

# Monday's Not Coming



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF TIFFANY JACKSON

Tiffany Jackson was born and raised in Brooklyn Heights, New York. She knew at four years old she wanted to be a writer, after she spelled the word “nose” correctly all by herself. Her parents moved the family around New York several times when Jackson was a child, and she enjoyed many vacations in Kingston, Jamaica, to stay with her grandparents. She attended Howard University in Washington, D.C., and then earned her master’s degree from The New School in New York. Her degrees are in film and media studies. Her first young adult novel, *Allegedly*, made it onto several “best of YA” lists after its 2017 publication, as did her novel *Monday's Not Coming*. When she’s not writing, Jackson works as a production manager in television. She currently lives in Brooklyn.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Jackson has said in interviews that the events of *Monday's Not Coming* were loosely inspired by two real-life cases of mothers murdering their children. In both cases, months passed before anyone noticed that the children were missing. Many details of the abuse Monday and her siblings suffer come from a 2015 case from Detroit, Michigan: the mother, Michelle Blair, abused all four of her children, murdered her 13-year-old daughter and 9-year-old son, and hid their bodies in a chest freezer with the help of her oldest daughter. The 2009 Washington, D.C., case concerning Banita Jacks, who murdered all four of her children, inspired more of the issues the novel explores in terms of identifying and preventing child abuse. In this case, Child Protective Services and the local police department didn’t follow up on previous neglect charges, didn’t check in when the children didn’t show up for school, and ignored a teacher’s repeated calls to report neglect and suspicions that something had gone seriously wrong. In both of these real-life cases, the children’s bodies were only discovered when the mothers were evicted from their homes. The Jacks case inspired legislation in D.C. allowing police departments, CPS, and schools to relax confidentiality guidelines and communicate more openly in cases of suspected abuse or neglect. Jackson hopes that *Monday's Not Coming* will help raise awareness of the prevalence of cases of Black children, and especially Black girls, going missing, an issue that gained momentum in 2017 when the hashtag #missinggirlsDC went viral.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

*Monday's Not Coming* is an issue novel, or a teen novel tackling complex or difficult subject matter—in this case, child abuse and filicide. Issues across the genre vary from mental illness (John Green’s *Turtles All the Way Down*) and intimate partner violence (Sarah Dessen’s *Dreamland*), to suicide (Jay Asher’s *Thirteen Reasons Why*) and eating disorders (Laurie Halse Anderson’s *Wintergirls*). Within the novel itself, Claudia mentions a number of books that Monday read that also deal with abusive home situations. These include *Sharp Objects* by Gillian Flynn, *Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky, and most notably, V. C. Andrews’s 1979 novel, *Flowers in the Attic*. In interviews, Tiffany Jackson has said she wanted to differentiate *Monday's Not Coming* from novels that employ what essayist Alice Bolin (*Dead Girls: Essays on Surviving an American Obsession*) terms the trope of the “dead girl”: the deceased female in a novel, podcast, or TV show whose character isn’t fleshed out, and is instead treated more as a prop. Bolin mentions novels like *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* that play into this trope, in addition to true crime podcasts like *Serial*. Jackson has written two other novels in addition to *Monday's Not Coming*, both of which deal with murder and violence. Her debut novel, *Allegedly*, is about a girl accused of murdering an infant, while in *Let Me Hear a Rhyme*, three Brooklyn teens promote their murdered friend’s rap tracks.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Monday’s Not Coming
- **When Written:** 2016-2017
- **Where Written:** Brooklyn, New York
- **When Published:** 2018
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Young Adult Novel; Thriller; Issue Novel
- **Setting:** Washington, D.C.
- **Climax:** In the “Before” timeline, Claudia finds out that Monday is dead. In the “After” timeline, Ma tells Claudia that Monday has been dead for two years.
- **Antagonist:** Mrs. Charles and, more broadly, the various agencies and individuals who should have identified that Monday and her siblings were being abused and prevented Monday and August’s death.
- **Point of View:** First Person

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Therapeutic Coloring.** As Claudia and Daddy discover in the novel, many studies have found coloring, especially coloring mandalas and other complex designs, to offer therapeutic

benefits. Studies tend to find that coloring helps reduce stress and encourages participants to relax—though publications like *Psychology Today* are careful to point out that though coloring is therapeutic, it's not a substitution for formal therapy. In part because of the benefits, though, several adult coloring books have made it onto bestseller lists over the last decade.

