

Small Great Things Study Guide

Small Great Things by Jodi Picoult

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Plot Summary

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Ruth Jackson grew up in a poor part of the city, and her mother worked as a maid for the Hallowells, a wealthy white family in Manhattan. As a child, Ruth showed a high level of intelligence and earned a spot at an elite school. Her mother taught Ruth about the importance of appearances, and Ruth spends most of her life struggling to fit into a white-dominated world and profession.

As a child, Ruth and her sister Adisa occasionally went with their mother to the Hallowell home. They sometimes played with the daughter of the family, Christina. There, Ruth learned more about the division between the races though as an adult, she realized that at least some of those issues were of her own making. One day, the three children were present when Mrs. Mina Hallowell went into early labor and gave birth to a son with only Ruth's mother to help her. Ruth noted that the three children witnessed the event, and each had a different reaction. Christina had her child through a surrogate mother; Rachel had five children; and, Ruth became a labor and delivery nurse.

Ruth is the only black nurse in her department when Brittany Bauer gives birth to a son she names Davis. She and her husband, Turk, are skinheads and do not bother to hide their prejudice. Ruth takes care of Davis for only a few minutes before Turk objects and the supervisor removes Ruth from the case. Ruth is understandably angry but obeys the demand. A couple of days later, a pediatrician performs a circumcision on Davis. Nurses must observe infants following the procedure, but the nurse assigned to Davis' case is called away for an emergency C-section. Policy requires that the supervisor help with transporting the patient to the emergency room, meaning that Ruth is literally the only nurse available to watch Davis.

She steps into the nursery where the infant is sleeping to monitor him, keeping in mind that she has been told not to touch him. When Davis stops breathing, Ruth goes against those orders, trying the minor steps that sometimes start an infant breathing again. Those steps have no effect, and the supervisor arrives at that moment. She asks what Ruth is doing, and Ruth answers that she is not doing anything. The medical staff does everything possible, but the baby dies.

Turk files a complaint with the police and an investigation ensues. Ruth had worried that she would lose her job because she took action, but it then appears that she might be put in prison because she said she had done nothing. As she prepares for trial, she connects with a public defender named Kennedy McQuarrie. Kennedy is white and believes that she has no prejudices. She and Ruth have a connection that borders on friendship as Kennedy learns what everyday life is like for Ruth and Kennedy discovers that she - like most people - does have some prejudices. In Kennedy's case, she goes overboard trying to seem unbiased.



Ignoring all her basic rules in a trial of this nature, Kennedy allows Ruth to take the stand to tell her own version of events and she then talks at length about race and prejudice. Ruth also tells the truth - that she had taken action when Davis stopped breathing, though she was told not to touch the infant. When Kennedy presents evidence that Davis died because of complications related to his mother's gestational diabetes, the jury becomes irrevocably hung and the judge grants Kennedy's motion to dismiss all charges.

Years pass. Ruth becomes a nurse practitioner; Brittany commits suicide. Turk realizes that his hatred has no purpose in his life. He becomes a speaker, talking against the hate that rules so many people and events. He marries, takes his wife's last name to distance himself from his past, and has a daughter. One day, he arrives at a clinic, and Ruth takes care of his daughter. He is not certain if she recognizes him, but he is happy to see that she is thriving after the ordeal.



Stage One: Early Labor, Ruth

Summary

As the story opens, Ruth talks about the “miracle” that happened at the home of the Hallowell family where Ruth's mother worked as a servant. The wealthy family had a daughter, Christina, who was a little older than Ruth and a little younger than Ruth's sister, Rachel. Rachel later changed her name to Adisa. (For the sake of clarity, she is referred to as Adisa in this guide except in direct quotes.) One day, a snowstorm hit the city. Ruth and Adisa went with their mother to the Hallowell home, as they sometimes did. Mina Hallowell went into labor unexpectedly, and Ruth's mother delivered the little boy before the ambulance arrived. Ruth, Christina, and Adisa witnessed the birth. The event impacted each girl differently. Christina chose to have her only child through a surrogate. Adisa had five children of her own. Ruth became a labor and delivery nurse. Ruth says the miracle that day was that Mina reached out to Ruth's mother for help. Despite their socioeconomic, education, and racial differences. Christina and Ruth held hands with equal disregard for the things that made them different. The chapter ends with Ruth saying that she has waited her entire life to see that happen again.

Analysis

The titles of the sections are significant because they serve as an analogy for what is happening at that point in the lives of the various characters. Ruth's life was in “early labor” as she watches her mother deliver the Hallowell's son. The event had an impact on the three girls who saw it and affected each in a different way.

There are several details offered up in this brief introductory section that give information about Ruth's life. She lived with her mother and sister, Adisa. Her mother was a maid who went to work even when the weather was horrible. Ruth says that Mina and Christina Hallowell needed Ruth's mother. It was more acceptable for them to all travel through the bad weather to reach the Hallowell house than to leave the two Hallowell women alone, especially on a day when Sam Hallowell was out of town.

One of the main themes of the book is prejudice. There is no doubt that prejudice is alive and well throughout the world. While race is one basis for prejudice, there are hundreds of others. Ruth feels that she has faced a constant flow of prejudice and, by the final words of that chapter, says there are no situations in which prejudice does not become a factor. Some readers may feel this is true, while others may feel it is an exaggeration. It is left to the individual reader to decide.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Ruth's childhood, based on information revealed in this section. Keep the list and add details as they emerge in coming chapters.



Discussion Question 2

What can the reader assume about Ruth's mother, based on her actions in this chapter?

Discussion Question 3

How did the birth of the Hallowell baby impact each of the three girls who witnessed it? Do the different reactions seem believable?

Vocabulary

encircled, associates, emerged, tile, miniature, crooned, swooped, seamless, membranes



Chapters 2 – 4: Stage One: Active Labor, Ruth, Turk, and Ruth

Summary

In the second chapter, “Ruth,” Ruth says people have different needs, such as a mother who does not care how she looks during the delivery but wants to put on makeup, brush her hair, and look good after the birth. She was in the same situation when she gave birth to her only son, Edison, and worried that her hair was overly frizzy. Ruth arrives at work at Mercy-West Haven Hospital. There is a charge nurse named Marie on duty. Ruth and one other nurse, Corinne, are the two nurses who will care for all the labor and delivery patients that day. Marie congratulates Ruth on the fact that her son, Edison, is on the honors list for his grades at school. Ruth is proud, but she feels it is impolite to seem proud. Marie gives Ruth and Corinne their assignments. Ruth is to take care of two patients who have already gone through delivery, including Brittany Bauer. Her husband, Turk, is in the room with her. They have a newborn son, Davis, who is scheduled for a circumcision. Lucille is the nurse who was with the Bauers throughout the night. She gives Ruth additional information, including that there is “something a little off” about Turk (17). Ruth enters the room and immediately notices that Brittany seems panicked. Brittany holds tightly to the baby and Ruth takes that as new-mother protectiveness. She hears a slight heart murmur and relates that information, adding that the condition usually heals by itself in newborns. She then has to take Davis to a warm table across the room for a more thorough examination, which is routine. She hears Turk and Brittany furiously whispering for a minute, then they stop talking.

She returns Davis to Brittany's arms and suggests they try to get him to nurse. Brittany flinches, and Turk demands to see Ruth's supervisor. Ruth leaves the room and talks to Marie. She assures Marie she has done nothing wrong. When Marie and Ruth return, Turk says he does not want Ruth, “or anyone who looks like her,” caring for Davis (20). It takes Ruth a second to realize they are not angry because she has done something wrong, but because she is black.

The third chapter is titled “Turk.” The first black man he met had “killed” Turk's older brother in a wreck, but the jury could not agree on a verdict, and the man was not convicted (21).

The story briefly reverts to Turk and Brittany's trip to the hospital when Brittany was about to deliver. Turk recalls his fear as he thinks about the horrible world this baby will be born into. Turk then picks up memories of his childhood. After his brother's death, his mother drank incessantly, lost her job, and moved in with her father. Turk's grandfather was tough. He once left Turk alone with no money, forcing Turk to walk for miles. When Turk caught up with his grandfather five hours later, he lashed out. His grandfather was proud, and began teaching Turk to fight.



When Turk was 15, he spent a month with his father and met a young man named Raine Tesco. Raine provided friendship when Turk desperately needed it. Raine invited Turk to attend the Invisible Empire camp with him where a man let Turk shoot a gun. The targets were all blacks and one was the image of Martin Luther King, Jr. Raine introduced Turk to Francis Mitchum, an older man who had been involved in the skinhead movement for years. The members had tattoos of spiderwebs, and each fly in the web represented someone they had killed. Francis had 10. Francis spewed anti-black rhetoric.

The story picks up at the hospital just after Davis' birth. Turk and Brittany are discussing names and end up with Davis. They are happy with the white nurse, Lucille, but are upset when Ruth arrives. While Ruth is checking on Davis, Brittany and Turk discuss the situation. They are both upset and Turk demands to see Ruth's supervisor.

The story reverts to years earlier. Raine and some other young men took Turk to a gay bar where Raine's friends beat up the first two men who exited. Turk was shocked to find his father leaving the bar and realized he had missed all the signs that his father was gay. Turk attacked with a vengeance and Raine had to pull him away when police sirens grew near. Turk's actions became legend among the skinheads.

The story picks up at the hospital. Turk tells Marie, the supervisor nurse, that he wants a white nurse. He says the hospital routinely takes steps to make their patients feel comfortable, and issues veiled threats about making a public issue about their rights as parents. Marie gives in and puts a note in Davis's file.

The story reverts to Turk's youth. He returned home after his mother's death and found transcripts of the trial related to his brother's wreck. His brother, Tanner, had been high and the skid marks proved that he was on the wrong side of the center line. Turk still believed the black man was to blame for Tanner's death, because the wreck would not have occurred if the man was not on the road.

The fourth chapter is titled "Ruth." Ruth has never been in a situation like the one involving Turk and she prides herself on being a good nurse. She takes a short break to the cafeteria. When she returns, there is a hot pink Post-it note on Davis's file, that reads, "No African American personnel to care for this patient." (43) Marie equates it with a family who would cite a religious preference. Ruth is angry, but says she will obey Marie's rule to not touch the baby. At the end of her shift, Ruth sees all the white staff members leaving for the shift change, and realizes she is "tired of pretending" race does not matter (46).

The story reverts to Ruth's childhood. She was a gifted student and attended Dalton, the private school Christina attended. Ruth never really fit in with her fellow students, who were white and wealthy, and she got some negative feed back when she gained admittance to Cornell with some saying she got in only because she was black. Ruth's mother insisted that Ruth would succeed because of who she was, not because of her skin color. Remembering her own education, Ruth and her husband moved to a middle-class predominately-white neighborhood so that Edison would attend a good school.



When Ruth reaches home after the confrontation with Turk, Edison is upset. His best friend, Bryce, is black, and Edison planned to ask Bryce's sister to homecoming. Bryce's reaction was angry, saying their parents would never allow his sister to date a black boy.

Ruth thinks about her childhood. She was lighter in color than Adisa, and they were both fully aware of that. As an adult, Ruth wonders if her desire for a better life was at least partly possible because she had “a head start” because of her skin color (53). As an adult, Adisa still lives in Harlem, in a bad neighborhood where drugs are rampant. The day after Davis's birth, Ruth and Adisa meet to get their nails done. Ruth says that Adisa loves to play the role of a victim of her race and prejudice. Unexpectedly, Adisa says Marie's demand that Ruth stay off the case is not Ruth's fault, but does say it is what happens to blacks. Ruth counters, naming some successful blacks, but Adisa says they are all light-skinned. Ruth is supposed to be off that day, but Lucille is sick and she asks Ruth to take her shift, meaning Ruth will work a double shift.

At work, Ruth checks Davis's chart, telling herself that she just wants to be certain someone has scheduled a consultation for the faint heart murmur Ruth noticed during her initial examination. The Post-it note is still in place. The next morning, Ruth takes a brief break in the room that was once used as a nursery, but is now where routine procedures, such as circumcisions, are performed. Corinne arrives with Davis. Ruth asks if the baby has begun to nurse, knowing that Brittany was having problems during the first few hours. Corinne says Davis is still sluggish. The doctor asks Ruth about the baby, not realizing Ruth has been removed from his care. The situation grows tense, and, in an effort to “make a joke,” Ruth suggests the doctor could sterilize the infant during the circumcision (60). She then walks out.

Back on the ward, one of the mothers has to be taken for an emergency C-section. Corinne and Marie both go with the mother, leaving Ruth alone on the ward for about 20 minutes. Corinne asks Ruth to monitor Davis in keeping with the hospital requirements following a circumcision. Ruth goes to the nursery and sees that Davis is sleeping. Her mind wanders for a moment, and when she looks again, he has stopped breathing. She is torn. There are some minor steps to take that will sometimes start an infant breathing again, but she has been told not to touch the baby. One of her thoughts is that she might be fired, but another is that her job does not matter as much as a life. She knows what she should do in normal situation, but hesitates, fearing that Marie might catch her touching the baby. She does take some steps, but does not yet call for help. While she hesitates, Marie enters and asks Ruth what she is doing. Ruth says she has not done anything.

