary Magna had known what Connie was doing to keep her alive, she'd have been very angry. It's after Connie revives Scout that she and Soane become friends.

After Connie finishes remembering about Arnette giving birth, her thoughts slip to a time when she is sitting on the porch and a man with a cowboy hat, shades and green eyes arrives. He is sitting near her on the porch, then, without moving, he is next to her. The man is obviously an apparition but it's left to the reader to determine the significance. There are other interesting characters that might be apparitions. One of those is a "night visitor" described by Mavis. Mavis is somewhat asexual in her desires though it makes her angry for Gigi to say that. This makes the night visitor more obscure. It's not clear whether this is a real person from Ruby taking advantage of Mavis's proximity or if it's an apparition. It's never fully explained and is left to the reader. Another is seen by Dovey Morgan but only at her house in town. She refers to this man only briefly and there seems to be nothing sexual in their relationship but Dovey depends on his brief, erratic visits for friendship. The man appears in daylight and seems real but is odd because Dovey doesn't know who he is. This is not typical in the small, closed community of Ruby.



# Lone

## Lone Summary

Lone is out one evening, gathering herbs, when she happens to wander near the community ovens. There she overhears the men talking and realizes that they are planning an attack on the Convent. She drives to the Convent and wakes the women who aren't alarmed at all.

Lone was a small child when the group of families looking to settle a new community wandered near her house. Her mother had died and she suddenly realized that she needed to be outside at a particular time. She positioned herself outside and was found and taken in by Fairy DuPres, a midwife. Fairy taught Lone everything she needed to know about the trade and Lone took Fairy's place when she died. Lone is now old herself and none of the young women in Ruby choose to allow her to deliver their babies, preferring instead to go to the hospital with white doctors and nurses where they are coddled and pampered for several days after the birth. Lone recalls all the works she's done for families over the years and is hurt by the rejection.

Lone knows that the men of Ruby are looking for a way to get rid of the women of the Convent. The men say it's because the women are evil and they blame a series of mishaps on that evil. One event is the death of a young couple in a car. The men argue that the couple was a short distance from the Convent and that they were bound to have seen the lights from the Convent, but died anyway. Their conclusion is that there's evil in the Convent. Lone says that the Fleetwoods want to blame someone for the handicaps of the Fleetwood children born to Jeff and Sweetie though she's delivered lots of healthy babies and the first of those children was born before the women arrived at the Convent. There are other stories of things that support the theory that the women of the Convent are involved in all sorts of abominations. One of those is that a farmer found marijuana growing in one of the fields but the truth is that K.D. planted that marijuana there at Gigi's behest. Deacon believes Connie has given Soane potions to make her "less loving," never considering that his affair with Connie probably did that.

At the Convent, the women dance in the rain. Pallas, with her infant - a healthy son - joins them. Lone spreads the word among the men of Ruby not involved in the raid on the Convent and several join to try to stop the Morgans. Meanwhile, the men - including Steward, Deacon and K.D. - storm the Convent. Deacon kills the first woman he sees. The others from Ruby arrive, including Soane and Dovey. Steward and Deacon are standing near each other and as Deacon prepares to pull the trigger, Steward intervenes but isn't fast enough and Connie is killed. The rest of the women have scattered to the fields and some of the men say they shot them down. Everyone leaves and Roger goes to the Convent later to pick up the bodies but finds none.



## Lone Analysis

Lone is something of an oddity and there are people in the town who believe she can read minds. As is the case with anything of this nature, the people are at least somewhat suspicious with some of them naturally looking for the evil side of the gift. Another interesting aspect of Lone is that she can see and read signs and omens that are overlooked or misread by others. She points to the buzzards seen on the day of K.D. and Arnette's wedding. Lone says that the buzzards were seen as an omen related to the young couple but that they'd actually been searching for the death they could smell from the air - a young couple with an infant in the car. Lone hints at a darker undercurrent here, even more so than the affairs and lies that have been revealed up to this point. The people refuse to have the "white law" officials in the area. They are worried about interacting with the law, at least in part, because of bad situations prior to their settling of Ruby. Their experiences have created a mistrust that runs very deep. But they are willing to do a lot in order to cover up anything that might require judicial intervention. In the case of these travelers, the men of Ruby are willing to cover up the deaths in order to keep the law from snooping around.