**Horror.** A lifelong fan of horror and thrillers, Jackson was introduced to the genre as a kid through R. L. Stein's *Goosebumps* series. On her website and in interviews, she makes a point to note that whenever she's not writing or working, she tries to watch as many horror movies as possible.



## PLOT SUMMARY

*Monday's Not Coming* is told in three different timelines. "One Year Before the Before" chronicles the year before the protagonist, Claudia's, best friend Monday disappears. "The Before" details Claudia's search for Monday. And "The After" takes place two years after authorities find Monday's body—though Claudia (and for much of the novel, the reader) isn't aware that it's been two years. Claudia goes through the "After" timeline believing she's 13, when she's actually nearing her 16th birthday.

In "One Year Before the Before," Claudia and Monday are in seventh grade. The girls spend their time hanging out at Claudia's house after school, making up dances to their favorite songs and talking about boys. Several days per week, they go to the **library** with Monday's little brother, August. Claudia often gives Monday clothes, since Monday's are usually threadbare. Their friendship begins to change when Monday decides to act on her feelings for Jacob Miller, the best-looking boy at school. Though Jacob and Monday hang out and kiss on the weekends, Jacob refuses to acknowledge Monday at school. Around this time, a rift develops between Claudia and Monday: Claudia resents Jacob for messing with her best friend, and for some reason, Monday becomes very angry with Claudia when Claudia keeps asking where Monday's little brother, August, went. Rumors start to circulate that Monday is promiscuous and that she and Claudia are romantically involved with each other. Monday and Claudia beat up Jacob one day for refusing to counter the rumors. Several weeks later, after Monday does a disastrous job dyeing her hair, she hides in the bathroom and Claudia follows to comfort her. As they sit on the floor in a stall, someone takes a picture of them and circulates it on Facebook. The angle of the photo makes it look like Monday is performing oral sex on Claudia. Claudia's parents, Ma and Daddy, threaten the school and get the picture taken down from the internet, but the damage is done. The girls grow further and further apart.

In the "Before" timeline, Claudia has just returned from spending the summer between seventh and eighth grade with

her grandmother in Georgia. It's been an odd summer because Monday hasn't written to her like she usually does. Monday's phone is disconnected, and Monday doesn't show up to school at all the first week. Claudia finally goes to Monday's house after school one day, but Monday's mother, Mrs. Charles, acts aggressive and insists Monday is with her daddy. Claudia is distraught. She believes something may have happened to Monday, but Monday's disappearance also poses a different problem for Claudia: Monday has been helping Claudia cover up her dyslexia for years, and now, Claudia is on her own. Without Monday's help, Claudia fears she'll never get into the prestigious Banneker High, the high school she and Monday planned on attending. Eventually, her teachers identify her dyslexia and send her to the Learning Center, where tutors help her learn to read and manage her diagnosis.

Claudia spends months trying to track down Monday. Ma and Daddy encourage her to not get involved, claiming that whatever's going on with Monday's family is "private family business." When Claudia goes to the police, an officer named Detective Carson suggests that Monday just ran away, and he makes Claudia feel guilty for trying to take time and resources away from other missing girls. The only person who seems to share Claudia's concern for Monday's well-being is Mrs. Valente, her seventh-grade English teacher—though even Mrs. Valente can't figure out where Monday is. Claudia runs into Monday's older sister, April, at several points, but April brushes Claudia off every time. Finally, in the spring, April takes Claudia to her house. The house is filthy and dark, with a big chest freezer buzzing in the entryway. April takes Claudia to Monday's bedroom, where Claudia finds Monday's journal. When Mrs. Charles comes home unexpectedly, Claudia spends several hours hiding under Monday's bed and, after nearly being discovered by Mrs. Charles, eventually sneaks out the bathroom window. She takes Monday's journal and Monday's library copy of *Flowers in the Attic* with her.

The next day, Claudia comes down with a high fever. When she hears police sirens and learns that the Ed Borough housing complex is blocked off, Claudia knows something is wrong. She bikes to the complex, where she learns that the police found two dead bodies in Mrs. Charles's freezer: Monday and August. Not long after, Detective Carson and Detective Woods come to Claudia's house to question Ma and Daddy. The cops insist on taking Monday's journal as evidence, shattering Claudia—the journal is all she has left of Monday. Claudia falls into a deep depression and, when she returns to school several weeks later, she experiences a mental break and screams in the cafeteria. She doesn't return to school after this.