Marie takes control, ordering Ruth to take the next steps. Ruth calls the emergency team to the nursery. Marie orders Ruth to begin compressing his chest. The team arrives. The doctor evaluates and says the compressions are not effective, prompting Ruth to push harder. The situation is rapidly deteriorating and Ruth pushes harder until the anesthesiologist tells her to “lighten up.” Brittany and Turk have arrived in the room and Brittany asks what is happening. Ruth gives a technical answer. The doctor does another evaluation and calls for an end to the efforts. They remove the breathing bag and Turk runs into the room, grabbing it from the trash and demanding someone show



him how to save Davis. They call the time of Davis's death as 10:04. Marie hands Davis's body to Brittany as the doctor talks to Brittany and Turk. Ruth leaves the room and throws up in the bathroom. She feels ill at the thought that the baby might have lived if she had acted more quickly.

Ruth recounts the hospital's policy regarding babies who die. The parents are never forced to give them up until they are ready. The nurses know those mothers will not have a lifetime to spend with their babies, so they give them all the time they need to let go of the bodies. She is preparing to leave when Marie finds her. Marie says they have to follow protocol, and asks Ruth to recount everything that happened in the nursery before Marie arrived. Ruth says the baby stopped breathing "a moment" before Marie's arrival. Marie asks why Ruth allowed a moment to pass. Ruth says it was because she was ordered not to touch the baby. Ruth goes to the morgue and holds Davis's body before she leaves the hospital.

Analysis

Appearances is one of the book's themes. Ruth talks about one aspect of this theme in the second chapter when she explains that women usually want to put on makeup, brush their hair, and make themselves presentable soon after the delivery. She felt the same when her son, Edison was born. She knew that her hair was a frizzy mess, and she wrapped a towel around it so that no one would see. It seems that Ruth is not really worried about her hair being a mess as much as she is worried that it is frizzy, which is a problem she sees as an effect of her race. This is a complex theme seen in the lives of various people throughout the book.

Ruth is a single mother raising Edison to the best of her ability, but she is not the stereotypical working mother. Her husband did not abandon the family, but died in Afghanistan. She is also highly intelligent and educated, and is willing to work hard to ensure that her son has a good life. These are all important to her character and to understanding why she reacts to certain situations, but it seems that her childhood has a profound affect on her that she never comes to terms with.

In the first scene showing Ruth interacting with colleagues, the nurses revert to jargon specific to the labor and delivery ward of a hospital. The use terms like "G one P" and "circ." The reader who does not understand all these terms will still understand the basic information of the story. The author explains the terms that are necessary for understanding the story.

The word "nigger" is used several times in the book. It is an indication of the hatred felt by the prejudiced people involved in the story. Some readers may find the term offensive, but the author is clearly using it for that very reason. The skinheads use the term in a derogatory manner in an effort to offend people – both black and white. The opening line of the first chapter from Turk's perspective reads, "The first nigger I ever met killed my older brother." This is an important first look at Turk's attitude, which is one of the book's themes.



Turk had a rough childhood. His parents divorced and his brutal grandfather was present in his life. His brother died in a car wreck, which prompted his mother's descent into alcoholism. Turk became a problem, often getting into trouble at school and uncaring about the consequences. This background made him more susceptible to the skinhead message of hate and violence.

Turk's attitude about the man who wrecked with Turk's brother, Tanner, is an example of Turk's prejudice. He grew up believing that the black man was responsible for the wreck, and that the man had literally murdered Tanner. However, Turk found the trial transcripts after his mother died, and he read the pages which revealed the real story. Tanner had been high and had crossed the center line. He was clearly at fault in the wreck and it seems incredible that the jury had not come to that conclusion. Turk seems to accept the transcripts as fact, which should mean that he no longer blames the black man for the event, but he has an entirely different reaction. He continues to blame the black man from that point, but only for being at that spot on the road when Tanner crossed the center line. Most readers will find it to be a completely unreasonable attitude, though it is fueled by years of violent teachings and by Turk's own grief at his brother's death.

Adisa makes an interesting analogy as she and Ruth are getting their nails done. She says that Turk's attitude and the resulting fallout are not Ruth's fault. Then, she goes on to say that Ruth has spent most of her life learning how to do everything like whites. She compares this to the saying, "Do as the Romans do." She then goes on to say that a black person who learns all those things still will not be invited into the emperor's palace. Her point is that Ruth can learn to live like whites, but she will never be invited fully into the white world.

There are some important aspects of the scenes just before Davis's death. Ruth is forced into an impossible situation. She has been ordered not to participate in the baby's care, but she is literally the only nurse available on the floor to watch after Davis when the other two nurses have to care for an emergency C-section. She notices that Davis is not breathing, and she hesitates, wondering what she is supposed to do. She does take the steps she would take in any situation – touching the baby and gently moving him – which would often be enough to start the infant breathing again. She is in the process of that when Marie enters the room and asks what she is doing. Ruth says she was not doing anything, because she is afraid she would be fired. When Marie questions her later, Ruth again insists she did nothing. She had actually taken the steps that she should have, but she had not yet called for help. Some readers may find it reprehensible that she does not call for someone else to help when she knows Davis is in trouble.

Another important part of the scene is when Turk and Brittany enter the room. They have heard the nurses call for the emergency team and know that Davis is in the nursery, and that is why they enter. They see that Ruth is part of the team trying to save Davis's life, but they zero in on the anesthesiologist's words when he tells Ruth to lighten up her compressing. Turk will continue to insist that she was being aggressive because she did not like Turk and wanted revenge for Turk's prejudice.



Discussion Question 1

Describe Turk's early years. What pieces of his childhood make him susceptible to the hatred preached by the skinheads?

Discussion Question 2

What kind of character is Adisa?

Discussion Question 3

List three instances of prejudice seen up to this point. Which do you see as the most reprehensible? Why?

Vocabulary

demur, contort, ebb, coiffed, auxiliary, ostensibly, intercepted, profound, panicking, eddy, prenatal, alternative



Chapters 5-7; Stage One: Active Labor, Kennedy, Turk, and Ruth

Summary

Chapter 5 is titled “Kennedy.” Kennedy McQuarrie is a defense attorney married to Micah. They have a young daughter named Violet. Kennedy's mother, Ava, grew up in the “debutante circuit” of North Carolina (75). When both Micah and Kennedy work late, Ava takes care of Violet. Kennedy and Micah plan to go out for dinner one evening, but Ava has plans. Kennedy takes Violet along. Violent remarks on their waiter's turban. When Kennedy says he is Indian, Violet says he does not look like Pocahontas. Kennedy is embarrassed and distracts Violet. She asks Micah if the waiter will label them bad parents because of Violet's comment. She then worries that she should have handled the situation differently.

Chapter 6 is titled “Turk.” Turk and Brittany's dad, Francis, are dismantling the nursery before Brittany comes home. They paint the walls white, take down the crib and other baby-related items, and make the room back into a guest room. Francis does not outwardly look like a skinhead. He runs a drywall crew and has urged the members of his skinhead community to take on the appearances of a typical American. They grew out their hair and limit their meetings to smaller gatherings of like-minded friends. Francis and Turk run a website together, and Turk believes that people are even more afraid when they realize that skinheads are living among them, and no longer stand out by appearance alone.

The sight of the dismantled crib sends Turk into a fit of anger. He goes to the bathroom and shaves his head to reveal a tattoo of a swastika with Turk's and Brittany's initials in the center. Turk got the tattoo just after Brittany accepted his marriage proposal. When Francis sees Turk's shaved head, he says he understands that Turk is “going to war.” (84) Turk and Francis pick up Brittany at the hospital. Turk cannot stop thinking about the vision of Ruth “beating on my son's chest” (85). Brittany's grief is so deep that Turk fears he might have lost her too.

Turk has to throw water on Brittany to wake her up enough to attend a meeting with Carla Luongo, the hospital's lawyer. Turk is disgusted that she is Mexican. Turk opens the meeting by saying he knows Ruth is responsible for Davis's death. Turk then says he plans to sue the hospital, though he is not certain how that side of the legal system works. Carla counters, asking why he would take that step when it seems obvious that Ruth is personally responsible.

Turk leaves Brittany at home and goes to the police where an officer named MacDougall listens to Turk's claim that Ruth is responsible for Davis's death. MacDougall calls Turk later that day, saying that Davis's body has been released for burial and that there could be charges against Ruth. Turk and Brittany are joined by



friends and family at Davis's funeral. Both struggle through it but when Brittany reaches out to hold Turk's hand, he feels a glimmer of hope that they might survive their son's death. When they all return to the house, Detective MacDougall shows up "to pay my respects," but has no new information (102). When everyone is gone, Brittany throws casserole dishes, breaking them and crying that food will not make her feel better. Turk holds her, saying that people are doing the only things they know to help. Brittany taunts Turk, saying a real man would avenge his son's death. After she is in bed, he goes out, finds a homeless man, and beats him.

Chapter 7 is titled "Ruth." Ruth meets with Carla Luongo. Carla asks questions about Davis, Ruth's interaction with the infant and his family, and Ruth's attitudes about being removed from Davis's case.

Ruth's mother, Lou, still works six days a week for Mina Hallowell. Ruth hates to see her mother working as a servant after all these years. After the meeting with Carla, Ruth visits Lou and, with some prompting about what is wrong, tells her everything. Lou asks if Ruth is overreacting, prompting Ruth to evaluate herself. Christina arrives with her son and Mina. Christina talks to Ruth for a few minutes, but Ruth soon leaves.

When Ruth was a child, she once wandered into Sam Hallowell's study where he was watching black and white films of early Disney movies. That night, Ruth dreamed that she could not see colors, and everyone told her that was reality and would always be.

Ruth stops by the house and briefly talks to Edison about a project he is working on. He points out that few people know more than a few famous black people. When Ruth arrives for work, Marie announces that her license has been revoked and that she cannot work. She removes her few things from her locker and security guards escort her from the hospital. She calls her union representative. Corinne calls her and says she is certain Carla did not "intentionally" sacrifice Ruth to prevent Turk from filing a lawsuit. Edisa says she always expected something like this would happen, and that Ruth's life in "Whiteville" does not mean she belongs (122). Adisa warns that Ruth has to find a lawyer, but Ruth says she cannot touch the savings because it is for Edison's college.

Ruth does not tell Edison about the situation. The union lawyer calls and says Ruth has been accused of failing in her duties as a nurse. Ruth manages to go to sleep and is deeply asleep when the police break open her door at 3 a.m. They announce Ruth is being charged with murder and involuntary manslaughter, wrestle Edison to the floor when he questions the officer's presence, and take Ruth away in her nightgown and handcuffs. A young officer fingerprints her. Detective MacDougall and a woman named Detective Leong question her. Ruth answers questions until she realizes they are trying to convince her to confess. She stops talking and asks for a lawyer.



Analysis

As the first chapter on Kennedy opens, she is dealing with a new jail rule that prohibits women from wearing underwire bras into the jail. She has to argue about the rule and, at the end of the meeting, she says she plans to wear her underwire bra in the next time she sees her client. She then asks the warden to “pardon the metaphor,” and says she assumes “there will not be any fallout” from the fact that she has on a bra (74). This kind of metaphor is just one of several literary devices seen throughout the book. The use of metaphors and understatement are seen several times with regard to race, such as Adisa's insistence that Ruth would not be invited to live in the castle, just because she learns the rules of the country.

Turk has a tattoo of a swastika on his head, above his hairline so that it does not show unless he shaves his head. His initials and Brittany's initials make up the center of the shape. The swastika is the symbol of the German political party responsible for the deaths of millions of Jewish people, and has come to be symbolic of hatred, prejudice, and violence. This kind of symbolism is seen throughout the book as the members of the skinhead community express their hatred for blacks in general and Ruth in particular.

By the time of Davis's death, most of the skinheads in Turk's circle of acquaintances are living a hidden life. They are not openly advertising their rhetoric, but are living everyday lives and mostly look like ordinary people. Their choice to change their appearances is an example of one of the book's themes.

Turk recounts several events and scenes during his early years, including fights and criminal activity. During all those, he continues to gain notoriety that gets him noticed by members of the skinheads. Francis is something of a legend among the skinheads, and he contacts Turk because everyone is talking about Turk. That is what brings Turk and Brittany together. The early scenes from his life are not necessary to the action surrounding Davis's death, but provide a level of characterization that help the reader understand motives and actions. The author similarly builds up other main characters, including Ruth, Adisa, and Brittany.

Ruth is a deep character who struggles constantly with racial issues. She went to a private school but never really fit in with her white classmates. Ironically she never really fit in with the black girls from her old neighborhood either because she went to school in a predominately white school. There is an important look at this struggle in the opening pages of Chapter 7 when Carla Luongo calls Ruth for a meeting. When Ruth hangs up the phone, Edison asks Ruth if she was talking to someone white. Ruth cannot figure out why he would ask that question, but Edison says that Ruth's “voice changes” when she is talking to a white person (106). This seems to be evidence that Ruth is uncomfortable in her dealings with other people, which indicates a level of bias on her part, though it could be prompted by the fact that she is so often subjected to prejudicial treatment. These issues are complex, and readers will naturally put their own beliefs, experiences, and biases into the analysis.