There's an interesting scene with Deacon and Steward facing off just as one of them shoots Connie. It's noted that the twins have not looked each other in the eye for decades. It's not explained why this is the case but it seems that Deacon may be becoming less hard-hearted as he ages. It may also be that the two men don't like what they see in the other - one recognizing weakness where there has never been any and the other seeing arrogance and evil that they had shared as young men. Whatever the reason, it's noted that the two men never look directly at each other. However, when one of them is about to shoot Connie, Deacon reaches out to stop Steward. The gun is fired anyway and Connie is killed. What's interesting is that Steward says that they were right to take this step and points out the signs of witchcraft - including the drawings on the basement floor. But the other twin says that "We bear the responsibility." It's never explained which of the twins fired the shot. Their wives will struggle with this as time passes. Deacon seems to have had the most reason to kill because he is remembering the shame of his affair with Connie. But it may also be that Deacon cared for Connie at some point. It seems mostly likely that Steward killed Connie and Deacon tried to stop him but it's left to the reader to decide.

It's interesting that most of those who try to stop the massacre are not particularly interested in saving the women of the Convent. They are actually acting on self-preservation. They know that if a group of women are killed and it's discovered that there was foul play involved, the "white law" will become involved. While the men don't seem particularly worried about protecting the Morgans or anyone else involved, they are adamant that they don't want the law to have any reason to come around Ruby.





# Save-Marie

## Save-Marie Summary

Mourners are gathered at the gravesite of the Fleetwoods' youngest child, a little girl her mother named Save-Marie with the obvious hope that the name would become an answered prayer. There are a couple of versions of what happened at the Convent. Some believe that at least one survived and took the bodies of the rest, fleeing in the old Cadillac. Few believe that Lone is telling the truth when she says that she overheard the Morgans and others planning the attack. Lone believes that, because there wasn't intervention from the white law and no retribution, that the town of Ruby has been given "a second chance." With no bodies, some of the men quickly gloss over the entire event. Those who do want to report it to the law know that if the police come snooping around, they won't find any bodies at the Convent but might find the bodies of the couple and their infant in the car.

Deacon Morgan always drives to the bank he and his brother own - Morgan Savings and Loan. But on a morning after the massacre he walks. He is not dressed as impeccably as usual and is barefoot when he walks up to Richard Misner's door. Deacon tells Richard that he realizes that he's become what the founders of Haven had hated - a man who is set up to be judge and jury with the power to rout anyone who doesn't conform.

One day Richard and Anna go to the Convent to see if they can find evidence of what really happened. They see the markings on the cellar floor though Anna puts them down to women trying to "bridle" the "slavers" that hold them. Anna and Richard try to figure out what happened but have a vision - Anna sensing a door and Richard sensing a window - that hastens their leaving, though they aren't sure what it means. Billie knows that the women will return, and that it's only a matter of "where and when."

The final section of the book begins with Manly Gibson, a prisoner serving life, out in the sunshine on a work detail. He sees a group of women near the river and realizes one of them is his daughter, Gigi. He manages to get closer and they talk briefly with her promising to write. Dee Dee Truelove is at home alone when she sees Pallas approaching with an infant clutched to her chest. Pallas goes upstairs and finds a pair of shoes she'd left on her last visit before getting into a car with some other women. Sally Albright is in a dinner when she sees her mother. They sit together, share a meal and talk, and then are outside without Sally realizing how it happened. Seneca is standing on a street when her sister, Jean, sees her. They have only a very brief encounter before Jeff, Jean's husband, calls her away.



## Save-Marie Analysis

While there's obviously no wrong-doing on the part of the people of Ruby with regard to the couple who froze in their car with their infant, it seems that at least some of the people feel guilty about the deaths. They don't report having found the bodies and don't want the law snooping around the Convent for fear that the bodies will be discovered. There's no wrongdoing so the only real "crime" here was in not offering the family shelter with the blizzard about to hit.

Deacon tells Richard about his grandfather, Zachariah, who had been a twin as well. Zachariah and his brother had gone their separate ways because one had seen something in the other. Deacon now says that it wasn't that one was ashamed of the other, but that one had recognized the same faults in himself and was ashamed of that.

