Warriors Don't Cry

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MELBA BEALS

Melba Pattillo Beals was born on Pearl Harbor Day—the day that the Japanese attacked a US naval base in Hawaii, thereby launching the United States into World War II—to Lois and Howell Pattillo. Beals was her parents' first born, but they also had a son, named Conrad. Lois was an educated and ambitious woman who was among the first black students at the University of Arkansas. During Beals's childhood, Lois worked as an English teacher and would later earn a Master's degree. Howell was a worker on the Missouri Pacific Railroad. Beals's parents divorced when she was seven. Beals entered Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas in September 1957 as part of the Little Rock Nine—the first African American students to attend Central in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the landmark Supreme Court case that ended segregation in American public schools. Due to Governor Orval Faubus's closing of all Little Rock schools in 1958 to halt integration, Beals was relocated with the help of the NAACP. She moved into the home of Dr. George McCabe, a professor at San Francisco State University, and finished high school in Northern California. In 1962, Beals enrolled at San Francisco State University for two years, then left to marry John Beals, a martial-arts expert. The couple had one child, Kellie, then divorced after seven years. Beals pursued a career in journalism and worked as a news reporter for an NBC affiliate in San Francisco. She was also the host of a radio news talk show for ABC. She has written articles for numerous publications. While working as a journalist, she simultaneously ran her own public relations firm and, in 1990, published her first book on self-promotion entitled *Expose Yourself*. In 1999, Beals joined the faculty of Dominican University in California and founded its Department of Communications and Media Studies. In the same year, she and other members of the Little Rock Nine received the Congressional Gold Medal for their contributions to integration and civil rights. She continues to write and work as a public speaker.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Central High School was among the first Southern public schools to be integrated. Arkansas was more progressive than other Southern states in its compliance with integration. The University of Arkansas's Schools of Law and Medicine were integrated in 1948 and schools in Hoxie, Arkansas were integrated in 1955. A year before, the small towns of Charleston and Fayetteville integrated their public schools. The responses of some Arkansan school boards were swift in response to the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and its follow-up *Brown v. Board II* decision in 1955, which sought the integration of public schools "with all deliberate speed." In 1960, six-year-old Ruby Bridges enrolled at the all-white William Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans during what has been called the "desegregation crisis of 1960." The integration of public schools was a major step for black people in securing the right to equal treatment under the law, though the Civil Rights Act would not be passed until 1964, officially ending segregation in public places and banning employers from discriminating on the basis of race. In instances in which Melba's family wants to distract her from the pressures of integration, they follow the news about the "space race" between the US and the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union successfully launched Sputnik on October 4, 1957.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Over the last fifty years, several memoirs and historical accounts have been written about the integration of Central High School. Daisy Bates published the first memoir about the Little Rock Nine in 1962, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock: A Memoir*, which included a foreword by Eleanor Roosevelt. In 2009, Carlotta Walls LaNier also published a memoir about her experiences at Little Rock, *A Mighty Long Way: My Journey to Justice at Little Rock Central High School*, co-written with Lisa Frazier Page. In 2011, the journalist David Margolick published *Elizabeth and Hazel: Two Women of Little Rock*, which tells the dual stories of Elizabeth Eckford's harrowing experience at Central High and the trauma she suffered afterward, as well as the story of Hazel Bryan (one of Eckford's tormentors, famously captured in a photograph) seeking redemption for her racism. In the United States in the early- to mid-1990s, there was a surge of interest in publishing books about the Civil Rights Movement and about black people's experiences under Jim Crow. As a result, many black American writers enjoyed more fame and acclaim in the nineties: Maya Angelou read her poem "On the Pulse of Morning" at the first inauguration of President Bill Clinton in January 1993, and Toni Morrison won the Nobel Prize for Literature in the same year. From the 1970s forward, Black women's personal histories were dominant in African-American literature; particularly notable is the persistent popularity of Maya Angelou's memoir, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. In 1996, the scholar bell hooks wrote a memoir about growing up under Jim Crow, titled *Bone Black: Memories of a Girlhood*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Warriors Don't Cry: The Searing Memoir of the

Battle to Integrate Little Rock's Central High School

- **When Written:** 1957-1994. The account is based on diaries that Beals kept while at Central High, as well as press clippings that she and her family collected.
- **Where Written:** Little Rock, Arkansas and San Francisco, California
- **When Published:** 1994
- **Literary Period:** 20th-century African-American Literature
- **Genre:** Nonfiction; Memoir
- **Setting:** Little Rock, Arkansas
- **Climax:** Melba tries to enter Central High School and is confronted by violent segregationists. She watches while Elizabeth Eckford, another member of the Little Rock Nine, faces the huge, angry crowd alone.
- **Antagonist:** Little Rock segregationists; racism
- **Point of View:** First-person

EXTRA CREDIT

Johnny Mathis. Beals notes that in August of 1957, Johnny Mathis, a popular African-American singer in the 1950s, had his first hit with "Chances Are." Mathis, along with Nat King Cole, is one of the singers from the era whom Beals admires. Two years later, Mathis performed on Pat Boone Chevy Showroom, a variety show. He and Boone, a white man, sang "Peace on Earth" side-by-side on the air, at Boone's insistence, despite the threat of opposition from Southern Chevrolet sponsors.

Bill Clinton and Hope, Arkansas. Beals went back to Central High in 1987 to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the school's desegregation. Arkansas Governor and future President Bill Clinton, whom she refers to as "Billy Clinton," was there to greet her and the other members of the Little Rock Nine. Clinton is a native of Hope, Arkansas where, in June 1958, Judge Harry J. Lemley issued a judgment in the *Aaron v. Cooper* case allowing for a temporary end to integration at Central High. His decision was later overturned by the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals.

PLOT SUMMARY

Melba Pattillo Beals is born on December 7, 1941 amid the uproar over the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor. Melba, a nine-pound baby, is born at a white hospital that also serves black rail workers, such as her father, Howell. She is delivered with forceps, causing an injury to her scalp that nearly kills her. The doctor ordered nurses to irrigate Melba's head with Epsom salts and water every few hours, but they refused to give proper care to a black girl. She probably would not have survived if not for a black janitor's passing mention of the doctor's instructions. When Melba is four years old she begins to question the segregation that she sees every day in Arkansas, such as not being allowed to ride a merry-go-round or watching her family get overcharged for food and then humiliated by Mr. Waylan, a white grocer, for questioning the injustice.

Life changes when the Supreme Court issues its decision in the landmark case, Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas on May 17, 1954. May 17 is also the day on which Melba is nearly raped by a white man seeking revenge for the verdict. Melba is rescued by Marissa, an occasional bully and social outcast, who beats the man over the head with her leather schoolbag then runs away with Melba. When they reach Melba's house, Marissa explains what happened to Melba's grandmother, India. Grandma India makes a bath for Melba and the family decides not to go to the police, since Howell fears that talking to them could make things worse. On May 24, 1955, the Little Rock school board announces a plan to integrate the all-white Central High School. When Melba's teacher at Horace Mann High School asks if anyone who lives within Central High's district would like to attend the school, Melba raises her hand. She is mostly inspired by curiosity about Central, and reasons that, if schools became open to black people, other services would also become available to them.

Melba spends August of 1957, the month before she eventually enrolls at Central, visiting her Uncle Clancey in Cincinnati, Ohio along with Grandma India, Mother Lois, and her younger brother, Conrad. Melba enjoys the relative freedom that black people have in Cincinnati. She is pleased not to have to cross the street when a white person passes on the sidewalk, to browse in a department store without anyone looking at her disapprovingly, to get served in a nice restaurant or at a movie theater concession stand, and to be invited over to a white neighbor's home for dinner. While in Cincinnati, Mother Lois gets a call from Melba's father, Howell, saying that Melba has been chosen to help integrate Central High. Though her mother and grandmother initially disapprove of her decision and are angry with her for not first asking for their permission, they later become her biggest sources of emotional support and protection. Initially, seventeen black students, including Melba, are selected to integrate Central, but only nine, later nicknamed the Little Rock Nine, attend the school. They include Ernest Green, Elizabeth Eckford, Jefferson Thomas, Carlotta Walls, Gloria Ray, Thelma Mothershed, Terrence Roberts, and Minnijean Brown. Melba knew all of the other children prior to their attendance at Central, but Brown is a particularly close friend.

On September 4, the day that school starts, hundreds of segregationists—some from as far away as Mississippi, Louisiana, and Georgia—show up to protest the integration of the school. As soon as Melba and Mother Lois arrive at the school, a horde of angry racists confront them, chanting and shouting racial slurs. Mother Lois pulls Melba forward to try to

find the other members of the Little Rock Nine. They reach a "hub of activity" and find Elizabeth Eckford alone in the middle of it, cradling her schoolbooks while "a huge crowd of white people" scream at her back. Melba and her mother are harassed, grabbed, and chased by white men, one of whom carries a rope. Though Melba does not yet have a driver's license, Mother Lois throws her the car keys and prompts her to run to the car. Melba gets to the car before her mother, but they both manage to drive away and escape the rabid crowd. Back home, Melba says that she wishes to go back to Horace Mann High, which prompts Grandma India to call her a quitter. When Minnijean Brown calls with an invitation to go to the community center, Grandma India forbids Melba to go out of concern for her safety, and Melba breaks down crying. Her grandmother tells her to make this her "last cry," for she is "a **warrior** on the battlefield for [her] Lord" and "warriors don't cry," for they know that God is always by their side. Soon thereafter, Melba starts to get threatening phone calls from harassers. Grandma India starts to keep a night watch over the family with the help of her shotgun, which she nicknames "Mr. Higgenbottom."

Melba struggles to adjust to the sacrifices that she makes for integration, particularly the limitations it places on her social life. She frequently visits the home of Daisy Bates, where she and the other members of the Little Rock Nine meet the press. While there, Melba also meets Thurgood Marshall whose positivity and eloquence are inspirational to Melba. In late September, Melba attends a court hearing with Marshall and Bates to hear Governor Orval Faubus's challenge to federally mandated integration, which is struck down by Judge Ronald Davies. Melba is excited to think that on Monday she will officially be a student at Central High, though she learns quickly that her entry into the school will not be easy. She strategically enters via a side entrance with a police officer and is quickly hustled down the hall, past hostile onlookers. On her way to her first class, a mother spits on Melba and hurls racial slurs at her. When she gets to her first class, her teacher ignores her and her classmates harass her. She gets a reprieve from the abuse when she enters Mrs. Pickwick's shorthand class. Mrs. Pickwick is sympathetic and sternly reprimands the white students who attempt to harass Melba. Melba is suddenly rushed out of class and into the principal's office by her guide. Once there, Melba learns that a huge mob has amassed outside. The Little Rock Nine are smuggled past the crowd through a dark cellar by Gene Smith, Assistant Chief of the Little Rock Police Department. Safely back home, Melba and her family learn from a newscast that the mob took over the school, beat up a black reporter, then beat up numerous white reporters. At the invitation of a reporter, Melba pens her own story about her first morning at Central High, which ends up on the front page of the local newspaper.

Some order is restored when President Eisenhower, insistent that Governor Faubus comply with the Supreme Court's order to integrate, sends federal troops from the 101st Airborne Division. Federal officials arrive at Melba's home one night with a message from the President, asking her to return to school and assuring her that, if she does, she will be protected. Sarge drives some of the Little Rock Nine to school in a car that is part of a convoy. Danny, a young soldier of slight build, serves as her bodyguard. Melba resumes her classes and once again encounters harassment. In some spaces, such as Mrs. Pickwick's class, she is protected, but in others, she encounters indifference or even antipathy from teachers and administrators. From Danny, Melba learns how to be confident and alert so that, like a soldier, she will be prepared for an attack. This comes particularly in handy when someone lobs a stick of dynamite at her in a stairwell.

In the midst of the drama surrounding the integration of Central High, Melba's crush, Vince (a student from her previous, all-black school), asks her out on her first date. The joy of her happy Sunday outing with Vince is marred by news that the Arkansas National Guard, which is often more sympathetic to segregationists and fails to protect the black students, has taken over security at Central. At the end of the school day, a group of girls traps Melba in a bathroom stall and tossing a flaming wad of toilet paper flying inside, but Melba escapes. Melba's attackers are becoming bolder and more violent. Even the return of Danny and the 101st Division does not protect her from vicious attacks. While walking down the hallway, she is nearly blinded by a boy who throws acid into her eyes, but Danny flushes her eyes out with water. During a meeting with a group of student segregationist leaders organized by a Norwegian journalist, the white students express their outrage at having troops in their school, while the black students defend themselves from accusations that their attendance at Central will lead to intermarriage or black students ruling over whites. Melba notices signs of stress in several members of the Little Rock Nine. Minnijean becomes obsessed with trying out for the choir, believing that if the white students hear her sing, they will accept her. Gloria and Elizabeth become solemn and withdrawn. Jefferson, like the two other boys, endures "a lot of brutal physical punishment."

A day before Thanksgiving break, Danny breaks protocol and speaks to Melba, urging her to take care of herself. When she asks if he is leaving, he does not respond. A week before her sixteenth birthday, without Danny by her side, Melba physically deflects an attack from a white boy. She sets about planning her sixteenth birthday party, mostly inviting old friends from Horace Mann High and excluding all of the Little Rock Nine except for Minnijean so as to help her feel more like her old self, as opposed to the well-known political figure that she has become. Vince is the first and only guest to arrive at her party. Melba learns that the others will not come out of fear of being killed for associating with Melba. On December 14, four days

before Christmas vacation, the *Arkansas Gazette* reports that the army will cut 432 soldiers from Central High. On December 17, a day before the break, Minnijean is involved in a cafeteria incident in which a bowl of chili spills onto two boys who are harassing her. As a result, she is suspended. A second cafeteria incident results in her expulsion. With the help of the NAACP, she moves to New York and attends the private New Lincoln school.

Melba enjoys Christmas, which she spends with her family, including her father, and Vince. Talking to Vince now, she realizes that they have less in common and that he spends most of their time together asking what it is like to be a celebrity. In the new year, Melba begins to feel "weary and nervous," despite her New Year's resolutions to try to remain strong. She tells her grandmother that she wishes she were dead. When Melba is pelted with eggs in the morning before school, Grandma India encourages Melba to turn the tables on her attackers by making them think that she likes the abuse. She follows her grandmother's advice and, as predicted, the students think that she is crazy, and they back off. She has more difficulty avoiding Andy, a segregationist who threatens to kill her. She is saved by a tall, muscular boy "with a bushy shock of blond curls" who arranges for her to drive his Chevy away from the scene. He introduces himself as Link and forms a protective friendship with Melba in which he feeds her information about the segregationists' plans to sabotage her at Central. Though he offers Melba protection, Link does not understand how the hatred at Central isolates her. He asks that she give an interview saying that most of the students at Central are not so bad. He is more worried about the school's reputation and the cancellation of school activities than Melba's feelings about lying. As they get to know each other, Link tells her more about his family. His father is also a white supremacist, but "isn't for beating up anybody's children." He later introduces her to his nanny, Nana Healey, who suffers from what Link thinks is tuberculosis and lives in poverty without access to proper healthcare. After a lifetime of service to his family, Link's parents dismiss her without providing her any financial help. Nana Healey later dies on Link's graduation day. Meanwhile, Mother Lois faces the possibility of not having her teaching contract renewed unless she agrees to withdraw Melba from school. Enlisting the support of the press, she draws public attention to racist school board officials' attempt to coerce her. When Bishop O.J. Sherman, a powerful clergyman in the black community, intervenes, Lois's school administrator offers her a contract renewal.

On May 27, Ernest Green becomes the first black person to graduate from Central High. Link graduates in the same year and goes to a college in Massachusetts. Melba spends her summer receiving awards and special treatment, along with other members of the Little Rock Nine, for their sacrifices in the name of integration. Unfortunately, segregationists continue to wage battles in court, and Governor Faubus closes all of Little Rock's high schools. Segregationists used their economic and political power to put pressure on the black community to get the remaining members of the Little Rock Nine to leave Central. By September of 1959, the NAACP intervenes, launching an effort to find families that would take in members of the Little Rock Nine so that they could finished their educations. Melba moves in with the McCabes in Northern California and finishes high school there. Only Carlotta Walls and Jefferson Thomas stay at Central and graduate.

In 1962, Melba enrolls at San Francisco State University, where she lives as the only resident of color in "a previously all-white residence house." She meets John, and they marry after six months of courtship. John is white, which makes Mother Lois skeptical of his and Melba's union. The couple have one child, Kellie, then divorce after seven years due to John's backward ideas about women's roles and Melba's ambition to be a journalist. Link, with whom Melba maintained a correspondence, is upset to hear that she married a white man, for Melba told him that they could not date due to his being white. Melba never hears from Link again. She enrolls at Columbia University's School of Journalism and becomes a reporter for an NBC affiliate in California. She believes that her experience at Little Rock taught her "to have courage and patience." It also taught her that an understanding of people's interdependence can lead all mankind "to respect and honor our differences."

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Melba Pattillo Beals – A member of the Little Rock Nine, Melba is the sixteen-year-old main character and narrator of *Warriors Don't Cry*. Her participation in the effort to integrate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, is the subject of this memoir. Born on Pearl Harbor Day, December 7, 1941, Melba suffered "a massive infection" a few days after her birth due to an injury to her scalp caused by forceps. Mother Lois takes Melba to a white hospital in which railroad workers, such as Melba's father, sometimes seek care. The white nurses nearly cause Melba's death by failing to provide follow-up care by irrigating her head with Epsom salts and water. Shortly after the Brown v. Board of Education decision, which is handed down when Melba is thirteen and a student at Dunbar Junior High School, she is attacked and nearly raped by a white stranger. At all-black Horace Mann High School, Melba is a typical teenager who enjoys music and wrestling matches, as well as socializing at her local community center. She aspires to be a singer and, during a visit to Cincinnati to see her great-uncle Clancy, envies the relative freedom black people have in northern cities. She signs up to attend Central High School on a

whim when a sign-up sheet is passed around her class—a decision which quickly puts her at odds with both her family and the broader community of Little Rock, black and white alike. Melba, like the other students, is verbally harassed and threatened with violence for her decision to participate in the integration of Central High. She struggles through the school year, doing her best to respond with nonviolence to the threats she faces on a daily basis. Eventually, she moves to California to finish school after Orval Faubus (the Governor of Arkansas) shuts down Central in a last-ditch effort to halt the process of integration, but not before Melba has garnered national attention for her exceptional bravery and courage.

Mother Lois – Melba's mother Lois is a determined woman who protects Melba from violent segregationists. She was one of the first black students to integrate the University of Arkansas, from which she graduated in 1954. She teaches seventh-grade English while attending night school to get her Master's degree. Due to her love of literature, Melba recalls that their shelves were stocked with books from authors that both Mother Lois and Grandma India loved, including Emily Dickinson, Langston Hughes, and James Weldon Johnson. She and Melba's father, Howell, got divorced when Melba was seven. Mother Lois raises Melba and Melba's brother, Conrad, with the help of Melba's grandmother, Grandma India.

Grandma India – Melba's grandmother, Grandma India is a devout Christian woman with a strong sense of social justice and a belief that "God had pointed a finger at [her] family," which has been "blessed with good health and good brains." Grandma India believes that God spared Melba's life during her infancy so that she could serve the purpose of helping to end segregation. Grandma India is a constant source of encouragement and strength for Melba, who is frequently distraught and isolated by her experiences at Central. She encourages Melba to think of herself as a **warrior** on the Lord's battlefield. In October 1958, Grandma India dies of leukemia.

Howell – Melba recalls her father as a large man—over six feet four, with "broad shoulders and big muscles in his arms." Melba's father works as a hostler's helper on the Missouri Pacific Railroad. Melba's parents divorce when she is seven because her mother becomes frustrated with Howell's refusal to go back to school and finish one more course to obtain a college degree so that he can get a better-paying job. He resists this, Melba writes, because he preferred the relative freedom of the outdoors.

Conrad – Melba's younger brother. He has a bedroom "cluttered with pieces and parts of things" including "strange trucks, glass jars of crawly bugs, and a wooden train" that their father built for him. Conrad likes to count marbles, put puzzles together, and play Monopoly. Melba recalls that she and her brother shared a sadness about their father's absence. It is Conrad who discovers his sister shortly after a stranger tries to rape her.

Marissa – An older girl who attends Dunbar Junior High School with Melba. Marissa is initially described as a bully who throws "overripe persimmons" at Melba. No one knows how old Marissa is but, due to her size, she is believed to be too old for their seventh-grade class, perhaps even as old as sixteen. Marissa's father is "a rich minister" in the community, which Melba thinks explains adults inaction when it comes to correcting Marissa's bad behavior. Unable to understand her behavior, the teachers call Marissa "retarded." When Melba is assailed by a white man who attempts to rape her, Marissa comes to her rescue by hitting the man over the head with her leather schoolbag and then grabbing Melba's arm and running away.

Elizabeth Eckford – Melba describes Eckford as "petite" and "a very quiet, private person" who was always friendly at their old school, smiling and waving at Melba from across the hallways. Like all of the other members of the Little Rock Nine, she is very serious about her schoolwork. Unlike the rest, however, she soon becomes the most visible member of the group. Melba watches Eckford get chased by fifty angry white people while soldiers in the Arkansas National Guard do nothing to protect her. A famous photo shows Eckford trying to enter Central High School while a white teenager, later identified as Hazel Bryan, screams at her. Melba notes that, though Eckford was afraid on that day, she remained "regal" in her bearing.

Minnijean Brown – Melba's closest friend in the Little Rock Nine, Minnijean lives one block away from Melba. They see each other nearly every day and share a lot in common, including a love for the singers Johnny Mathis and Nat King Cole, as well as desires to be singers themselves. Minnijean is expelled due to a series of cafeteria incidents, instigated by white boys who were taunting her. With the NAACP's funding, she later moves to New York and attends New Lincoln School.

Orval Faubus – The Governor of Arkansas and a segregationist. Faubus sends soldiers from the Arkansas National Guard to Central High School, but he does so with the purpose of neither ensuring the integration of the school nor maintaining its segregation—only to carry out orders. Faubus opposes integration, claiming that it would unleash violence. He clashes with President Eisenhower over what the president sees as Faubus's unwillingness to cooperate with the Supreme Court's order to integrate schools "with all deliberate speed." In 1959, Faubus shuts down all Little Rock schools in yet another effort to defy federal orders to integrate.

Daisy Bates – Melba describes Bates as "a petite and smartly dressed, steely-eyed woman" who serves as the Arkansas state president of the NAACP. Bates and her husband own the black newspaper, the *Arkansas State Press*. She is the target of segregationists who drive past her house and toss firebombs and rocks through her windows. She hosts a media event at her home, at which Melba makes a bad joke that earns her negative attention.

Link – A white student at Central High who befriends Melba. He informs her about ways in which the segregationists, some of whom are his friends, intend to commit violence against her. During their first meeting, he arranges for her to take the keys to his Chevy and drive away from a potential confrontation. Mother Lois and Grandma India are initially wary of trusting Link, but Melba comes to rely on him to keep her safe and alert within Central High. Later, he suggests that Melba move away from Little Rock with him, but Melba decides to continue on at Central.

Carlotta Walls – A member of the Little Rock Nine, Walls is also an athlete. She is slender and energetic, according to Melba. She is "a girl-next-door type" who is always in a good mood and eager to try something new. Melba further describes Walls as a determined girl who always quickly does the things she says she is going to do. Walls eventually graduates from Central High School.

Ernest Green – The eldest member of the Little Rock Nine, Green is a senior in high school at the time that he helps to integrate Central High School. Green is a member of Melba's church and his aunt, Mrs. Gravely, is a history teacher at Melba's junior high school. Melba describes Green as warm and friendly; he greets her every week at Sunday school. Ernest eventually becomes the first black graduate of Central High.

Terrence Roberts – Roberts was a junior in high school, like Melba, when he joined the Little Rock Nine. She describes him as tall and thin and "a friend since first grade." Roberts was humorous and incisive. Melba recalls loving the way in which, at their old school, he always hummed "a cheerful tune when he wasn't talking." At Central, Melba notices that he has become "nervous" and "not as cheerful."

Jefferson Thomas – Melba remembers Thomas, a member of the Little Rock Nine, as "quiet" and "soft-spoken." He was an athlete and a top student in his class. She recalls that he had a "subtle" sense of humor that made people "giggle aloud" when they were "not supposed to." Along with Carlotta Walls, Thomas is one of few members of the Little Rock Nine who graduated from Central High.