In the "After" timeline, two years later, Claudia doesn't remember that the police have already arrested Mrs. Charles for murdering Monday and August. She believes she's 13 and that no one is taking her seriously about her missing friend. Claudia attends church activities at Ma's request, where an

older boy named Michael attempts to befriend her. She also attends tutoring sessions with an old lady named Ms. Walker and returns to dance classes. As the months pass, Claudia continues to seek out April. This never goes well—April always insults Claudia and insists that Claudia didn't really know Monday. Meanwhile, Claudia and Michael grow close, and Claudia even befriends several girls in her dance class.

One day at the library, Claudia realizes that she has Monday's copy of *Flowers in the Attic* in her bag and decides to return it—and asks the librarian, Ms. Paul, to see the other books Monday checked out. Although this is against the rules, Ms. Paul complies, and Claudia learns that most of the books that Monday checked out were about child abuse. Realizing that Monday was being abused, Claudia decides to seek out Monday's father, Tip, who's working in Maryland. Michael takes Claudia there, but the trip doesn't go well: Claudia realizes that Monday must be dead, and she believes Tip killed her.

Later that night, Ma tells Claudia that Monday has been dead for almost three years; Claudia just keeps forgetting. Over the next week, Claudia begins to recover. Her parents give her an iPhone, so Claudia pores over articles and news clips covering Monday's death. She dances in her final recital and feels like Monday is dancing with her, and Daddy gives Claudia photocopies of Monday's journal. Ma decides that the entire family should go to therapy. Claudia's therapist suggests she needs to find closure, so Claudia seeks out April one final time. April reveals that Claudia has forgotten about Monday's death twice before—but April always played along, in part because she appreciated that Claudia never gave up on finding Monday. Claudia and Michael also begin to date, and Michael helps Claudia with one final task. Outside of Monday's house, they listen to the recording of Mrs. Charles's confession, in which she calmly details how she killed her children—and says she isn't sorry. Then, Claudia goes to the Charles's house and speaks to Monday's neighbor, Ms. Roundtree. Claudia admits that what continues to haunt her is the buzzing sound the freezer made, but Ms. Roundtree tells Claudia to think of it as Monday humming a song instead.

away Monday's many bruises and her fear of her mother, Mrs. Charles. And because the girls are so close, Claudia is shocked when Monday mysteriously disappears without saying goodbye, and she wonders if Monday is avoiding her or if something more sinister has happened. As Claudia searches tirelessly for Monday, she demonstrates her love for and loyalty to her friend—but she also learns that she wasn't a perfect friend to Monday. Monday's older sister, April, insists that Claudia held Monday back from new experiences, and that Monday believed Claudia is spoiled. Losing Monday is emotionally painful for Claudia, who has no other friends. But without Monday to help her with homework, Claudia is finally diagnosed with dyslexia and learns to read properly, and she also begins to make new friends at dance class and church. A year after Monday goes missing, the police discover that Mrs. Charles murdered Monday and her little brother, August, and kept their bodies in the freezer. But because the knowledge of her best friend's brutal murder is so traumatic, Claudia represses the memory that the police found Monday and continues to search for her for the next two years. So in the "After" timeline, Claudia believes she's still 13, but she is actually nearing her 16th birthday. Around this time, Claudia gains back some of these repressed memories surrounding Monday's death. As she begins to recover from her trauma and remember more consistently, she also makes peace with everything she's since learned about Monday.

**Monday Charles** – Monday is Claudia's best friend and Mrs. Charles's daughter. When she's not busy caring for her little brother, August, 13-year-old Monday spends most of her time outside of school at the **library** (her favorite place) or Claudia's house, making up dances to their favorite songs. The girls think of themselves as twins or soul sisters, and they do everything together. Monday is a good student and voracious reader, and she helps Claudia hide her dyslexia. Monday is gregarious, wants to be popular, and also becomes interested in boys long before Claudia does. When the girls are in seventh grade, Monday sets her sights on her longtime crush, Jacob Miller. She uses her skill at braiding hair to convince Jacob to hang out with her and is thrilled when they kiss and he promises to tell the school they're a couple—and is distraught when he ignores her. Desperate for his attention, Monday starts ignoring Claudia and acting in ways that Claudia considers strange. Then, sometime over the summer between seventh and eighth grade, while Claudia is out of state visiting her grandmother, Monday mysteriously disappears. As Claudia works tirelessly to figure out what happened to Monday, she begins to piece together Monday's tragic life story. Mrs. Charles had been abusing all four of her children for years and murdered Monday not long after Claudia left for her summer trip. Monday had regularly checked out novels about child abuse from the library in the hopes that someone would realize what was going on. Mrs. Charles's neglect and abuse were why Monday always wore threadbare clothes, had visible bruises, and seemed