The stories of the encounters of the women with their families are obviously not real. In the case of Gigi with her father, Manly Gibson, he is part of a work detail and there are many guards patrolling nearby. Manly sees Gigi and recognizes her, then tries to get closer to her. If there had been guards who could also see the women, this would never have been allowed. Also, Manly asks Gigi if she has a necklace he'd given her and she says that she does, though in fact that necklace had been lost many years earlier. In the case of Seneca, she is standing in a street being treated for cuts to her hand when Jean comes up to her. But when she looks down at her hands after being treated, there are no gaping wounds as there should have been. These encounters are obviously opportunities for the women to see those they loved and those who hurt them.

The book ends with a three-paragraph section in which there are two women - one coal black who is probably Connie - and a younger woman. It's noted that one of them is called "Piedad" and that she sings about "solace." The scene is described as "the ease of coming back to love begun." A ship arrives and Piedad looks to see the "disconsolate" passengers and crew. The final line of the book reads, "Now they will rest before shouldering the endless work they were created to do down here in paradise."



# Characters

## Connie

Also known as Consolata, she is taken by a group of nuns from the streets of Portugal and a life of prostitution at the age of nine. Connie has an incredible devotion for the nuns, specifically Mary Magna. She grows into adulthood with the nuns who vow that they'll care for her always. As she ages, the only thing Connie really fears is that she will die alone. Connie is living in the Convent with only the aged and ailing Mary Magda when Mavis arrives. Connie welcomes Mavis and exhibits her accepting nature in her nonjudgmental attitude when Mavis says that her twins are living in the Convent with the women. Connie has a gift or magic power that allows her to see things that aren't readily available to others. She's the first to say that Pallas is expecting a child. Connie also has the gift of healing, though it's something she initially believes to be evil. She is able to heal Scout Morgan after a fatal car crash and she held Mary Magna to life long after the old woman's body had given out, even though she knows Mary Magna would have hated that. Connie has an affair with Deacon Morgan, a fact that should have created a rift between Connie and Deacon's wife. In fact, Soane Morgan and Connie become friends and Soane owes Connie even more gratitude because of Connie's healing of Scout.

## Mavis Albright

A woman who lets her twins die of suffocation in a car while she is inside a grocery store buying wieners. Mavis feels guilt for allowing the deaths of her children though she denies that she was away for more than a few minutes and that guilt drives her to believe that her husband and remaining children are planning to kill her. This prompts Mavis to leave her family behind and she winds up at the convent where she settles in with Connie and lives for many years. Mavis is closer to Connie than the others though each of the women claims that Connie favors them. Mavis claims that her twins, Merle and Pearl, live in the Convent with the women. She says that she can tell by their voices and their laughter that they are growing older and this thought occupies a great deal of her time. Mavis is also certain that Arnette's child, the boy who died soon after his premature birth, was "with" Merle and Pearl. Mavis spends most of her life afraid of arrest for having killed her twins. She believes that her husband is searching for her and that there's an arrest warrant out for her, both which make her unwilling to go back and seek out her remaining three children, even though she puts herself in a position to be able to see them at school.



## **Gigi**

Her name is really Grace. She is a young woman who arrives in Ruby dressed as a street walker would be and who is soon involved in an affair with K.D. Morgan. Gigi is tough but also fears being hurt.

## **Arnette Fleetwood**

Girlfriend of K.D. Morgan early in the book, she flees to the Convent where she miscarries the baby she's carrying. She goes away to college and returns later to marry K.D. and have a family with him. She is the aunt of Save-Marie Fleetwood.

## **K.D. Morgan**

His real name is Coffee but he's called K.D. which is short for Kentucky Derby, the nickname given to him after he won a race in the newly-settled town of Ruby. K.D. fathers an illegitimate child with Arnette Fleetwood. Though that child doesn't survive, he and Arnette later marry and have a family. He is the nephew of Steward and Deacon Morgan.

## **Sweetie Fleetwood**

Wife of Jeff and mother of Save-Marie, she is apparently devoted to her children though all of them are severely handicapped or diseased. Sweetie is possibly reacting to the strain of constantly caring for those children when she walks away from the house and goes to the Convent.

## **Dovey Morgan**

Wife of Steward Morgan and sister of Soane, Dovey is a firm believer in her ability to become a good wife and mother when she and Steward marry. However, as time passes, she becomes disillusioned and she eventually thinks that at least some of the misfortune that befalls her family is her fault.