Thelma Mothershed – Another friend of Melba's and a member of the Little Rock Nine whom Melba saw frequently. She is petite like Elizabeth Eckford, and has a "very pale complexion" and "wise eyes" that "peered through thick-lensed, horn-rimmed glasses." Mothershed is burdened with a heart condition that changes her complexion "to a purplish hue" and forces her to lie down often and rest to catch her breath.

Mr. Waylan – A white grocer who mainly serves black customers. Melba describes Mr. Waylan as a "tall, skinny" man with an "Adam's apple sticking out above his collar" and a "fish-belly blue-white skin and oversized fingernails." Mr. Waylan was "the white man [Melba] saw most often," usually "twice a week," for her family regularly bought groceries from him until Mr. Waylan overcharged them by twenty-two dollars. This act prompted anger from Melba's father until Grandma India quietly commanded him not to react. Mr. Waylan insisted on charging them more because, he said, he supplied the family with groceries on credit when they could not pay.

Melba's Potential Rapist – On the day that the Supreme Court handed down its decision in the Brown v. Board of Education case, Melba was in the seventh grade and walking home from school, daydreaming of her parents' reconciliation when a man with a "gravel voice" called to her from the inside of his car. There, Melba saw a man much bigger than her father—"broad and huge, like a wrestler"—offering her candy and demanding that she "take a ride home." He mentioned the *Brown v. The Board of Education* decision and told her that he refused to allow his children to attend school with black children. When Melba tripped over her shoelaces while running away from him, he got the opportunity to try to force himself on her. Melba was rescued, however, when Marissa hit the man over the head with her schoolbag.

Uncle Clancey – Melba's great-uncle who lives in Cincinnati, Ohio with his wife, Julie, a music teacher. Uncle Clancey is an Episcopalian priest. Melba goes north with her Mother Lois, Grandma India, and Conrad to visit them. Melba envies the freedom that her aunt and uncle have and is surprised when their white neighbors interact with her and invite her to dinner. She is also pleased to go with Uncle Clancey to dinner at "a fancy restaurant" where the white waiters are courteous. Melba plans to "beg and plead" with her uncle to let her move in with him and her aunt while she finishes high school.

Thurgood Marshall – An attorney for the NAACP and the chief attorney in the Brown v. Board of Education case. Marshall also served as the head of the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund. Shortly before Melba attends Central High School, she and her family watch an announcer talk about Marshall on television. Marshall, in concert with the NAACP, ordered the Federal District Court to start integrating schools immediately. In 1967, President Lyndon Johnson appointed Marshall to the Supreme Court, where he served as the first black justice until 1991.

Vince – Melba's crush. Vince is two years older than Melba and drives a Chevy. Melba describes him as "a caramel-colored John Darren." Grandma India describes him as the "polite boy" from the wrestling matches. When Melba attends the matches, she imagines herself on pretend-dates with Vince who eventually asks Melba to be his girlfriend. Later, the pair grow apart due to Melba's fame as a member of the Little Rock Nine.

Mrs. Clyde Thomason – The secretary of the League of Central High Mothers. She and her group filed a petition for an injunction to keep the Little Rock school board from integrating Central High School. Thurgood Marshall asked a judge at the Federal District Court to issue an order which would prevent

Mrs. Thomason and her mothers' group from interfering with the Supreme Court's plan to integrate schools. The judge agreed to issue the order. Later, Mrs. Thomason and company advocated to get the 101st Division out of Central High, briefly leaving Melba and the other members of the Little Rock Nine without protection.

Danny – A soldier in the "Screaming Eagle" 101st Airborne Division. Melba describes him as a young man of slight build and "about five feet ten inches tall, with dark hair and deep-set brown eyes." He offers protection to Melba within the school, and inspires her to cultivate a steely, warrior-like disposition of her own in the face of the threats of violence she faces every day.

Sammy Dean Parker – A staunch young segregationist and an apparent leader among those opposed to the presence of the Little Rock Nine, motivated by a host of irrational fears that range from being overrun by black students to interracial marriage and miscegenation. In an interview with *The New York Times*, she raises the suspicion that the Little Rock Nine are being paid by the NAACP to integrate Central High School.

Mrs. Elizabeth Huckaby – The girls' vice-principal at Central High School. Melba remembers Mrs. Huckaby's emphasis on "fair play" and how she protected Melba and other members of the Little Rock Nine from further abuse, such as having them sit in her office during some school events in which their safety could be in peril. However, Melba recalls instances in which Mrs. Huckaby underestimated the severity of the abuse that the black students suffered or accused them of exaggerating.

Nana Healey – Link's former nanny whom his family fired after she became ill with what Link suspects is tuberculosis. Link tells Melba that Ms. Healy worked for his family all her life. When his father got married, Link's grandmother "gave her" to him "as a kind of gift." Despite her lifetime of service, Link's family offers her no financial help, due to a belief that it was not good to "spoil" black people. Link delivers groceries to her home and Melba finds a black doctor who sees Nana Healy and informs the two teenagers that she does not have much longer to live. She dies on Link's graduation day.

John – Melba's husband, whom she meets in college. The couple marry six months after meeting and have one daughter together named Kellie. John and Melba divorce after seven years together over his being a "farm boy" who wanted a wife who would "putter around the house and have babies," which conflicted with Melba's wish to be a journalist.

The McCabes – A white, Quaker family in Santa Rosa, California who take Melba in after a call is sent out by the NAACP seeking sympathetic families who would give members of the Little Rock Nine "safe harbor" and the resources with which they could continue their educations. George McCabe is a psychologist. He and his wife, Carol, have four children. Though Melba is initially "frightened" to live with a white family, the McCabes prove to be very loving and have a positive influence on her.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Gloria Ray – A member of the Little Rock Nine who attended Sunday school with Melba. Beals describes Ray as delicate and "as meticulous about her attire as she was about her studies." She speaks in "softly measured words" but with intensity.

Auntie Mae – Melba's aunt, whom Melba describes as a "real live wire." Members of the family surmise that Melba inherited some of Mae's feistiness. Mae is hopeful about Melba's decision to help integrate Central High and thinks that she is just "sassy enough" to handle it successfully.

Judge Ronald Davies – The federal court judge who denies Governor Faubus's request to halt the integration of Central High School.

Dwight D. Eisenhower – Also known as "Ike," Eisenhower was the 35th President of the United States. He demanded that Governor Faubus carry out the order of the Supreme Court to integrate Central High School without interference.

Gene Smith – The Assistant Chief of the Little Rock Police Department. Melba describes him as a "tall, raw-boned, dark-haired man." He helps the Little Rock Nine exit school safely, escaping the angry mob.

The Driver – A white man appointed by Gene Smith to drive Melba, Thelma Mothershed, Minnijean Brown, and Ernest Green away from Central High School. He warns them to roll up the windows, lock the doors, and keep their faces away from the windows to avoid assault while he drives them home.

Jess Matthews – The principal of Central High School.

Sarge – A soldier in the 101st Airborne Division who drove the Little Rock Nine home in a car that was a part of a military convoy.

School Superintendent Virgil Blossom – The superintendent of the Little Rock public school system. Melba describes him as "tall, stocky," and "grim-faced." Despite the pleas of concerned parents and students alike, Blossom does nothing to protect the Little Rock Nine.

Mrs. Pickwick – Melba's shorthand teacher. Mrs. Pickwick exhibits kindness and sympathy toward Melba and warns hostile students against saying anything inappropriate to her. Mrs. Pickwick is "a tiny, dark-haired woman," and Melba describes her as someone who does not tolerate "hanky-panky."

Andy – A violent segregationist student at Central who threatens to kill Melba and waves a switchblade knife in her face at one point. Link protects Melba from Andy by foiling his attempts to do her harm.

TERMS

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas – A landmark United States Supreme Court case in which the justices ruled unanimously that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. The decision was handed down by Chief Justice Earl Warren in 1954. The plaintiff, Topeka resident Oliver Brown, filed a class-action suit against the Topeka Board of Education after his daughter, Linda, was denied entry to the city's all-white elementary schools. The case was first brought before the Supreme Court in 1952. At that time, the Court, led by Chief Justice Fred M. Vinson, was divided over school segregation but ultimately declared that Topeka's segregation laws should stand. Vinson died in 1953 and **President Eisenhower** replaced him with California governor Earl Warren. Warren secured a unanimous decision in *Brown v. Board*, declaring that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional, as it was in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment's "equal protection" clause. *Brown v. Board* overturned the Supreme Court's 1896 decision *Plessy v. Ferguson* which declared that public services ought to be "separate but equal." The Supreme Court's decision on *Brown v. Board* sided with the argument that the requirement of separate services and facilities for people of color indicated inequality. In 1955, the Court passed down the *Brown v. Board of Education II* decision, which demanded that lower courts and school boards proceed with integration "with all deliberate speed."

NAACP – The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was founded in response to a deadly race riot which broke out in Springfield, Illinois in 1908. In its early years, the organization worked to address the spate of lynchings and other forms of terrorism that black people suffered, particularly in the South. Its first leaders were notable white liberals concerned about civil rights, including John Dewey, Jane Addams, and William Dean Howells, as well as Mary White Ovington and Oswald Garrison Villard (both descendants of prominent abolitionists). W.E.B. DuBois, whose Niagara Movement for civil rights created a foundation for the NAACP's social justice work, was its only black executive member at the time of its founding. The NAACP played a key role in the integration of Southern schools.

The Little Rock Nine – A group of nine black high-school students from Little Rock, Arkansas who agreed to be the first black students to integrate all-white Central High School three years after the Supreme Court decided *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. The "nine" included Melba Pattillo Beals, Elizabeth Eckford, Minnijean Brown, Ernest Green, Carlotta Walls, Thelma Mothershed, Gloria Ray, Jefferson Thomas, and Terrence Roberts. The Little Rock Nine had previously known each other at their all-black high school, Horace Mann High School. Beals attended Sunday school with Ernest Green and had known Terrence Roberts since the first grade. Minnijean Brown was Beals's closest friend and lived in her neighborhood. The nine teenagers integrated Central High School in September 1957, at the start of the school year.

White Citizens' Council – A segregationist group that, along with the Central High Mothers' League, led the opposition against the Little Rock Nine's integration of Central High School. Citizens' Councils formed throughout the United States in direct response to *Brown v. Board of Education*. Members of the group believed that black people were inferior to white people and should remain separate. They promoted their racist ideology through various media, including weekly television and radio programs. Some states sponsored promotional films from the Council which illustrated the supposed benefits of segregation. Though the Citizens' Councils viewed themselves as a less extremist group than the Ku Klux Klan, they, too, resorted to violent intimidation and spying. The Council was especially successful in Mississippi where it had the support of the white supremacist senator and plantation owner, James O. Eastland. The White Citizens' Council lives on today under a new name. They currently call themselves the Council of Conservative Citizens, a group that claims to espouse the anti-immigrant and anti-civil rights concerns of European Americans. The Council of Conservative Citizens has chapters all over the South.

THEMES

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

RACISM AND LIVING UNDER JIM CROW

In the decades after the American Civil War, Arkansas, like all Southern states, adhered to a legal system of segregation, known informally as "Jim Crow"—named after a popular caricature of a black slave in nineteenth-century minstrel shows. Jim Crow laws recognized people as either White or Colored and required separate services and accommodations for each group. By the time Melba, the author of *Warriors Don't Cry*, is four years old, she becomes aware of this system of segregation and begins to ask her mother, Lois, and grandmother, India, why white people write "Colored" on "the ugly drinking fountains, the dingy restrooms, and the back of buses." She also notices that black people seem to live in a state of "constant fear and apprehension," and highlights the "shame" she feels when she watches members of her family "kowtow to white people." Melba learns early on that white people are in charge and, even after she agrees to help integrate Central High School, fears

that the system might never change. Through recording her experiences, Melba illustrates how Jim Crow not only reduced Black Americans in the South to second-class citizens, but also dehumanized them, allowing for white people to commit a staggeringly wide range of abuses against black people with impunity.

Melba's experiences with segregation are sometimes life-threatening. From birth to her teen years at Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, she is too often the victim of the white supremacist notion that black people's lives simply do not matter. Though living under the weight of such a denigrating system crushes the spirits of some people, it tends to reinforce the determination of the Beals family to confront the injustices of segregation.

As an infant, Melba nearly dies in a white hospital due to its nurses' refusal to follow the doctor's orders to irrigate her head with warm water and Epsom salts "every two or three hours." When Mother Lois confronts a nurse about this, she tells Lois that they "don't coddle niggers." The unwillingness to treat a nearly newborn child with a fever of 106 who is suffering from convulsions illustrates the thorough contempt that white supremacists have for the existence of black people. If not for a black janitor's passing mention of the doctor's instructions to Mother Lois, Melba may not have lived. The irony of this story is that Melba's life is saved by a black janitor who paid attention to the doctor's directions about Melba's health, while the white people who had been appointed her caretakers ignore the vital directive. Grandma India attributes the janitor's chance remark to divine intervention and later comes to believe that God spared Melba's life so that she could help to lead the fight against injustice at Central High.

While at Central High School, Melba suffers a range of abuses. Some of them are verbal, such as routinely being called a "nigger," while others are direct threats to her life or health. While using the restroom, a group of white girls send a flaming wad of toilet paper down over the stall and bar the door, preventing Melba from escape. She is able to stomp out the flame, though her blouse is singed. Even with the protection of Danny, a soldier in the 101st Airborne Division sent by President Eisenhower, Melba suffers life-threatening injuries. In one instance, while walking down the hall, a boy throws acid into her face, nearly blinding her. Danny immediately gets her to a sink and repeatedly flushes out her eyes with water, saving her from blindness. Melba thanks God for Danny's presence and addresses him in her prayers. Her faith encourages her to see her resilience in the face of abuse as evidence that she has God's protection and, therefore, must be doing God's work.

Melba knows that segregation does not have to define life in the South. Her trip to Cincinnati to visit her Uncle Clancey and Aunt Julie shows her that it is possible for black and white people to co-exist peacefully. She also notices that she and other members of the Little Rock Nine are making inroads among some white students at Central High. Some of the white kids smile at Melba or quietly direct her to the proper page in a textbook during class. Melba uses these examples of small gestures of kindness to demonstrate that, for many black people, integration is simply a matter of being treated with human dignity—a basic level of respect that whites take for granted.

However, this understanding of respect is lost on many segregationists, particularly Sammy Dean Parker, a staunch young segregationist who leads the opposition to the Little Rock Nine. In an interview with *The New York Times*, Parker acknowledges the position of Melba and the other black students but she fails to understand it, positing that they do not want integration any more than the white students do, and that the NAACP must be paying them to integrate Central High School. This suggestion confounds Melba who wonders "where on earth [Parker] thought there was enough money to pay for such brutal days" as Melba and the other black students were "enduring." Parker's misunderstanding of the motivation behind the actions of students like Melba is not only the result of racism, but of a difference in values. Parker wrongly assumes that money is what motivates Melba, when in fact Melba is standing up for the principles of dignity and equality.

In Cincinnati, on the other hand, Melba comes to believe that not all white people are as hateful as those whom she encounters in Little Rock. She "couldn't stop hoping that integrating Central High School was the first step to making Little Rock just like Cincinnati, Ohio." In Cincinnati, "the white neighbors who [live] across the street" from her aunt and uncle invite her to dinner and talk with her "about ordinary things." It is the first time Melba has such an experience, and it teaches her that whites are people just like her—they even use the same "blue linen dinner napkins that Grandma India favored." Melba delights in being treated like an equal, whether standing side-by-side with the neighbor's daughter, Cindy, while she buys popcorn at the concession stand of a drive-in movie theater, or walking down the street proudly without having to step aside for a white pedestrian.

Melba's account of her experiences in both Little Rock and Cincinnati help the reader to understand that the purpose of integration was to reject Jim Crow statutes which had legalized substandard living for black people in the South and permitted routine disrespect and threats to their existences. Whites enjoyed great economic and political privilege, which rested on the premise that black people should have little to none. For Melba, integrating Central High School is the first step in dismantling the demeaning system that she learned to endure from birth as the norm.

PASSIVE VS. VIOLENT RESISTANCE

From both Grandma India and the 101st Airborne Division soldier, Danny, Melba learns what it means to be a **warrior**. Warriors require both the mental strength to withstand abuse and the physical courage to resist violence when it poses a mortal threat. Grandma India and Danny demonstrate to Melba that, while one should never encourage violence, it is important to defend oneself. Grandma India defends the family by keeping watch over the house at night with a shotgun. Danny tells Melba that she is in a battle that requires "warriors," and encourages her to defend herself after she is attacked by a group of football players at a pep rally. Melba becomes bolder about protecting her well-being, but she prefers to deflect harassment by following her grandmother's advice to "take charge of these mind games" that some white students play in an effort to get Melba to leave Central. For Melba, whose sense of strength relies more on her Christian faith than on her potential to harm others, it is both more practical to be non-violent and nobler. Her book encourages non-violence as the safest and most effective approach to fighting injustice, while it also acknowledges the occasional necessity of violent resistance.

Though Grandma India does not encourage violence, she is realistic about the possibility of being confronted with it. To protect the family, she stays up at night with a shotgun in her lap. Meanwhile, Danny's job as a soldier is not to engage in verbal spats with the students or to have physical confrontations with them. He tells Melba that he is only present to keep her alive. With his training and the help of other soldiers, he is able to carry out his task without getting attacked or resorting to violence. In this regard, both Grandma India and Danny show Melba how she can respond to violence without acting violently herself. She learns a form of passive resistance which teaches her how to defend herself without causing serious harm to others or further inflaming an already dangerous situation.

Grandma India nicknames her shotgun "Mr. Higgenbottom." She keeps the gun in a "leather case in the back of her closet" and takes it out to "set up her guard post near the window to the side of the yard where she thought [the family] was most vulnerable." Melba notices how, after settling into her rocking chair Grandma India takes "a moment for contemplation and prayer." The image of Grandma India praying with her gun may seem contradictory, given that Christ preached non-violence. However, the peril that her family faces forces Grandma India prepare for the possibility that she will have to harm another person in self-defense. She makes a slight compromise by promising only to aim for fingers and toes, for she insists that God would not forgive anyone who takes a life.

In contrast to the image of Grandma India seated in the rocking chair is that of Danny, with his erect posture. Melba comments on the way in which Danny stands "so erect," with a "stance so commanding that no one would dare to challenge him." Like Grandma India, Danny holds a gun and will only use it in the event that Melba's life is threatened. Watching him reminds Melba that she, too, has to appear "confident and alert," so she mimics what she thinks a soldier would be like in battle. When someone throws a stick of dynamite at her, Danny quickly alerts her to move and stamps out the fuse. Danny tells a stunned Melba to keep moving, for they do not have time to stop. Melba finds Danny's voice "cold and uncaring," but does not take this personally, as she assumes that this is what it means to be a soldier—that is, to continue on as though unfazed by personal danger in order "to survive."

The departure of Danny and the other members of the 101st Airborne Division forces Melba and the other members of the Little Rock Nine to rely on themselves for protection and defense. Though it is not clear from the narrative how the others fare in physical confrontations, Melba seems to remember how Danny encouraged her to defend herself. The black students' inability to rely on the Arkansas National Guard, some of whom seem more sympathetic to the segregationists, make self-defense imperative. However, Melba remembers both the examples set by Danny and Grandma India, and so she is never the aggressor.

When Melba resumes classes after Thanksgiving break, a boy shouts a racial slur at her. He puts out his foot to trip her "in the hallway on the way to [her] first class" and Melba quickly responds by stepping on his foot, "hard." She gamely pretends that it is an accident and "grinned" while the boy's "face reddened."

In another instance, a few days before her birthday, she is distracted from thoughts of her "sweet sixteen" by a boy who grabs her wrist and twists her arm behind her back. Melba bends her knee, jams her foot forward, and kicks the boy in his crotch. Though he curses at her and threatens to kill her, Melba feels stronger for having defended herself.

Just after the fight with the boy who seeks to subdue and abuse her, Melba faces down two boys who routinely taunt her in homeroom every day. With her newly found strength, she "squared [her] shoulders" like a soldier and "glared at them" as she whispers that she will be at the school the next day "and the next day and the next." She discovers a determination within herself to stay and fight.

In some instances, the book shows, violent resistance is futile, and non-violence is a powerful practice. When someone "standing on the stairs above [Melba's] head" pelts her with eggs in the morning before classes start, she feels helpless. She returns home to clean up and her grandmother advises her to turn the tables on her abusers, making them think that their mistreatment is actually welcome. The tactic, which limits her abusers' power to victimize her, works immediately.

Melba's mind tricks probably prevent her from experiencing an

incident similar to Minnijean Brown's cafeteria confrontations with a boy who repeatedly dumps soup on her. Minnijean is first suspended, then expelled, for supposedly retaliating. Melba feels concern over the possibility of expulsion due to a cafeteria incident and avoids confrontation in one instance by remaining seated until the room clears. She pretends to immerse herself in a book about Mahatma Gandhi's prison experience, which results in her being taunted and threatened. When Melba politely smiles at her attacker and says "thank you," the boy seems "astonished" and slowly backs away from her. For Melba "turning the other cheek" was "beginning to be a lot of fun" and she feels that she is winning "in a bizarre mental contest" against her attackers. Her ability to outwit them calms her and makes her feel safer. By welcoming her attacker's aggressions, she paradoxically removes herself from physical danger and is simultaneously able to de-escalate confrontations and put the segregationists ill at ease.

Melba's response to violence and oppression within the halls of Central evolves in the few months from her enrollment at the school to the month of her sixteenth birthday. She goes from stoically bearing verbal and physical abuse to finding clever ways to resist it in ways that make her feel less victimized. Without the protection of Danny and other members of the 101st Airborne Division, she knows that she can either fend for herself or possibly be killed at school. Her understanding of how to fend for herself, however, is no longer limited to tolerating or committing violence as she discovers that, under certain circumstances, she can rise above the fray altogether. Melba learns through her experience at Central High that resistance can take many shapes.

THE COST OF NON-CONFORMITY

Melba's decision to participate in the integration of Central High School is one that she makes based on her personal curiosity. She had always wondered what was inside of the school that she and other black people were forbidden to enter. However, her willingness to be part of the group to integrate Central High raises fears among her black community that white segregationists in Little Rock will attack her and the rest of the Little Rock Nine. Thus, Melba and her family contend with the moral dilemma of having to choose between doing what is just versus doing what will keep them and other black people in Little Rock safe. Melba learns that following her own desires and principles can put her at odds with the wishes of her community and strain her relationships with Mother Lois and Grandma India, who are initially wary of her decision to integrate Central, and angry with her for not discussing the matter with them first. Melba's choice to attend Central High is ultimately a choice not to conform to the system of segregation nor to her family's habit of "kowtowing" to whites to remain safe.

Melba does not tell her family when she signs up to attend Central High School. She describes the act of putting her name on the sign-up sheet as a spontaneous gesture. Although the implications of this action are far from ordinary, her impulsive decision-making is typical of what any teenager might do when piqued by curiosity and the chance to do something new. On the other hand, it is that kind of decision-making—the ready willingness to do what others are too hesitant to do—which spurs social change. The mixed reactions from within Melba's family reflect the divergent views that people in the black community had in the 1950s about fighting segregation. Though everyone wanted an end to Jim Crow, some people sought to confront the system more actively, while others thought it safer to bear it and continue living their lives.

The reactions from her immediate family, which must deal directly with the consequences of Melba's decision, is harsh and angry. The night before they leave Uncle Clancy's home in Cincinnati for Little Rock, Melba hears her family yelling, pacing, and discussing the issue all night. Her mother refuses to talk to her over breakfast and her Grandma says that Melba is "too smart for [her] britches." Mother Lois and Grandma India's reactions reflect both their concerns about Melba's growing up and making decisions without them—decisions which, however noble, could put her at great risk—as well as their personal concerns over retaliation from angry segregationists who would punish Melba for disrupting the status quo.