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Claudia Coleman** – Claudia is the protagonist of the novel; she's 13 years old in the "Before" timeline and believes she's still 13 for much of the "After" timeline but is actually about to turn 16. Claudia lives a relatively privileged life with Ma, Daddy, and her best friend, Monday. Ma and Daddy own their house and can afford to send Claudia to dance classes, and they don't allow Claudia to ever spend time at Monday's house, implying that it's unsafe. Though Claudia loves Monday and believes that they are soul sisters, she's also quick to explain

terrified of her mother. By reading Monday's journal, Claudia also discovers that Monday resented her at times, particularly for her dyslexia. Monday saw school as her ticket out of her abusive home situation—and Claudia's learning disability threatened to make Monday choose between her best friend and a prestigious high school.

**Ma** – Ma is Claudia's mother and Daddy's wife. She's 10 years younger than Daddy, and she and Claudia have a relatively close, but also strained, relationship. Ma is strict and expects Claudia to apply herself to her studies and to be active in youth activities through their church. Ma also suffered four miscarriages after her difficult pregnancy with Claudia, so Claudia fears that she's not enough for Ma—that maybe Ma wants another child who can read better and make friends more easily. Ma works in a kitchen in addition to running a catering business on the side. Ma loves Monday and considers her one of "[her] girls," and she only tolerates the volatile Mrs. Charles for the girls' sake. But to Claudia's surprise, Ma doesn't seem worried when Monday seems to go missing. Though she expresses more concern and makes more of an effort to track down Monday's whereabouts than Daddy does, Ma supports Daddy when he insists that whatever is going on with Monday is private and none of their business. Instead of worrying about Monday, Ma seems to double down on encouraging Claudia to do well in school—especially once Claudia is identified as having dyslexia—and make new friends. Eventually, though, Claudia realizes that Ma knew far more about Monday's situation than she let on. Ma was aware that when Monday was out of school for a month with the flu, Monday had actually been temporarily placed in foster care after being removed from Mrs. Charles's house. Ma was also the last person to see Monday alive—and she placed a call to social services after seeing Monday for that last time, and Ma fears this call sent Mrs. Charles over the edge and led her to murder Monday. Following the discovery of Monday's body, Ma throws herself into protecting Claudia from experiencing any more trauma. She does this by playing along when Claudia forgets that Monday is dead and by encouraging Claudia to immerse herself in her life without Monday. Once Claudia remembers again that Monday is dead—which marks the third time she's repressed the memory and then remembered—Ma insists that the whole family receive therapy.

**Michael** – Michael is Claudia's love interest in the "After" timeline and Ms. Walker's grandson. He's a year older than Claudia and attends the same church. Claudia remembers him as Mikey, the chubby kid of the congregation. But Michael has grown up since then—now he's tall, handsome, funny, and charming. At first, Claudia is reticent to get involved with Michael—largely because it seems like Ma asked Michael to befriend Claudia, and that he's only nice because he pities her. Claudia refers to Michael as "Mr. Popular" at one point, because Michael is gregarious, kind, and can make anyone love him in mere minutes. Even Ma, who's usually very strict, doesn't

express any interest in keeping him away from Claudia; she thinks he's entirely trustworthy. Michael adores football above all else, which dictated where he chose to go to high school—and causes some issues for him. His dad has recently retired from the air force and took a job in Dubai. The job was supposed to be temporary, but when it turns out to be permanent, Michael is distraught: there's no football in the Middle East. He eventually works it out with Ms. Walker to stay with her and finish school in Washington, D.C. Because Michael knows that his grandma tutors kids with learning disabilities, he realizes that Claudia has dyslexia. Though Claudia fears that he'll tease her or think less of her, Michael consistently tells her that she just thinks differently than other people and is just as smart as anyone else. As Claudia and Michael grow closer, he helps her unravel the mystery of what happened to Monday. As he spends more time with her, it doesn't seem like he always knows for sure whether Claudia remembers what happened to Monday or not. Once Claudia finally remembers for the third time that Monday has been dead for two years, Claudia and Michael's relationship finally becomes officially romantic. He helps her achieve closure by driving Claudia to listen to Mrs. Charles's confession outside of Monday's house.