## **Steward Morgan**

Husband of Dovey, he has no children but spends a great deal of time with his nephew, K.D. He is Steward's twin and the two men look a lot alike but grow significantly apart over the years.



## Deacon Morgan

Husband of Soane, he is Steward Morgan's twin. The two men own the bank and are credited by most of the older generation as having been the town's major founders. Some people resent Deacon and Steward though others admire them. Deacon begins to see something in Steward that he hates even more because they are twins and he can see it also in himself.

## Soane Morgan

Sister of Dovey and wife of Deacon Morgan, Soane is mother of the two boys - Easter and Scout - who are killed in the war. She is fully aware of the affair between Deacon and Connie and goes to the Convent while pregnant with a third child, possibly to confront Connie. Soane miscarries after that visit. Years later, Connie brings Scout back to life and Soane loves her for this gift, even after he dies in the war. Soane and Connie become good friends and Soane is there when Connie is killed.

## Pallas Truelove

A young girl who runs away with an artist who works at her school. The two go to her mother's house where the young man and Pallas's mother are soon engaged in an affair. Pallas is heartbroken and runs away, eventually winding up at the Convent. She is devastated by grief upon her arrival and doesn't talk at all for some time. Connie realizes immediately that Pallas is pregnant though Pallas herself doesn't realize it for some time.

## Seneca

A young girl who was abandoned and learns during her time in foster care that self-mutilation garners positive attention. Seneca is hitchhiking when she sees Sweetie Fleetwood walking in a storm and gets out to walk with her. That's how she ends up at the Convent though when Sweetie leaves, Seneca remains. She is a caring individual and is the one who tries to help Pallas as Pallas grieves.



# Objects/Places

## The Convent

A mission building that was home to a Catholic school for Indian girls and that was the scene of the confrontation between the women who lived there and the men of Ruby.

## Ruby

The name given the town in Oklahoma where the Morgan twins and others go to start a new life.

## Paterson

Where Mavis Albright's mother lives and where she goes immediately after leaving home.

## Newark

Where Mavis has the Cadillac painted.

## Demby

A town near Ruby where most of the people of Ruby shop.

## Wichita

Where Seneca goes to ask Eddie's mother for money for his lawyer fees.

## Langston, Oklahoma

Where Arnette goes to college.

## Portugal

Where Connie is living when she is picked up by the nuns.



## **Christ the King School for Native Girls**

The original name of the Convent.

## **Morgan Savings and Loan**

The bank owned by the Morgan twins.



# Themes

## Clinging to the Past

One of the main themes of the story is the desire to have things remain the same. The people of Ruby, especially the older people, can tell verbatim the story of their ancestors' quest to found the town of Haven. The story is told and retold so much that when an outsider arrives - Richard Misner - he wonders about the fact that the people seem to cling to the minute details of that story but never tell the story of their own efforts to found a town of their own. An important example of this is seen when the men of Haven pack up the oven and move it - including every brick - to the new location. This occurs despite the fact that there is limited space for moving. When they arrive in Ruby, they put the oven back together and create a community gathering place. However, the oven doesn't hold the same significance as it had in the past. People have ovens in their homes now and there's no need for daily gatherings at the oven. The young people begin spending time there for recreation and someone paints on the over - an action the town fathers see as outright desecration. This clinging to the past includes taking the law into their own hands though the younger generation eventually begin to speak up for themselves, demanding respect and refusing to accept the word of their elders without being given reasons.

## Prejudice

Prejudice can be defined as a hatred or mistrust of anything different. This is especially true in the case of the people who settle in Ruby. They remember being victimized by whites and recall the stories told by their parents and grandparents of the devastation of prejudice. Armed with this, they head to Ruby with the intention of creating a utopian society that will allow nothing different inside in order to maintain the status quo. Having been subjected to prejudice, the majority of the people of Ruby resort to a heightened sense of prejudice themselves. When one of their own - a young man named Menu - chooses a "sandy-haired" woman as his wife, the people refuse to accept her. Menu complies with the ruling but throws himself into constant drink. The people of the town eliminate self-blame by saying that Menu is drinking because of his experiences in the war. In another instance, Patricia says that the people of Ruby have always waged the battle of black against white, but are now going so far as to be prejudiced against light-skinned blacks as being something less than pure. This prejudice is seen clearly when the men attack the Convent, hating the women who are different from what the men believe to be normal.