Ruth is experiencing pain that she has never fully experienced before. She knows that Adisa is often angry about prejudicial attitudes, but Ruth tries to fit into her life without those kinds of problems. They have apparently always been brewing just below the surface. As a child going to the Hallowell home on Saturdays, she once grew angry and told her mother that she does not intend to be a slave to someone, like her mother was to Mina. Her mother slapped her for the words, and years later Ruth discovered that her mother was actually teaching Ruth and Adisa to be self-sufficient, so they would never be helpless like Mina and Christina.

Discussion Question 1

What is Ruth's attitude about her mother? About her mother's work? Does any part of her attitude seem snobbish?

Discussion Question 2

How do Turk and Brittany begin coping with Davis' death? What aspects of their background affect their coping mechanisms?

Discussion Question 3

Describe the events leading up to Ruth's arrest. Do these seem believable?

Vocabulary

withering, frenetic, sequined, negotiate, sector, deadpan, ethnicity, aggressive, metaphor, relegated, corroborated, platitudes, vigil



Chapters 8-10; Stage One: Transition, Kennedy, Turk, and Ruth

Summary

Chapter 8 is titled “Kennedy.” Kennedy meets the newest member of the public defender team. He is black and his name is Howard, and their first meeting is awkward. Kennedy, as a public defender, often meets her clients for the first time in the courtroom during arraignment with very little time to figure out what is best for them. That is the case with Ruth. She manages to get a few minutes alone with Ruth and convinces the judge to set bail at the value of the equity in Ruth's house. There are many whites in the gallery and they grow angry. At one point, Turk spits on Ruth. Kennedy talks only for a minute with Edison and Adisa. Adisa is rude, calling Kennedy “white girl” and herself “nigga” (147). Ruth is panicked when she realizes it will take days to process her equity into bail. Kennedy rushes back to Edison and Adisa, explaining what needs to be done. Edison thanks her but Adisa is rude again. By that night, Kennedy becomes determined to be assigned to Ruth's case.

Chapter 9 is titled “Turk.” Turk talks to a lawyer about suing Ruth, but finds he needs to wait until the criminal trial is over. Back at home, he writes on the blog he maintains with Francis, but this time he reveals his name while talking about Davis. Within hours, thousands of people have read the post. On arraignment day, Turk arrives at the courthouse to find about 20 people there to support him. Turk is furious to find out the prosecutor is black, but he accepts that she is the way to avenge Davis's death. When Ruth enters the courtroom, Turk spits on her. He is dragged from the courtroom, but does not care.

Outside the courthouse, Turk sees all the news reporters. He approaches one, talking openly about Davis. When the prosecutor appears, the reporters turn their attention to her and Turk walks to the side of the building, forcing a van to swerve. Ruth is inside and Turk takes pleasure from the fact that Ruth would have seen him on her way to prison. When he gets home, Brittany is awake for the first time in days. She smiles as she watches television coverage of the trial.

Chapter 10, “Ruth,” opens with Ruth as she is taken from the courtroom and transported to prison. The story then reverts to her memories of the night she spent with her mother before she began college. Lou said Ruth was destined to do “small great things,” referring to a speech by Martin Luther King, Jr., in which he said, “If I cannot do great things, I can do small things in a great way” (173). After a few weeks of commuting to school, Ruth bought a Yale travel mug, not because she needed a cup for her coffee, but because she wanted her fellow commuters to realize she belonged at Yale.

Ruth remembers sleepovers at Christina's house. She never quite felt that she fit in. She was fully aware that her mother worked for Christina's mother, and that Ruth wore



Christina's hand-me-down clothes on the school's casual Fridays. Ruth fears that Christina feels a duty to include her.

Ruth arrives at the prison and suffers the indignity of a strip search and processing. Late that night, a guard orders her out of her bunk, has her change back into the nightgown she was wearing when she was arrested, and she finds Edison waiting outside the prison for her.

Analysis

Adisa is willing to turn almost every situation into a racial issue. When Kennedy talks to them the first time, Adisa says Kennedy must have picked her out of the crowd because she is black. Actually, Ruth pointed out Edison, and Kennedy makes the connection on her own. Kennedy handles lower profile cases, meaning she does not expect to actually be Ruth's lawyer when the case goes to trial. She tells Adisa and Edison that she will not be the one to represent Ruth, which makes Adisa go off on another rant. This time, she accuses Kennedy of passing the case off because Ruth is black. These are all examples of Adisa's racial attitude, which has probably been prompted by years of prejudicial treatment. However, she is not able to see past the race issue in any situation, and she blames race for everything, even when it is not an issue and when someone like Kennedy is not looking at race as a motivation.

Kennedy is over-anxious about her reactions with regard to race. Her first meeting with the new lawyer in her office, Howard, is awkward as she makes a comment that could be construed as racial and then becomes overly self-conscious about the remark. This is typical of her throughout the book and shows a completely different level of racism than most other characters.

Kennedy's mother tells Kennedy that Violet demands to be Tiana for Halloween, the black princess from one of the Disney movies. Kennedy says she will buy the costume. Her mother disapproves, saying that it took "years for Disney to give all those little black girls their own princess," and questioned whether it was right to let Violet be Tiana. Her point may be an honest attempt at fairness. She may not want her granddaughter to dress up like a black princess. Knowing her personality, it is more likely she believes that the young black girls deserve to have the princess to themselves. In either case, Kennedy and her mother argue over the situation, and Kennedy admits to being tired of everything. She probably deals with race on a daily basis, though she is about to be immersed in prejudice on a whole new level than anything she has experienced. These examples of prejudice and racial bias are an important theme seen throughout the book.

The relationship between Ruth and Christina is complex, and it is further complicated by Ruth's insecurities. As teenagers, Ruth fears that Christina feels obligated to include Ruth in activities, such as sleepovers. Ruth fears that Christina's friends will not understand if Ruth takes time to put her hair up in a scarf so it will not be frizzy when she wakes. Her fears are an undercurrent that affects most aspects of their relationship, and in some ways, Christina is more devoted to Ruth than Ruth is to Christina. One day,



Ruth and some friends are spending the night with Christina. When the girls decide they are hungry, Ruth is the one who goes to the kitchen to ask for a snack. There are several reasons for this. First, it's Ruth's mother who prepares the cookies for the girls to eat. Also, Christina takes her friendship with Ruth for granted and it probably does not seem out of place to ask Ruth to get the snacks. Finally, Christina is a privileged girl. As such, she is accustomed to having people do her bidding. But, when Ruth gets downstairs, her mother points out that manners dictate that Christina should have been the one to get the snacks. Ruth is mortified that Christina asked her, and is also upset that she obeyed without giving it a second thought. The entire situation makes Ruth even more self-conscious and fearful of her relationship with Christina.

An interesting conversation takes place between Ruth and her mother when Ruth goes down to pick up the snacks. Her mother assures Ruth that “we are here” whenever Ruth wants to return to them. Lou does not explain but it seems likely that she sees Ruth trying to fit in with white friends, and that she is trying to make Ruth see she can become a successful, educated adult without totally forsaking her family.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the relationship between Christina and Ruth, as seen from Ruth's point of view. What aspects might Christina describe differently? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Do you think Ruth is – as Adisa insists – trying to live the life of a white person? Support your answer.

Discussion Question 3

Describe the first meeting between Adisa and Kennedy. What do you think the two women think of each other?

Vocabulary

insidious, virtually, specious, surety, deployment, affluent, lamenting, precipitated, clarify, lynching, gingerly, heinous



Chapters 11 – 14; Stage One: Transition, Kennedy, Ruth, Kennedy, and Ruth

Summary

Chapter 11 is titled “Kennedy.” Kennedy realizes that she is caught up in Ruth's case because she has repetitive dreams about Ruth. In one of the dreams, Ruth is speaking a foreign language that Kennedy cannot comprehend. Finally, Ruth opens her mouth and butterflies emerge. In another, she dreams they are eating a feast, but when she asks for more water, discovers they are in prison.

Once she reaches the office, Kennedy asks her boss, Harry Blatt, for Ruth's case. He agrees. Kennedy gets through the morning's arraignments before she heads to the prison to meet with Ruth. On the way, she practices what she will say. She is surprised when she arrives to find Ruth has already been released. They meet a few days later over lunch. Both are tense. Kennedy makes a comment about “people like you,” referring to Ruth's status as an accused killer. (195) Ruth takes the comment to mean black until Kennedy explains. They talk about race. Ruth insists that she is only accused because she is black. Kennedy cannot argue that point, but says they cannot bring it up at trial if they hope for an acquittal. Kennedy says that Ruth could hire a lawyer as soon as the trial ends and sue the hospital for discrimination. She estimates Ruth could get millions in a settlement. Ruth continues to argue that they have to talk about race, but Kennedy urges Ruth to trust Kennedy's experience. Ruth agrees, though the issue will arise again.

Chapter 12 is titled “Ruth.” Ruth realizes that Edison missed school the previous days to get through the process of posting bail. She sees that their relationship has changed, and that he is now much more of an adult than he had been just days earlier.

Ruth talks about her first meeting with Kennedy. She says Kennedy talks a lot, as if she is nervous, but Ruth does not know what to say anyway. When Kennedy pays for their meal, Ruth's first instinct is to insist on paying for her own, but she realizes this might be a way for Kennedy to connect with her clients, and stops herself from complaining.

Chapter 13 is titled “Kennedy.” Kennedy learns that Ava has been watching a news channel that Kennedy feels is inappropriate for Violet. Her mother argues that Violet does not need to be so protected. Kennedy thinks about Ruth being ripped from her son, and wants to protect Violet even more.

Chapter 14 is titled “Ruth.” Ruth visits Christina at Christina's invitation. Christina says she'd wanted to hire a lawyer to represent Ruth, but her husband – who has filed candidacy for a political office – refused. Ruth accuses Christina of arranging their meeting to tell Ruth they can no longer associate. Christina objects, saying she'd only



wanted to see that Ruth was alright. Christina gives Ruth the cash she has in her wallet. Ruth rushes to leave the apartment and leaves the money under the mat at the door.

Adisa takes Ruth through the process to apply for government assistance since Ruth is without a job. Adisa wants to get a black activist named Wallace Mercy involved, but Ruth refuses. Ruth then gets a job at McDonalds. She does not tell Edison and he finds out by accident when he arrives at the restaurant. At home, he tries to make her quit. He says everyone at school knows about Ruth's arrest, and are being overly understanding. Another day, Edison gets in trouble for hitting his best friend, who was making McDonald's jokes about Ruth. Edison is clearly furious at the situation and Ruth does not have a way to make it better for him.

Ruth is preparing for a shift when Wallace Mercy arrives at her house. He offers his support, and points out that many people are willing to support her claim of discrimination. Ruth declines the offer. He leaves an envelop stuffed with cash and checks from people who have heard about Ruth's plight. Another morning, Kennedy stops in at McDonald's with Violet. Both are embarrassed, and Ruth wonders how Kennedy expects Ruth to survive while waiting for the trial to take place.

Eventually, Kennedy stops in at Ruth's house to talk about Davis' medical files. Ruth explains the terminology. Ruth discovers that the lab results of the routine tests done on all infants is not in the file. Ruth suggests they show the jury the Post-it note Marie wrote, but Kennedy says that shows that Ruth had a reason to be angry, which could become motive. Kennedy again says that bringing up the racial issues between Ruth and the Bauers would hurt Ruth's chances of acquittal. Ruth believes that winning an acquittal without mentioning Turk's bigotry will not actually be a win. After Kennedy leaves, Ruth looks through the envelop for Wallace Mercy's business card.

Analysis

Kennedy's dream about Ruth is symbolic and prophetic. The symbolism is related to the fact that the women are separated by race, which is a bigger distinction than Kennedy realizes at this point. In the dream, Ruth speaks a foreign language. That symbolizes Kennedy's fear that she cannot understand Ruth's life, though Kennedy does not yet realize that she does not understand Ruth. The dream is also prophetic, because Kennedy will soon discover that she understands little about Ruth or her life.

There is yet another complexity added to the relationship between Ruth and Christina when the two women get together for lunch at Christina's apartment. It's a luxury apartment. Ruth notes that it could be used for a photo shoot. The situation grows tense when Christina says she wanted to hire a lawyer for Ruth. Ruth's immediate reaction is that Christina sees Ruth as a problem to be dealt with. Christina may not feel that way at all. The limited perspective means the reader cannot know her motivations, but it seems more likely that she really is concerned. If she was not concerned about Ruth, she could simply have kept her distance. The limited perspective is truly limiting in this



instance, and the reader will never know whether Ruth sees the situation as it is, or if she misunderstands Christina's overture.

When Ruth leaves Christina's, she rushes to put distance between herself and the money she leaves under Christina's welcome mat. Ruth knows that money is going to be a problem since she does not have a job, and that she really does need the money. However, she cannot view it as a gift between friends, and so she turns it down. That is more evidence of Ruth's character, which is an important part of why she reacts in specific ways.

Ruth has never applied for government assistance and does not know how to go about it. Adisa leads her through the process, angrily insisting that the official who works Ruth's case provide a full range of assistance, including a promise that Obamacare will cover insurance. Ruth is mortified throughout the process. As they leave, Ruth accuses Adisa of being rude but Adisa points out that she is the rude person who helped Ruth get the help she needs. This is yet another example of the differences between the two sisters. Not only has Adisa had occasion to go through this assistance process, she is not ashamed to ask for help. Ruth is much more self-sufficient, and hates to be in that position.