Reactions from Melba's extended family are mixed, but more positive. On Labor Day, Melba goes to her Auntie Mae's house "for the last picnic of the summer." Melba admires her aunt, a "real live wire" who, people say, passed down "some of her feisty ways" to Melba. Mae is sure that Melba is "sassy enough" to integrate the school. On the other hand, Melba's Uncle Charlie does not understand why she would want to go someplace where she is not wanted. Mae's words validate Melba's willingness to take action in favor of integration, a position that her mother and grandmother later support. In the Beals family, it seems that the women are more inclined to act in support of justice: Mother Lois participated in the integration of the University of Arkansas, Grandma India fearlessly defends the family home, and Auntie Mae lauds Melba's courage while Uncle Charlie doubts her. Thus, while her mother and grandmother doubt the wisdom of her decision, they neglect to realize the example they have set for going against social expectations to do what is just and necessary. If, as Grandma India asserts, God "had pointed a finger at [their] family," then, it stands to reason that they are unique and have an obligation to do what is right, no matter the personal cost.

In addition to her family's doubts and concerns, Melba's motives are also misunderstood by members of the black community, some of whom gossip behind Melba's back. Some of the gossip misunderstands the Little Rock Nine's motives just as much as the segregationists do, illustrating that when

individual principles sharply differ from established norms, hostility and misunderstanding can occur on all sides.

During Thanksgiving, the Beals family prepares to donate the clothing and toys they no longer need, but Conrad stalls when Grandma India and Mother Lois ask him to donate his train. They use Melba's willingness to give up some of her favorite clothes and shoes as an example of the kind of selflessness he should strive to embody, but he protests that Melba "likes suffering and doing without," which is why she goes to Central. Conrad heard this from his friend Clark, who had heard it from his parents. Clark's family does not understand why Melba would stay in a white school and endure "being mistreated every day." Their position reveals the depth of fear felt by many black people at the time, many of whom preferred to bear segregation and live in relative peace within their own communities, rather than seek integration and draw the ire of white segregationists.

Melba's isolation becomes particularly clear when none of her friends from Horace Mann High School show up to her birthday party. She intentionally does not invite any members of the Little Rock Nine, except for her old friend Minnijean Brown, because she wanted to feel like her old self again. However, as Melba's friend Marsha tells her, Melba is not one of them anymore, for she and the other members of the Little Rock Nine "stuck their necks out" and the other black children simply are not "willing to die with [them]." As much as Melba wants to believe that she is the same person she was when she attended Horace Mann High, her birthday experience illustrates that she is no longer an average black teenager or even an average member of the black community. Instead of offering her comfort and support, her community keeps its distance from her to protect itself.

Soon after she makes her decision to attend Central High, Melba experiences firsthand the way in which personal decisions can have political implications—and the ways in which her individual decision to help integrate Central High would hinder her and her family in unforeseen ways. She learns that, sometimes, one has to make hard choices without the support of one's community, or even one's family, for those choices often stir other people's fears and insecurities. The process of integrating Central High briefly isolates Melba from her family and causes her to lose friends. However, the book suggests that in particularly difficult times, isolation is one of the unfortunate but justifiable costs associated with going against convention to stand up for one's values and challenge the status quo.

RELATIONSHIPS, ROMANCE, AND EMPATHY

For many teenage girls, part of turning "sweet sixteen" is the benefit of pursuing first romances. In *Warriors Don't Cry*, Melba enjoys a relationship with her first crush, Vince, a classmate from her former high school. She also develops a romantic friendship with Link, a white student at Central High, whose desire to protect Melba both within Central High and outside of its walls suggests his affectionate feelings for her. Unfortunately, Melba does not develop a full romance with either boy due in part to their inability to understand her experience or empathize with it. She notices that she and Vince have fewer things to talk about and that he treats her more like a celebrity than as a friend. Meanwhile, Link, who was raised in a white supremacist family, fails to fully understand the difficulties of Melba's exclusion or her reasons for wanting to be at Central High. Melba's relationships with both Vince and Link demonstrate how Melba's political activity makes romance difficult and show her that there are no fellow students outside of the Little Rock Nine who can empathize with her circumstances. Ultimately, Melba suggests that the ability to empathize is key to success in relationships—especially romantic ones—but that people's capacity for empathy is often not strong enough to overcome vast differences in experience.

White students at Central High, even those who are sympathetic toward the Little Rock Nine, do not completely understand the nine black teenagers' personal sacrifices and tend to focus on their own feelings of being "occupied" and missing out on cherished school events due to the integration of Central. Melba's interactions with Link, who is sympathetic and protects her by feeding her information about the segregationists' intentions to sabotage her, nevertheless reveal how the separatism enforced under Jim Crow makes it difficult for whites to understand or relate to the pain and subjugation of black people. The normalcy of white supremacy made it difficult for many whites, even those who wished to help, to identify with the Southern black experience.

Link calls Melba one evening, furious that "many of his senior class activities" will be canceled due to concerns about violence erupting at the school due to integration. Link does not sympathize with Melba's inability to participate in school events as she had at her previous high school. Instead, he boldly demands that she do a television interview claiming that the students at Central were "not such bad people" and that things were getting better at the school, despite this not being reflective of Melba's experience. The conversation causes Melba to question Link's motives for helping her: was he being nice only so that she would lie to the media and provide a positive story about Central High? Though Link does not prove to be as duplicitous as Melba initially suspects, his willingness to use her and discount her feelings to get what he wants is evident of an inability to identify with her experience of oppression.

During their last meeting, Link insists that Melba come with him when he moves "to the Northern town near Harvard University where he [will] attend college," but Melba insists on

returning to Central despite the threats against her. Melba recalls how Link was "talking loud and frightening [her]," and how she calmed him down by saying that she would "think about running away to the North" with him. Though Link's offer is kind, it is also unrealistic, influenced in part by his romantic interest in Melba. Melba later mentions that the reason she didn't pursue a romance with Link—her unwillingness to date a white man—causes them to fall out of communication in adulthood. Link's desire to have Melba run away with him may have stemmed from his desire to protect her, but it also stemmed from his own romantic interest in her and blindly ignored her own desire to graduate from Central so that her sacrifices would not have been for nothing.

Vince is Melba's only close friend from Horace Mann High School who remains a constant presence in her life (since her friend Minnijean moves to New York to attend New Lincoln School), but they grow apart due to Melba's fame as a member of the Little Rock Nine and the maturity she develops as a result of her unique experience. When Vince arrives at Melba's birthday party, she finds it hard to distinguish between him and the white boys who torment her in school because he is so light-skinned. She reminds herself that Vince is one of her people, despite how light-skinned he is, and also reminds herself of how much she enjoyed their first date together. Still, Melba finds it difficult to make conversation with him and notices that she daydreams about him much less than she used to. Vince also mentions that she does not return his calls. Vince represents the period before Melba enrolled at Cnetral—a period in Melba's young life in which she was more innocent and carefree. She has since come to view white people, and those who look like them, with skepticism and mistrust—habits that she has developed to ensure her survival. She does not mean to apply this perception to Vince, but she has come to rely so much on instinct that she has to remind herself when she is in the company of those who are on her side. In this way, even subtle differences between people are shown to stand in the way of their ability to empathize with one another.

Though Grandma India encourages Melba to extend a standing invitation to Vince to spend time at their home, Melba still finds it difficult to feel that she has meaningful things in common with him. He calls one day to say that he will "come by on Christmas, with Mother's permission." The thought of spending time together on such a special day elicits a romantic feeling in Melba again, but that feeling is extinguished again when Melba realizes what little they now have in common. Vince spends much of their time together asking "about Central and teasing [her] about being a celebrity." Her fame, as well as her isolation due to the potential dangers that face her outside of her home, cause her to live a kind of "fishbowl" existence in which people—even those whom she knew and trusted before—treat her as a subject of curiosity rather than as a fellow teenager.

For a sixteen-year-old, social isolation can be devastating. Melba's isolation is further complicated by her inability to enjoy her first romances as a teenager, though she desires to. Her torment at Central, much of which comes at the hands of white boys, complicates her ability to trust Vince, who is light-skinned enough to look white, and Link, who is a product of the white supremacist society that she is fighting against. Coupled with the highly unusual nature of Melba's own experience at Central, these factors cause her budding romantic life to falter, showing that such relationships are only worthwhile if those inside them are able to empathize with one another despite their subtle—or not so subtle—differences.

SYMBOLS

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

ETHIOPIA

Shortly after Melba and her family are overcharged and verbally intimidated by the grocer, Mr. Waylan, Grandma India places calls to her friends to discourage them from shopping at his store. She tries to get a group of them to patronize a shop "across town," but none of them wants "to cause trouble." In frustration, Grandma India reads aloud from her Bible the following passage: "And Ethiopia shall stretch forth her wings." Grandma India uses the Scriptural passage to teach Melba that one day things will be different for black people. Though she might not see the changes, she explains assuredly that Melba's lifetime will be different from hers. Melba is skeptical and "anxious," worried that white people might always be in charge. Thus, Ethiopia becomes a symbol of black freedom and power. The Scriptural passage evokes an image of Ethiopia—historically, one of only two African nation that has never been colonized—as a bird longing to express its natural impulse to stretch its wings and take flight. Likewise, black people in 1950s America had a wish to be free—to attend school and to shop wherever they pleased, for example—without encountering abuse or intimidation.

WARRIORS

Grandma India tells Melba that, because she is fighting for justice, she is a warrior "on the battlefield for [her] Lord." Grandma India, a Christian woman, frequently uses Biblical references to motivate Melba and to portray Melba's integration of Central High School in the context of a greater purpose: that of fighting for what is good and just. Melba finds herself in need of such motivation when she begins to cry after her grandmother forbids her from going to the community center to meet her friend and fellow member of the Little Rock Nine, Minnijean Brown. Grandma India

orders Melba to make this her "last cry," for warriors fighting on behalf of God do not cry, as they know that God is always by their side. "On the Battlefield for My Lord" is also Grandma India's favorite hymn. She sings it to Melba when Melba is a baby, during the time that Melba suffers from a fever and convulsions due to her head infection. The hymn, as well as Grandma India's vision of her granddaughter as a warrior, provides them with strength and reinforces the belief that the Beals family can fight hardship and oppression through prayer, hard work, and courage. Later, after Melba meets Danny, a soldier in the "Screaming Eagle" 101st Division who is assigned to protect her, she takes inspiration from his courage and stoicism in her effort to stay strong while facing abuse from racist students and administrators. Danny also encourages Melba to try to defend herself in physical confrontations with her attackers, telling her that she needs to be a warrior in the battle to integrate Central High. Thus, although Melba is not technically a warrior, warriors come to signify the courage, strength, and dedication required to fight for what is right.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Simon Pulse edition of *Warriors Don't Cry* published in 2007.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ My grandmother India always said God had pointed a finger at our family, asking for just a bit more discipline, more praying, and more hard work because he had blessed us with good health and good brains. My mother was one of the first few blacks to integrate the University of Arkansas, graduating in 1954. Three years later, when Grandma discovered I would be one of the first blacks to attend Central High School, she said the nightmare that had surrounded my birth was proof positive that destiny had assigned me a special task.

Related Characters: Melba Pattillo Beals (speaker), Mother Lois, Grandma India

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis

Warriors Don't Cry begins with Melba Pattillo Beals describing her grandmother's belief that Melba was destined to perform the work of integrating Central High School. The first line indicates the family's belief in the direct and active role of divine grace in their lives. Melba does not convey her willingness, nor that of her mother, to integrate Southern educational institutions as an expression of their individual greatness or courage, but instead, as something they did to show God their gratitude for being granted good health and intelligence. Mother Lois's integration of the University of Arkansas, along with Melba's survival of illness, are perceived as omens that Melba was born to fight for justice. For Grandma India, it is "proof positive," suggesting a belief in signs from God, but also in predestination, or the notion that one's life has already been planned by God.

❝ Black folks aren't born expecting segregation, prepared from day one to follow its confining rules. Nobody presents you with a handbook when you're teething and says, "Here's how you must behave as a second-class citizen." Instead, the humiliating expectations and traditions of segregation creep over you, slowly stealing a teaspoonful of your self-esteem each day.

Related Characters: Melba Pattillo Beals (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

Melba explains how she learned about segregation around the same time that she learned to write the alphabet and do the multiplication table, thereby connecting her growing understanding about Jim Crow to her general formative experience. Unlike learning to read or to do arithmetic, there is no formal instruction in Jim Crow's rules. Instead, one develops an understanding of one's lowly place in society through a series of humiliating and degrading experiences. Melba's description of an awareness that "[creeps] over you" depicts a sense that the degradation of one's spirit under Jim Crow is a slow process. She does not relate that degradation to the abstract sense of being denied equal rights under the law, but to the everyday experience of being mistreated in one's own community and excluded from places and activities that whites enjoy freely.

With the passage of time, I became increasingly aware of how all of the adults around me were living with constant fear and apprehension. It felt as though we always had a white foot pressed against the back of our necks. I was feeling more and more vulnerable as I watched them continually struggle to solve the mystery of what white folks expected of them. They behaved as though it were an awful sin to overlook even one of those unspoken rules and step out of "their place," to cross some invisible line. And yet lots of discussions in my household were about how to cross that line, when to cross that line, and who could cross that line without getting hurt.

Related Characters: Melba Pattillo Beals (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 7-8

Explanation and Analysis

Melba explains how black people survive under Jim Crow, using her family as an example. This explanation comes before a story about a trip to Mr. Waylan's grocery store. The Pattillo family challenges Mr. Waylan when he overcharges them, but they retreat when he threatens to stop selling them groceries, knowing that there are few other places where black people can shop. Mr. Waylan is an example of the "white foot pressed against the back of [their] necks"—that is, he's a white person who uses his privilege to exploit and dominate black people. To avoid retaliation, black people try to learn how to please white people and to anticipate their desires even before whites can express them. Melba's family also follows these rules, but they also look for ways to challenge white supremacy. Challenging the codes and customs of Jim Crow, however, requires great care—the timing must be right, as well as the cause, and only certain people can do it without getting hurt or killed. The family's confrontation with Mr. Waylan is exemplary of the way in which they were willing to cross the line, while their retreat demonstrates how to pick their battles.

Chapter 2 Quotes

I crept forward, and then I saw him—a big white man, even taller than my father, broad and huge, like a wrestler. He was coming toward me fast [....] My heart was racing almost as fast as my feet. I couldn't hear anything except for the sound of my saddle shoes pounding the ground and the thud of his feet close behind me. That's when he started talking about "niggers" wanting to go to school with his children and how he wasn't going to stand for it. My cries for help drowned out the sound of his words, but he laughed and said it was no use because nobody would hear me.

Related Characters: Melba Pattillo Beals (speaker), Melba's Potential Rapist

Related Themes:

Page Number: 15-16

Explanation and Analysis

Shortly after the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, Melba is sent home from school early. Her teacher tells her to stay close to her classmates but, after getting lost in her daydreams, she loses sight of her friends and gets attacked and nearly raped by a white man. Melba's description of the man who tries to rape her is that of a monster—he is "broad and huge, like a wrestler." He seems indomitable, "even taller" than the strongest man she knows—her father. Melba draws a contrast between the enormous man and her smaller self in girlhood. Her helplessness is not simply the result of being a child, but more particularly the result of being black. No one will hear her, the man says, not so much because her voice is small, but because her skin color makes it less likely that anyone will acknowledge her suffering.

For me, Cincinnati was the promised land. After a few days there, I lost that Little Rock feeling of being choked and kept in "my place" by white people. I felt free, as though I could soar above the clouds. I was both frightened and excited when the white neighbors who lived across the street invited me for dinner. It was the first time white people had ever wanted to eat with me or talk to me about ordinary things. Over the dinner table, I found out they were people just like me. They used the same blue linen dinner napkins that Grandma India favored. They treated me like an equal, like I belonged with them.

Related Characters: Melba Pattillo Beals (speaker), Grandma India

Related Themes:

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

Melba goes with her mother, grandmother, and younger brother, Conrad, to Cincinnati to visit her Uncle Clancey and Aunt Julie. She is relieved to be free of the pressures of living under segregation and is surprised and excited to be welcomed by her aunt and uncle's white neighbors. Melba's experience of Cincinnati shows her that not all white people are hostile toward black people and that blacks and whites are probably more alike than they are different. This awareness helps her to maintain hope later at Central High when she faces outrageous mistreatment from whites who are hostile to her presence.

Melba uses Biblical language to describe her wonder at life in Cincinnati. Her comparison of the Ohio city to "the promised land" not only conveys her exaggerated sense of the place feeling like Heaven due to the relative peace that she experiences there, but also her sense that Cincinnati is exemplary of how the rest of the country ought to be—a place where blacks enjoy the same privileges as whites and where the races can socialize freely if they choose to do so.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ I ran to my room and fell onto the bed, burying my face in the pillow to hide the sobs that wrenched my insides. All my disappointment over not getting into Central High and the mob chase as well as the big sudden changes in my life over the past few weeks came crashing in on me. Then I heard Grandma India padding across the room and felt the weight of her body shift the plane of the mattress as she sat down. "You had a good cry, girl?" Her voice was sympathetic but one sliver away from being angry [....] "You'll make this your last cry. You're a warrior on the battlefield of the Lord. God's warriors don't cry, 'cause they trust that he's always by their side. The women of this family don't break down in the face of trouble. We act with courage, and with God's help, we ship trouble right on out."

Related Characters: Grandma India, Melba Pattillo Beals (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

Grandma India has forbidden Melba from going to meet her friend and fellow member of the Little Rock Nine, Minnijean Brown, at the community center out of fear for Melba's safety. Melba collapses on her bed, overwhelmed by the disappointments of the day. The inability to go to the community center deprives her of the only possibility of enjoying a pleasant social experience, which is especially needed after her violent confrontation at Central High with whites who oppose her attendance at the school.

Grandma India's strong, supportive presence counters the "the big sudden changes" that "[crash] in on [Melba]." The weight of Grandma India's body on the bed is both literal and figurative, for she shifts Melba's mood, just as she "[shifts] the plane of the mattress" almost immediately with her forceful presence. Grandma India places Melba's actions not only within a Biblical context, but also within the personal context of coming from a lineage of strong black women who "don't break down in the face of trouble" but overcome it. Thus, being a warrior is about doing what is just and never losing sight of the ongoing and necessary task of performing God's work—in this case, the pursuit of justice.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ It's Thursday, September 26, 1957. Now I have a bodyguard. I know very well that the President didn't send those soldiers just to protect me but to show support for an idea—the idea that a governor can't ignore federal laws. Still, I feel specially cared about because the guard is there. If he wasn't there, I'd hear more of the voices of those people who say I'm a nigger [...] that I'm not valuable, that I have no right to be alive [....] Thank you, Danny.

Related Characters: Melba Pattillo Beals (speaker), Orval Faubus, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Danny

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 106

Explanation and Analysis

In response to Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus's use of Arkansas National Guard troops to keep the Little Rock Nine out of Central High School, President Dwight D. Eisenhower sends soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division to the school to ensure that the black teenagers

are granted entry to Central, and to protect them from harassment both inside and outside the school.

After returning home from Central, Melba writes in her diary about spending her first day with Danny—the soldier assigned to protect her. She is sure that President Eisenhower did not send Danny and the other troops specifically to protect the lives of black people or to ensure the progress of civil rights, but because the President, a former general, would not abide disobedience of federal authority. Melba's view is the combined result of cynicism—not believing that white people could act with the interests of black people in mind—and at the same time a clear-eyed understanding of politics and law. Still, the President's actions have made it easier for her to attend school, and have made it less likely that she will suffer from the routine abuse that demoralizes her and makes it that much harder for her to remain at Central.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ "Look out, Melba, now!" Danny's voice was so loud that I flinched. "Get down!" he shouted again as what appeared to be a flaming stick of dynamite whizzed past and landed on the stair just below me. Danny pushed me aside as he stamped out the flame and grabbed it up. At breakneck speed he dashed down the stairs and handed the stick to another soldier, who sped away. Stunned by what I had seen, I backed into the shadow on the landing, too shocked to move. "You don't have time to stop. Move out, girl." Danny's voice sounded cold and uncaring. I supposed that's what it meant to be a soldier—to survive.

Related Characters: Melba Pattillo Beals, Danny (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 110-111

Explanation and Analysis

Danny has just told Melba that he will "be in the background" because the school's administrators are trying to see if the Little Rock Nine can manage without the soldiers "being up real close." Meanwhile, Melba has faced constant abuse from segregationist students and does not want Danny to leave her side. She feels uneasy about depending on a white man, but she has no choice, particularly when a stick of dynamite whizzes past her in the hall. Interestingly, it is not the sight of the dynamite that startles Melba, but the sound of Danny's voice, which alerts her to a danger that she does not realize is present while thinking about all the bad things that can happen without Danny walking alongside her. As Melba observes Danny's behavior, his efficient responses to danger surprise her, as does his seemingly "cold and uncaring voice." However, his responses echo Grandma India's instructions that she must be a "warrior," which means not responding to trouble with fear or sadness but with courage.

❝ "You've gotta learn to defend yourself. You kids should have been given some training in self-defense." "Too late now," I said. "It's never too late. It takes a warrior to fight a battle and survive. This here is a battle if I've ever seen one." I thought about what Danny had said as we walked to the principal's office to prepare to leave school. I knew for certain something would have to change if I were going to stay in that school. Either the students would have to change the way they behaved, or I would have to devise a better plan to protect myself. My body was wearing out real fast.

Related Characters: Melba Pattillo Beals, Danny (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 113

Explanation and Analysis

Melba comes to the realization that she must figure out how to defend herself after a physical confrontation with a group of football players in the auditorium after a pep rally when she is choked by a boy far bigger than she is. Danny echoes Grandma India's assertion that Melba is a "warrior," though Danny uses the word in the more literal sense of Melba fighting back physically against her attackers. Melba's effort to integrate Central is a "battle," both in the moral sense of doing what is righteous in the Christian sense that Grandma India invokes and in the physical sense of simply attending Central without getting killed. Grandma India's advice gives Melba moral strength, while Danny's keeps her focused on her physical well-being. However, Melba is uncertain about how exactly to proceed. She remains hopeful that the "students [can] change the way they behave" and retains that possibility as one way that she can manage to stay at Central. Due to her physical exhaustion, she cannot continue to withstand physical abuse, and there is a limit to how much she can fight back.

Chapter 10 Quotes

A girl smiled at me today, another gave me directions, still another boy whispered the page I should turn to in our textbook. This is going to work. It will take a lot more patience and more strength from me, but it's going to work. It takes more time than I thought. But we're going to have integration in Little Rock.

Related Characters: Melba Pattillo Beals (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 117

Explanation and Analysis

Melba writes in her diary about a rare good day. She is optimistic about the prospect of integration. Small expressions of kindness, in her view, signal progress. For Melba, along with many other black people, the primary goal of integration is to be treated like a human being. However, Melba does not view the work of integration as a concerted effort between her and sympathetic white people, but a singlehanded effort that requires her to convince white people that she is not much different from them. She acknowledges that she underestimated how long it would take to integrate the school, and she is likewise a bit hasty in thinking that these demonstrations of kindness signal true progress. She underestimates the impact of peer pressure from segregationists, which later discourages white students from showing her kindness, as well as obstinacy from racist adults in Little Rock who exert institutional pressures, such as firing Mother Lois from her teaching job.

Chapter 11 Quotes

Later in *The New York Times*, Sammy Dean Parker and Kaye Bacon said that as a result of the meeting they now had a new attitude. One headline in the *Gazette* read: "Two Pupils Tell of Change in Attitude on Segregation." Sammy Dean Parker was quoted as saying, "The Negro Students don't want to go to school with us any more than we want to go with them. If you really talk with them, you see their side of it. I think the NAACP is paying them to go." When I read her statement, I realized Sammy hadn't understood at all our reason for attending Central High. I wondered where on earth she thought there was enough money to pay for such brutal days as I was enduring [....] What price could anyone set for the joy and laughter and peace of mind I had given up?

Related Characters: Melba Pattillo Beals, Sammy Dean Parker (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 126-127

Explanation and Analysis

Melba recalls her response to a newspaper story printed shortly after she and a couple of other members of the Little Rock Nine met with three segregationists at Central High for a roundtable with a Norwegian reporter. During the meeting, Melba was adamant about the black and white students not needing to socialize. Sammy Dean Parker—a girl Melba identifies as a leading troublemaker at the school—uses Melba's comment to suggest that the black students do not want to integrate at all but have been bribed to do so. Parker's belief that political organizations from the North were trying to change things in the South was a common one at the time. For Melba, the comment is offensive for its suggestion that she would accept money to tolerate such abuse. Melba also finds it incredible that Parker cannot sympathize with the black students' wish to go to school and enjoy the peace and friendship that Parker and the others take for granted.