## A Desire to Be Separate

The people who found Ruby are determined to create a safe society. Their efforts are dramatic in that they leave their homes and travel to find a new place to create a





community - just as their ancestors as done. This desire to be separate is so strong that the people of Ruby don't report the death of a young couple and an infant who froze to death because it would mean that the "white law" has a reason to be in the area. When the men of Ruby attack the women of the Convent, there are those who are angry, not because the actions are wrong, but because it will bring in the law. The fact that this doesn't happen is seen by Lone DuPres as "a second chance" for Ruby. This desire to be separate isn't necessarily a bad thing and is practiced by groups, especially religious groups, in an effort to avoid situations they see as temptations. But the people of Ruby truly take it to another level. There is no diner in town because that would encourage people to stop. There is no hotel for the same reason. An interesting point is that some people recognize this desire for what it is. Patricia notes that people constantly block her out and that she hates it, but when Richard Misner tries to talk to her, she blocks him out in the same manner.

# Style

## Point of View

The story is written in third person and the point of view varies from one character to another over the course of the book. There is a limited omniscient perspective though the reader has to put together a series of perspectives in order to gain a full view of the events. For example, the author tells of an affair undertaken by Connie and the reader knows that her lover is one of the Morgan twins from Ruby, but does not know which until the very end of the book when the perspective has switched to another character. This takes place continuously throughout the story so that the reader comes to look forward to the changing points of view in order to gain a different perspective and answer questions left unanswered by the focus on each character. The perspectives are skewed by the fact that each of the characters has personal perceptions, ideals and prejudices. Specifically the prejudices related to race are used by the author to skew the perspectives of various characters. These are in keeping with the attitudes and actions real people in those situations would likely have, making the characters - at least to some degree - more believable.

## Setting

The story is set in the fictional town of Ruby, Oklahoma, in the 1970s with flashbacks and recollections of the pasts of the various characters. The town is realistic in some ways but there are aspects of the town that are not believable. The time frame and some of the events are real and this lends an air of credibility that might otherwise be lacking. For example, one of the pastors talks about the death of Martin Luther King Jr. and the effect of that leader's death on the civil rights movement. Both the civil rights movement and King's death are real events and the use of these as catalysts for events in Ruby helps make the town seem real. It also seems possible that the personal relationships that existed in Ruby could have actually occurred though the depth of those described by this author seems somewhat fantastic. The descriptions of locations, people and events in the story are adequate. There are several settings with regard to both time and place. The town of Ruby itself and its outlying properties and the old mission building known as "the convent" are among those. Specific settings, such as a particular house or room are not given a great deal of description but this does not really detract from the story. Another specific setting is the area around the community oven. This becomes an important part of the story because it represents the ideals on which Ruby was founded.

## Language and Meaning

The plot of the story is fairly simple but the subplots and the presentation are convoluted to the point that readers may have trouble keeping track of the events and people



involved. There is a great deal of imagery and many aspects of the story are left to the interpretation of the reader. For example, all the women who had lived at the Convent make appearances to their loved ones after the shooting but it seems evident that they weren't really there. The reader is left to determine the significance of both the women's appearances and the people to whom they appear. There are not many difficult words but the words used are presented in a manner that some readers may have difficulty following. There are some curse words in the book and some references to sexual encounters. There are also some dated references to blacks, specifically the word "Negro" and others that are slang. The book was written in 1999 and the use of these words, at least to some degree, is a product of the period. Other uses are an effort to make the story seem realistic to the time and physical setting.

The reader should be aware that there is talk throughout the book about the invincibility of the people of Ruby. It seems that some think that the people of Ruby are somehow protected and are immortal. The death of the little girl, Save-Marie, sets people wondering if this has changed. The ideal is not thoroughly examined in this study guide because of a lack of space but also because the mentions of immortality don't really stand up to close scrutiny and are one of the many aspects of this story that are left to the reader's interpretation.