Edison is struggling with the situation at school, because everyone knows about Ruth's arrest and are being overly understanding, making concessions such as extra time to complete assignments. Edison is furious about it, and his anger will grow over the coming days. Ruth tells Edison that they will get through the situation together, and that they do not need anyone to make things easier for them. Afterward, she admits to herself that she lied to him about that. Ruth is angry and hurts for herself, but she is furious on Edison's behalf.

Wallace Mercy is a television personality. He is black and focuses on wrongs, especially prejudicial situations. He has a great deal of influence, as evidenced by the fact that Ruth automatically knows who Adisa is talking about. When Wallace visits Ruth, he says that he "mentioned" her story during one of his programs, which prompts the viewers to send in the money to help Ruth get through her situation. That is evidence of his power with the viewing public.

While Wallace Mercy is visiting, he asks if anyone at the hospital stood up for Ruth. She mentions Corinne, but Wallace points out that Corinne did not really stand up for Ruth. Ruth says she would not have wanted Corinne to risk her job, but Wallace says that there are people who believe in fighting prejudice, and that those people are willing to risk everything to support Ruth. This is an example of the fight against prejudice, which is one of the book's themes. There are people who are constantly fighting against the prejudicial attitudes, which keeps the problem in the forefront of the public view. An interesting aspect of this scene is that Ruth says she needs to talk to her lawyer before taking any action. Wallace counters, saying the lawyer is white and therefore does not understand the race issues at play. Ruth has thought that same thing, but she does not say so to Wallace. Instead, she stands up for Kennedy, saying that it is important not to



judge Kennedy based on race. That seems counter to how Ruth really feels, and it seems like a continuation of her ongoing effort to fit in with whites.

Kennedy and Ruth are at opposite ends of the spectrum when it comes to the question of bringing the race issue into the case. Kennedy believes the jurors will see Turk's attitude as a motive for Ruth to let Davis die, or even to misuse her skills to kill the baby. Kennedy's focus is on keeping Ruth from being convicted of murder. But to Ruth, the race issue is important. She wants to use the trial to bring the prejudice she experienced to public attention. Both women have a point. Kennedy wants to keep Ruth out of jail. Ruth wants to right a wrong. When Ruth and Kennedy are talking through the question, Ruth becomes angry at Kennedy, saying Kennedy cannot possibly understand. Kennedy claims that color is irrelevant, but her example shows that she overcompensates in her effort to appear non-prejudiced.

Discussion Question 1

What would Wallace Mercy likely do with Ruth's story, if she gives him permission to follow it?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Kennedy say they cannot bring up race at the trial? Why does Ruth want to make it an issue? In your opinion, who is right? Explain your reasoning.

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Christina invites Ruth to lunch?

Vocabulary

triage, infinite, consecutive, monitoring, stark, contrary, flaws, banned, profiling, gallantly, paradox



Chapters 15-18; Stage One: Transition, Turk, Kennedy, Ruth, and Kennedy

Summary

Chapter 15 is titled “Turk.” Skinheads gather monthly at Francis's home, in the duplex he shares with Turk and Brittany. Three months pass after Davis' death before an event occurs. Brittany hides in the bedroom. One of the women has a crying infant and Turk holds the baby. Brittany enters the room and is furious. Another night, Brittany urges Turk to take some action that will ensure that everyone remembers Davis. Turk goes to Raine Tesco's house. He now lives in the suburbs and makes it clear that he will not participate in any action Turk has planned. He explains that he has changed because he does not want his daughter to grow up in a household filled with hate and violence. He says he does not believe in the skinhead rhetoric, and that their teachings are untrue. He says he wants to remain friends with Turk. Turk leaves, knowing he will never see Raine again. He meets with others who are still in the skinhead community, but no one will help him mount an attack in Davis's name. At home, he has to explain it to Brittany, who says she understands.

Chapter 16 is titled “Kennedy.” Wallace calls Kennedy, saying Ruth has asked him to be her adviser during the trial. Kennedy goes to Ruth's house and pleads with her to reconsider. Their conversation grows angry but Ruth agrees.

Kennedy begins to work on evidence for her case. She visits the human resources director at the hospital and finds that Ruth was passed over for promotions for no apparent reason. Kennedy throws out a parting shot, saying that it seems to be “dumb luck” that Ruth was the person the hospital “chose to throw to the wolves” (259). Kennedy decides that Ruth's attitudes are starting to take hold in Kennedy's outlook. Later, Ruth invites Kennedy to go shopping and Kennedy accepts, believing it is Ruth's way of getting past their earlier arguments. At the store, clerks shadow Ruth, ostensibly to help but obviously watching her movements with suspicion. When they leave, a security guard searches Ruth's bag but not Kennedy's, which gives Kennedy a brief look at the life Ruth lives, just because of her skin color.

After they leave, Kennedy asks Ruth why she did not say anything about the prejudicial treatment in the store. Ruth says she has never become accustomed to it, but has been forced to “figure out how to let it go” (264). Later, Kennedy talks with Ava about the racial prejudice that was rampant in their home in North Carolina when Kennedy was a child. Her mother talks about an even greater level of prejudice when she was a child. She says Kennedy thinks prejudice is bad because she cannot see how far they have come.



Kennedy discovers that the judge assigned to Ruth's case is Judge Thunder, who is known to be tough. When Kennedy leaves the courthouse that day, she discovers that Wallace Mercy is part of a gathering in support of Ruth. Adisa is with him.

Chapter 17 is titled "Ruth." Kennedy is furious at Ruth but Ruth knows nothing about Wallace's involvement. She confronts Adisa who makes it clear she is enjoying the publicity, and is trying to change Ruth's mind. Ruth discovers that Edison is with Adisa's son, and Ruth grows angry. She knows Adisa's son is often in trouble and she forces Edison to go home.

Ruth and Edison go to Kennedy's for dinner one evening. Everyone is slightly nervous and Kennedy is mortified when Violet makes a statement that seems racial. Ruth assures her that they are not angry at a child's talk. Edison answers Ruth's cell phone when Mina Hollowell calls, telling them that Lou died. She had a stroke while cleaning, a second in the ambulance, and died on the way to the hospital. When Edison and Ruth reach the hospital, Mina is very upset. Ruth goes into the room and cleans her mother. Adisa joins her and they share their grief. Mina pays for the elaborate funeral, which is just as Lou would have wanted. Adisa gives a heartfelt speech. Ruth stands and remembers her mother saying, "When you're ready for us, we'll be waiting on you" (290). Ruth sees all the people in the pews, mostly black, who know her by name and have prayed for her for years. Ruth stands, quiet except for her crying, until Adisa goes on stage and takes her away.

At the wake, Kennedy and Ava approach. Ruth has her mother's recipe book, and she know she sounds bitter when she says her mother never finished writing down her best recipes because she "wasted her life" serving the Hollowell's. (291) Ava says that she knew someone very much like Lou. She shows Ruth a photo of Ava as a child, in the arms of a black maid. Ruth recognizes the love between the black woman and the white child. When Kennedy hugs Ruth, she feels it is the first real hug she has ever received from a white woman.

Chapter 18 is titled "Kennedy." Kennedy asks for Howard, the new lawyer who happens to be black, to help her during the trial. Kennedy sees his race as a positive for her. She still plans to avoid discussions of race at the trial, but is working to create the best situation for a favorable outcome. She briefs Howard on how to evaluate jurors and they begin working through the potential jury pool, looking for information about any that would help – or hurt – Ruth's chances. They split the list and begin driving to the juror's homes, looking for anything to give them clues about the people. They meet back at Kennedy's house later, to go over their findings. They resume the next day. Howard presents Kennedy with a study that showed whites who try not to appear racist were more likely to "suppress their real feelings about the darker-skinned" black person, which he believes will impact how some whites will see Ruth, who is light-skinned.

The first day of jury selection begins. Howard's job is to take copious notes on the jurors so that he and Kennedy can make the best decisions possible. They use several tactics to fully discover which jurors are prejudiced. At the end of the second day, the jury is seated. Kennedy is overall happy with the result.



That weekend, Kennedy and Micah visit one of Micah's friends from college, Ivan, who is now in neonatal medicine. He goes over Davis's file with Kennedy, including a test that showed Davis had low blood sugar. Initially, Kennedy put that down to his mother's gestational diabetes, but she now has a clue that there could have been another problem at work. Ivan says the condition could be fatal. He also tells Kennedy that the state lab that evaluates the test is closed on Saturday and Sunday, meaning the hospital might not have had the results before Davis died, depending on when the test was done.

Analysis

The scene of Ruth and Kennedy shopping in the department store is a stark look at the prejudice Ruth faces on a daily basis. The women are remarkably similar. Both have advanced educational degrees and work in professional fields, though Ruth has lost her nursing license by that point. Both live in the same middle-class neighborhood. Ruth is a little older, but the two women have similar lives with the exception of their skin color. But when they are walking out of the department store, a security guard searches Ruth's bag, apparently to be certain she has not stolen anything. The guard does not look at Kennedy's bag, though the two women are obviously together. This is an example of the overt prejudice that Kennedy has overlooked, because it does not apply to her.

Kennedy really does not understand some situations that blacks face. At one point during the early hours of their research, Howard calls and says he cannot see one of the potential juror's homes because it is in a gated community behind a wall. Kennedy suggests he look over the wall, just to see what the community looks like. Howard counters, saying there are signs indicating an active neighborhood watch, and points out that the neighbors would not likely be kind if they found a black man peeking over the wall around the community. Kennedy is embarrassed, as she usually is when faced with a racial situation. Her hypersensitivity to the issue a problem for her, though it indicates that she really does want to make a difference.

Kennedy's mother, Ava, grew up in North Carolina in a highly prejudiced area and family. Kennedy remembers her uncle using racial slurs, and that everyone laughed about it though Kennedy did not even realize what was happening. When Kennedy asks her mother why no one spoke up, Ava says that it was because nothing they could say would make a difference in that relative's thoughts or actions. Kennedy says that not speaking up ensured that the man continued his racial slurs. It seems ironic that Kennedy is berating her mother for not speaking up while taking a similar tactic in her case with Ruth.

At one point, Ava talks about a maid to whom she was very attached as a child. The woman was present one night when Ava's parents were in heated conversation about an impending integration. The man cried, and that was when Ava realized she had a son. Ava says she never thought about the fact that this woman had a life outside of Ava's home, or that she might be devoted to her family in addition to her devotion to



Ava. That is very similar to Lou's situation, in some ways. Lou is old by the time she dies, and seldom does any major work at the Hallowell home, but she continues to work. Adisa says Mina Hallowell is basically performing charity by paying Lou. The fact is that the two women have a relationship that is not friendship, but does have a level of devotion, seen by the fact that Mina is heartbroken when Lou dies. These relationships are overridden by prejudice, but they are also human bonds that have an important role in the lives of both sides.

The conversation with Micah's friend, Ivan, turns out to be very important to Ruth's case. Ivan explains that the timing of the test is important, and that the hospital might not have known that Davis was suffering from more than low blood sugar. His lab report shows that he had a disease called MCADD, or medium-chain acyl-coenzyme. When the child with that disease lacks food, he can crash. Davis was denied food for a few hours before his circumcision, which is normal procedure. During the trial, it will become clear that he died because of this, not because of anything that Ruth does.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Lou's death and funeral. What does Ava say in an effort to console Ruth about her mother's life time of being a servant?

Discussion Question 2

What is Kennedy's attitude about prejudice? What does Ava say about Kennedy's perspective compared to Ava's perspective. Does Ava have a valid point?

Discussion Question 3

Describe Ruth and Kennedy's shopping trip. What does Kennedy learn?

Vocabulary

postracial, unilateral, progression, obsessing, rehashing, vehemence, divisive, dubious, pundits, abyss, monochromatic, infinitesimal



Chapters 19-22; Stage Two: Pushing, Ruth, Turk, Kennedy, and Ruth

Summary

Chapter 19 is titled “Ruth.” Kennedy had presented Ruth with Davis's newborn screening, which was missing from the original file. By this point, Ruth has tried to tell Kennedy the truth – that she tried to get Davis breathing before Marie enter the room, though she was ordered not to touch the baby. Initially, she was afraid to tell the truth. Now she is ashamed at having lied so long. Seeing the report and realizing the true cause of Davis's death, she knows that it really did not matter that she was a black nurse tending a white baby. Adisa assures Ruth that she will be with her throughout the trial, and Ruth is grateful but still refuses to be part of the protestors in front of the courthouse. She and Edison plan to meet Kennedy to sneak into a back entrance of the courthouse.

Chapter 20 is titled “Turk.” Turk and Brittany go first to the cemetery to visit Davis's grave, then to the courthouse where they find the demonstration. A group of supporters join Turk and Brittany, willing to be known as skinhead supporters though they have worked to blend into their communities.

Chapter 21 is titled “Kennedy.” She arrives at the courthouse to see the black faction and the white faction, separated but there for the same trial. She goes around back where she finds Edison and Ruth. Ruth is naturally apprehensive.