As I stepped into the hallway, just for an instant the thought of fewer troops terrified me. But the warrior inside me squared my shoulders and put my mind on alert to do whatever was necessary to survive. I tried hard to remember everything Danny had taught me. I discovered I wasn't frightened in the old way anymore. Instead, I felt my body muscles turn steely and my mind strain to focus [...]. A new voice in my head spoke to me with military-like discipline: Discover ink sprayed on the contents of your locker—don't fret about it, deal with it. Get another locker assigned, find new books, get going—don't waste time brooding or taking the hurt so deep inside. Kicked in the shin, tripped on the marble floor—assess the damage and do whatever is necessary to remain mobile. Move out! Warriors keep moving. They don't stop to lick their wounds or cry.

Related Characters: Melba Pattillo Beals (speaker), Danny

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 127-128

Explanation and Analysis

Headlines in the newspaper announce that half of the 101st Division is returning to its base in Kentucky. Initially, Melba is unsure of how she will cope without Danny's protection, but remembers his earlier advice that she learn how to defend herself. Melba appeals to the "warrior insider [her]" to help her confront the hostility of segregationists. She issues advice to herself in the form of a series of commands, pushing herself not to feel bad about the series of indignities and disruptions that she faces daily, but to fix whatever damage the segregationists cause and move on. She mimics Danny's attitude as a soldier, forcing herself to develop both physical and mental discipline. Her focus on remaining mobile and strong also echoes Grandma India's advice, when Melba had what was to be her "last cry." In that instance, Grandma India used the strength of the Pattillo women as an example of how Melba should behave. In this instance, Melba uses the contrasting image of a white male soldier for inspiration, proving that role models can come in many forms, despite her initial surprise that she was placing her trust in a white man.

> As Minnijean and I spent time together that evening, I could tell she was beginning to be deeply affected by what was being done to her at Central High. She seemed especially vulnerable to the isolation we were all struggling to cope with. She had decided she would be accepted by white students if she could just show them how beautifully she sang. She was almost obsessed with finding an opportunity to perform her music on stage [....] Little did we know that even while we were discussing her performing in school programs, the Central High Mother's League was preparing to make a bigger fuss than ever before to exclude her. But their threats did not stop Minnijean [....] Did she figure they would be enraptured by her performance? I shuddered at the thought of what the students would say or do to her if she made it.

Related Characters: Melba Pattillo Beals (speaker), Mrs. Clyde Thomason, Minnijean Brown

Related Themes:

Page Number: 130

Explanation and Analysis

Minnijean has come over to Melba's house to show off photos of them and the other members of the Little Rock Nine in the week's issues of major magazines, including *Life* magazine. Minnijean then tells Melba about her plan to become a part of Central High's Christmas program. She thinks that her singing talent will cause the white students to look past her race and accept her. Minnijean seems to believe that white society is accepting of black people who reveal an extraordinary quality, such as the talent to entertain, though this does not prove to be true for her. While Melba worries about the psychic damage that the students can inflict on Minnijean if she somehow makes it into the show, some of their friends, such as Terrence, think that she should try to perform and learn a lesson—the lesson being that there is nothing she can do to win acceptance with people who are committed to hating her.

> "Melba likes suffering and doing without; that's why she goes to Central. But why do I have to?" "Where did you get a notion like that about your sister?" "Clark said that's what his folks say because Sis stays in that white school, being mistreated every day." "Her staying there means she has made a promise that she intends to keep, because she told God she would and she doesn't want to let herself and God down," Mother Lois said, walking over to look Conrad in the eye. "So you must explain that to Clark the next time he inquires about your sister's motives."

Related Characters: Grandma India, Conrad (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 133

Explanation and Analysis

It is Thanksgiving and, as part of their family tradition, the Pattillos are donating cherished items to charity to show their gratitude. When Grandma India asks Conrad to give up his toy engine, Conrad balks at the suggestion, so Grandma India uses Melba as an example, since Melba is giving up a favorite article of clothing. In response, Conrad quotes his friend Clark who, in turn, was quoting his parents in saying that Melba attends a school where she is not wanted because she wants to suffer and deny herself pleasure.

Based on the comments from Clark's parents, some members of the black community seem to have a low opinion of Melba. They do not see her effort at Central as an attempt to improve the lives of all black people, but instead as an expression of fanaticism and masochism. The comment underscores just how revolutionary Melba's actions are. While most black people living in the South detest Jim Crow as much as Melba and her family do, they are not willing to suffer the uncomfortable consequences of

challenging the system.

❝ When Mrs. Bates asked, "Do you kids want white meat or dark meat?" I spoke without thinking: "This is an integrated turkey." The annoyed expression on her face matched the one on Mother's, letting me know that maybe I should have prepared a speech. The reporters began snickering as they posed a series of questions on turkeys and integration, calling on me by name to answer. My palms began sweating, and my mouth turned dry. I hadn't meant to put my foot in my mouth. I didn't want the others to think I was trying to steal the spotlight, but once I had spoken out of turn, "integrated turkey" became the theme. "You'll live to regret that statement, Melba," Mother said as we were driving home. I knew she was agonizing over the consequences of my frivolity. She was right. I would suffer.

Related Characters: Mother Lois, Melba Pattillo Beals, Daisy Bates (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 137-138

Explanation and Analysis

Melba and the other members of the Little Rock Nine are having an "official" Thanksgiving dinner at the home of Daisy Bates for the benefit of the media. As Mrs. Bates slices the turkey, Melba makes a bad joke and immediately regrets it. In saying something silly, Melba makes a common mistake. The difference is that she cannot afford to be thoughtless, not only because her statement is recorded and later used by her hecklers to taunt her, but because her position as an integrationist requires her to be always on her best behavior. Just as she must be watchful of her behavior and physical well-being while at school, she must be watchful of what she says publicly. To prove that they were worthy of having the same rights as whites, black people always had to be on their best behavior. Any misstep, including a dumb joke, could be used as an excuse to deem them unworthy of the most basic of civil rights.

Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ Sweet sixteen? How could I be turning sweet sixteen in just a few days and be a student at Central High, I thought as I entered the side door of the school [...]. I had relished so many dreams of how sweet my sixteenth year would be, and now it had arrived, but I was here in this place. Sixteen had always seemed the magic age that signaled the beginning of freedom, when Mama and Grandma might let loose their hold and let me go out with my friends on pre-dates. But with integration, I was nowhere near being free.

Related Characters: Melba Pattillo Beals (speaker), Grandma India, Mother Lois

Related Themes:

Page Number: 141

Explanation and Analysis

Melba is on her way to school, thinking about her upcoming sixteenth birthday. For her, there is a contradiction between the greater freedom and independence she expects to feel after turning sixteen and the restrictions placed on her to ensure her safety. Though she expected Mother Lois and Grandma India to relieve their restrictions on her, since integrating Central High, they have forbidden Melba from leaving the house alone out of fear of her becoming the target of segregationists. What Melba particularly desires is her first experience of romance, signaled by her wish to "go out with [her] friends on pre-dates." However, her work as a social justice warrior conflicts with her ability to be a typical teenager. As she enters Central, she is surrounded by people her age, but her racial difference makes her an outsider and excludes her from experiences that she ought to be able to share with her classmates, such as celebrating her "sweet sixteen."

Chapter 15 Quotes

❝ I pretended to become intensely involved in my book. I was reading about Mr. Gandhi's prison experience and how he quieted his fears and directed his thoughts so that his enemies were never really in charge of him. All at once I was aware that one of my hecklers was coming toward me. "Niggers are stupid, they gotta study real hard, don't they?" he said in a loud voice. "Thanks for the compliment," I said, looking at him with the pleasantest expression I could muster so he would believe I wasn't annoyed. "Study hard now, nigger bitch, but you gotta leave this place sometime, and then we got you." "Thank you," I said again, a mask of fake cheer on my face. He seemed astonished as he slowly started to back away. I felt myself smiling inside. As Grandma India said, turning the other cheek could be difficult […] it was also beginning to be a lot of fun.

Related Characters: Melba Pattillo Beals (speaker), Grandma India

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 181

Explanation and Analysis

Melba is sitting in the school cafeteria. She is worn out from the constant physical attacks and has started to wear Band-Aids on her heels to protect her from people who walk closely behind her and step on her heels. Melba demonstrates her interest in nonviolent resistance by reading a book about Mahatma Gandhi. She then applies his lesson about redirecting her thoughts so that her enemies at Central would at least fail to wear her down emotionally and psychologically. Melba employs the trick that Grandma India suggests: pretending to be flattered by her harassers. There is a contrast between the "mask of fake cheer" that Melba wears to confront her attackers and her sense of "smiling inside" when the confrontation does not result in violence or further harassment. The "mask" is Melba's false expression of ease and graciousness in the face of verbal abuse, which she knows can easily become physical abuse. When she successfully diverts her attacker, she feels both a sense of triumph and relief at not having been attacked. In this sense, "turning the other cheek" is difficult, for she never knows what her harassers may do, but it is "a lot of fun" when she succeeds in disorienting them, thereby making them feel as out of place as they try to make Melba feel.

Chapter 17 Quotes

❝ Meanwhile Mrs. Huckaby, the woman I considered to be somewhat near fair and rational about the whole situation, had lapsed back into her attitude of trying to convince me there was nothing going on […]. I was seeing things; was I being too sensitive; did I have specific details? When she stopped behaving in a reasonable way, she took away the only point of reference I had […]. I supposed that she must be under an enormous weight and doing her best […]. But once again I had to accept the fact that I shouldn't be wasting my time or energy hoping anyone would listen to my reports. I was on my own.

Related Characters: Melba Pattillo Beals (speaker), Mrs. Elizabeth Huckaby

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 195-196

Explanation and Analysis

The segregationists' campaign against the Little Rock Nine has intensified. Violently racist students are not only physically abusing the black students, but also holding up signs and dispensing cards. Melba appeals to Mrs. Huckaby, her only ally in Central High's administration, but is disappointed not to get sympathy from the vice principal. Melba reasons that Mrs. Huckaby's denial is the result of external pressure. Mrs. Huckaby's behavior is a subtler and more subversive form of white supremacy. Though Melba may be right in thinking that Mrs. Huckaby is denying Melba's experience to avoid continuously taking disciplinary action against students, it is also possible that Mrs. Huckaby does not believe that Melba is, in fact, the victim of constant attacks. Whatever the cause of Mrs. Huckaby's denial, it confirms for Melba that she has no solid support from any adult in Central with the power to protect her. This requires Melba to work harder at developing the steeliness and single-mindedness of a warrior.

Chapter 18 Quotes

Early on Wednesday morning, I built a fire in the metal trash barrel in the backyard, fueled by my school papers. Grandma said it would be healing to write and destroy all the names of people I disliked at Central High: teachers, students, anyone who I thought had wronged me […]. Grandma India stood silent by my side as I fed the flame and spoke their names and forgave them […]. Finally she said, "Later, you'll be grateful for the courage it built inside you and for the blessing it will bring." Grateful, I thought. Never. How could I be grateful for being at Central High? But I knew she was always right.

Related Characters: Grandma India, Melba Pattillo Beals (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 213-214

Explanation and Analysis

Melba has just completed her first year at Central High—a traumatic experience that has deprived her of teenage normalcy. To purge her negative feelings, Grandma India suggests starting a bonfire to destroy the material things from that year that Melba no longer needs, so that she can be rid of negative feelings. By burning the names of those who hurt her, Melba can destroy her hatred symbolically and forgive so that she can focus on what she has gained from her difficult experience. Burning names on paper is a traditional spiritual practice meant to banish evil. Grandma India knows that Melba cannot acquire wisdom from her experience until she first lets go of negativity. Melba remains too angry and hurt to understand how the experience at Central has built her character and made her more capable of confronting injustice in other settings, but the burning of names is intended to release the hurt so that she has the clarity to see her blessing.

In 1962, when I had attended the mostly white San Francisco State University for two years, I found myself living among an enclave of students where I was the only person of color. I was doing it again integrating a previously all-white residence house, even though I had other options. I had been taken there as a guest, and someone said the only blacks allowed there were cooks. So, of course, I made application and donned my warrior garb because it reminded me of the forbidden fences of segregation in Little Rock.

Related Characters: Melba Pattillo Beals (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 220

Explanation and Analysis

It has been three years since Melba was last in Little Rock. Though Melba is out of the South and is now a resident of San Francisco, she finds that segregation still exists, even though it is outlawed. Armed with her sense of being a warrior on the Lord's battlefield, she pursues integration everywhere she goes, never wanting black people to be excluded from any space that they seek to enter. The fact that the residence hall at San Francisco State initially admits black people only as cooks is reminiscent of how the only black people allowed into Central High were cafeteria workers.

Melba describes her assumption of the role of "warrior" in the context of a costume that she occasionally wears ("warrior garb"), indicating that she is not constantly fighting against injustice but only performs the role when she deems it necessary—that is, when she encounters spaces that erect barriers against her people ("forbidden fences").

Epilogue Quotes

And yet all this pomp and circumstance and the presence of my eight colleagues does not numb the pain I feel at entering Central High School, a building I remember only as a hellish torture chamber. I pause to look up at this massive school—two blocks square and seven stories high, a place that was meant to nourish us and prepare us for adulthood. But because we dared to challenge the Southern tradition of segregation, this school became, instead, a furnace that consumed our youth and forged us into reluctant warriors.

Related Characters: Melba Pattillo Beals (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 224

Explanation and Analysis

Melba has returned to Central High School with the other members of the Little Rock Nine to commemorate the

thirtieth anniversary of the school's integration. It is 1987. The current Arkansas Governor, and future U.S. President, Bill Clinton welcomes Melba and the others back to the school. The former students receive a hero's welcome, but, for Melba, the commemoration does not help her feel any better about the pain that she endured. Her memory of Central as "a hellish torture chamber," as well as her subsequent panic attack just before re-entering the school, suggest that she still struggles with the trauma she endured there.

Her comments on the school's massiveness are reminiscent of her initial reaction to the school, which reminded her of a museum. Melba still reacts to Central with a mixture of wonder and terror. The building still seems inaccessible to her, though she is one of the people who helped to make it famous. Though it is a high school, Central is a place that disconnected her from a normal teenage experience rather than facilitating one. Her description of Central as a "furnace" complements her earlier analogy to "a hellish torture chamber." However, there is an element of optimism in Melba's metaphor of a "furnace." While a "hellish torture chamber" is suggestive of eternal damnation and may reflect her teenage self's belief that her torment at Central would never end, a "furnace" has Biblical undertones, an allusion to the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, the three martyrs who were burned alive but emerged from the furnace untouched, protected by God. Furnaces also suggest transformative or generative powers. She and the other members of the Little Rock Nine enrolled as typical youths but were "forged" into "warriors." As her Grandma India predicted, the experience at Central built up her character. Still, Melba notes that the Little Rock Nine were "reluctant" in their roles—uncertain of what they would confront from day-to-day or even if the experiment to integrate Central would succeed.

> "How does the city look to you now?" I answer the question to myself. Very different from when I lived here. Today I could not find my way around its newly built freeways, its thriving industrial complexes, its racially mixed, upscale suburban sprawl. It is a town that now boasts a black woman mayor. My brother, Conrad, is the first and only black captain of the Arkansas State Troopers—the same troopers that held me at bay as a teenager when I tried to enter Central.

Related Characters: Melba Pattillo Beals (speaker), Conrad

Related Themes:

Page Number: 225

Explanation and Analysis

Melba responds to reporters' questions about her sense of Little Rock's progress. It is a far more modern city than it was when she was growing up there. Its progress is typical of many Southern cities which learned (often through being forced) to include black people in civic, social, and economic life. Her brother, Conrad, is a high authority in law enforcement, which is rather ironic, given their father's mistrust of law enforcement and Melba's experience of being mistreated by law enforcement. Melba says that she "could not find [her] way around" in Little Rock's new suburbs and its freeways—examples of its modernity. She means this both literally—she has been living in San Francisco and no longer knows Little Rock very well—and figuratively. Thirty years earlier, she navigated a very different city, one that excluded her and anyone who looked like her. The version of Little Rock that she visits in 1987 is a city that cannot function without black people, who also govern it.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

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

CHAPTER 1

Melba Pattillo Beals's grandmother, India, believes that the Pattillo family is special. Due to their "good health and good brains," she thinks they have an obligation to be of service to God and to lead others. Reflecting on "the nightmare that had surrounded [Melba's] birth," India believes that "destiny had assigned [Melba] a special task." Melba's mother, Lois, was one of the first black people to integrate the University of Arkansas, graduating in 1954.

According to Grandma India, the family's lack of conformity to the codes and conventions of Jim Crow is not so much about an individual desire to be extraordinary, but rather is the result of their faith, which helps them see the injustice of Jim Crow and gives them the will to resist it. To show gratitude to God, they view themselves as servants of divine will, not as individualists.

Melba is born on December 7, 1941 on Pearl Harbor Day. Lois's doctor injures Melba's scalp, which results in "a massive infection." Lois takes Melba to a white hospital that "reluctantly" treats the families of the black men who work on the railroad. A doctor operates to save her life "by inserting a drainage system beneath [her] scalp." When Melba's condition does not improve, Lois seeks help from nurses and doctors who do not take her concerns seriously.

Melba connects her life to historical events, both the wartime tragedy of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the personal tragedy that confronts her family when she faced death as an infant. While the United States fought the threat of tyranny in the Pacific, the Beals family fought the tyranny imposed on black people living under Jim Crow.

Two days after the operation, Melba comes down with a fever of 106 and starts convulsing. A black janitor finds Lois crying. She explains that Melba's infection is getting worse. The janitor sympathizes and mentions that the surgeon's prescription for Epsom salts and warm water must not have worked after all. When Lois searches for a nurse and mentions the doctor's instructions, the nurse admits to hearing the directive, but says that they "don't coddle niggers." Lois does not argue with the nurse, out of fear of costing her husband, Howell, his job. She begins Melba's treatment herself and, within two days, Melba's condition improves.

Unable to rely on those who are responsible for Melba's care, Lois realizes that only she can ensure Melba's survival. Ironically, it is not a medical professional who provides Lois with the information that she needs to keep Melba alive, but a black janitor whose lack of power at the hospital mirrors Lois's own sense of helplessness. Lois struggles with her desire to confront the nurses for their lethal indifference, but doesn't want to cost her family its livelihood.

By the time Melba is four years old she starts asking questions about segregation, "which neither [her] mother nor grandmother cared to answer." At the age of five, she has her first experience with Jim Crow. Her family gathers at Fair Park for a Fourth of July picnic. The black people who go to the park are to remain in a wooded section, away from the pool and the merry-go-round, but Melba sneaks away to ride the merry-go-round since she has saved pennies for months to ride one of the horses. When she goes to the concessionaire to give him her money, he refuses to let her ride and calls her a "picaninny." The other people waiting in line stare at her angrily, as though she has done something wrong. She realizes that, no matter "how many saddles stood empty," there would never be room for her on the merry-go-round.

Melba realizes that life under Jim Crow means that she will always be excluded from the things that white people are allowed to enjoy freely. This exclusion is of course the legacy of slavery, which is why the concessionaire refers to her as a "picanninny"—an enslaved child who picked cotton on plantations. Melba unexpectedly experiences this awakening to the realities of racism and segregation during the Fourth of July, a day on which Americans celebrate their freedom and independence from a tyranny—a power which Melba realizes still rules black people's lives.

Melba grows up in a "big, old, white wood-frame house at 1121 Cross Street." During her early childhood, she lives there with her mother, Lois, her grandmother, India, her father, Howell, and her younger brother, Conrad. In the front hallway, there are tall mahogany bookcases that hold volumes of Shakespeare, Chaucer, Emily Dickinson, James Weldon Johnson, and Langston Hughes. On some of the shelves are the textbooks that Melba's mother uses to teach seventh-grade English and the books for "the night classes she [takes] to get her master's degree."

Melba's home is described as a kind of sanctuary from the cruelties of the outside world. Moreover, it is also the place where she learns to value education. Her reading of the literature on the bookcases contributes both to her eloquence as she articulates her experience at Central to reporters, and to her awareness of her place within a broader human experience.

Grandma India spends a lot of her time in the kitchen, "scrubbing it sparkling clean or baking cornbread, simmering collard greens, or preparing her special gourmet salmon souffle." India learned to cook "her fancy dishes" during her years "as a maid in white ladies' kitchens on Park Hill." During one of Melba's private talks with her grandmother in India's garden, Melba says that she wishes to exchange her black body for a white one. India insists that what Melba really wants is to be free. She encourages Melba to keep a diary so that she can share these thoughts with God.

What Melba does not want is a life of subservience, which is all that life under Jim Crow offers black people. This system has taught her to believe that to be white is to be free, while being black is to be unfree. However, many black people, such as her grandmother, used what they learned during their years of servitude to care for their families and to apply more creativity in their own domestic lives.


Melba's father, Howell, works on the Missouri Pacific Railroad "as a hostler's helper." Lois constantly encourages him to return to school and finish the final course that he needs to get a bachelor's degree but he refuses, saying that he prefers to work outside where he is free. Howell is an outdoorsman who loves hunting and fishing and being in the woods where he is left alone. Melba begins to worry that her parents' differences will cause them to divorce, as her friend Carolyn's parents did. Lois, on the other hand, remains determined to complete her master's degree and studies for her night-school exams.

Melba's parents, like many couples, have differing lifestyles. However, their lives are complicated by the pressures of being black in the South. Lois wants her husband to get a degree so that he will have access to the few professional opportunities available to black people. Howell's idea of freedom has little to do with economic prosperity or education—more conventional paths to progress—and more to do with his experience of nature.

As Melba grows older, she notices how the adults around her live "with constant fear and apprehension." They try to solve "the mystery of what white folks [expect] of them." Melba feels shame when she watches adults in her family "kowtow to white people." Her family tends to be especially worried when they go to Mr. Waylan's grocery store. One Friday evening, the family goes on a shopping spree there with the money from their earnings from the week. When Howell looks over the bill, he notices that the family is overcharged by twenty-two dollars—more than a day's pay. They mention it to Mr. Waylan who says that it is back payment for instances in which he sold them groceries on credit. When the family continues to protest, Mr. Waylan threatens not to sell them anymore groceries.

The incident at Mr. Waylan's grocery store is exemplary of the way in which white people, particularly white business owners, use segregation laws to oppress and economically exploit black people. If they do not "kowtow" (that is, grovel) to whites and avoid questioning their authority, black people risk losing access to precious resources, such as food. The incident also depicts how normally pleasurable moments, such as shopping sprees, are easily spoiled by the cruel realities of Jim Crow, which allows whites to take black people's hard-won income without black people having any recourse.

The family decides not to return to Mr. Waylan's store, which only offers its black customers "day-old bread and slightly rotting meat for one and a half times the price fresh food was sold to white folks." Grandma India calls all of her friends and tries to convince them to go to another store across town, but they are reluctant to do so, out of fear of causing trouble. Grandma India takes solace in her Bible and reads the following verse: "And **Ethiopia** shall stretch forth her wings." She tells Melba that her life will be different. Melba is anxious for the change that her grandmother assures her will occur.

Though Grandma India has the will to challenge Mr. Waylan in the only way that she safely can—by depriving him of business—fear of white supremacy is so ingrained that her friends continue to shop at his store to avoid arousing suspicion of rebellion. Despite her friends' typical timidity, which frustrates Grandma India, sending her to her Bible for solace, she remains certain that Melba's generation will have more power to stand up for itself.

CHAPTER 2

On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court decides in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas that separate public schools for blacks and whites are illegal. Melba is twelve years old. Her teacher at Dunbar Junior High School dismisses her class early and tells them to be careful and to "walk in groups." Melba does not understand her teacher's eagerness to rush her and her classmates home, so she does not walk with the others but trails behind, daydreaming about the persimmon trees and how, in the spring, Marissa, an older girl and occasional bully, likes to pelt her with overripe persimmons. Other than worrying about Marissa, who is bigger than Melba and prone to hiding in the bushes, Melba feels safe in the field and goes there to sing as loudly as she wants, and to daydream about being a movie star or about moving to New York or California.

Melba is an average preteen, worried about bullies and full of fantasies about stardom and faraway places. She does not yet realize how the Supreme Court's decision will end her innocence, though her teacher at Dunbar tries to protect it by her warning the children to "walk in groups." Melba feels safe in large, open spaces where she can be herself (singing "as loudly as she wants") and escape the only peril that she knows—Marissa and overripe persimmons. This depiction of Melba's late childhood represents the turning point from a period of innocence to one in which Melba is confronted with the most brutal realities of Jim Crow.