## Structure

The story is divided into a series of chapters or sections that are named for various women who are characters of the book. The first of these is Ruby, for whom the town in Oklahoma is named. The other chapters are Mavis, Grace, Seneca, Divine, Patricia, Consolata, Lone and Save-Marie. Save-Marie is the only chapter with two sections, with the second focusing back on the events of the fight at the Convent. The length of the chapters varies greatly. For example, Grace is only twenty-four pages in length. Seneca is more than fifty pages. The book is three hundred, twenty pages. There is an interesting page early in the book, prior to the first chapter. This page is blank except for the single word, "Lois." There is no explanation for that page. The chapters are titled by name only without number or any other identifiers. Each of the chapters begins with a page that is blank except for the name of the chapter. The next page in each chapter is blank. Chapter titles are on even numbered pages and any chapter that ends on an even-numbered page also includes a blank page between the end of that chapter and the title page for the next chapter.

The story does not flow in chronological order and this may create problems for some readers. Instead, the book is presented as a series of perspectives and the perspective from one person or a group of people is presented to fruition before reverting to some other perspective. The next chapter may pick up at some point that occurred during the previous chapter or may actually pick up prior to the events of the previous chapter, as is the case in the chapter titled "Consolata."



## Quotes

Twenty men; now twenty-five. Circling the circling cars. Ninety miles from the nearest O for operator and ninety from the nearest badge." Ruby, Page 13

"There were no whites (moral or malevolent) around to agitate or incense them, make them ugly-up on the oven and defy the adults. In fact, local citizens were prospering, had been on a roll for more than a decade: food dollars for beef, for wheat, gas rights sold, oil fueling purchases and backing speculation." Seneca, Page 102

"The man whose hand was healing from a chopping block mistake would not get to the second clean bandage before a fresh cord was finished and stacked. Having been refused by the world in 1890 on their journey to Oklahoma, Haven residents refused each other nothing, were vigilant to any need or shortage." Seneca, Page 108

"Whatever else, thought Anna, the Convent women had saved the day. Nothing like other folks' sins for distractions." Divine, Page 159

"They were different from other communities in only a couple of ways: beauty and isolation. All of them were handsome, some exceptionally so." Divine, Page 160

"Usually, but not always, white against black. Now they saw a new separation: light-skinned against black." Patricia, Page 194

"Lone didn't visit often, but when she did she gave Consolata information that made her uneasy. Consolata complained that she did not believe in magic; that the church and everything hld forbade its claims to knowingness and its practice." Consolata, page 244

"Connie never questioned the reality of the twins and for Mavis, who had no intention of explaining or defending what she knew to be true, that acceptance was central." Consolata, page 260

"There were nervous questions, a single burst of frightened giggling, a bit of pouting and simulated outrage, but in no time at all they came to see that they could not leave the one place they were free to leave." Consolata, Page 262

In was said she could read minds, a gift from something that, whatever it was, was not God, and which she had used as early as two, when she positioned herself to be found in the yard when her mother was dead in the bed. Lone denied it: she believed everybody knew what other people were thinking." Lone, Page 272

Had it not been for Luther Beauchamp - who told the most damning story - and Pious, Deed, Sands and Aaron - who corroborated much of Lone's version, the whole thing might have been sanitized out of existence. Yet even they could not bring themselves to report unnatural deaths in a house with no bodies, which might lead to the discover of natural deaths in an automobile full of bodies." Save-Marie, Page 187



"They think they have outfoxed the whiteman when in fact they imitate him. They think they are protecting their wives and children, when in fact they are maiming them." Save-Marie, Page 306



## Topics for Discussion

Why do the men of Ruby attack the Convent? Describe, in detail, how they reason that they are right to do so. What is the truth about all these reasons?

Two of the women at the Convent have affairs - Connie and Gigi. Describe their affairs. Describe the men they have affairs with. What are the outcomes of each? How do the affairs differ? How are they similar?

Identify: Soane Morgan? Deacon Morgan? Steward Morgan? Patricia Best? Dovey Morgan? K.D. Morgan? Arnette Fleetwood? Sweetie Fleetwood? Save-Marie Fleetwood? Lone DuPres? How are each of these related? How are each connected in the town's business?

Compare the five women who live at the Convent at the time of the attack. How does each come to be there? What are the dynamics of the relationships between the women? What do they have in common? How are they different?

There are several supernatural aspects of this story. Describe three and explain what might really have happened in each instance.

Compare Gigi and Arnette. How are they similar? How are they different?

Why was Ruby founded? How did the families come to live there? What is the attitude to outsiders? Give an example of that attitude.

It could be said that Ruby was an effort to create a utopian society. Do you believe that's what the founders had in mind? Did their efforts work out? Support your answers.