Chapter 22 is titled “Ruth.” Ruth is nervous in the courtroom and admits that she has to focus to keep from running away. The prosecutor, Odette Lawton, does not make eye contact with Ruth and Ruth knows it is because they are on opposite ends of this case and Odette does not want the jury to associate them, though they are both black women. Odette opens with her version of the events leading up to Davis's death, “glossing over” Turk's bigotry (337). Kennedy counters, talking about how Ruth's supervisor, acting as an agent of the hospital, forced Ruth to abandon her duty as a nurse by ordering Ruth not to touch the child. She goes on to say she has proof that Davis would not have lived, regardless of who was caring for him at the time.

Corinne is the first witness for the prosecution. She testifies that Ruth “stormed off” after being removed from the case (341). She goes on to talk about leaving Davis in Ruth's care and Davis's death. Under Kennedy's question, she says she knew about the note that said no blacks were to care for Davis, but cited the emergency C-section she was dealing with and said there was no choice but to leave Ruth to look after the baby. Kennedy's parting shot at Corinne is that it is “funny” that Ruth is accused of killing the baby but Corinne is not.



Marie is the next witness and she goes through Turk's demand that no blacks care for his son. She admits to writing the note and says Ruth took it personally. Ruth is upset, reliving the moments as Marie talks about Davis's death. Ruth questions herself afterward, wondering if she did fail to do what she should have. She has lunch with Edison during a break. Edison asks if the scene was really as Marie described. Ruth says it was worse than Marie's description.

The anesthesiologist testifies about Ruth's performance, and makes it clear that he does not think she was acting inappropriately. During a break, Ruth confides to Kennedy that she does not know what she will do if she cannot be a nurse. The pediatrician, Dr. Atkins, takes the stand, talking about Ruth's comment that she should sterilize Davis. Kennedy introduces Davis's newborn screening. Atkins testifies that the normal routine of having a baby go without food for a few hours before the circumcision would be deadly for a baby with MCADD.

A couple of days into the trial, Christina arrives at Ruth's house. She reveals that she has been attending the trial. Ruth asks why Christina is there now, and she says they are friends, and "this is what friends do" (365). Christina reveals that she had once told Lou about picking up a black man who was hitchhiking. Lou was furious and Christina thought it was because Lou feared for Christina's safety. After hearing the police talk about barging into Kennedy's house, including handcuffing Edison because he was a "large, angry black youth," she has realized that she put the black man in a potentially dangerous situation as well (364). Ruth realizes there is distance between her and Christina, but she reaches out and takes her friend's hand.

The medical examiner takes the stand and the photos of Davis's autopsy cause a problem when Brittany begins to scream. Then a juror faints. The judge calls for a recess while everyone gets themselves back together, then the trial picks back up. The medical examiner admits that he did not have Davis's newborn screening when he was performing the autopsy, and he says that his report would have been different. He meets Ruth's eyes and she takes that as an apology. Odette questions further, and the doctor admits that the results might have been an error, and that children diagnosed with MCADD are subjected to another test to be sure the diagnosis is correct. She ends by asking if he can say for certain that Ruth's inaction, then her forceful compressions contributed to Davis's death. Kennedy objects but Odette has planted a seed of doubt in the jurors.

At home one evening, Ruth thinks about the instances when babies died at the hospital, and her role to those grieving parents. Edison spends hours away from home, and is furious when he returns. He and Ruth argue with her saying that she might have to leave him, as he leaves the house again.

Analysis

Davis's newborn screening is missing from his medical file. A chance comment from Ruth makes Kennedy go looking for the document. When she discovers from Ivan that it



is significant, she brings it to trial. Odette is angry, saying she has not had time to examine the document, but Kennedy counters, saying it was missing from Davis's file and questioning whether the prosecution might have had some motive for keeping it hidden. It seems likely that Odette is not trying to do anything illegal, but it also seems that she and the investigators have not done their jobs fully. If this document had been seen at the beginning, it probably would have eliminated charges against Ruth.

The writing throughout the trial becomes somewhat tedious, but most of it serves a purpose. The various witnesses go through their knowledge of the events leading up to Davis' death, or providing expert information about the medical processes and findings. However, mixed in with the repetitive testimonies are bits of information that have meaning to Ruth's life. For example, she notices that Corinne looks tired, and wonders if she is having trouble in her personal life, which is typical. When Corinne makes a comment about how the situation with Turk Bauer affected Ruth, Ruth thinks that Corinne has never really been able to understand the racial issues Ruth faces.

Friendship is a theme that sets the tone for some of the scenes and characters. Ruth has come to realize that she and Corinne were never really friends, but were pushed into being something more than co-workers by their close working relationship. The chance situation that they worked together made them seem like friends. A similar attitude makes Ruth over evaluate her friendship with Christina. When Christina shows up at Ruth's house during the trial, Christina makes it clear that her friendship with Ruth is more important to her than her husband's quest for a political office. Christina says that friends stand by each other, as she is trying to do for Ruth. This time, Ruth reaches out to Christina. She and Christina were probably put together as children only because Lou worked for Christina's family, but it seems that Christina's devotion to Ruth is genuine, unlike some other friendships.

The relationship between Adisa and Ruth is important to the characterization, and their interactions are vital to the character development. Ruth remembers that she did not really fit in with Adisa's friends when they were young because Ruth attended a different school and spent most of her time with whites. But when some of Adisa's friends picked on Ruth, Adisa stood up for her sister, saying that she can have other friends, but Ruth is her only sister. Adisa stands up for Ruth in a similar way when Ruth is trying to speak at Lou's funeral. Though the women are very different with different ideas, it is clear that Adisa will do anything in her power to help Ruth.

Ruth's attitude toward Adisa borders on rude sometimes. She hates Adisa's lifestyle and believes Adisa is too often playing the role of a victim. She talks about the fact that Adisa's children are misbehaved and rude. She is furious when she finds that Edison is spending time with Adisa's son. She also suspects that Adisa is hoping to gain something for herself by making Ruth's case public through Wallace Mercy. Despite all this, the two sisters depend on each other and remain close, which is a statement of their characters.



Discussion Question 1

Describe the information Kennedy finds out about Davis' illness. Why is this good news for Ruth's case?

Discussion Question 2

Describe the relationship between Adisa and Ruth. Does it seem believable?

Discussion Question 3

What is the lie Ruth has told ever since the moments before Davis's death regarding her initial actions? Why has she never told anyone the truth?

Vocabulary

intubate, significant, performed, pediatric, moot, misfortune, exacerbated, conveniently, acquitted, colossal



Chapters 23-26, Stage Two: Pushing, Turk, Kennedy, Ruth, and Kennedy

Summary

Chapter 23 is titled "Turk." Turk is trying to help Brittany calm down after her outburst in court. The prosecutor says that Brittany's actions were helpful to their case, but that she should not have threatened Ruth in the courtroom. When Odette and Turk are alone, Odette says Brittany is too unpredictable to put on the stand. Turk questions Odette about the MCADD, and is upset that Davis was sick and the hospital did not know. Turk tells Brittany that she is not testifying because he cannot stand to see her hurt so much.

When they return to the courtroom, Turk takes the stand. Odette brings up Turk's beliefs, and he says he is "not anti-black," but is "pro-white." Odette points out some people might find it offensive and Turk does not disagree, but says he does believe the hospital had a duty to obey his request for no black personnel. He ends his testimony under Odette's questions by saying he was doing what he felt was best for his son. There is a break and Odette counsels Turk on the tactics Kennedy will take.

When Kennedy questions Turk, he says that Ruth murdered Davis before they could do additional tests to find out if he really had MCADD. She questions Turk about his blog. Kennedy poses the idea that Turk has to find someone to blame, or accept that he and Brittany created a child with a birth defect, an idea unacceptable to some arms of the Aryan Nation. Turk shouts that Kennedy is a "race traitor," and is forced from the courtroom. (389) Odette tells Turk that his actions hurt their case.

Chapter 24 is titled "Kennedy." Kennedy and Odette are in the judge's chambers. Kennedy argues that there is no evidence to support murder and asks the judge to rule on that. He agrees that Ruth's comment about sterilizing Davis was spiteful, but did not prove premeditation. With that decision, he takes the murder charge off the table, leaving Ruth facing a possible sentence for involuntary manslaughter.

Kennedy says they should rest their case at this point. Ruth still wants to get on the stand. Ruth finally tells Kennedy that she did try to resuscitate Davis, and that she has lied all this time because she was afraid of disobeying the order not to. Kennedy argues, saying that Odette will turn that into proof that Ruth is a liar. Ruth says that is better than having people think she killed the baby.

The next day, Ruth continues to insist she have her turn on the stand and Kennedy gives in, protesting the entire time. On the stand, Ruth admits to her lie, saying she was afraid to tell anyone she had touched Davis for fear of being fired. Odette zeroes in on the lie, making Ruth admit everyone she lied to. She then tries to make Ruth admit that she did not care that Davis died. Odette pushes, trying to make Ruth say that she was afraid of losing her job, and that is why she stood by without touching Davis. She also



pushes Ruth to admit that she was angry at Turk and was willing to take it out on a baby. Finally, Ruth is furious and says she did think that Davis would be better off dead than raised by a bigot like Turk. Howard jumps to object, but the jury has already heard it.

During the recess, Kennedy asks Ruth if she is happy that she messed up the case. Ruth grows angry again, saying she has kept her mouth shut about wrongs for her entire life. She then says she wants to fire Kennedy. As a matter of routine, Kennedy asks the judge to drop the case, but he refuses. Odette asks for the murder charge to be put back on the table, but the judge refuses that as well. He announces that closing arguments will begin Monday.

Kennedy spends a lot of time thinking about her motivations, and accepts that she really wanted an acquittal because it was her first murder trial, taking Ruth almost out of the equation altogether. She offers Micah a metaphor, saying that her job is like someone catching babies that are being thrown out of a window, without ever trying to stop the person throwing the babies. She is working as a defense attorney, but never addresses the problems that put so many people right back into the justice system.

Chapter 25 is titled "Ruth." Edison is arrested for a hate crime. Ruth immediately calls Kennedy. Chapter 26 is titled "Kennedy." Kennedy goes to the jail to get Edison and discovers that he painted swastikas and the words "die nigger" on the hospital walls. Edison tells Kennedy he hoped Turk would be blamed, and that it would prompt the charges against Ruth to disappear. Kennedy convinces the magistrate to release Edison, explaining the circumstances and Edison's promising future. On the way home, Edison lashes out at Kennedy, accusing her of avoiding the race issue throughout the trial. At home, Edison confesses his actions to Ruth, and she slaps him, then touches him tenderly as Kennedy drives away.

Back at her office, Kennedy knocks over a pile of papers. She scans through them as she picks them up. Kennedy realizes for the first time that there is information on the back of the lab results. She begins looking up the information and finds nothing that could have been fatal. Then she sees a notation for "sickle-cell trait" (425). She immediately gets her phone and calls Wallace Mercy, asking for his help.

When they return to the courtroom on Monday, Ruth again demands a new lawyer, but the judge refuses, saying that Kennedy's performance has been acceptable. He does give them a few minutes alone. Kennedy says she finally sees that Ruth deserves equity, and Ruth agrees to another chance.

Kennedy gives a heartfelt closing argument. She points out that most people will say Turk is racist, but will not admit to their own biases. She says racism is not just hatred, but is treating someone differently because of their personal feelings. She talks about passive racism, when people ignore that there are injustices and do not speak up about them. She ends by presenting a scenario of what could happen if the people facing prejudice were no longer subjected to it.



Analysis

Kennedy spends a lot of time working through her conflicts to try to figure out what she is supposed to do and how she is supposed to feel. She has learned a great deal from Ruth up to this point, but she is having trouble honestly evaluating herself with regard to prejudice. She finally does admit that she really wants to win the case because it is her first murder case. Her emotions are chaotic as she tries to sort through her feelings and to honestly accept the lessons she has learned from Ruth. It is interesting that Edison feels very much like his mother. When he is alone in the car with Kennedy, he angrily points out that she has never mentioned the racial aspects of the case, and it is obvious that he also believes Kennedy is wrong.

Kennedy basically has an epiphany in which she comes to realize and accept the levels of racism that exist, why they exist, and what role most whites play in that situation. She pours all that out to the jury, admitting that lawyers avoid talking about race because it makes everyone uncomfortable. She calls on the jurors to look at the role race played in Ruth's charges, but also points out that there is medical evidence that Ruth is not to blame.

When Kennedy leaves Edison on the porch at home after his arrest, Ruth is in constant physical contact with Edison. Kennedy says she drives away, she leaves Ruth and Edison, "tangled in each other's regret" (424). That is one of several examples of imagery used in the book. The word "tangled" indicates that they do not have the ability to just walk away from each other, and that they each caught up in the problems of the other. They also regret decisions and issues that brought them to this point, and each has impacted the other. Most notably, Edison's actions could put an end to his college education, if he is convicted of a hate crime.

Discussion Question 1

What happens when Ruth takes the stand? Why does she fail to remain composed?

Discussion Question 2

Describe Kennedy's closing arguments. Predict Ruth's reaction.

Discussion Question 3

Why does Edison spray paint the racist symbol and words? What were his motivations? What does this say about his character?