In response to the Supreme Court verdict, radio announcers talk a lot about Little Rock. They describe a place that Melba does not quite recognize—a place where blacks and whites get along peacefully and black people earn good wages. However, Melba knows that only teachers, doctors, and preachers earn "tolerable salaries." There are few jobs as "clerks, policemen, bus drivers, or insurance salesmen" open to black applicants. Melba reflects on how Mother Lois gave up on trying to convince Melba's father, Howell, to return to university. They divorced when she was seven.

The announcements reflect the differences between black and white people's experiences of Jim Crow. Black people's general fear of challenging white supremacy is what maintains peace, and white people's sense that blacks are entitled to far less than whites explains the belief that blacks make good wages. However, the pressure to make a good living remains. Howell's unwillingness to get a degree and pursue more lucrative work results in his leaving the family.

Melba enters the persimmon field deep in her thoughts about integration, her parents' divorce, and daydreams of stardom when she hears "a man's gravel voice." He offers her a ride in his car and tries to lure her to him with candy. She refuses and he becomes more demanding. The man, who becomes Melba's potential rapist, chases her, slaps her, and takes his pants down. She resists him, then he punches her in the face. He rips at her underpants while saying that he would show her that the Supreme Court cannot run his life. Suddenly, he frowns, lets out "an awful moan," and clutches the back of his head. Marissa has hit him over the head with her leather school bag and she urges Melba to run. When Melba is too slow, Marissa grabs her hand and leads them both away.

Melba's personal world, characterized by daydreams, is violently disrupted by a white man who is determined to hold on to his own illusion of white supremacy, which was codified into law until the Brown v. Board of Education decision. The routine rape of black girls and women was a key instrument of white supremacy, both during slavery and the years of segregation that followed, a way for white men to demonstrate their extralegal dominance over black people. Melba's attacker is trying to show that he can do as he pleases to her, as though her humanity under the law does not exist.


When they arrive at Melba's house, her brother, Conrad, sees her first and wonders about what happened to her face and why her clothes are torn. Grandma India opens the back door and Marissa explains what happened, using the word "rape," which Melba does not understand but associates with something "awful and dirty." Grandma India prompts Melba to take a bath and puts a cold cloth on her face. She also says that they will burn the clothes that Melba was wearing. While in the bathtub, Melba hears the adults, including her father, arguing about how to handle the situation. Howell insists that they not call the police who "are liable to do something worse to her than what already happened."

Melba does not yet have the language to describe what happened to her, but she understands that it was a violation. The family's decision not to call the police reflects the common mistrust of the police in black communities, as police officers were often among the chief proponents of Jim Crow across the South. It is significant that Melba's father is most mistrustful, given that black men are most frequently the target of police harassment.

Grandma India tells Melba not to tell anyone about nearly being raped, especially not Conrad. She tells Melba to pray for her potential rapist, asking God to forgive him and teach him to do right. By the time the bruises go away, Melba does not feel shame, but she commits to reading the newspaper every day so that she will know when Supreme Court justices have made a decision "that make white men want to rape [her]."

Perhaps because Melba is so young, she does not understand that there is nothing that she or anyone else did to cause her attacker to attempt to rape her. Her sense of shame is reinforced by Grandma India's directive not to tell anyone about her attack. Even at a young age, she understands that there was a relationship between the Supreme Court case and the white man's attempt to rape her.

The newspapers are full of stories about the Brown v. Board of Education case and white people in Little Rock are saying that they do not want their children going to school with black children. The Little Rock School Board adopts a plan to limit integration to Central High, which they will not allow to begin until September 1957.

Though the Supreme Court has mandated desegregation throughout the South, Little Rock defies the court. Thus, Central High becomes a symbol of both progress and of Little Rock's insistence on retaining segregation.

One day, Melba's teacher at Horace Mann High asks if anyone would like to go to Central and Melba spontaneously raises her hand. She had always been curious about what it was like inside of Central and she also reasons that, if black people are allowed to attend all-white schools, maybe other opportunities will become available to them, such as going to shows or sitting in the first row of the movie theater. She follows news of the Montgomery Bus Boycott in December 1955. The following year, the NAACP files suit to make integration begin immediately, despite overwhelming disfavor in Arkansas and Governor Orval Faubus's commitment not to comply with integration.

Melba volunteers to integrate Central High School on a whim, not yet realizing either the consequences of her decision for her or her family, or that it will place her as a historic figure on the timeline of the Civil Rights Movement. She bases her decision on curiosity—a desire to know what she has been deprived of, such as access to a good, well-funded school and the benefit of going to a movie and sitting in the best seats in the theater.


A group of white mothers called the League of Central High Mothers organize an effort to keep black children out of the school. Mrs. Clyde Thomason, secretary of the group, files a petition for an injunction to keep the Little Rock school board from carrying out its plan. Melba figures that the white mothers will succeed in keeping her out of Central, so she does not bother to tell her family about signing up to enroll there.

The white mothers use their privilege to try to protect segregation. Melba assumes that the power of white supremacy will prevail and keep her out of Central. She does not tell her family about enrolling at the school because she figures that she will never have a chance to go anyway.

Melba prepares to go to Cincinnati, Ohio with Mother Lois, Grandma India, and Conrad to visit her Uncle Clancey. Melba regards Cincinnati as "the promised land" due to the feeling of freedom she senses there. She is surprised when the white neighbors invite her to dinner and when she goes to the movies with their daughter, Cindy, and orders from the concession stand without getting dirty looks. Melba walks down the street with her mother and grandmother without having to step aside for a white pedestrian. They go to department stores and freely look over the merchandise. Melba goes to a lunch counter and orders a root beer, slightly surprised at not being watched. When they go to "a fancy restaurant" with Uncle Clancey, white waiters smile and bow. Melba thinks it is "paradise" and decides to "beg and plead with Uncle Clancey to let her live with him and her Aunt Julie until she finishes high school.

On what seems to be her first visit to a Northern city, Melba immediately recognizes the difference between how she and her family feel in Cincinnati. They can go where they please and do what they please without worrying about what white people may say or do to them. This experience illustrates how the desire for civil rights is mainly a desire for respect. Melba's experiences in Cincinnati contrast with the instance in which she was forbidden to ride on a merry-go-round, despite having the money for a ticket, and with the instance in which Mr. Waylan took an entire week's pay from her family for groceries.

They get a phone call from Melba's father, saying that Melba has been chosen to integrate Central. A news announcer says that seventeen black children will enroll at Central in the fall of 1957. Mother Lois and Grandma India are shocked and outraged that Melba would make such a decision without telling them. In the morning, her mother does not speak to her and her grandmother tells her that she is "too smart for [her] britches." They hurry home, ending their vacation.

Though Melba must leave Cincinnati, where she is very happy, she is going back to Little Rock to join the effort in making the city more like Cincinnati—that is, a place that offers more equality to black people. Lois and Grandma India's outrage is a mixture of fear, shock, and concern over Melba growing up and making decisions without them.


CHAPTER 3

When Melba arrives home, her life changes immediately. She notices that plans for integration "[consume] the energy of the entire city." No one in Little Rock seems to talk about anything else. Melba starts attending a series of meetings with officials in Little Rock's education system and in the NAACP. She meets Daisy Bates for the first time, a woman who strikes Melba as "very calm and brave" despite threats against her life and her home from segregationists. The only good thing about the meetings is that they give Melba a chance to reunite with her friends. Though there were originally seventeen participants in the integration of Central, some of them drop out due to threats of violence. In the end, there are nine students, all of whom Melba already knows.

Daisy Bates becomes a mainstay in Melba's life and a role model, given Mrs. Bates's own experiences with defending herself against white supremacists. Despite the seriousness and formality of the process of joining Central, Melba focuses, like a typical teenager, on how she will get to spend more time with her friends. This mindset also gives her comfort, reminding her that she will not be alone at Central. Her relief at spending more time with her friends contrasts with the danger that further isolates her, leaving her with only eight allies instead of the original sixteen.

The other students include Ernest Green, the eldest, Terrence Roberts, Jefferson Thomas, Elizabeth Eckford, Thelma Mothershed, Melba's "special friend" Minnijean Brown, Carlotta Walls, and Gloria Ray. They all come from strict families whose parents hold "well-established positions" and work hard to create stable lives for their families. They share the traditional values of many "small-town Americans." They are all church-going and work hard in school. None of them have much money, but they all take great pride in their appearances. They are also individualists with strong opinions, and all of them want to go to college.

The Little Rock Nine come from families that are very similar to many other American families. However, the burdens imposed on them by racism make them more conscious of how others perceive them, which is why they are careful about their appearances. Melba and the other students come from families that emphasize respectability. Jim Crow has relegated them to a second-class status, but they do not accept that they are second-class.

On Labor Day, Melba gathers with the rest of the family at her Auntie Mae's house "for the last picnic of the summer." Mae is very similar to Melba and the family often says that Melba inherited her aunt's "feisty ways." Though Melba's Uncle Charlie says that he does not know why Melba would want to go where she is not wanted, her aunt insists that Melba is just the right person to integrate Central High.

Mae is another example of a strong, independent woman in Melba's family. The men, such as her father and her Uncle Charlie, seem more likely to content themselves with the status quo and remain in relative peace, while the women challenge it.

The family learns that Governor Faubus will send the Arkansas National Guard to the school—not to act "as segregationists or integrationists," but to carry out assigned duties. He goes on to say that it may not be possible to control the outbreak of violence that can result from "forcible integration." On the night of the governor's announcement, the Beals family get a series of calls, one of which is a bomb threat. Grandma India decides to keep watch overnight with her shotgun, which she nicknames "Mr. Higgenbottom." Melba begins to wonder if attending Central is a good idea and starts thinking again about trying to move to Cincinnati instead.

Melba underestimated the magnitude of the task she is performing and is overwhelmed by the response to her future presence at Central. The integration requires a control of violence both at school and at home, upsetting the relative peace and safety Melba had previously known. She wants to escape to Cincinnati where life is easier and where she thinks the work of integration has already been completed.

The NAACP calls to let Melba and the other members of the Little Rock Nine know that they should not go to Central until they are notified. During a meeting, School Superintendent Virgil Blossom says that parents should not go to school with the children, for it would be easier to protect the teens without the adults present. Federal judge Ronald Davies rules that integration at Central will begin on Wednesday. Daisy Bates calls to tell the children where to meet and that, perhaps, they "would be accompanied by several ministers," some of them white.

Going to Central is unlike any other first day of school, given the level of planning and the inability of the teenagers to enter the school alone, as they normally would. The presence of the white ministers is to ensure that the black students will not encounter violence. White protestors, even violent ones, would be less likely to assault a white clergyman in his church garb.

On the morning before Melba's first day at school, the family sits down for breakfast and Grandma India leads a prayer. Mother Lois reminds Melba that she does not have to integrate Central and wonders if Melba will regret what may have been a "hasty decision." Suddenly, the phone rings. Mother Lois answers it and announces that it is time to go.

Though Mother Lois is allowing Melba to integrate Central and agrees with the principle behind Melba's actions, she is fearful for the danger that her daughter will encounter—a danger that she thinks Melba has underestimated.

CHAPTER 4

Mother Lois drives Melba to school. On their way, they see many of their neighbors standing outside on the sidewalk, which strikes Lois as strange, particularly when she waves and they do not wave back. Melba waves at her friends, Kathy and Ronda, but their disapproving glances match those of the adults. They are listening to the radio. Mother Lois parks the car at 7:55 AM when the announcer mentions the presence of a crowd.

Their black community is no more enthusiastic about the integration of Central than members of the white community. Their black neighbors are fearful of what could happen to them due to Melba's non-conformity. Their "disapproving glances" foreshadow the social ostracism that Melba later experiences.

Melba sees large crowds of white people lining the curb, stretching for a distance of two blocks. There are young and old people, men and women, uniformed police officers and soldiers. All of their attention appears to be focused on "the center of the line of soldiers." The onlookers are chanting angrily and yelling racial slurs. Mother Lois grabs Melba and yells above the uproar that they have to find the group. Some of the white people seem to be staring "anxiously" at Melba and her mother. When they reach of the hub of the activity, they see that Elizabeth Eckford is the focus of the crowd's attention. Elizabeth stands alone, searching for the right place to enter the school. Her eyes are "hidden by dark glasses" and she stands "erect and proud," despite the fear she must feel. Melba wants to help, but there is no way to wedge through the crowd. Finally, Elizabeth makes her way to a bench at a bus stop.

Elizabeth Eckford's experience at Central has been committed to historical memory in a photograph. Melba's recollection of the first day they attempt to go to school contextualizes the well-known image of Eckford entering Central High alone with a mob of white people behind her, screaming and berating her. While Melba and her mother seek out the other members of the Little Rock Nine, Eckford faces the crowd alone, foreshadowing the loneliness and ostracism that all of them will eventually face at Central. Eckford presents a confident exterior, just as Melba will later, betraying the hurt and fear that roil within her.

Though Melba and Mother Lois try to get through the angry crowd without attracting attention, a white man grabs Melba's sleeve. She gets away from him when another man distracts his attention. Suddenly, another white man starts following them and Melba and her mother find themselves being chased by four men. Lois tosses the car keys at Melba and instructs her daughter to leave without her if necessary. Melba runs to the car while her mother steps out of her heels and walks briskly in her stocking feet. Another pursuer joins the group, this one carrying a rope. A man close to Melba swings at her with a tree branch but misses. Finally, her mother catches up to the car. Melba throws open the passenger door and speeds away.

Melba experiences her first violent confrontation with a mob—this one seemingly composed solely of white men—as a result of trying to attend Central. Lois is afraid, but she avoids showing it so that her daughter will not panic. Thus, Lois instructs Melba to run, while Lois "walks briskly in her stocking feet"—seeking to outpace the mob while also giving the impression of remaining calm. The sight of a pursuer with a rope raises the fear that they could be hanged—as the lynching of black people was still a relatively common practice in the South in the first half of the twentieth century.

While driving, Melba sees that the streets are full of people whom she knows do not live in her neighborhood, particularly tattooed, tobacco-chewing white men. Grandma India meets her and Lois at the door of the house and hurries them inside. She piles chairs against the locked back door and answers Melba's question about Elizabeth Eckford's safety. A white man and a white woman sat beside her on the bench, then rode away with her on the bus. The other students were turned away by the guards to stay safe. Mother Lois expresses anger at the guards' unwillingness to protect Elizabeth. She tells Melba that she can go back to school at Horace Mann "for now," but Grandma India objects, believing that will not solve anything. In fact, she reasons, it could embolden white people to use soldiers to oppress black people even further, just as the guardsmen kept the Little Rock Nine from entering the school.

The integration of Central High attracts segregationists from other cities and states. Mother Lois is outraged at how the Arkansas National Guard is used to uphold white supremacy but is not used to protect a child against a violent mob. She is concerned now for Melba's safety and thinks that her integration of the school is not a good idea. Grandma India, on the other hand, thinks that, if they back down now, white supremacists will further oppress black people instead of leaving them alone. A retreat due to weakness or fear would send a signal that black people can be intimidated, into complying with white supremacy.

Lois tells Melba not to discuss with anyone what happened outside of Central that morning. She also forbids Melba to leave the house. When the phone begins to ring incessantly, Grandma India forbids Melba to answer it. Melba says that she would like to resume classes at Horace Mann and her grandmother chastises her for trying to give up when things get difficult. Melba writes in her diary that she has to go back to Central, otherwise white people will always be in charge.

The perils that Melba faces lead to her family's decision to isolate her socially—that is, to keep her in the house and to limit her ability to answer the phone. Though Melba dislikes the inconveniences of integrating Central, she decides to endure them so that she and her family can live more freely.

Minnijean Brown calls and asks where Melba was when the students tried to enter Central earlier in the day. Melba explains that she was across the street. Minnijean explains that Elizabeth Eckford was alone because she did not know where the meeting place was. She does not have a phone and, therefore, did not get Daisy Bates's call. Minnijean explains that the other students went to the U.S. Attorney's office then to an FBI office. Minnijean invites Melba to go to the community center, which sounds like a wonderful idea to Melba, given all the good times that they had there. However, Grandma India does not allow Melba to go. For Melba, this is the last straw. She goes to her room and cries. Melba's grandmother tells her to make this her "last cry," for she is a **warrior** on the battlefield of the Lord and "warriors don't cry."

Both Elizabeth Eckford's isolation outside of Central and Melba's distress over being unable to go to the community center illustrate the importance of feeling a sense of community. With the other students present, Eckford would have felt less personally targeted by the mob. At the community center, Melba can socialize with people she knows and forget the unhappiness that she experienced earlier in the day. Her disappointment at being unable to go is understandable, but Grandma India tells her to strengthen herself, for there will be more disappointments down the road.

The phone rings again. Grandma India answers and tells Melba that she thinks it is Vince on the other end. Melba excitedly rushes to the phone only to hear a voice issuing a death threat. When she returns to the living room, she lies and says that it was not Vince but another friend. Grandma India says that she will keep watch again overnight and turns down Mother Lois's offer to do it instead. Grandma India, after all, is a better shot and can successfully aim at fingers and toes. She does not want to kill anyone out of fear of not being forgiven by God for taking a life.

The danger of being attacked and even killed is always close at hand, though Melba still does not expect it. Her romantic daydream of Vince is disrupted by a death threat, and Grandma India keeps watch to stave off danger, though her faith keeps her from wanting to take a life. The danger posed against the family never makes Grandma India vengeful or vindictive.

CHAPTER 5

Melba starts each day following news about integration. Aside from that, she tries to maintain some normalcy by helping Grandma India with chores and by practicing her application of make-up. One late afternoon, Grandma India enters the front hall and asks Melba to help her find her parasol. She is going to a wrestling match. Melba wants to go, too, and applies make-up and wears dark glasses, hoping that this will suffice as a disguise.

Ironically, Melba seeks to resume her normal life by disguising herself, thereby appearing abnormally, so that she can partake in all of the social activities that she misses. She tries not to look like herself—out of fear of being a target—so that she can feel like herself again.

The matches are held in Robinson Auditorium, a space usually reserved for whites only. During the matches, Melba would usually go to get a drink at the soft-drink stand and would see Vince there and invite him back to sit with her, Grandma India, and Grandma India's friend, Mr. Claxton, thereby enjoying what would otherwise be a forbidden double-date. Melba recounts how Grandma India becomes unusually excited during the matches and then, when they are over, reverts back "to her quietest and most cultured tone." This time, Grandma India refuses to allow Melba to attend the match out of fear for her safety. Melba becomes upset again and writes in her diary that freedom is not integration but the ability to go to wrestling matches.

Melba commits to attending Central so that spaces like Robinson Auditorium can always be open to black people, not just on the days of the wrestling matches. However, she misses the social interaction and fun of watching the matches, as well as the benefit of seeing her grandmother—who is usually composed—enter a frenzy of excitement. The auditorium, when it is reserved for blacks only, is a safe space for both Melba and Grandma India where they normally feel free to be themselves.

Melba sees a picture of Elizabeth Eckford in the Sunday newspaper. The photo is part of an ad paid for by a white man from a small town in Arkansas, calling shame to the hatred and bigotry that Elizabeth experienced. The ad, as well as the knowledge that a white man paid for it, make Melba feel hopeful.

Knowing that the ad was paid for by a white man proves to Melba that not all white people are against them. His use of Elizabeth Eckford's suffering to inspire shame signals empathy with the students.

Melba marks the ad as the beginning of a great Sunday that just keeps getting better. Before church starts, Vince walks up to Melba and asks her to be his girlfriend. The invitation distracts her from church services and from the minister's talk about integration and doing what is necessary "to heal any sour feelings" against white people. Melba understands that the church and the black community are essential to helping her get through the school year.

The ad confirms that Melba is not alone in her belief that Central should be integrated. Vince's companionship is not only a dream come true, considering her crush on him, but also an offering of much needed friendship from someone within her own community.

In the newspaper, Melba reads about plans for a conference between Governor Faubus, President Eisenhower, and members of Eisenhower's cabinet. Faubus asks for a compromise, which Eisenhower refuses. Meanwhile, Melba and the other members of the Little Rock Nine develop closer friendships.

The Little Rock Nine's growing camaraderie is contrasted with the growing rift between Faubus, who seeks to maintain his state's perceived right to preserve segregation, and Eisenhower, who refuses to allow Faubus to ignore federal authority.

Just before Governor Faubus's court hearing to account for his stalling integration, the teens are invited to Daisy Bates's house to meet with the press. Numerous "very dignified and important-looking men" from the NAACP sit in her living room, including Thurgood Marshall whom Melba recognizes from the newspaper reports of the Brown v. Board of Education decision (whose arguments against segregation Marshall had delivered). Marshall announces that they are petitioning for a court order for Faubus to move his national guard troops from the front door of the school so that the Little Rock Nine can enter. Melba is struck by Marshall's self-assurance. However, when he says that they must prepare themselves to testify in federal court, Melba again fears both becoming a target of threats and enduring yet another excuse from the governor to keep them out of school.

Melba admires Thurgood Marshall's intelligence and confidence, as well as his certainty that he and the NAACP can get Faubus to remove the troops and follow federal law. Melba, it seems, is "struck by Marshall's self-assurance," out of surprise that Marshall thinks that Faubus would allow himself to be redirected by the NAACP, even by court order. Testifying in court makes Melba nervous—not for the usual reason of having to speak publicly—but out of fear of that the governor will use her words against her and make all of her efforts up until now for naught.

During the meeting with the press, a group of news reporters, most of them white, ask the Little Rock Nine a series of questions for thirty minutes. At first, questions are directed to Elizabeth Eckford, then to all of them. After the main session, in which reporters ask Melba how she feels about going back to Central and ask Lois how a mother could put her child in such a situation, they have one-on-one interviews. Talk of the teens being heroes and heroines makes Melba proud of the Little Rock Nine as well as of her mother and grandmother for their support. She wishes that Grandma India could tell the reporters how she stands guard at night. Melba is fascinated by how the reporters work and appreciates how they all speak to her respectfully. For the first time, she feels equal to white people. She starts thinking that she wants to be a news reporter when she grows up.

Melba likes the attention that she gets from reporters. For the first time, white adults pay attention to her and care about what she has to say. She is unfazed by their careless comment about her mother's parental competence and focuses instead on the heroic image that the press constructs for her and the other students. Melba's desire to be a reporter is not just the result of her interest in their work, but of wanting to retain the feeling that her words matter and that she can have some part in disseminating the truth. The reporters who cover the Little Rock Nine's story give them the power to tell the truth about living under Jim Crow.

Governor Faubus's day in court arrives on September 19th. The federal court decision would be precedent-setting and could affect the whole country. States' rights advocates "from surrounding Southern towns" arrive in Little Rock and segregationists publish ads to increase participation at their rallies. The Arkansas National Guard continue to stand outside of Central and "hooligans [rampage] through the streets," preying on people who walk alone in isolated areas or at night. Melba feels the tension at home and finds it hard to concentrate. Thoughts of Vince offer a welcome distraction. Melba decides to ask her mother and grandmother for permission to date him. Mother Lois instructs Melba to invite him to the house after the court hearing. Melba is excited about Vince and decides to let God worry about what will happen at the court hearing.

Melba struggles to retain some aspects of a normal teenage life to distract herself from the pressures of integrating Central. Pursuing a relationship with Vince gives her some comfort, a relief from otherwise persistent feelings of unease. Furthermore, it reminds her to focus on those things that are within her control. She decides "to let God worry about" the court hearing, not out of a sense of futility, but so that she can continue to do what she is supposed to do—that is, retain some social life and, most importantly, focus on her education, which is her reason for wanting to attend Central.

CHAPTER 6

Melba hopes to meet Governor Faubus face-to-face, believing that he will be in the courtroom. The Little Rock Nine enter the Federal Building with Daisy Bates, Thurgood Marshall, and several other people. Melba wears dark glasses so that no one can see how fearful she is. She feels that, since the integration began, both black and white people got in the habit of staring at her. The faces she saw on the morning of the hearing were all different. Some have "welcome smiles, others [are] indifferent," and some are "undeniably angry."