**Daddy** – Daddy is Claudia's father and Ma's husband. He's a big, strong, former football player who adores Claudia and Ma. He also plays in a go-go band with his brother, Claudia's Uncle Robby. In his job as a truck driver who delivers cars to dealerships around the U.S., Daddy has earned enough money to buy his family's home. Though Daddy is supportive of Claudia when it comes to school and dance, he's annoyed when Claudia refuses to talk about anything else but Monday's disappearance. He believes that whatever's going on with Monday is "private family business," and so they shouldn't intervene. But when even Ma begins to express concern for Monday's wellbeing, Daddy makes small attempts to check on Monday, as when he tracks down the phone number for Monday's estranged father, Tip, and calls him to find out if he knows what happened to Monday. Daddy is incensed when he and Ma learn that Claudia managed to make it to the eighth grade before the school caught her dyslexia, but he sees her diagnosis as a good thing and something that will help her succeed. Though Claudia often sees Daddy as an antagonist and as standing in the way of her attempts to find Monday, Daddy is nevertheless there to support Claudia as she grows and heals. He encourages her to focus on herself and is always there to rescue her when she gets in trouble. He ultimately recognizes that his attempts to shelter Claudia from the truth of Monday's death were misguided and gives her an iPhone, hoping she'll be able to use the phone to consistently remember what happened.

**Ms. Paul** – Ms. Paul is a librarian at the local [library](#). She agrees to watch Claudia after school most days while she works, partially in exchange for plates of food and cash from Ma. Ms.

Paul is kind and seems to genuinely care about Claudia and Monday's wellbeing, since she sees the girls so often. In the "After" timeline, when Claudia begs Ms. Paul to let her see all the books that Monday ever checked out, Ms. Paul complies—even though doing so violates confidentiality rules. With this, Ms. Paul shows how committed she is to helping Claudia recover and remember that Monday is deceased, even if that means breaking the rules.

**Shayla Green** – Shayla is Ashley Hilton's best friend and bullies Claudia and Monday at school. She spreads rumors that Monday and Claudia are romantically involved and torments Claudia when she discovers that Claudia takes classes at the Learning Center. However, the novel also suggests that there is more than Shayla than just being a bully. Indeed, in a flashback to two years before Monday's disappearance, Ma and Mrs. Charles discuss that Shayla's dad is abusing her mom, suggesting that Shayla's home life is fraught and, perhaps, dangerous. When Claudia finally returns to school after Monday's body is discovered, Trevor and Carl taunt Claudia about Monday's death, and Shayla is the first person to stand up to them.

**Ms. O'Donnell** – Ms. O'Donnell is an eighth-grade English teacher at Claudia's school. She's known for being mean and difficult, though Mrs. Valente also insists that lots of kids ultimately appreciate her class's rigor. Claudia hates Ms. O'Donnell because she's one of the teachers who sits in on the meeting where Mr. Hall tells Ma and Daddy that Claudia is dyslexic.

**Darrell Singleton** – Darrell is another boy in Claudia and Monday's class. He lives in Ed Borough, near Monday, and has had a crush on Monday for years. Because of this, Claudia seeks him out when Monday doesn't show up at school. Months later, in the spring, Claudia learns that Darrell and Monday were sexually involved, and Claudia can't believe that Monday hid this from her.

**April Charles** – April is Monday's older sister by three years. April and Claudia openly dislike each other—Claudia sees April as a liar, overly promiscuous, and an all-around example of what not to be. But when Monday goes missing, Claudia recognizes that April represents her only hope of figuring out where Monday went. So Claudia seeks April out in both the "Before" and the "After" timelines, asking for information. At first, April goes along with Mrs. Charles's story: that Monday is with her father, Tip, and then that she's staying with her aunt. But she gradually offers clues that suggest Monday isn't coming back and even implies that Monday is actually dead. Over the course of their various run-ins, April says a number of things that challenge Claudia's understanding of Monday. She insists, for instance, that Monday's favorite color was actually purple—but Monday believed Claudia wouldn't allow them to have the same favorite color, so Monday always lied and said it was pink. April also implies that Monday resented Claudia for holding her

back from new experiences. Continuing to try to speak to April causes a number of social problems for Claudia, as April has a bad reputation for being very promiscuous. Wherever April goes, people whisper, taunt her, and stare. But the novel also implies that April engages in sex work to support her younger siblings. Not long after Monday and August's funeral, April confides to Claudia that while Mrs. Charles forced her to put August in the freezer, she put Monday in the freezer of her own volition (Monday was unresponsive and possibly already dead at the time). She insists that she needed time to figure out how to save Tuesday and keep what was left of the family together. April deeply regrets her complicity. Over the next two years, April plays along with Claudia's episodes of forgetting that Monday died. She does this in part because, though she was jealous of Claudia and Monday's relationship, she also appreciates that Claudia was the only person who never gave up on finding Monday.