Vocabulary

fundamental, cooperate, faithfully, equivalent, literally, ashen, chrysalis, ambidextrous, ubiquitous, arbitrary, blissfully, theoretically



Chapters 27-30; Stage Two: Pushing, Ruth, Turk, Kennedy, and Ruth; and Chapter 31; Stage Three: Afterbirth, Turk

Summary

Chapter 27 is titled "Ruth." Odette takes the floor, saying that the jurors do not have to like Turk or what he stands for, but alleging that Ruth turned a father's request into a racial incident. After the jury is released, Odette tells Kennedy and Ruth that she is having the charges against Edison dropped.

Kennedy warns that there will be a lot of reporters trying to talk to Ruth as they leave the courthouse. They see Wallace Mercy with a woman dressed in a pink suit. She goes to Brittany and introduces herself as Brittany's mother. Brittany attacks and turns to her father for backup. Instead, her father says, "Hello, Adele." Ruth turns to Kennedy, saying she had not expected that, but can see by Kennedy's reaction that she is not surprised.

Chapter 28 is titled "Turk." Later, Francis confides in Turk that he loved Adele but refused to attend church services with her. When a choir director "took an interest" in Adele, Francis accused her of cheating on him, though he is not certain she did. (440) It was in the aftermath of that relationship that Francis was introduced to the skinheads. Turk and Francis go to the cemetery where they find Brittany on Davis's grave, stabbing her arms in an attempt to eliminate the black blood.

Later, at the hospital, Turk has to work through his thoughts. They are that blacks are "inferior," but Brittany is black and he loves her (442). He holds onto that idea as he comes to terms with the fact that the skinhead rhetoric is false. Turk goes to the nursery where a father is standing at the window. The man identifies his daughter. Turk locates a dark-skinned baby and identifies that infant as Davis, though Davis's skin had been light. He begins to cry, realizing that he would not care if Davis had dark skin, if he was only alive.

Chapter 29 is titled "Kennedy." The jury does not return for two days. Ruth and Kennedy talk about the lab report that gave Ruth the clue about Brittany's mother. Kennedy says it has nothing to do with whether the jury finds Ruth guilty, but it does show Brittany and Turk's hypocrisy. Meanwhile, Howard is looking into possibilities for an appeal, if Ruth is found guilty. After urging the jury to come to a conclusion, the judge announces that the jury is split, 11-1. Howard and Kennedy believe the one is a teacher who could never admit that she had any prejudice, and was probably angry at Kennedy's closing arguments.



Back in the courtroom, the judge dismisses the jury, then rules that he sees a lack of evidence that Ruth caused Davis's death. He apologized for the situation and dismisses court.

Chapter 30 is titled "Ruth." Ruth lets Adisa and Edison know about the ruling. Christina texts her congratulations and Ruth thanks Kennedy and Howard. Kennedy suggests they meet for lunch the following week. Ruth feels that they will truly be equals.

Ruth realizes she left her mother's lucky scarf in the courtroom, and goes back to find it. The room is empty and she takes time to think. She considers that Edison might be a lawyer or a judge someday. Aloud, she says the word "yes," because it means the same as "I can," which is the opposite of being powerless (450).

In Chapter 31, Turk is in an examination room in a clinic with his three-year-old daughter, Carys. Turk is now married to a stockbroker, Deborah. When they married, he took Deborah's last night to distance himself from the life he lived as a skinhead. Now, Turk lectures on prejudice and hatred. He describes how other skinheads broke into his home and beat Turk and Francis after learning that Brittany's mother was black. He had begun working on a divorce when Brittany killed herself. Most people do not believe the kind of person Turk was.

His thoughts are drawn back to the present when Ruth enters the room. She is a nurse practitioner and introduces herself as Ruth Walker. He then looks around and sees the name "Ruth Jackson" on her nurse practitioner's license. She apparently does not recognize Turk. She examines Carys and predicts it is strep. When Ruth is gone, Carys looks at the only tattoo that Turk did not have removed. It is the word "Love" on the knuckles of his hand. She asks if that is her name. He says Carys means "love" in another language. As they wait for Ruth to return, Turk and Carys hold hands.

Analysis

The final three chapters of this section move quickly, as does the trial. The judge's ruling seems to be a way for the author to fully bring the situation to an immediate close, because the prosecutor might have taken some time to investigate further and refiled the case.

Deus ex Machina is the literary term for the kind of resolution seen when Brittany's mother introduces herself. That is the one part of the book that most readers will feel is overly-contrived. It seems unbelievable that Francis is a skinhead, raising his daughter alone, and that no one knew Brittany's mother is black. The fact that Francis just admits to the relationship is equally contrived. The judge's ruling has a similar feel, but not to the same degree.

Francis has a background of tolerance that will let him move out of the skinhead community. It is feasible that he will walk away from that life and thrive away from the rhetoric and hatred. Turk was indoctrinated as a teenager, but he has been questioning the skinhead theology for awhile. For example, Kennedy asked him if it is possible that



God punished him for his racial hatred by taking Davis' life, and Turk gave that possibility some thought. When he asked Brittany if she had considered that, she was furious. The fact is that Turk can also walk away from the skinhead lifestyle, and can move on. Brittany, however, is another story. Brittany has been taught the rhetoric her entire life. She knows nothing else and has never questioned whether her father's teachings could be true. The reader will learn that she could not move past the shock of knowing that her mother is black.

Kennedy admits that introducing Adele to Brittany had nothing to do with Ruth's case, but it did have to do with the prejudice that Brittany displayed throughout the trial. Some may feel that Kennedy's actions are unwarranted, especially considering that Brittany later commits suicide. Wallace Mercy seems happy to help Kennedy in her quest to find Brittany's mother because it points out the level of hypocrisy displayed by Brittany and Francis.

After the trial, Ruth does meet with Wallace Mercy, granting him an interview. She receives donations from people all over the world who wanted to show support, which is one of the book's themes.

The final chapter of the book is meant to wrap up the story so that the reader knows what happens to most of the characters. They learn that Brittany died of an overdose and Turk says she killed herself because she could not accept the reality. Turk has become a motivational speaker, but is devoted to his daughter. Ruth has excelled in her field. Most of the characters emerged to a happily-ever-after existence, but Turk says that he struggles with the memories of what he did and what he was.

Discussion Question 1

Who is Adele? Describe her meeting with Brittany. What is Brittany's reaction?

Discussion Question 2

What happens after the jury fails to reach a verdict? Why does Kennedy believe one juror holds out for a guilty verdict? Why do you believe the judge takes his action?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Ruth say "yes" in the empty courtroom? What does this indicate about her emotions at the time?



Vocabulary

utterly, rousing, ethical, directive, stride, incident, disregard, adhering, palatable, imbue, rhetorical, examination, gigs, defamation, purpose, mundane, selfish, extinction, cautious, dramatically, practitioner



Characters

Ruth Jackson

Ruth is a black woman who works as a labor and delivery nurse. She is a skilled nurse with some 20 years of experience when the Bauer baby is born. She loves her job and prides herself in providing what her patients need, sometimes even without them knowing their needs.

As a child, she has the advantage of being treated well by the wealthy family that employs her mother. Through that connection, Ruth learns more about how wealthy whites live and act. She is intelligent and gets a scholarship to an elite private school. She goes on to earn a nursing degree from Yale.

Whites treat Ruth differently than they would treat a well-educated, professional white woman. Blacks also treat her differently because she lives on the fringes of white society. She is skeptical of her white friends, always suspecting that they are not really friends but are merely acquaintances because of proximity or work. Over the course of the trial, she comes to realize that some of that is from her own attitudes and her natural tendency to protect herself.

Ruth is a likeable character and most readers will find they are able to identify with her, at least to a degree. She has honorable traits as she deals with a less-than-perfect world. She is doing the best she can for herself and her only son, and she is offering the best care she can to the mothers who come into her ward at the hospital. After the trial, it is clear that she manages to get her life back on track, making an even better career for herself.

Kennedy MacQuarrie

Kennedy is a brilliant young attorney who works for the public defender's office because she wants to do something positive for others. Typically for the public defenders, she is overworked and often forced to make snap decisions for her clients. She literally meets Ruth Jackson at Ruth's arraignment, with only a few minutes to get to know the basics of Ruth's case. She expects a more experienced attorney to be assigned as Ruth's attorney, but asks for the chance to take the lead. She is a little surprised that her boss grants the request.

Kennedy sets out to get the charges dismissed, but she soon discovers that Ruth wants to tell the story from her point of view. After spending her life trying not to speak her mind, Ruth wants nothing more than the opportunity to talk about the racism that set the events in motion. Kennedy initially rejects the idea, but comes to realize that there are some things more important than winning an acquittal.



At the beginning of her relationship with Ruth, Kennedy believes she is a modern-thinking woman who has no prejudicial biases. Kennedy soon learns that is not the case, and her work for Ruth brings Kennedy to a deeper understanding about her own self. With that understanding, Kennedy gets a small look into Ruth's life.

Turk Bauer

Turk is a young man who adheres to the skinhead philosophies. He is married to Brittany and has disassociated himself from his parents. He believes that the skinheads will stand beside him through everything. He is touched when several fellow believers arrive at the trial to show support.

Ultimately, Turk has been brainwashed into accepting the ideals of the skinhead movement. He was not raised with those values, but his hurt as a child prompts him to embrace the lifestyle. He is actually a sensitive man, as seen in his love for Brittany and for his son, Davis. He is devastated when Davis dies and – as would be a normal reaction for any grieving parent – looks for someone to blame. The fact that Ruth is black sets her up to be the person to take the blame.

Turk's attitude changes dramatically after he learns that Brittany's mother is black. At that point, he begins to look more carefully at both the teachings and his reasons for being part of the skinhead community. As the book comes to a close, Turk has turned his life around and spends a lot of his time speaking out against violence and hatred – the two main ideologies of the skinheads.

Both Turk and Brittany are difficult characters. Most readers will hate their prejudicial acts and will not sympathize with Turk and Brittany, even as grieving parents. People who have been subjected to or who have witnessed that kind of prejudicial treatment may find the characters believable or may feel that the actions and motivations are too contrived to be believable.

Brittany Bauer

Brittany is the young wife of Turk Bauer and the mother of Davis. She is understandably heartbroken when Davis dies. She fully embraces the ideas of the skinheads and believes in the truth of their ideology. She is still struggling with Davis' death when she learns that her mother is black. Davis' death and the realization about her mother being black push Brittany over the edge. Brittany commits suicide.

Edison Jackson

Edison is Ruth's only son. He has good manners and makes good grades. Ruth expects him to make a good life for himself. He struggles after Ruth's arrest and acts out in unexpected ways as he tries to cope. Ultimately, he stands fully behind his mother. He



fears what their lives will become if she is sent to prison. Edison is a likeable character, but he may be too perfect for some readers to fully believe.

Adisa

Adisa is Ruth's older sister. Her birth name is Rachel, but she changes her name to Adisa. Except in direct quotes, she is referred to as Adisa throughout this study guide for clarity's sake. Adisa is a strong-willed person who understands Ruth more than Ruth believes. Ruth, on the other hand, believes she understands Adisa's thoughts and motivations, but comes to learn that there are depths to Adisa that she has never recognized. Adisa is angry about the prejudice blacks face, but she embraces that anger – at least to some degree. She is not willing to keep her mouth shut as Ruth always does, even when it makes her life more difficult.

Adisa is a staunch supporter as Ruth goes through the arrest and trial, never wavering in her support for her sister. She attends the trial and takes steps she hopes will help Ruth whenever she has the opportunity.

Adisa has five children and seems to be doing a poor job of raising them. They seem to be little more than street thugs. Ruth is furious to discover that Edison is spending time with Adisa's son. Adisa is struggling financially and is, in many ways, the typical poverty-stricken black woman living in a poor part of the city.

Francis Mitchum

Francis is Brittany's father and one of the older members of the skinhead community to which Turk and Brittany belong. He has a reputation as being a killer and full of hatred toward blacks. His ideas and rhetoric provide one of the first times that Turk realizes he is not the only person who hates blacks. Francis is actually a faker who is just acting out his hatred of a specific black woman who hurt him. As the story comes to an end, a black woman arrives who announces that she is Brittany's mother, and Francis does not deny the claim. He admits that this woman broke his heart, prompting him to join the skinheads and take on that way of life.

Raine Tesco

Raine was a young man in his early 20s when he met Turk. The two worked at the same “alternative coffee house,” which was owned by a friend of Turk's father. Raine provided friendship at a time when Turk desperately needed it, and he took Turk to the first skinhead events. When Brittany insists on revenge, Turk turns to Raine and is shocked to discover that Raine has turned away from the skinhead community to raise his children with totally different attitudes.



Ruth's Mother

Ruth's mother is a devoted, loyal woman. She works as a maid for her entire life, remaining with the same family until the day she dies. Ruth's mother is responsible for teaching Ruth her values. As a young woman, she performed her jobs seamlessly, going so far as to deliver Mrs. Hallowell's baby without any fuss. She sometimes took her two daughters with her to the Hallowell's home when the girls were young, which is how Ruth became a part of Christine Hallowell's life.

Christina Hallowell

Christina is the daughter of Mina and Sam Hallowell, who employ Ruth's mother for many years. Christina is sincerely interested in Ruth's well-being, but initially says she cannot be involved because of her husband's political aspirations. She later takes a stand as Ruth's supporter, making it clear that her friendship is more important than appearances.