Like Elizabeth Eckford, Melba uses dark glasses to retain a neutral look, so that her enemies cannot recognize her fear and pain. The sunglasses are a symbol of Melba's resistance in that they do not allow others to show how emotionally impacted she is by the events around her. The dark glasses allow her to appear *stoic, though she does not feel that way.*

For their safety, the Little Rock Nine enter the courthouse through a side door and go up an elevator. The group and their escorts are jammed inside. Melba sweats and struggles to breathe. The doors open to a sea of photographers trying to get pictures and reporters asking questions. They make their way to the courtroom. A white lady behind Melba makes a comment about how black people smell bad. The leaders of the Arkansas National Guard arrive, followed by Governor Faubus's attorneys. One of the attorneys explains that elected officials do not need to be present to answer a summons. Melba sees it as a missed opportunity. If she had a chance to see the governor in person, she thinks that she may not have disliked him so much.

The white lady behind Melba repeats a cruel and long-standing misbelief about black people being unclean and having a bad smell. This illogic reinforces whites' aversion to having the Little Rock Nine at Central High. The comment is also designed to remind Melba that she is unwanted. Her disappointment at not seeing Governor Faubus is due to her desire to humanize him. She only knows him from television as a distant figure who seeks to protect the tradition of segregation in Arkansas.

Thelma Mothershed, who has a heart condition, begins to turn blue and struggles to breathe, exhibiting symptoms that are typical of her condition. Daisy Bates insists that the teens focus on their testimony while she looks after Thelma. The Honorable Judge Ronald Davies enters the courtroom. Tom Harper, one of Governor Faubus's attorneys, asks that the case be dismissed due to an absence of a three-judge panel, which is typically used in a case involving constitutional issues. Judge Davies insists that the case will proceed, even though the attorneys ask to be excused. Harper reads a statement from Faubus saying that the governor will not concede his responsibilities to the federal government. The lawyers then state their refusal to proceed, in a kind of protest to the court. The attorneys for the Justice Department declare themselves *amicus curiae*, or friends of the court, and declare that they have prepared one hundred witnesses to support the order for integration. The judge announces that the witness testimony will begin after lunch.

Thelma's reaction alerts the others to the tension of the present day, despite it being a typical reaction from Thelma. The standoff between Judge Davies and the attorneys is a battle between federal power, represented by the judge, and the belief in states' rights, represented by Faubus's attorneys. The attorneys' flagrant disrespect of the judge, as well as the governor's statement regarding "his responsibilities" to uphold the Southern standard of segregation, are in keeping with the South's history of resentment toward the federal government for its ability to interfere in state affairs. It is a resentment that has lingered in the South since the Civil War.

The only place that will serve the Little Rock Nine and the members of the NAACP is "a greasy joint" in a "shabby section" of Little Rock. Thurgood Marshall sits with the Little Rock Nine, eating overcooked hamburgers topped with wilted lettuce. He expresses shock that Faubus's attorneys walked out of court, suspecting that it was their plan to do so all along.

Though Melba is in awe of Marshall's dignity and stature, as a black man he too is subjugated to the substandard treatment that black people receive under Jim Crow. His compliance with this poor service is juxtaposed with the entitled behavior of Faubus's attorneys.

The witnesses all make one major point: the threat of violence due to integration was an insufficient reason to have called out the Arkansas National Guard. School Superintendent Virgil Blossom talks about how the school board planned the integration and chose the students who, he says, were selected "on the basis of scholarship, personal conduct, and health." Melba wonders if he knows about Thelma's heart condition. Ernest Green and Elizabeth Eckford turn out to be the only students who testify, to Melba's relief. An attorney mentions the Brown v. Board of Education decision, which reminds Melba of her potential rapist. Judge Davies announces his decision: Governor Faubus used the Arkansas National Guard to thwart integration, which would proceed at Central High." Someone in the courtroom curses at Judge Davies, but Melba is thankful for him and excited for the opportunity to be a Central High student on Monday morning.

There are both public and personal dimensions to desegregation. Melba associates the Brown v. Board decision not with the possibility of being able to enter spaces that were previously barred to her, but with a man's attempt to violate her body and destroy her innocence. An historical moment in which black people became freer was, for her, an introduction into the ways in which white people could still control and brutalize black bodies. The thought is a fleeting one, however, for she is excited to fulfill the promise of the Supreme Court decision by enrolling at Central, despite white people in the courtroom being just as opposed to her presence as her attacker was.

CHAPTER 7

Melba worries that integration will be halted again. At the same time, she prays for the strength to make it through the school year. The children meet at Daisy Bates's house. The Little Rock Nine are split between two cars driven by NAACP officials. They cannot take the usual route to Central due to police warnings that segregationists might be waiting for them. Indeed, half a block away from the school's Sixteenth Street entrance are hundreds of white people shouting racial slurs.

Despite the court order, the white people in this community, and some from other parts of the South, remain firmly opposed to the black students' presence at Central. Their collective commitment to white supremacy and racism is evident in their gathering to harass the students and abuse them into submission.

Inside of the school, the shouting and harassment worsens. Melba notes that the inside of the school feels like a museum. It is the largest building that she has ever entered. A petite woman with dark hair and glasses leads them to the principal's office. Melba recognizes Mrs. Huckaby, the vice principal for girls, from previous meetings with the school board. She introduces them to Principal Jess Matthews who acknowledges the Little Rock Nine with a frown. Mrs. Huckaby hands them their schedules and instructs them to wait for their guides. Suddenly, Thelma has another attack. The students are concerned but Mrs. Huckaby rushes them out.

Melba's comparison of Central to a museum indicates that the school has far more space and resources than what was available to her at Horace Mann. She feels overwhelmed. The principal's displeasure with the black students' presences makes it seem as though she does not belong there. Once again, Thelma has an attack due to her heart condition during another tense moment and, again, the students are urged to proceed without her, as though nothing should interrupt their effort at Central.

The students notice that none of them have the same homeroom or shared classes. When Melba questions this, a man sitting behind the long desk says, in a mean, booming voice, "You wanted integration…you got integration." Melba finds herself alone and following "a muscular, stocky white woman with closely cropped black hair" past the first groups of students who attempt to bar her way. She is frightened and feels numb. Her fantasies of Central do not measure up to the "treacherous" reality. She runs to keep up with her guide, despite the distractions of the angry voices around her. Suddenly, she feels a slap, then spit dribbling down her face. A white woman a little older than Mother Lois blocks her path and screams "Nigger!" The woman hysterically says that the next thing black people will want to do is marry one of their children, which strikes Melba as odd, given that she is still forbidden to date and certainly would not want to marry a mean white person from Little Rock.

The separation of the black students effectively eliminates their only base of support at the school. Melba admits that she has underestimated the hostility toward the Little Rock Nine at the Central. Though there are plenty of white adults in the street who oppose the presence of black students, Melba is surprised to encounter similar hostility from educators. Central has always been a space that Melba wanted to enter, but it is now a dangerous and hostile space. Melba finds herself confronted by the fears of white people—sexual fears of miscegenation, but really, fears about the slow erosion of white supremacy—that she is too young to understand fully. She is also unsure of how to react, particularly in response to an elder.

When Melba enters her first class, a hush falls over the room. She walks toward an empty seat and all the students sitting nearby move away. The teacher ignores her and allows a boy to heckle Melba and threaten her with violence. The next class is gym where girls are playing volleyball outside. Though the gym teacher is pleasant, the girls make a point of aiming the ball at Melba's head, hitting her hard in one instance. While trying to escape the cruelty of the girls, she worries about the nearby mob. The gym teacher alerts Melba to a group of women jumping the school fence and shouting obscenities. Melba runs away, but a student sticks her foot out and trips her, causing Melba to fall face forward and cut her knee and elbow. A girl says, "What do you know. Niggers bleed red blood." She tries to kick Melba, but Melba grabs her foot and twists it, as she had seen wrestlers do during the matches, and the girl falls backward.

Melba's first day of school is characterized by a series of moments of emotional and physical abuse. When she is not facing threats from students, she faces them from the mob gathered outside of the school. There is nowhere to escape, neither inside nor outside of the school. The ease with which the white students hurt Melba, as well as the comment about her blood being red, which could either be genuine surprise or sarcasm, indicate how Jim Crow has taught the white students that black people are sub-human and unworthy even of the consideration they would normally show a dog.

Melba runs inside, looking for the office. She bumps into people who hit her and call her names. She begins to cry. Crippled by fear, she thinks of Grandma India saying the following, "God never loses one of his flock." Suddenly, she sees her stocky guide again who takes her to Mrs. Pickwick's shorthand class. Mrs. Pickwick is a petite, dark-haired woman who welcomes Melba, urges her not to sit near the window, and tells anyone who tries to heckle her that they will be sent to the principal's office. While walking toward her seat, she sees the crowd in the street. The crowd outnumbers the police who are often powerless to stop people from running toward the school.

Melba takes solace in her faith that she is doing God's work, and in the memory of her grandmother's encouragement. Melba experiences relative peace in Mrs. Pickwick's class. Finally, Melba meets an adult who empathizes with her and who tries to ensure her care. Meanwhile, the crowd outside threatens to overtake the police in a scene that illustrates the law's inability to eliminate or even control white supremacy.

As Melba settles into shorthand class, her guide reappears and says that she has to go to the principal's office. In the office, two girls in the Little Rock Nine are crying and the staff is frantic about how to control the crowd. The children are trapped inside the school. Someone suggests letting the mob have one child in order to save the others. It frightens Melba to think that the adults would be willing to let her or one of her friends hang. Then, Gene Smith, Assistant Chief of the Little Rock Police Department, enters and takes charge, leading the children out through the cellar and into a basement garage where two cars await. Smith instructs the students to keep the windows rolled up, the doors locked, and their faces away from the windows and tells the driver to move fast and not stop driving for any reason. The car speeds through the mob and gets Melba safely home. The driver tells her to get in the house right away. Melba makes him the second white man whom she will pray for God to protect.

The school staff's reaction to the mob that has overwhelmed the school is an indication of how ill-prepared the administrators are for the task of integration. Worse, while two children are already emotionally distraught over the difficult day, a staff member inhumanely offers to sacrifice a child to the angry mob, suggesting that they do not value black children as they would white children. With his quick thinking and command of a dangerous situation, Gene Smith emerges as a hero. Though he is simply doing his job, Melba feels thankful for him, as she has lost faith in so many of the white authority figures around her.

Grandma India rushes out of the front door to greet Melba. The alarmed neighbors stand outside and ask if Melba is all right. One, Mrs. Floyd, says that, now that Melba has had her "lesson," she need not "go back to that awful school anymore." Grandma India ushers Melba past her and onto the couch of their living room where she can comfortably watch TV and drink Grapette soda.

Though Melba needs the black community's support in making it through Central, Mrs. Floyd's comment is indicative of the fear that some black people, particularly older ones, felt in response to challenges to Jim Crow. The "lesson" is, presumably, that the South will not change.

Melba learns that, even after the students are safely out of the school, the mob continues to rage. Mother Lois comes home and asks if Melba is all right. Grandma India asks about the cuts on her knee, but Melba decides to tell them later so as not to cause her mother further concern. Melba learns that one reason why the Little Rock Nine were able to get into Central that morning is because the mob busied themselves with beating up black and white reporters, as well as some "out-of-towners." Even those who reached the relative safety of police cars were showered with a hail of rocks.

The segregationist mob is hostile toward anyone who seeks to change their tradition of segregation. This includes people who are seen as outsiders, whether or not they truly are. This news about what occurred outside of Central reveals that Little Rock is not only a racist city in 1957, but a deeply provincial one, fearful of any outside influences.

Conrad rushes in next to greet Melba. His friend, Clark, had told him that she was dead. The family reads a copy of the *Arkansas Democrat*, which is filled with pictures of the mob. Phone calls pour in, some from concerned family and friends, and others from strangers issuing threats. One phone call is from a news reporter who asks Melba about the situation and is impressed with how articulate she is. He offers her an opportunity to write an article about her first morning at Central, which she begins writing right away. The next day, the story is published by the Associated Press and is placed on the front page of the local newspaper.

By writing about her experience at Central, Melba gets her first opportunity to publish an article in a newspaper, foreshadowing her future career as a writer and journalist. By writing her own story, Melba is able to exercise some control over the unfolding narrative of integration at Central. Rumors are rampant in her community about what occurred at Central. By taking control of her own narrative, she seeks to combat the misrepresentations of her first full school day.

In the article, Melba talks about being glad that she went to Central that morning, despite her experience being an abnormal one for a fifteen-year-old. She writes about feeling as though she "were lost on an island" and how she longed to assure her white classmates that she would not hurt them—that she is "an average teenager," just like them. Every time she thought about giving up, someone kind would come up and spur her on with kind words or positivity. She mentions that she did not know how dangerous the crowd was until she was told that she had to leave for her safety. Still, Melba thinks that integration is possible in Little Rock.

When speaking to the media, Melba balances her harrowing story of a day full of verbal and physical abuse with anecdotes about support she received from white students, though she makes no mention of such support in this portion of the memoir. The inclusion of these kind white students (probably make-believe) who "[spurred] her on" may be an expression of her hope that she will one day encounter such support.

After Melba writes the article, she acknowledges to herself that she has not told the whole truth, but instead a version that will not interfere with the process of integration. She thinks that, maybe if she remains patient and prays, one day the white students really will welcome her and treat her like an ordinary human being.

Melba refrains from detailing her abuse at Central out of concern that others will perceive this as evidence that her efforts are futile. Furthermore, she remains optimistic that, eventually, the white students will grow accustomed to her presence and accept it.

That evening, the Pattillo family watches Governor Faubus deliver a statement from his Sea Island, Georgia retreat, urging NAACP leaders and school officials to allow a "cooling-off period" before resuming integration. In response, President Eisenhower commits to using the full power of the United States to carry out the orders of the Federal Court. Still, on Tuesday morning, the mob returns.

The Arkansas governor seeks to stall progress to placate his constituency of segregationists, while the President insists on the state's obedience to the law. The mob, ruled by its own internal logic and commitment to white supremacy, continues to terrorize the Little Rock Nine.

CHAPTER 8

Early on Tuesday evening, the 101st Airborne Division arrives. The Pattillo family has dinner in front of the television so that they can hear President Eisenhower's explanation of why he has sent the troops. President Eisenhower condemns the mob rule in Little Rock, asserting that it threatens "the very safety of the United States and the free world." Governor Faubus delivers "a pleading speech" in which he declares that Little Rock has been occupied. Later that night, the doorbell rings. Grandma India announces that it is "white men wearing black hats." She grabs her shotgun and urges them to state their business. They are from the Office of the United States. They urge Lois to allow Melba to go back to school, assuring her that Melba will be protected.

President Eisenhower sends the troops out of anger toward Governor Faubus's disrespect of federal authority. The conflict between the President and the governor is less about Melba's civil rights and safety than it is about Eisenhower's unwillingness to allow Faubus's disobedience to persist, out of concern that it could set a dangerous precedent which could disrupt desegregation efforts in other Southern states. He contextualizes Little Rock within a broader effort to maintain order.

On Wednesday morning, they turn the corner near Daisy Bates's home and see about fifty soldiers from the 101st Division, nicknamed the "Screaming Eagle" Division. People stand around watching. Melba recognizes some ministers from the community's churches and several of them smile and nod at her. She worries that people see her differently. Thelma and Minnijean also inspect the soldiers. Other students mill about and Melba wonders what they are waiting for. She then remembers that there will be an assembly at school with a military briefing. Reporters and photographers are also present, some of them hanging from trees or standing on cars. Mother Lois whispers "good-bye" and says a prayer along with one of the ministers. The students ride away to Central in a station wagon that is part of a convoy. Their driver, Sarge, is friendly and pleasant, but the reactions from onlookers are mixed. Some wave, while others raise their fists.

The military presence changes the responses from both black and white people to the Little Rock Nine. Whereas before, Melba's black neighbors seemed to ignore her, they now give her friendly acknowledgement. Some of the "onlookers," who are presumably white, wave, perhaps in a demonstration of respect to the U.S. military, while others remain obstinately aggressive toward everyone associated with the desegregation effort. Melba thinks that people "see her differently"—as less of a neighbor and more as an object of interest and spectacle.

When the Little Rock Nine arrives at school, groups of soldiers are lined up, just a few feet apart. Others are running up and down the street in front of Central with their bayonets pointed. Sarge explains that it is "crowd control"—keeping the mob away. The soldiers surround the Little Rock Nine. Melba looks at her friends; they, too, are impressed by the display of military power. Melba feels sad that such great lengths must be taken, but proud to live in a country that is willing to take such measures for her.

The military's orderly presence helps the students feel safer. Melba, however, is ambivalent about their presence. She appreciates them but finds it unfortunate that some white people are so opposed to her existence that she would need to be escorted to school by federal troops. She has both pride in her country and sadness over its slow progress.

Once the Screaming Eagles deliver the children inside, no one seems to know what to do. Principal Jess Matthews breaks the awkwardness with a forced smile, then directs the students to their classrooms. A soldier follows each member of the Little Rock Nine in their respective directions. Melba passes several groups of students who whisper obscenities at her and at the soldier. The soldier, whose name is Danny, ignores them. He tells her that he will wait for her in the hall, for the soldiers are not allowed to enter classrooms. If she needs him, she is to "holler."

The school's staff is as ill-prepared for the presence of federal troops as they have been for every other aspect of the integration of Central High. The segregationist students are unfazed by Danny's military status. His protection of Melba identifies him as an enemy—one sent from the federal government to force change upon the South.

In the English class, the teacher tells Melba to sit near the door where Danny can see her. A "tall, dark-haired boy" begins to harass her and the teacher says nothing. The boy harasses her throughout class and when Melba asks after class if she "could do something to calm people down," the instructor says that she is not "gonna browbeat their students to please you'all." Melba is relieved to go to Mrs. Pickwick's class next where she is left alone.

The teacher's response indicates that some adults are on the side of the segregationist students. While the principal would not vocalize his disapproval of the black students' presence, the white teacher does. Moreover, the instructor claims the segregationists as "their students," thereby excluding Melba.

On the way to Mrs. Pickwick's classroom, Melba stops to use the restroom. Danny leans against a wall, "across from the bathroom door." Melba encounters a girl who tells her that there is no sign marked "Colored" on the door. When Melba emerges from the stall, she sees that someone has scrawled "Nigger, go home" on the mirror.

Danny cannot protect Melba from verbal harassment or from the ostracism that she experiences from white teenage girls, who are as eager as their male counterparts to alienate Melba and to assert their white supremacy.

Danny takes Melba to Mrs. Huckaby's office. Carlotta and Thelma are already there. Mrs. Huckaby says that, from now on, she will escort the girls to the restroom and the cafeteria. They thank her and the four of them walk to the cafeteria. Melba describes a room that "seemed to be half the size of a football field." Many students turn and look at them, but Melba feels less awkward due to the cafeteria workers being black. This time, she does not feel "the same twinge of embarrassment" at seeing black people in service positions, instead she is "thrilled to see them smiling back at [her]."

The cafeteria is a daunting space both for its size and for it being a space in which students are typically left unspervised by adults. Melba and the others know that they will be even less protected here. She feels less alone and outnumbered when she sees the black cafeteria workers. Still, they occupy the servile positions black people typically held in the South at the time, positions that Melba thinks are less respectable.

Over lunch, a couple of friendly white girls sit with Melba, Thelma, and Carlotta. They say that many of their friends stay away because they fear the segregationists who warned against showing the Little Rock Nine kindness. After lunch, Melba goes to gym class. The bandage on her knee is a reminder of the assault that she fears, but she quickly changes into her gym uniform, moves past someone who tries to block her way, and ignores the "stares and name-calling." She finds that she is better able to cope and goes out to meet Danny who directs her to the first-level playing field. Several soldiers are posted in the area where gym class will be held, which makes Melba feel much safer.

The knowledge of secret support from some white students, coupled with Danny's presence, causes Melba to feel more confident in her ability to confront her hecklers and abusers. She is beginning to mimic Danny's stoicism in response to the segregationists. She is unresponsive to them and avoids them so that she can continue on with her day. Still, she relies on the organized presence of the soldiers to ensure her safety.

Danny greets Melba at the end of class and leads her through an isolated passage where they are confronted by "sideburners"—boys who copy their hairstyles from Elvis and James Dean. They heckle Danny, then one of them slams Melba's books out of her hand. The thugs then surround them. Though Melba feels an urge to run, Danny tells her to remain still. More soldiers emerge, holding onto their nightsticks. The hooligans disperse and the soldiers withdraw.

Melba experiences a moment in which Danny cannot protect her on his own. The "hooligans" are so bold that they are willing to physically confront the armed soldier. However, Danny shows her how to remain calm and collected, even in a situation of being overwhelmed and threatened.

Melba goes to French class next. There is no heckling; some students even smile. Melba is excited about French class because Mother Lois speaks French fluently, so Melba understands the language. The students talk about suntanning and one student talks about not wanting to get too dark out of fear of "being taken for a nigger." Things do not get better in study hall where the teacher does not allow Melba to sit where Danny can see her and the students harass her. Suddenly, a helicopter lands and Melba knows that it is time to go home. Protected by the Screaming Eagles helicopter, Melba walks to the army staff car waiting at the curb.

Melba goes to French class thinking that it will offer a brief escape from her abuse. Speaking another language contributes to the sense of feeling like another person. The fact that all of the students are learning another culture and language also places them on more equal footing. The mean comment about "suntanning," however, reminds Melba of her exclusion based on her skin color.

When Sarge asks the Little Rock Nine about their day, it is the beginning of "a funny round-robin" to see who can give the most colorful description of their day. Usually the stories bring joyful relief, but all laughter halts when someone's eyes fill with tears. Sarge takes them to Daisy Bates's home where reporters await. The reporters bombard the students with questions about what it is like inside of the school and how they are treated. One reporter asks Melba if she would like to be white. Without missing a beat, Melba asks if the reporter would like to be "Negro" and goes on to say that she is proud of what she is. Though her color is currently inconvenient, that will not always be the case.

The students try to find humor and levity in an otherwise sad and grim circumstance, though it is difficult. Their hurt is compounded by a reporter's silly assumption that the problem is about the students' color, as opposed to racism. The reporter's question about the students wanting to be white reflects a common misunderstanding that integration is about wanting to be white or about desiring proximity to white people when it is, instead, simply a desire for equal treatment and equal access.

Stan Opotowiski of the *New York Post* asks Melba if she can write as well as she speaks and offers her an opportunity to write what she is thinking for the paper. Melba thinks she should do it because if not for the "nosy persistence" of Northern reporters, the story of the Little Rock Nine and their demise would have been no more than "a three-line notation buried on the back page of a white newspaper."

The offer is Melba's second opportunity in journalism, but for a bigger newspaper. Melba sees it less as a chance to hone her skills and more as a favor to Northern news outlets that have ensured that the Little Rock Nine's story would not be forgotten. Melba reasons that the reporters' persistence has kept her alive.

The Little Rock Nine are then whisked off to Dunbar Community Center where they answer more questions in a more formal setting. When Melba arrives home, there are still more reporters on her front porch. Some of them talk to her neighbors. She thinks that she cannot face them, but she does and conducts more interviews. By 9:00 PM, she is exhausted. She wakes up to an alarm radio playing Buddy Holly's "Peggy Sue." That morning, Melba writes in her diary that she knows that Danny is not exactly a bodyguard for her but is there to protect federal power. Still, if not for him, she would hear more of those voices calling her a "nigger" and telling her that she has no right to live. So, she is grateful.

Melba is a part of history now, canonized by all of the interviews and by the diary that she keeps. Her own record of what happens at Central serves as a corollary to what the newspapers print. Hearing Buddy Holly, a popular rock star of the day, on the radio is a reminder of how certain aspects of black culture are welcome in mainstream society, but black people are not.

CHAPTER 9

During the ride to Central, Melba asks Sarge if the soldiers feel as odd as the Little Rock Nine to be propped up in jeeps with guns mounted up front just to take them to school. Sarge says that they do not feel at all awkward, for they are carrying out orders. The hecklers have a lot of energy that morning. A girl walks on Melba's heels and when Melba turns around to look at her, the girl spits in her face. A group of boys then bumps straight into her and begins to kick her. When Melba asks why Danny does not do something, he makes it clear that he is not present to engage in any conflict with the students.

There is a contrast between the soldiers' display of power and how they use it. The guns mounted on their jeeps suggest aggressive power, but their orders are to deflect violence, not to initiate it. The contrast between the military's aggressive appearance and the way Danny protects Melba initially confuses her. She expects him to physically defend her from abuse, though he can never do that, due to the possibility of inflaming more violence.