The relationship between Christina and Ruth is an important part of Ruth's identity. Ruth has always felt that she did not quite fit into Christina's life as a friend, partly because Ruth's mother worked for Christina's mother and partly because of their racial and economic differences. As Christina learns more about Ruth and Ruth learns more about people like Christina, Ruth has to face the fact that at least some of her insecurities were of her own making.

Odette Lawton

Odette is the prosecuting attorney handling Ruth's case. She is black, which Turk sees as a horrible coincidence. Ruth notes that Odette never makes eye contact, obviously trying to distance herself from the other black woman involved in the trial.

Howard Moore

Howard is a young black attorney who joins the prosecutor's office. Kennedy chooses him to help her with the jury research at Ruth's trial, and he remains her co-counsel for the remainder of the trial.



Symbols and Symbolism

Skinheads

The skinheads symbolize hate and a rhetoric of white supremacy. This is a term used to describe the white supremacist group to which Turk Bauer belongs. The term refers to the fact that they once shaved their heads as a means of standing apart as a group, but they ended that practice as a means of blending in with their communities. Hate and violence are commonplace for members of this group. They hate anyone who is not white and anyone who chooses an alternative lifestyle, such as homosexuals. They do not approve of government rules. They are in favor of having the freedom to own and carry guns.

Davis Bauer

Davis is a baby born to Brittany and Turk Bauer. For Turk and Brittany, he is a symbol of hope for the future. For Ruth, he is a symbol of continued prejudice and hatred.

The Talk

The Talk symbolizes Ruth's attempt to protect her son from prejudice because prejudice finds its way into every aspect of their lives. Ruth describes having the Talk with Edison, which most readers will immediately expect is the conversation about sex. Instead, this Talk is about race, and it is as important to Ruth as the conversation about sex. It is symbolic of Edison's discovery that his skin tone is different from other students in his class and that some of those students will think less of him because of it.

The Post-It Note

The Post-it note is a symbol of Turk's prejudice against Ruth, simply because of her race. The labor and delivery supervisor for Ruth's shift is Marie, and she posts the note on Davis Bauer's chart after Turk complains about Ruth's presence in their room. The note becomes an issue at the trial, and it is cited as a motive for Ruth's action – or inaction – when Davis crashes.

Ruth's Nursing License

The nursing license symbolizes Ruth's successful education and career. Ruth's loss of her nursing license represents the prejudicial attitudes that led to Ruth being the scapegoat for Davis's death. Ruth is educated as a nurse, including a degree from Yale. She is proud of her medical skills as a nurse, as well as her ability to help other people.



She is devastated when she loses her nursing license after the Bauer's levy claims of wrongdoing against her.

Wallace Macy

Wallace Mercy is a television personality who becomes interested in Ruth's case. He symbolizes an effort to make the public aware of prejudicial situations. He is intent on making Ruth's case public, promising that there are many who would support her fully.

White Schools

Ruth attends a predominately-white school, as does her son, Edison. These schools symbolize a better education that is not always available in the predominately black and poverty-stricken neighborhoods where many blacks live.

Christina's Money

Christina gives Ruth money before the trial begins. To Ruth, that money symbolizes the gap between them. Christina does not see it that way, and says she only wants to help Ruth.

Swastika

The swastika is a symbol of the German military. It is associated with the murder of millions of Jewish people as the Germans sought to rid the world of everyone who was not a perfect example of the Aryan race. Turk has a swastika on his head, with his and Brittany's initials in the center. Edison paints a swastika on the side of the hospital in a misguided attempt to try to get his mother acquitted. He believes that Turk will be blamed and that will bring an end to the trial.

Newborn Lab Results

The Newborn Lab Results represent the truth about Davis's death, which the hospital caused by not having the lab results in time to take appropriate steps. The nurses withhold food for a while before Davis is circumcised. It is that time without food that prompts his system to crash, which results in his death. If the results had been returned immediately, the circumcision would have been handled differently.



Settings

Mercy-West Haven Hospital

Mercy-West Haven Hospital is where Ruth works as a labor and delivery nurse. The hospital is not the largest in the area, but the delivery ward is often very busy. The hospital seems typical of smaller facilities during this time. For example, the nursery is no longer used for babies on a regular basis because the babies spend most of their time in the rooms with their parents.

Upper West Side

The Upper West Side is where the Hallowells live and where Ruth attends a private school most of her life. The area is symbolic of affluence and privilege that is mainly available only to whites. The area serves as a stark contrast to the poverty of Harlem, where Adisa lives.

The East End

The East End is the neighborhood where Ruth and Kennedy live, though they never know they live in the same area until Kennedy is representing Ruth. The area is predominately white, and Ruth considers it a better place to raise Edison. One of the main reasons she chooses to live in the East End is to save Edison from living in one neighborhood while attending school in another, as Ruth did when she was a child.

McDonald's

Ruth goes to work at McDonald's after she loses her job at the hospital. This particular McDonald's is apparently near her home, because Edison stops in there after school, which is how he discovers that Ruth got the job. Edison is horrified that his highly-educated mother is working at McDonald's, but Ruth is just happy to be earning money.

The Courthouse

The Courthouse is where the trial against Ruth is held. It is typical of courthouses of the place and time, and it serves as a place where news reporters and others gather for a look at the people involved in the trial. Outside the courthouse is where Brittany's mother confronts Brittany and Francis, bringing the story to another climactic point.



Themes and Motifs

Turk and Brittany's Beliefs

Turk and Brittany are fully involved in the skinhead mentality by the time Davis is born. Their backgrounds are different, but Turk and Brittany are in full agreement by this point in their marriage. Their beliefs lead them down a tragic road and only Turk emerges understanding how wrong he has been.

Turk is not raised with the skinhead mentality. He is indoctrinated into that lifestyle by other young men when Turk is a teenager. By that time, his parents have divorced and he is spending time with his father when he meets some skinheads, including Raine Tesco. Raine befriends Turk at a time when Turk is floundering and desperately in need of a friend. Raine takes Turk to a gay nightclub where they attack some gay men. It is only when he is becoming involved in the attack that Turk discovers his father is gay. He brutally beats his father, which earns him a reputation among the skinhead community. When he meets Brittany, she informs him that the story has grown as people tell it, so that some believe Turk killed his father.

Turk accepts the ideals of the skinhead community, especially those of Francis, Brittany's father. Turk and Francis run a website together to promote the ideology at a time when most skinheads are becoming less vocal about their lifestyle in an effort to avoid persecution. While Turk becomes indoctrinated into the lifestyle, Brittany is raised in it. She believes the teachings with all her heart, which is why she cannot handle the knowledge that her mother is black.

Turk and Brittany's beliefs are what sets the trial in this book into motion. Turk and Brittany are in the hospital, celebrating the birth of their son, Davis. They are ecstatic about the baby and naturally feel protective of him. Tragically, their prejudice makes them refuse the service of the woman who is probably the most skilled nurse on the ward. They refuse to let Ruth have anything to do with Davis's care, simply because he . Their prejudice is so strong that they literally do not want to let a black nurse touch their child. They object to Ruth's interaction with Davis, which leads to the charges filed against Ruth.

Turk and Brittany are understandably horrified when they discover that Davis is in trouble with an entire team working to save his life. Ruth is on that team, and they zero in on that point as they look for someone to blame. Hearing one doctor tell Ruth that she needs to back off the chest compressions she is performing, they believe that she is performing her duties incorrectly. During the trial, the doctor discounts that fact.

Their lifestyle makes them suspicious of any black person, which impacts many aspects of their everyday lives. For example, the district attorney prosecuting Ruth is also black. Turk has no choice but to deal with the woman, though his hatred for her is just as strong as his hatred of Ruth.



Another important aspect of this theme is seen as Brittany urges Turk to enact some violence after Davis' death. She wants revenge, which is an understandable reaction to her grief. Her upbringing makes her ready to take that desire to fruition.

Prejudice

The skinheads of this book are a racially-motivated group of people who hate anyone who is not strictly white and anyone who chooses a different lifestyle. They spread their prejudicial message and enforce their beliefs with violence. Most fully believe their ideology and create lifestyles around furthering their cause. That prejudice governs everything they do.

For the members of the skinhead community, prejudice overwhelms everything else. That prejudice makes Turk and Brittany refuse Ruth's service for Davis, though Ruth is arguably the most experienced and caring nurses on the ward. Davis's death is tragic, but Ruth does not play any part in it. He is actually suffering from an undiagnosed illness that, combined with preparing for the circumcision, causes Davis's death. Turk's prejudice makes him jump to the conclusion of blaming Ruth – the only black person in the room at the time of Davis's death.

The skinheads' prejudice is mainly based on race. They believe in white supremacy, and have a general rule determining how much other races are hated. For example, Turk says that he hates some races more than others. He does not explain his reasoning. It may be that he has some reason for the order, but it may be simply an ingrained hatred that is more intense for some races.

The prejudice is mainly based on race, but there are other factors at work. For example, the skinheads hate anyone who is homosexual. In his first outing, Turk participates in beating up homosexual men, and one of them turns out to be his father. When Brittany wants to be involved in a violent act, she and Turk attack two gay men.

An interesting turn in this theme is seen in the fact that most are willing to associate with people they hate if the situation benefits them. For example, a black woman is assigned as prosecutor in the case against Ruth. Turk is forced to work with her, believing this black woman is the only person who can get justice for Davis.

Turk was initiated into the community as a teenager. He was rebellious and angry, and another skinhead focused in on that, befriending Turk in a way that made Turk believe these people were his friends. Brittany, however, was raised with the prejudicial attitudes, meaning they are more deeply ingrained in her than in Turk. Brittany literally cannot stand it when she discovers that her mother is black, and she kills herself.

Another example of this theme is seen in the way Ruth is treated on a daily basis. She takes Kennedy with her on a short shopping trip. While they are in the store, clerks shadow Ruth, making it clear they are keeping an eye on her. After they have paid for their purchases, a clerk stops Ruth and checks her bag but does not check Kennedy's,



though the two women are obviously together. It is not until this event that Kennedy fully understands the prejudice that Ruth faces, just because of her skin tone.

Kennedy herself is another example of this theme. She believes that she is not prejudiced, but discovers that she goes to the opposite extreme as she tries not to show her prejudice. When that discovery, she pushes readers to think about their own prejudices, whether those are related to race, gender, or some other criteria.

Changing Attitudes

Life is filled with change as people grow, learn, and are affected by other people. The characters of this book similarly show changing attitudes and develop different ideas as they grow, mature, and learn. Turk is the main character exhibiting this theme, but other characters are also examples of changing attitudes.

Turk grew up in a non-traditional manner, which made him susceptible to the skinhead rhetoric. His brother was killed in a wreck, and Turk blamed the other person involved, who happened to be an older black man. Turk hated the man for his involvement, though it might not have been the man's fault at all. His hatred turned toward all blacks, and that hatred was spurred by his friendship with Raine Tesco. Raine was an active member of the skinhead community, and he befriended Turk at a time when Turk desperately needed a friend. The fact that Turk blamed a black man for his brother's death made him doubly susceptible to Raine's message of white supremacy.

Turk met and fell in love with Brittany, who was the daughter of a famous member of the skinhead community. She was fully immersed in the lifestyle, and Turk followed her lead deeper into the attitudes of prejudice and hatred. By the time their son is born, Turk is so deeply involved that the skinhead community shows their support by showing up at the trial.

Turk seems willing to let the justice system take out revenge on Ruth, but Brittany wants a violent revenge. She goads Turk into seeking revenge and he looks for other members of the skinhead community to help him. What he finds is that most are unwilling to go that far. They may hate blacks and be willing to show their support, but they are not willing to go so far as to put their lives on the line for their cause. This shows a changing attitude in general, which can partly be explained by the fact that the skinheads are trying to live peaceful, normal lives in mainstream America.

Turk goes to Raine's house believing that Raine will absolutely join him for a violent revenge. When he arrives, he is surprised to find that Raine's house is the epitome of a normal American house. He expects to find that Raine is merely hiding his skinhead attitudes, but finds that Raine has made a complete change. Raine explains that he wants to raise his children without the hatred and prejudice, and has left the skinhead life completely behind. His children are the catalyst that changed his attitudes. Turk could not predict that he would undergo a similar change just a few years later. In fact,



he becomes a speaker, talking about the negativity of hatred and prejudice, and is pleased when he finds that Ruth is taking care of his daughter during an illness.

Kennedy is another major example of this theme. She enters her role as Ruth's attorney with the belief that she is not prejudiced, but discovers that she has not idea about the facts of Ruth's life and that she does have prejudices, though she tries not to let them affect her attitudes or actions. In fact, she goes to the opposite extreme, trying so hard not to show prejudice that she becomes overly careful.

Appearances

Appearances are important to most people, though some will deny that it matters and others will downplay the significance. The characters in this book are no different as appearances play a role in the lives and actions of several of them.

The skinheads are a major example of this theme. The term comes from their tendency to shave their heads, setting themselves apart in appearance from others who have different priorities and ideals. However, as police crack down on hate crimes and skinheads find themselves under a microscope, they focus on their appearance as a way of allowing room to further their cause. They grow out their hair so that people cannot tell they are skinheads at a glance. They live in normal neighborhoods with everyday jobs and lives. Turk believes that people are even more afraid when they discover that skinheads are no longer setting themselves apart by their appearance. Kennedy actually proves out that fact, telling her husband that she has realized that skinheads could be anywhere, even in their neighborhood.