Melba goes to the principal's office to report her abuse, but a female clerk sitting behind the desk says that they require adult witnesses to file complaints against students and the soldiers do not count. The clerk then mocks Melba, which hurts as much as being abused. She decides to mimic Danny's confidence and alertness, imagining herself as a soldier in battle.

Unlike at her previous school, Melba cannot rely on the adults for protection or guidance. More frustratingly, no one believes her reports of abuse and they seem to favor her harassers. Knowing that both the adults and the students are hostile to her presence, Melba relies only on herself for protection.

Melba spends the rest of the day enduring the pranks, then gets in the convoy where she enjoys verbal games with her friends, and finally goes to Daisy Bates's house to give more interviews. The next day, Friday, Danny announces that he is going to be "in the background," for school officials want to see how the students fare without the military presence. Melba realizes that she has come to rely on Danny for protection.

Melba's life at Central has become rather routine, and Danny's presence is a key aspect of that routine. It also seems to be the first time that she has had any kind of relationship with a white male and the first time that she has come to trust a white man.

Meanwhile, there is a lot of excitement at the school due to an upcoming football game with Baton Rouge High School—Central's archrival. While Melba is walking through one of Central's cavernous halls, Danny screams for her to look out. He tells her to get down as a stick of dynamite whizzes past her. He stamps out the flame and urges her to keep moving. His voice sounds "cold and uncaring," but Melba assumes that this is the attitude that is necessary to survive.

The students' jubilation over the game contrasts with the peril Melba faces in "Central's cavernous halls." Her description makes the school seem like a dark yet expansive space in which anything can happen at any time. Though the dynamite could have killed them both, she is stunned by Danny's "cold" attitude, which she slowly adopts.

After gym class, Danny tells Melba that she will be going to her first pep rally and he cannot go into the auditorium with her. When Melba settles into a seat, she sees that Thelma Mothershed is just a few feet away. Still, Melba is afraid of what could happen in the "dimly lit room among [her] enemies." To keep herself calm, she quietly repeats the Twenty-Third Psalm. When the students use the school song, "Hail to the Gold, Hail to the Black" to mock Melba, she does not care.

Though Thelma is nearby, Melba does not feel more at ease—perhaps due to Thelma's fragile health condition. Melba takes solace in her faith instead. Her quiet chanting of the psalm separates her from the loud singing of the school song, which some students use as yet another weapon against her.

When the rally is over and Melba moves to exit with the other students, she is shoved backward by a strong hand, knocking down her books. A forearm presses against her throat. Her harassers are "three or four football-player types" who promise to make her life hell. When Melba tells Danny about the incident, he is surprised that she did not defend herself, saying that she is a part of a battle that needs **warriors**. Melba thinks about what he says and realizes that either the students' behavior will have to change or Melba will have to do a better job of protecting herself.

Melba is relatively defenseless against a group of boys who resemble "football-player types," though, as she begins to think about self-defense and protection, she realizes that it can take many forms. She can physically defend herself, as Danny suggests, or she can contribute to a change in the white students' responses to her.

CHAPTER 10

Melba gets up very early on Saturdays to claim time for herself listening to records, reading magazines, and writing in her diary. Mother Lois, on the other hand, is so consumed by news of integration that she reads stories such as that of FBI chief, J. Edgar Hoover getting angry with Governor Faubus for saying that the FBI secretly held the teenage girls for hours of questioning. Melba says that they should only talk about good things—nothing related to Central. Mother Lois and Grandma India agree.

So much of Melba's time is devoted to the work of integrating Central that she has to schedule time that would normally be widely available to a teenager. She only wants to "talk about good things" to remind her of the positive aspects of life and to help her feel that she has not lost all sense of normalcy.

Mother Lois announces that Vince called to ask if Melba could go with him to church on Sunday, then out for a bite to eat. Mother Lois agreed, on the condition that Vince and Melba have dinner with the family. When Sunday arrives, Melba cannot control her excitement. She tries to fix her hair like a movie star but settles on her normal ponytail. When Vince arrives, Melba heads for the door, but her mother stops her to marvel at her daughter's "first real date." Vince presents her with roses and, during the service when the minister at his mother's church mentions her name, he looks proud to be with her. Dinner goes well until Grandma India mentions that the Mothers' League is asking that the 101st be cut or removed from the school altogether.

Melba enjoys a milestone in any teenager's life—her first date. She frets over how she looks and wants to impress Vince. It is a rare moment in the memoir when Melba has a common teenage experience and is able to exhibit all of the feelings that another person her age would have in response to going out with their crush. Still, the experience is not altogether typical in that Melba becomes the focus of the sermon at church, and Grandma India spoils the mood with news that Melba will be less protected at school.

On Sunday night, Melba is unable to sleep. She is still excited from her date and worried that Danny and the other soldiers will be gone. On Monday morning, he is present, but on Tuesday morning, the Arkansas National Guard resumes duties. This causes the segregationists to resume their taunts and threats while the members of the guard slouch against the wall and watch. Melba wants to run away but then remembers Danny's message to her: "**Warriors** survive." She endures getting pelted with bottle-cap openers and even having a flaming wad of toilet paper dropped on her in a bathroom stall. She escapes by tossing books up at her captors, hitting them in the head.

Members of the Arkansas National Guard seem sympathetic to the segregationists, and Melba knows that she cannot rely on them for protection. Their lackadaisical attitude toward the violence around them is a stark contrast to the alert responsiveness of the 101st Division. Melba withstands painful physical abuse and bravely escapes when a group of girls attempts to burn her. She becomes the embodiment of Danny's dictum about survival.

Some white students reach out with kindness. However, the absence of the 101st causes the segregationists to increase their harassment "a hundredfold." They plan a belligerent protest. Danny resumes his security duties and, on Thursday morning, follows Melba down a hall when a boy flashes "a shiny black object" in Melba's face that causes a sharp, intense pain. Danny pulls her away by her ponytail and splashes cold water in her eyes. It was an acid attack. Melba demands to go home right away, despite needing a doctor.

There is a cognitive dissonance between the kindness that Melba experiences in one moment and the mortal threat that she experiences shortly thereafter. She is uncertain of whom she can trust, aside from Danny, who saves Melba from a boy's attempt to blind her. This is the second threat against her life in the past couple of days.

An optometrist examines Melba and covers her eyes with a soothing substance and patches. He also says that she will need to wear glasses for "all close work." Melba thinks that wearing glasses will make her unattractive to boys. In the evening, she is too tired to answer reporters' questions thoroughly, but says a quiet prayer before bed, thanking God for Danny's protection.

Melba is thankful for not having lost her eyesight but reveals that, despite the seriousness of the danger she faced, she remains concerned with trivial and superficial things just like any teenager—like the idea that girls who wear glasses as unattractive.

CHAPTER 11

Melba becomes so overwhelmed with the task of keeping herself safe that she falls ill. It appears to be flu, but she thinks it is sadness. Still, Melba forces herself to attend school the next day to participate in a talk with segregationist student leaders, organized by the Norwegian reporter, Mrs. Jorumn Rickets. Ernie, Minnijean, and Melba sit down with Sammy Dean Parker, who was in the newspaper hugging Governor Faubus, thanking him for keeping the Little Rock Nine out of school, and two other students. While Ernie insists that all they want is an education, the white students raise fears of intermarriage and being overtaken by black people. Later, in an interview with *The New York Times*, Parker says that she thinks that the Little Rock Nine also do not want to go to school with them but are being paid by the NAACP, a comment which strikes Melba as absurd.

Melba's illness is likely due to stress. She attends the roundtable with the hope that it can help the white students to understand why the black students want to attend Central, but the meeting only seems to result in more misunderstanding. The white students, particularly Parker, do not use the meeting as an opportunity to listen but instead to reassert the racist talking points they have learned at home. The integration of Central is, for them, not the simple effort of black students to attend school, but a plot to overtake the white students, which Parker attributes to the NAACP's meddling.

An announcement in the newspaper reads that half of the 101st will return to their base in Kentucky. Melba realizes that she can only depend on herself for protection and adopts the attitude of a **warrior**. She keeps her muscles "steely" in response to abuse and strains her mind to focus. By mid-October, there are very few 101st soldiers and few national guardsmen.

After only a month of protection, the federal troops' presence is scaled back. This leads Melba to the realization that there is little concern for maintaining the black students' safety, which forces her to find ways to keep herself safe.

Mrs. Huckaby tells the students to notify their parents of an upcoming meeting with School Superintendent Virgil Blossom. At the meeting, Blossom does not address any of the students' or parents' concerns but tells the students not to respond to their attackers. When Mother Lois asks if he has "any specific plans" to protect the children, Blossom rudely tells her that it is none of her business and ignores her while he continues to make "his meaningless comments." Mother Lois is angry and embarrassed but finally takes her seat. It upsets Melba to see her mother disrespected and it bothers her that the others, especially the black men present, do not stand up to defend her.

The meeting with Blossom is exemplary of how institutional racism operates. Blossom has the power to protect the Little Rock Nine but does nothing to address racism both due to his personal bias and due to possible pressure from racists on the schoolboard. The unwillingness of black men in the room to stand up to Lois frustrates Melba but is unsurprising, given both the futility of such a display and the possible threat of violence that black men face in the South when they assert themselves in opposition to white men.

Minnijean Brown goes to Melba's house in November to show a picture of Melba in Life magazine. The two of them also appear in other publications. Minnijean is becoming deeply affected by her ostracism and comes to believe that she can convince the white students to like her if they hear how beautifully she sings. She commits to finding an opportunity to sing onstage in a school program, despite the Mothers' League's plan to exclude her. The other students have also changed. Melba notices that they are more solemn and withdrawn.

The Little Rock Nine struggle to adapt to their ostracism, despite their wish to belong. Minnijean's attempt to join the Christmas program is based on the belief that, if she makes the first effort, the white students will accept her. Perhaps she believes that, if the national media deems them worthy of positive attention, eventually the students at Central will, too.

Melba is surprised when she is invited to give a speech to students who attend chapel services. The chapel is "a fairly safe corner of the school." Grandma India eases her fears that the students will throw things, for, at the very least, they "aren't heathens." When Melba speaks, she insists, they will know that they all worship the same Lord.

This is the first instance in which Melba is invited to address some of the white students at Central. Though some of them may be committed to segregation, she hopes that their equal commitment to Christianity will encourage them to listen to her.

For Thanksgiving, the Pattillo family has a tradition of sorting through their things and giving up things they do not need or use, as well as two things very dear to them. Grandma India asks Conrad to give up his train, which he insists on keeping, and uses Melba's example of giving up "her favorite blouse" to encourage him. He responds by saying that "Melba likes suffering and doing without," which is why she attends Central. He heard this from his friend, Clark, who repeated it from his parents. Grandma India says that Melba is at the school because she made a promise to God that she intends to keep. She also says that if Conrad does not "ante up," he will not get any Thanksgiving dinner and no one will play Monopoly with him for a week. He lets go of his train's engine to put in the gift box.

The assumption from Clark's parents mirrors the comment Sammy Dean Parker made to The New York Times. *Both suggest that the Little Rock Nine somehow* like *what they are enduring at Central. Though Melba does not record her reaction to what Conrad repeats, the comment must be rather hurtful. Melba depends on the black community for moral support and understanding, while the comment from Clark's parents demonstrates total misunderstanding and a lack of empathy—a position that her brother, however naively, is also supporting.*

According to the *Arkansas Gazette*, Little Rock authorities' agreement to maintain order allows for a deal with the federal government not to prosecute segregationists. Minnijean remains focused on trying to perform in the Christmas show. When Minnijean tries to register, Mrs. Huckaby lies and says that tryouts have passed. Minnijean is wounded, for the school officials had not been "sincere about offering Minnijean the opportunity" and, therefore, were not clear about the terms of participating. Melba and Thelma try their best to console her.

Melba is annoyed with Mrs. Huckaby and the other school officials—not for excluding Minnijean, which they all figured would occur in one way or another, but for letting Minnijean think that there was real hope that she could join the show. The attempt to spare Minnijean's feelings is, in a way, worse, for it only fed her hope that she would be included.

On Monday, November 25, Melba prepares to speak to 250 students gathered for Central High's early morning chapel service. At first, she garbles some of the words then speaks calmly. The students are impressed and a couple approach her afterward to congratulate her and to ask where she got her "Northern accent." Mother Lois is pleased to hear this and tells Melba to tell the students that her mother is an English teacher and that they only speak the King's English in their home. Melba confirms that there were no "flying objects," as she had originally feared, and that, during the service, she felt that the students shared a love of the Lord in common. Grandma India insists that, someday, the white students will have the courage to be nice outside of the chapel. Melba does not think so, but her grandmother is sure that things will not always be as they are presently.

Grandma India is basing her hope on her personal wisdom as well as the fact that the white students share enough in common with Melba to identify with her but are too preoccupied with maintaining segregation to notice. Their interest in Melba's speech is a compliment to her eloquence, but is also possibly based on the expectation, nourished by racist stereotypes, that black people would speak an inferior form of English. She demonstrates her respectability by presenting her best self, which works in this instance to combat her audience's possibly negative expectations.

The Little Rock Nine gather at Daisy Bates' house for an "official" Thanksgiving dinner on Tuesday evening. There is a news conference. Mrs. Bates asks if the students want "white meat or dark meat" and, speaking without thinking, Melba says that it is "an integrated turkey." Mrs. Bates and Mother Lois get an annoyed expression on their faces and the reporters snicker. While driving home, Mother Lois tells Melba that she will regret her statement.

Melba makes a bad joke that, unfortunately, is printed in a newspaper. She realizes that her visibility means that she cannot afford to speak so carelessly. Otherwise, the remark is an attempt to find levity, after months of somber meetings to help the students to integrate Central successfully.

The day before Thanksgiving break, Danny breaks the rules by coming up close to Melba and telling her to take care of herself and be careful. She realizes that he will soon leave her, though he will neither confirm or deny it. On Thanksgiving Day, she experiences feelings of "peace and joy," but reads a headline in the *Gazette* confirming her fear: the last of 225 GIs will leave the school. When Melba returns to Central on December 2, someone asks if "all niggers eat integrated turkeys," then puts his foot out to trip her. She steps hard on his foot, pretending it is a mistake. Other students mock her careless statement. The only thing that keeps Melba going is the promise of Christmas break.

Melba was careless with her quip at Daisy Bates's home, but is less careless than before when confronted by harassers. Her knowledge that Danny is leaving, coupled with a less pleasant than normal Thanksgiving, makes Melba look forward to Christmas—hoping that at least one holiday will not be spoiled by the integration of Central High. The integration has infiltrated every aspect of her life, even making her unable to enjoy cherished holidays.

CHAPTER 12

Melba's "sweet sixteen" is approaching. While entering the school, she dreams of the freedom that will be possible with that "magic age." While she is lost in her daydreams, a boy pulls her wrist and doubles her arm behind her back. No one is present to help her. Melba kicks the boy in the crotch before he can enlist his friends to abuse her any further. When she walks up the stairs to homeroom, she is greeted by the same two boys who taunt her every day. She glares at them and whispers that she will be present "tomorrow and the next day and the next."

Though Melba dreams of greater personal freedom, such as the ability to date, she is also maturing into a more capable and self-sufficient person. With Danny no longer around to protect her, she commits her first act of self-defense, which succeeds, and gives her the resolve to stay on at Central. She no longer feels as vulnerable as she once did.

When members of the Little Rock Nine compare notes, they find that their abuse is increasing. There are rumors of training programs to "sharpen the skills of hooligans inside the school." Meanwhile, Minnijean wages a second battle to appear with the choral group in the Christmas program. Thelma and Melba try to talk her out of it, to no avail.

The violent resistance to Melba and the other black students is probably the result of an organized effort to intimidate them into leaving Central. Not only does this not work, but it spurs some students, particularly Minnijean, to try harder to belong.

Minnijean is the only member of the Little Rock Nine whom Melba invites to her birthday party. She excludes others so that she can feel more like her old self and less like an integrationist. She also makes Minnijean promise not to talk about Central around their friends from Horace Mann High who are Melba's other guests. When Minnijean calls to say that she cannot attend the party after all, Melba is relieved, thinking that, without any members of the Little Rock Nine present, she can fade into her old group.

Melba tries to separate her identity at Central from who she thinks she is. Her self-image has not diverged from how she regarded herself at Horace Mann. She still thinks that she can blend into her "old group" and talk to them as though she never left her former high school, but her desire to "fade into her old group" is also a wish to forget who she has since become.

Vince is her first guest at the party. He offers Melba a gift of "tiny gold hoop earrings." After an hour, no guests arrive. Then, Melba's friend Marsha phones to say that she will also not be coming but will drop her gift off the next day. She says that their friend Ann is having her annual Christmas party and that everyone is going there. However, Melba knows that Ann's party does not start before eight and wonders why people cannot stop by her house first. That is when Marsha says that everyone is afraid to go to Melba's house and that no one is willing to die with her.

Fear of becoming targets of violence keeps Melba's old friends at bay. For the first time, she realizes that her choice to integrate Central has not only cost her the possibility of friendship at her new school, but has alienated her from her friends at her old school. Her choice to integrate Central has made them less proud and more afraid. Melba's sense of community is diminishing.

Melba's feelings are doubly hurt, for no one comes to her party and no one invites her to the biggest party of the year. She recognizes that Vince also wants to go to Ann's party and wonders if her mother and grandmother can make an exception tonight and allow her to go. Grandma India refuses, due to the white men who are parked at the end of their street, waiting for Melba to leave alone so "they can hang [her]." Melba sobs into her pillow that night, wishing that sometimes she could stop being a **warrior** and sometimes just be a girl.

With the exception of Vince, who only sticks around to be polite, Melba feels completely isolated from her friends. Nevertheless, she must maintain this state of isolation in the interest of remaining safe. Melba's work toward social justice excludes her from the pleasures of being a teenage girl—a sacrifice she did not expect to have to make.

With four days to go before Christmas break, the segregationists start a drive to get the Little Rock Nine out of the school before the end of the year. Melba is exhausted but looking forward to Christmas. On Tuesday, December 17, one day before vacation, five of them go to the cafeteria for lunch, which is always hazardous. Tuesday is chili day, which Minnijean loves. As she tries to get out of line, a group of boys blocks her path. The other kids freeze, fearing she might be in trouble. The white boys push a chair in front of her. Minnijean stands patiently. The others do not intervene out of fear of starting a brawl. As the boys taunt her, Minnijean's tray goes flying and the chili spills all over two of the boys. Everyone is stunned and silent, except for the black cafeteria workers who applaud. A school official shows up and whisks Minnijean away. By the afternoon, Melba learns that Minnijean has been suspended.

The cafeteria incident illustrates the helplessness of the Little Rock Nine in the face of mob harassment. Minnijean's mishap, which could have been an accident or the result of a nervous reaction, is deemed an act of aggression. What is most unjust is that the white students, such as the boys who torment Minnijean, are allowed to commit constant acts of bold aggression with impunity while Minnijean's sole transgression, which was probably unintentional, results in swift and immediate punishment. Her only sympathizers are the powerless cafeteria workers.

CHAPTER 13

By dumping chili all over the boy, intentionally or not, Minnijean opens a door for the segregationists to try to push them all out. One early evening, Melba and Mother Lois prepare to attend a Christmas party held by the National Organization of Delta Sigma Theta in honor of the Little Rock Nine. She has a delightful time and also enjoys Christmas Eve with her family. Vince calls to say that he will stop by Melba's house on Christmas. It excites Melba to share such a special day with Vince. However, her fantasy is better than the reality. She realizes that she and Vince have little in common.

Christmas gives Melba a break from the pressures of attending Central, though her status there becomes precarious after the incident involving Minnijean. Spending time with Vince no longer offers the comfort it once did due to Melba's extraordinary concerns and the inordinate amount of attention that she gets. It is also possible that, after getting to know Vince, he has proven to be less interesting than Melba first thought he was.

Melba's father, Howell, whom she calls "Papa Will," also comes over for the holiday. When he and Mother Lois look at each other fondly, it gives Melba hope that they may get back together, though rumors around church say that her father has a girlfriend. Melba accepts that her father is not coming home to stay.

Melba, like the children of many divorced parents, misses her father and wants her family to be a cohesive unit again. She may also miss Howell's protection and the necessary support of both her parents.

Melba decides not to talk about Central at Christmas, despite her family's overwhelming interest. She wants life to be normal again. However, the Associated Press includes the story of the Little Rock Nine among the year's top stories. By New Year's Eve, Melba is thinking a lot less about Central. Vince invites her to a party, but Mother Lois and Grandma India still refuse to allow her out of the house. Melba makes a list of New Year's resolutions, which include praying for the "strength not to fight back," maintaining the best attitude she can at school, and being a better friend to Minnijean to help her remain in school.

While Melba struggles to retain some feelings of normalcy, her family inadvertently spoils it for her by talking constantly about what happens at Central and by refusing to let her go out. Melba's New Year's resolutions reflect her unusual selflessness, especially for a teenager. Her main concern is that the Little Rock Nine help each other to remain strong against their enemies so that they can all remain at Central.

CHAPTER 14

The first days of school in the new year are "frightening" because, without Minnijean, members of the Little Rock Nine think that any of them could be suspended next. Melba withdraws from French class due to an inability to concentrate and she worries about her ability to perform in her other classes. Minnijean is allowed to return to school on January 13, "with the proviso that she not respond to her attackers in any way." Shortly thereafter, a boy throws what looks like a bucket of soup on her. He is suspended, but the others worry about "an all-out soup war."

Melba is so overwhelmed by fears of suspension that her worries interfere with her ability to do her schoolwork, even in the subject that she most enjoys. Thus, the segregationists have won a temporary victory over Minnijean, Melba, and the others, unsettling them enough to defeat one of their primary purposes in being at Central—that is, to gain access to the best education in the district.

The segregationists become more vocal. Two hundred "hard-core segregationist students" protest the presence of the Little Rock Nine by being absent from school and attending a rally held by the Mothers' League, speaking on "What Race Mixers Are Planning for Us." The segregationists also organize an effort to phone the Little Rock Nine's homes at all hours to harass them with bomb threats and hoaxes. On the day of another pep rally, Mrs. Huckaby suggests that the girls stay in her office. The students also have more meetings with Daisy Bates and the NAACP to discuss their problems.

The Mothers' League's effort against the Little Rock Nine illustrates the important role that white women have played in preserving white supremacy, using their privilege and their selective notions about family values to justify racism. The Mothers' League is a part of the concerted effort to get black students out of Central. Mrs. Huckaby's office and Daisy Bates's home are these students' only safe spaces outside of their own homes.

Soon, Melba becomes depressed. When she starts to wish for death, Grandma India says that this would be just what the segregationists want. She gets Melba to find a project that she really likes to distract her from her troubles. She studies the Explorer, the satellite that put the U.S. in the space race. Grandma India reads about it, too, so that they can both talk about it for hours.

Studying about the space race improves Melba's attitude toward life, for it is a reminder of humanity's progress, while her life at Central is exemplary of its backwardness. It also reminds her that world is much bigger than what is happening to her now in Little Rock.

Mother Lois suggests that Melba extend Vince a standing invitation to come to Sunday supper. He agrees and comes by, even on days when she does not want him to. Each day, Grandma India and Melba pray for Minnijean's strength. On Thursday, February 6, Minnijean is attacked again by the boy who dumped soup on her and a "ruckus" ensues. Her attackers accuse her of retaliation, including calling someone "white trash." When she is sent home without a suspension notice, Melba is relieved. Then, Mrs. Huckaby gives Carlotta an envelope to take to Minnijean which contains an expulsion notice. Minnijean gives an interview with the *Arkansas Democrat* explaining the pressure she was under at Central and her isolation. Thurgood Marshall says in the article that he does not know how much more mistreatment the students can take.

Mother Lois's idea to get Vince, someone who's company Melba appreciates, to come over every weekend is an attempt to keep Melba's spirits up so that she will not suffer a fate similar to Minnijean's. None of Melba's old friends are willing to visit her, so she relies on Vince for a sense of normalcy and a reminder of life before Central, despite the growing differences between them. Unlike Melba, Minnijean did not see herself as a lone "warrior" but desperately tried to fit in at Central, only to be disappointed. Melba's warrior stance has kept her strong and may have also protected her from disciplinary action.

One morning before school, a boy throws raw eggs on Melba. She returns home to clean up. Melba is embarrassed and Grandma India suggests introducing mind games—that is, smiling and being polite when she is abused to help defeat the segregationists' purpose of making her an unhappy victim. Melba tries this immediately when two boys try to prevent her from pulling open a classroom door. She thanks them for helping her get exercise. They look at each other, puzzled by her response.