They do other things in an effort to blend in, such as gathering in smaller groups and anonymously spreading their message of hate. When Turk visits Raine for the final time, he believes Raine is just trying to blend in. He is horrified to learn that Raine has genuinely left the skinhead community behind.

Ruth is another example of this theme. She talks about being at a sleepover at Christina's and knowing that none of the other girls would understand her need to wrap her hair in a scarf to keep it from being frizzy or to rub her knees, elbows, and heels to keep them from taking on an ashy caste. These were normal acts to Ruth as she sought to look her best. She even worried about her appearance just after Edison's birth. Without the ability to tame the frizz in her hair, she wrapped it in a towel and told visitors she had just showered. All these steps were taken in an effort to put forth the correct appearance.

From her own experiences, Ruth knows that other mothers want the same opportunity. She helps them achieve that, providing them a moment of privacy to put on makeup, brush their hair, or do whatever they felt was necessary. She prides herself in knowing that these small touches are important to these new mothers, and that it helps them feel better about themselves.



Christina is another example of this theme, though she seems to effortlessly achieve a photographic appearance all the time. Her apartment mimics perfection, and Ruth wonders what it would be like to live in a place that is so perfect.

Shows of Support

Several of the characters show support for fellow characters, sometimes in unexpected ways and against all odds. These become an important theme in the book because they are evidence of relationships, prejudices, and changing attitudes.

The relationship between Adisa and Ruth is one example of this theme. Adisa and Ruth have a rocky relationship in some ways. However, in other ways the two are completely devoted to each other. Ruth remembers Adisa standing up for Ruth as a child, saying that she could have other friends but she had only one sister. Adisa remains mainly true to that as Ruth faces the murder charge. Even when Ruth lashes out, angry at the circumstances but taking her anger out on Adisa, the two remain devoted to each other. In some cases, Ruth is not really thankful for Adisa's support. Ruth is angry when Adisa meets with Wallace Mercy, knowing that Adisa is probably looking to turn the situation in her favor. Ruth is also angry at how Adisa handles the situation when Ruth has to apply for public assistance, but Adisa points out that at least she was able to help Ruth get the help.

Edison's support of his mother is another example of this theme. Edison often reaches out to show Ruth his support, but he also shows his support in a completely negative way. Edison spray paints racial slurs on the hospital wall, hoping that it will put Turk in a negative light and bring an end to the charges against his mother. Though Edison's actions are misguided, he has his mother's best interests at heart.

Kennedy is another example of this theme. She desperately wants to win Ruth's case, but admits to herself that it is mostly because this is her first murder trial. Once she is able to put herself in Ruth's shoes, she admits that she would want to bring the entire race issue to the forefront of the trial. When that happens, she talks openly about prejudice to the jurors, though she fears it will not win the trial. Her willingness to support Ruth's desires for real justice overwrite her own desire to get Ruth acquitted.

Wallace Mercy is yet another example of this theme. Wallace has a television show and he tells Ruth that his viewers want to support her in her fight for justice. He asks if any of her co-workers stood up for her. Ruth says she would not have wanted Corinne to jeopardize her job for Ruth, but Wallace counters, saying that there are people who will stand behind Ruth 100 percent, regardless of the risk. Some people send Ruth money, both before and after her interview with Wallace, as a show of support.

Ruth sees that same kind of support from the people gathered at her mother's funeral. She realizes that these are people who have known her and prayed for her since her childhood. She feels a level of support from them that she has never felt from co-workers or white friends.

Styles

Point of View

The book is presented in first person from the different perspectives of Ruth, Kennedy, and Turk. Each of the three characters has a vastly different perspective of the world in general and of the situation involving the death of Davis Bauer.

The varying perspective gives the reader a full look into the minds of each character. Dividing the perspective by chapter means the reader can get the varying views more fully in the scene. For example, Ruth arrives in the Bauer birthing suite to find Brittany and Turk there with their newborn son. She realizes that Brittany is reluctant to let go of Davis and puts that down to the overly protective attitude of a new mother. She hears Brittany and Turk whispering and can only fear that she might have done something to make them question her skills as a nurse. In a later chapter, the reader sees the scene from Turk's perspective. He and Brittany are shocked when a black nurse arrives. They are not expecting it and do not know what to do at first. Having the two perspectives presented in different chapters is an interesting literary technique that works well in this book.

The perspective is, however, limited to only Turk, Brittany, and Ruth. The only way readers know what other characters think is through conversations and some narrative. For example, Edison is furious at a couple of points during the arrest and trial, but Ruth does not know exactly why. Since Ruth does not know why, the reader does not know why. The reader is not privy to Edison's thought processes and knows only what he tells Ruth.

Language and Meaning

The book's tone is mixed throughout, depending on the character who leads the perspective at that point. There are overriding hopes, fears, love, and hate that take over in various chapters, but the reader will likely be expecting a positive outcome based on an undercurrent that is felt throughout the book. That expectation is borne out as Ruth achieves a new career in the medical field and Turk ends his association with the skinhead community.

One aspect of the book seems trite and contrived. Brittany's mother is black and her father admits that his hatred of blacks is a result of that breakup. Those details seem overly convenient and that there could have been other ways of achieving the same end result.

There is a great deal of prejudice and hatred in the book, mainly for the skinheads who try to spread their ideology and rhetoric to others. There are also some sensitive racial issues presented, many in stark details. For example, Ruth takes Kennedy on a shopping trip where Kennedy discovers that Ruth is subjected to over-anxious clerks



who seem to fear that Ruth might be trying to steal something. As they leave the store, a clerk checks Ruth's bags but no one checks Kennedy's. The two women are shopping together and both are well-educated, honest people, but Ruth is treated differently because of her skin tone. That entire situation makes it clear that racial prejudice is alive and well, and that people like Kennedy have never really understood what blacks endure on a regular basis.

Another important point regarding the language of the book is the use of labor and delivery terms. This is apparently an effort to make the book seem authentic. The information Ruth and others nurses share about their patients is presented in medical terms and most casual readers will not understand half of the information. Important pieces of information, such as the significance of a sickle-cell anemia diagnosis, is explained so that the lay reader with no medical background can understand.

Structure

The book is divided into five parts and thirty-one chapters. Each is titled to mimic a stage of labor and the events of that part symbolize the various stages of a typical labor and delivery. The five parts are titled as "stages," which is a term used during labor. The titles are "Stage One: Early Labor," "Stage One: Active Labor," "Stage One: Transition," "Stage Two: Pushing," and "Stage Three: Afterbirth." Each of the parts is further divided into chapters. All the chapters are titled by one of three names, Ruth, Turk, or Kennedy. These are the three main characters of the book and the three who undergo the greatest changes in attitudes.

The first part has only one chapter, titled "Ruth." This chapter introduces Ruth with a focus on her skills and talents as a labor and delivery nurse, and how she came to that point in her life. The second part has six chapters. The first, third, and sixth are titled "Ruth." Two are titled "Turk" and one is titled "Kennedy." This chapter gives more background on the three characters, which is vital to understanding their actions and motivations in the coming chapters of the book.

The third part has eleven chapters. Five of these are titled "Kennedy." Ruth has four of these chapters and Turk has only two. Kennedy is a focus in this section as she learns to recognize and deal with her own prejudices. The fourth part has twelve chapters. This section begins and ends with chapters titled "Ruth." A total of five chapters are titled for Ruth in this section. The trial takes place in this section and there is a focus on testimony. Ruth fears going to jail but she equally fears keeping silent about the unfair prejudicial treatment. Four chapters are titled for Kennedy, who has to balance her desire to win with Ruth's demands. The remaining three are titled for Turk. The final part is aptly titled "Afterbirth" and contains a single chapter, "Turk." This chapter takes place several years after the trial and gives the reader a brief look at Turk and Ruth in the aftermath.



Quotes

The experience of watching Louis being born affected us all differently. Christina had her baby via surrogate. Rachel had five. Me, I became a labor and delivery nurse.”

-- Ruth (Stage One: Early Labor, Ruth paragraph 21)

Importance: Ruth, Christina, and Rachel (who is referred to throughout this guide as Adisa) have just witnessed Mina Hallowell give birth. The earlier part of this chapter is talking about Ruth's childhood, including how she came to be in a position to witness her mother deliver the Hallowell's son.

But when I open the folder, there's a hot-pink Post-it on the paperwork. NO AFRICAN AMERICAN PERSONNEL TO CARE FOR THIS PATIENT.”

-- Ruth (Chapter 4, Ruth paragraph 17)

Importance: Ruth has just discovered that Marie has given in to Turk's demand that no blacks will take care of Brittany or Davis. This note becomes part of the trial, and Ruth is accused of letting Davis die rather than risking her job to tend to him.

But when things began to change in the mid-nineties – when the government cracked down on skinhead crews – leaders like Francis found themselves strung up by their own brass balls, headed to prison. Francis understood that if you don't want to break, you have to bend.”

-- Turk (Chapter 6, Turk paragraph 82)

Importance: Turk is explaining why Francis called for the skinheads of his community to change their appearance. This tactic is one of the book's themes.

Then he sits down, invisible behind the partition that's between us.”

-- Kennedy (Chapter 8, Kennedy paragraph 26)

Importance: Kennedy has just met Howard after an awkward conversation with another co-worker about Howard's lack of experience and his race. That partition is part of the office furniture, but it is symbolic of the gap between Kennedy and Howard because of their different races.

It feels just a foreign to be soothing Britt while she sobs as it was for me to cradle an infant. This is not the woman I married. I wonder if I buried that fierce spirit along with the body of my son.”

-- Turk (Chapter 10, Turk paragraph 34)

Importance: Turk has never known Brittany to show signs of weakness like this, and he does not know how to handle it. This fear he expresses is a sign of his changing attitudes, which turns him in a completely new direction after the trial.



I know that people who become public defenders are doing it because morals are more important to them than money, or else they would be off making partner in the big city. Which means Miz Kennedy either has a trust fund or a sugar daddy.”

-- Adisa (Chapter 14, Ruth paragraph 15)

Importance: Ruth and Adisa are having lunch together, and they are talking about how Ruth will support herself while she is awaiting trial. Adisa continues to be scornful of Kennedy, and uses this example to say that Kennedy would not even think to talk to Ruth about surviving financially until the trial.

So we're looking for a unicorn,' Howard says. 'A supersensitive, racially conscious, straight white male.”

-- Howard Moore (Chapter 18, Kennedy paragraph 73)

Importance: Kennedy and Howard are discussing the kind of person they believe will be the most likely to consider Ruth's situation, and to find in her favor. Kennedy's next comment is that it does not have to be a “straight white male.” The person can be anyone who has endured prejudice.

I was crying because Kennedy had been right all along – it really didn't matter if the nurse attending to Davis Bauer was black or white or purple. It didn't matter if I tried to resuscitate that baby or not. None of it would have made a difference.”

-- Ruth (Chapter 19, Ruth paragraph 38)

Importance: Ruth has just gotten her first look at the results of Davis' newborn screening and realizes what those results mean. The results make Ruth ashamed that she has lied about trying to resuscitate Davis before Marie's arrival because nothing she did – or didn't do – would have saved the baby.

You may not like what they believe, you may not agree with them, but you cannot deny their just due as patients in the hospital to make decisions about the medical care of their baby. Exercising that privilege, Turk Bauer requested that only certain nurses attend to his infant.”

-- Odette Lawton (Chapter 22, Ruth paragraph 12)

Importance: Odette is addressing the jury for the first time about the case. She presents the situation as if Turk had requested specific nurses to care for Davis, instead of saying that he did not want any black nurses involved in Davis's care. She also brings up the subject of race, but she tries to say that Turk was within his rights.

If it wasn't for him, none of this ever would have happened. And after today, everyone was blaming her, and they should have been blaming him.”

-- Edison Jackson (Chapter 26, Kennedy paragraph 18)

Importance: Edison is talking about his impression after hearing the testimony in court and how he wanted to do something to help Ruth. He spray painted a swastika and



racial slur on the hospital, hoping that it would get Turk in trouble, which would end the case against his mother.

Naturally, Britt recoils, and then the woman lobs a blatant lie: that Brittany Bauer, the princess of the White Power Movement, is actually half black.”

-- Turk (Chapter 28, Turk paragraph 1)

Importance: Turk is talking about the moment when Adele arrives and announces that she is Brittany's mother. Ruth has already described the scene from her perspective, but Turk goes on to say that he immediately looks to Francis for an answer. Francis is the man who taught Turk most of what he knows about the skinhead philosophies. Turk is amazed when Francis does not deny it.

I say that hate ate her from the inside out, but what really happened was more mundane: a bottle of pills, swallowed with a bottle of vodka. She could never handle seeing the world as it really is, and so finally, she found a way to keep her eyes closed forever.”

-- Turk (Chapter 31, Turk paragraph 6)

Importance: In the final chapter, Turk is bringing the reader up to date on what happened after Ruth's trial. In this quote, he is talking about Brittany's suicide when she could not face the fact that her mother was black.