Melba is humiliated at school but decides to employ her grandmother's advice in letting her harassers think that she cannot be humiliated. The tactic has the added benefit of throwing Melba's harassers off-balance.

On Valentine's Day, it snows and members of the Little Rock Nine are pelted with snowballs filled with rocks. Elizabeth Eckford's father rushes out of his car to rescue them and he also gets hit. When Melba arrives home, Grandma India presents her with a Valentine's Day card from Vince whom Melba thinks less about due to her preoccupation with integration.

Mr. Eckford's failed attempt to help the children further highlights the helplessness of even the children's parents to shield them from abuse. The card from Vince should be a welcome distraction, but Melba has forgotten all about romance in her effort to survive daily life at Central.

Minnijean is officially expelled after a forty-minute hearing. NAACP officials arrange for her to attend a private New York high school called New Lincoln and to stay with the family of the renowned psychologist Kenneth Clark. Melba knows that she will miss Minnijean, but she is also a bit jealous of her ability to escape. On the other hand, the segregationists are wild with excitement for sending Minnijean north. A news article confirms that the National Guardsmen would stop all hall patrols but would remain in the building for "periodic checks." Melba writes in her diary about the daily abuse that she suffers from emboldened segregationists, including being spat on and slapped by a girl, having a boy named Andy hold a wrench up to Melba's face and make threats, and being hit with a tennis racket. Melba thinks that "only the **warrior**" exists in her now and "Melba went away to hide."

Minnijean's expulsion from Central is, in Melba's view, somewhat of a blessing in disguise. Minnijean will have the benefit of going to New York—a city that Melba has long wanted to visit, and of going to a school where she will potentially meet new friends instead of harassers. Meanwhile, Melba continues to face threats of mortal harm. To remain committed to her "promise to God" as well as her wish for things to be different in Little Rock, Melba hides her true self—that is, she disguises her fears and her wish for a life similar to what Minnijean will enjoy—so that she can stay in Arkansas and continue to fight for desegregation there.

By the beginning of March, Melba has sunk into a state of hopelessness. One day, while at school, she is jolted out of her melancholy by the voice of Andy, calling from a block away with a group of his friends. Another boy suddenly speaks to her. He has a head full of bushy blond curls and leans against a 1949 Chevy parked at the curb. He tells her that she needs to escape quickly. He devises a plan. He says that he will join in with the segregationists in taunting her and, when he does, he will put his keys on the trunk of his car for her to take, then to drive away. He says that his name is Link and that he will call her later. Melba does what he says. Though Andy claws at the locked door and runs alongside the car, she gets away.

Link appears in Melba's life as a literal lifesaver, for Andy has made two threats against Melba's life and, as Link now warns, is intent on killing her. In this instance, Andy approaches with a mob of his friends. Though Melba is worried about Andy's threats, they remind her that she does, indeed, want to live. She retains the will to fight against her attackers and to stay at Central.

CHAPTER 15

When Melba arrives home, Grandma India is concerned about her having a white boy's car. Mother Lois comes home and is just as upset to hear that Melba has trusted Link who could be setting a trap for Melba. He calls, as he promised. He tells her to drop off the car at an ice cream place and when she asks why he helped her, he says it is because Andy is serious about killing her. Every time she sees Link thereafter, he winks at her or wears a pleasant expression.

Grandma India does not trust Link, suspecting that he could use Melba's possession of his car to have her arrested. However, his rescue of her from his friend, Andy, results in a secret friendship between him and Melba. Link is a foil for Andy: Andy's rabid urge to kill Melba fuels Link's desire to protect her.

On her way to lunch, Melba goes to her locker and sees that it has been broken into and someone dumped out her books. At lunch, a group of white boys moves in close to her. She gets nervous. She sees Link among her regular attackers, behaving like a member of their group. Melba wonders about his sincerity. In the cafeteria, someone throws a golf ball wrapped in paper at her head. She tries to distract herself with a book about Mahatma Gandhi's experience in prison when someone approaches and begins taunting her. She thanks him and her harasser slowly backs away in astonishment. Melba is pleased with herself.

Melba continues to experience harassment, particularly as others attempt to stop her from going to class or doing her schoolwork. She tries to remain indifferent, using a book about Mahatma Gandhi to distract her. The mention of Gandhi suggests an interest in nonviolence, which Melba has been exercising all along by not initiating fights or striking out, except in self-defense.

CHAPTER 16

Melba goes home and excitedly tells Grandma India how she tried "some of the things Gandhi talks about," such as keeping calm in one's own mind no matter what is going on outside. Conrad yells from the hallway that someone is on the phone for Melba. She hopes it is Vince so that she can tell him about her victory, but it is Link. Melba is furious with Link because she saw him laughing with the segregationists and talking about plans to attack her. He explains that they were planning on doing "something big" to her in the cafeteria. He was there among them to try to help her. He goes on to explain that his father takes him to meetings where segregationists devise methods to get the Little Rock Nine kicked out of school.

Coupled with Melba's newly found strategies of nonviolence is a focus on understanding whom she can and cannot trust. Though she and Vince now have little in common, she still knows that he is a friend with whom she can share her difficulties and her victories. She does not know how to position Link, by contrast, who seems to be on the side of her tormenters. Even his family is involved in helping to get Melba and the others kicked out of Central. He seems to embody the white supremacy against which she is fighting.

Grandma India and Mother Lois still wonder about Link's motives. Melba's grandmother suggests that he could be trying to lure her into a trap for the Klan. Melba decides that she will trust Link because no one else could help to protect her inside of Central. He warns her not to go to her locker in the afternoon and she listens to him. Later, she finds that someone broke into her locker and "shredded the contents." Link also tells her that, in the beginning of April, the segregationists plan "to speed up their efforts" so that the remaining students in the Little Rock Nine cannot complete a full school year. Mother Lois and Grandma India still disapprove of Melba's relationship with Link, but they accept that he is helping her in a way that they cannot.

Link's position as a "double-agent" allows him to help Melba without compromising his social position in the community or at school. Melba allows him to help her because he is undoubtedly privy to information that no one else will share with her. With Danny no longer present, she cannot rely on a physical presence to protect her from violence; instead, she requires intelligence so that she can remain a step ahead of her attackers.

Soon, Melba and Link become secret friends. He still feels loyal to his family and friends who are segregationists but he feels "guilt and responsibility" about what is happening to the remaining eight students. Meanwhile, Melba notices stronger efforts by teachers to discipline student harassers.

Melba's appeal to Link and the teachers' increased efforts signal incremental change. Link's ambivalence reflects the complexity of racism. His racist friends and family may not be completely bad people, but they support an evil cause.

Easter arrives. Melba is excited to dress up for the holiday, though Grandma India resists Melba's urge to wear stockings. Grandma India and Mother Lois also encourage her to give up more for Lent, but Melba thinks that she is sacrificing enough by going to Central. Grandma still insists that she continue to do the "hard work" of repenting for her sins and Mother Lois tells her to answer her fan mail, which comes from all over the world. Some letters come with marriage proposals. Melba wants to keep the letters with the proposals, but Grandma India says that would be a personal sin.

Grandma India's resistance to Melba's growing maturity surfaces both when Melba chooses to attend Central and when she tries to dress in a way that shows her developing womanhood. Mother Lois and Grandma India's focuses on religious instruction is both motivating in some instances and constricting in others. Melba would like some room for fun or personal indulgence, but her mother and grandmother allow her few opportunities.

Link calls one day, furious because many senior class activities have been cancelled. The activities are cancelled out of fear of possible trouble due to integration. He fumes over how unfair it is, given all of his hard work. He suggests that Melba do an interview, saying that the students were "not such bad people." She insists on not lying and says that things are getting worse, not better. He ignores her and talks about how Central's reputation has suffered and that the students feel that they are treated like criminals. Melba encourages him to have faith in God, but Link does not believe in God and mentions that his Nana Healey, a black woman, tends to say the same thing. Melba says that she wants to go to Central so that she does not have to be someone's nanny. Their conversation brings back Melba's suspicions about Link.

Link helps Melba and sympathizes with her, but he is unwilling to share in her discomfort. He is angry over losing the privilege of participating in his senior activities, but he overlooks the fact that Melba would be excluded altogether from such events and cannot enjoy them at her former school, either. It is an instance in which his entitlement clouds his ability to identify with an experience that is not his own. He does not see the evil of the acts that Melba's tormenters, whom he knows as his friends and neighbors, are committing. Unable to respond adequately to his pain, just as he cannot respond to hers, she suggests that he trust in God setting things right.

Link next warns her to watch out for students who try to hand her election pamphlets to publicize upcoming school elections. Melba notices how much more sophisticated Central's student elections are compared to those at Horace Mann. Link says that when the black students pause to accept a pamphlet, someone will douse them with ink, grab their books, or worse. On Monday, the segregationists perform the forms of harassment that Link mentioned.

Melba notices how the white students at Central have more abundant resources than those at Horace Mann, even for extracurricular activities. The students use their autonomy in conducting school elections to exclude black people from the process of elections, just as black people were excluded from actual political elections at the state and national levels.

Link and Melba's conversations become more relaxed and he starts to tell her about his family. His father is a wealthy and well-known businessperson who contributes money to the Citizens' Council to help with his business. Link's father does not approve of race-mixing, but he is also not in favor of "beating up anybody's children."

Link's father would be regarded as a "moderate" white supremacist. In some ways, he is more dangerous than the violent ones due to his financial influence, which he can wield to deprive black people of jobs.

Melba reads an article in the *Arkansas Gazette* saying that Judge Harry Lemley of Hope, Arkansas will hear the Little Rock School Board's petition for "a postponement of integration for public schools." The article mentions that Judge Lemley is a native of Upperville, Virginia who "loved the South as though it were a religion."

Judge Lemley is an example of a steward of the law who will interpret it according to his personal biases, which are racist and segregationist. Melba interprets his love of the South as inseparable from those values.

During church dinner at Easter, Melba and Vince sit together, but it becomes clear to her that they have little in common. In her diary, Melba writes about her fears regarding Judge Lemley's decision. She writes that she salutes the flag every morning while white segregationists call her names. She thinks that if she salutes the flag every morning, "like a good American," the problems of integration will be worked out.

Vince and Melba have little in common now because she is overwhelmed by bigger questions about citizenship and what it means to be American. She is also famous. Her faith in her country's ability to improve, as well as her optimism, strengthen her and help her continue the work of getting the nation to live up to its ideals.

CHAPTER 17

The segregationists' campaign against the black students intensifies. Worse, when Melba goes to Mrs. Huckaby to complain, she tries to convince Melba that nothing is wrong or that she is too sensitive. Melba sympathizes with the "enormous weight" Mrs. Huckaby must be under, but also knows that she should not waste her time reporting to anyone at Central about her problems.

Melba cannot depend on the adults at Central. Either they are totally complicit with segregation or, like Mrs. Huckaby, generally fair but unable to empathize with the black students' experience, which is incompatible with their experiences within the school.

On Saturday morning, Melba gets a call from Link. He says that he needs her help. He tells her to meet him "just inside North Little Rock." Melba tells Mother Lois and Grandma India that there is "a big emergency" with Thelma, permitting her to drive to meet Link. It is a "dismal" part of town where black people live in appalling conditions. When they arrive at their destination, he prompts her to pull groceries from the trunk. He is providing them for his Nana Healey who worked for his family her whole life and was let go, without any compensation, after she got sick with what Link thinks is tuberculosis. She does not have any family of her own.

Nana Healey, like many poor, uneducated, black Southern women, does not have the power or the knowledge to challenge the conditions in which she lives or to fight for her rights against Link's family. The system of servitude in which Nana Healey worked is not much different from that which existed during slavery: servants could not challenge their white employers and, though they were paid, they had to content themselves with whatever compensation they received.

Melba and Link enter Nana Healey's "tiny, bare shack" which is "spotlessly clean." Nana Healey is angry when Link introduces Melba as his "friend," saying that they will get themselves "in a heap of trouble." Melba asks why Link's family did not "make some provision for her." Link says that his father "turns [him] off" by calling him "weak" and a "you-know-what lover." He also says that his father thinks "colored folks are used to doing without" and ought not be spoiled.

Link cares for Nana Healey as she cared for him when she raised him. She, like many other young, uneducated black women in the South, could only find work as a household servant. Such work was often thankless and made them vulnerable to many forms of exploitation, including Link's father's callous dismissal of Nana Healey.

Melba finds a black doctor who goes to see Nana Healey and reports that she does not have much longer to live. Melba decides to tell Grandma India about Nana Healey. At first, Grandma India is angry with Melba for having lied, but promises to visit Nana Healey during her weekly trips to North Little Rock. Soon, Link and Grandma India become friends and discuss Nana Healey's care.

As with Melba's secret decision to integrate Central High, Grandma India is concerned every time Melba makes an independent decision, particularly one that brings her in closer proximity to a young, white man. Grandma India has previously expressed her mistrust of Link.

The last days of school are stressful. Link warns about the segregationists doing something to someone's family, but Melba worries about a boy in study hall who threatens to throw her out of a window and the girls who encircle her "at least once a day" and say every negative thing they can about her body. Meanwhile, Mother Lois grows tenser and, on a Monday evening, gathers the family in the living room to announce that her teaching contract will not be renewed unless Melba withdraws from Central.

The threats against Melba are gender-specific: the boys threaten to cause her physical harm, while the girls ostracize her and attack her self-esteem. When this does not succeed in getting Melba to withdraw, the adults use their institutional leverage to threaten Mother Lois with unemployment. The pressure on the family is now not only physical and psychic, but economic.

CHAPTER 18

The family decides to talk to the newspapers to let them know how the segregationists are willing to deprive the Pattillo family of food and a home. During the last few days of April, Mother Lois goes to North Little Rock to plead for her job, only to be met with refusals. Meanwhile, the family is running out of money and cannot pay bills. An administrator calls her into his office and offers her a transfer to Oklahoma as her only option. He also mentions that, if Melba withdraws from school, they could talk about renewing her contract and giving her "a handsome salary increase." Mother Lois is certain that he is being pressured by his bosses on North Little Rock's all-white schoolboard who are fighting integration in the district. Walking away from his office, Mother Lois remembers Link's warning about something bad happening to the whole family.

The family uses the only power they have—the attention of the press—to fight back against those who try to pressure Melba into leaving school by depriving her mother of work. The administrator's attempt to bribe Lois with "a handsome salary increase" is another form of pressure, and one that is likelier to work given her family's need. Mother Lois feels the weight of white supremacy's institutional power: if local whites cannot physically intimidate or psychologically torment Melba into leaving, they will deprive the family of their only source of income.

At the end of the year, yearbooks are passed out and Central students make "fancy plans" for the end of the school year, but the black students are excluded. Melba is also excluded from graduation events at her own school which bothers her initially until she realizes that they may have simply forgotten about the Little Rock Nine due to their no longer being present.

The Little Rock Nine are isolated by both the black and white students who do not see them as part of their respective social groups. Melba gives her former classmates at Horace Mann the benefit of the doubt, ignoring how her political activity has estranged her.

Over the next few days, Melba is anxious for the news story about Mother Lois's job loss to be printed. Finally, the story makes it to a newspaper and calls of support come in. At Central, some of the students mock Melba for her mother's job loss. The segregationists also plan to prevent Ernest Green, a senior, from completing school at Central and attending the graduation ceremony. The tension at school increases and there are fewer Arkansas National Guard troops around, though Melba never feels protected by them anyway.

Melba feels more vulnerable due to her mother's job loss, as well as the potential danger that may await her at the commencement ceremony. As the students approach the end of the year, pressure mounts to try to ensure that the black students do not complete a full year. Furthermore, the absence of the troops—even as a symbolic presence—makes Melba feel more alone.

One day, Bishop O.J. Sherman, a powerful black clergyman, tells Mother Lois to go back to the administrator and say that the bishop would like her to have her job back. The administrator acknowledges Mother Lois's efforts to get her job back, including riling up bishops from the black community. The next day, he enters her classroom and congratulates her on her "fine teaching abilities." He reinstates her contract, and the family prays and thanks God for not forgetting them.

The administrator reinstates Mother Lois out of fear of Bishop Sherman's power to mobilize his congregation into protesting against the school district. Recent lessons from the Montgomery Bus Boycott, as well as the NAACP's active presence in Little Rock, remind him of how the black church and black political organizations could lead to further civil rights action.

One day, Andy threatens her with a switchblade while a soldier in the National Guard looks on and issues a faint reprimand. Melba misses Danny. Andy has started chasing her from the gym to the dark hallway connected to it. Melba decides to walk a different way from gym class to elude him. Meanwhile, the segregationists insist on not letting Ernest Green graduate and Melba begins to worry for his safety. Grandma India decides to distract her with hard work, including washing the dishes and studying for her final exams.

Melba's situation at school grows more serious. Andy, her primary tormenter, is getting bolder, and she has no one to rely on for protection. Grandma India tries to protect Melba from her negative thoughts by keeping her mind occupied, following the proverb, "Idle hands are the devil's workshop."

Melba's last day at Central feels like any other day. Early on Wednesday morning, she builds a fire in the metal trash barrel in her yard and burns her school papers. She follows Grandma India's advice and writes and destroys the names of people at Central whom she dislikes. Grandma India also tells her that, one day, she will be grateful for the courage that the experience has given her, but Melba wonders how long she will have to wait for that feeling of gratitude.

Melba performs the ritual act of burning names to send away evil so that she will not carry hatred from the difficult school year with her. Still reeling from all that has happened, Melba cannot yet see the ways in which her experience has already changed her and how it will benefit her in the future.

Mother Lois announces that none of the black students will be allowed to attend Ernest's graduation so that the authorities can more easily protect Ernest and his family if they need to. Ernest Green becomes the first black student to graduate from Central on May 27. The audience applauds all of the students, except for Ernest. When he walks across stage, they fall silent. The newspapers report that Ernest's diploma cost half a million dollars in tax funds, but Melba knows that it cost the Little Rock Nine their "innocence and a precious year of [their] teenage lives."

Ernest's graduation is a triumph, though the media irresponsibly overlooks Ernest's daily burden and personal sacrifice to focus, instead, on the temporary tax burden imposed on tax payers. The silent reaction to his walk across stage is somehow worse than jeers and flying objects, for the reaction implies that Ernest is not present at all.

Link calls and says that Nana Healey died on the day of his graduation. He then asks Melba to move with him to Massachusetts, where he will attend college. Melba insists that she must stay and go back to Central. They wave good-bye and she knows that they will never see each other again.

Link's loss of Nana Healey triggers a desire to care for Melba to ensure that she is never abused in the way that his nanny was. Melba, however, opts to exercise her power to resist what Nana Healey could not.

On May 29, eight members of the Little Rock Nine, not including Minnijean, go to Chicago to get an award conferred by the Chicago *Defender*, a black newspaper. In New York, they stay in suites at luxurious hotels and meet celebrities. In Cleveland, they receive the NAACP's highest honor, the Spingarn Medal.

The eight students reap some rewards for their willingness to suffer to ensure black progress and, ultimately, the nation's progress. The time away from Little Rock is a reprieve from abuse. It also reminds them that their effort is important and appreciated.

On June 22, Judge Lemley grants Little Rock's request to halt integration, delaying it for another three and a half years. The NAACP begins another round of appeals to get the remaining seven students back into Central. By 1958, they win their court battle, but Governor Faubus shuts down all of Little Rock's high schools. The segregationists also start to put pressure on the black community, squeezing people financially by pushing them out of their jobs. During what would be Melba's senior year, she waits for legislators, the NAACP, and Governor Faubus to resolve the entanglement surrounding the integration of Central.

Faubus's closing of Little Rock's schools is a final act of stubborn resistance. Though it ultimately fails, it is an extreme and rather self-defeating act to deprive all of the district's children of an education simply to prevent black children from integrating a previously all-white school. Faubus's actions also reflect his determination not to be bested by a black-led organization, out of possible concern of being humiliated in front of his racist constituency.

In the autumn, Grandma India gets leukemia and dies shortly after her diagnosis. Two of the seven remaining black families with a child at Central move out of Little Rock due to mounting pressure. NAACP officials send an announcement to chapters across the country to find families who will provide the remaining five students with safe harbor and the chance to finish school. Melba moves in with the McCabes of Santa Rosa, California. Dr. George McCabe is a professor at San Francisco State University. Melba describes them, a politically- conscious family of Quakers, as unconditionally loving. To this day, she calls them "Mom and Pop" and visits them frequently.

Melba loses her main source of support and advice. The death of Grandma India signals a new chapter in Melba's life, one also marked by her departure from Little Rock. She finds an unlikely surrogate family among the McCabes. Their religious faith coupled with their political activism is similar to Melba's own upbringing in a politically aware family. However, the McCabes—a white family—do not face the dangers that the Pattillos endured for political dissidence.

It is not until September 1960 that the NAACP succeeds in getting Central to integrate once again. Only two black students are permitted entry—Carlotta Walls and Jefferson Thomas, who graduate from the school. In 1962, Melba attends San Francisco State University where she integrates a previously all-white residence house.

By the sixties, Little Rock has made progress and Melba continues her crusade to ensure integration in every space in which black people are excluded. Though she leads a more peaceful life in California, she continues her habit of peaceful resistance.

One evening, Melba meets a brown-haired soldier "wearing olive-drab fatigues." He reminds her of Danny. His name is John and he is a blind date for Melba's roommate but soon returns to visit Melba. Six months later, the two marry. Mother Lois is skeptical of the marriage. The couple has one daughter, Kellie, but splits up after seven years due to John's backward ideas about women's roles and Melba's ambitions to be a journalist. She continues to hear from Link until she announces that she is marrying someone white, which sparks his jealousy, given his own romantic interest in Melba. Melba never hears from him again but thinks of him as "one of those special gifts from God sent to ferry [her] over a rough spot in [her] life's path."

Melba and John break up due to her husband's chauvinism, not his racism. This is the first instance in which Melba mentions the impact of sexism on her life and her resistance to that form of discrimination. Her choice to marry a white man conflicts with messages that she received growing up, particularly from Grandma India, that white men regard black women as sex objects, not partners. Grandma India delivers this message when she learns about Melba's friendship with Link, perhaps having suspected a romantic interest.

Melba attends Columbia University's School of Journalism and becomes a reporter working for an NBC affiliate in Northern California. She looks back on her experience at Little Rock as a formative one that gave her "courage and patience," as Grandma India said it would. The experience also taught her that people are all interconnected.

Melba fulfills her teenage wish to become a reporter. The values that she learned at Central not only helped her to survive, but have also made her more empathetic to others' suffering, a quality that makes her a better person and a better journalist.

EPILOGUE

The Little Rock Nine gathers again at Central High School in 1987 for a commemorative event and are welcomed by future President Bill Clinton, who is governor of Arkansas at this time. The Little Rock Nine now lives all over the world and all of them have successful careers. All of them have children and they bring their children to the event. Melba feels that their relationships with one another have not changed. For Melba, meeting them again is a rediscovery of a part of herself with which she has lost touch. Still, all of the "pomp and circumstance" at the event "does not numb the pain" of re-entering Central High.

Despite how many years have passed and how much has changed, both personally and politically, Melba still feels the impact of the trauma that she suffered while at Central. In a way, she remains frozen in time. Though she has not seen the other members of the Little Rock Nine since the fifties, they still seem to be friends. Reuniting with them makes her feel like her old teenage self, which is both reassuring, for she has not forgotten where she comes from, and painful.

Reporters ask what it was like at Central and how Little Rock has changed. The town has its first black woman mayor. Her brother, Conrad, is the first and only black captain of the Arkansas State Troopers—the same troopers who tried to keep her from entering Central High. A reporter says that Governor Faubus released a statement saying, if he could do it all over again, "he'd do the same thing." Terrence Roberts quips, if they could do it all over again, they, too, would do the same thing. When it is time to re-enter the school, Melba has a mild panic attack. The doors swing open and an impeccably-dressed black student emerges to greet them. He announces himself as president of the student body.

Melba's hometown no longer feels like the place where she grew up—one in which black people had to be careful not to step over the line that separated them from whites. The new Little Rock is not only a place where black people are included in civic life, but where they are essential to it. The city has abandoned the old values of segregationists like Governor Faubus, despite his stubborn resistance to admitting that he was on the wrong side of history, while the Little Rock Nine was on the right side.

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