**Mrs. Charles** – Mrs. Charles is April, Monday, August, and Tuesday's mother; she murders Monday and August and is the novel's primary antagonist. She's a single mother who lives with the children in Ed Borough. She and her husband, Tip, have been separated for some time—and Mrs. Charles purposefully keeps Tip away from the children and refuses to let him see them unless he pays her the thousands of dollars he owes in child support. She tolerates Monday and Claudia's friendship, though Mrs. Charles and Ma openly dislike each other. Sometime before the novel begins, Mrs. Charles loses her job and struggles to make ends meet. Mrs. Charles shows two very different sides of herself throughout the novel. In a flashback to two years before Monday goes missing, Mrs. Charles pleads with Ma to do what she can to convince a woman who attends Ma's church to leave her physically abusive husband, implying that it's the community's responsibility to keep the woman safe. But Claudia interacts with a totally different—and downright frightening—woman in the years after that incident. Monday seems unusually afraid of her mother and, at times, Mrs. Charles even physically abuses or verbally berates Monday in front of other people. When Claudia first begins her search for Monday, she goes to Mrs. Charles first—and Mrs. Charles behaves as though she'd like to hurt Claudia. When Ms. Valente visits the Charles house, she believes that there's something seriously wrong with Mrs. Charles and that she's dangerous. Finally, when the police go to the Charles's house to evict the family, they discover that Mrs. Charles murdered Monday and August and hid their bodies in her freezer. The ensuing investigation reveals that Mrs. Charles neglected and brutally abused her children for years. Though she denies it at first, Mrs. Charles eventually admits to murdering August and Monday and insists she isn't sorry for what she did.

**Tip Charles** – Tip Charles is Monday's father. He and Mrs. Charles are separated and for a majority of the novel, Tip doesn't appear in person. In the "Before" timeline, Tip hasn't

seen his children in years because he owes Mrs. Charles thousands of dollars in child support. Because of this, when Mrs. Charles tells Claudia that Monday is with her father, Claudia finds the story suspicious. Once it comes out that Mrs. Charles murdered Monday and August (who's also Tip's son), Tip finds out on the news. He attends his children's funeral wearing a shirt with an old picture of Monday on it, something that Claudia sees as proof of his offensive lack of engagement in his children's lives. In the "After" timeline, Claudia briefly suspects that Tip was the one who murdered Monday because of how nervous he acts when Claudia and Michael surprise him at his workplace. Claudia ultimately learns that Tip plans to fight the state's attempts to terminate his legal rights to his children, but it's unclear if his suit is successful. He also files a wrongful death lawsuit against the city, insisting it's their fault that Mrs. Charles murdered his children.

**August Charles** – August is Monday's little brother; he's three or four years younger than her. He's a wild child who can never sit still and is always a mess, which Monday finds difficult to deal with. Monday is tasked with looking after him after school, and Claudia thinks that their relationship looks more like a dictatorship than a sibling relationship. August suddenly goes missing in the winter when he's nine, and Monday is unwilling to tell Claudia what happened to him or where he went. Claudia doesn't learn until more than a year later that Mrs. Charles murdered August to punish him for attacking his sisters and forced April, August's other older sister, to stuff his body in the freezer. His disappearance goes unnoticed and uninvestigated for more than a year. The investigation uncovers evidence that both he and Monday suffered extreme physical abuse until their deaths—but because of all the physical trauma on their bodies, it's impossible to definitively identify the cause of death.

**Tuesday Charles** – Tuesday is Monday's little sister; she's supposed to be starting kindergarten in the "Before" timeline. Claudia begins to suspect that something is amiss when she runs into Tuesday in public and notices that Tuesday smells like urine. Whenever Claudia sees Tuesday, Tuesday offers cryptic clues that suggest Monday is still at home. After the authorities find Monday and August's bodies, Tuesday is placed in a psychiatric ward, suggesting that living with Mrs. Charles's abuse deeply traumatized her. When Claudia speaks to April at the end of the "After" timeline, April shares that Tuesday is doing better and is finally in school.

**Jacob Miller** – Jacob is considered the best-looking boy in Claudia and Monday's grade; he and Monday become romantically involved, though he hides this from his friends at school. Monday has had a crush on Jacob for years before seventh grade and finally decides that this is the year she's going to act on her feelings. At first, things seem to go well: Jacob invites Monday to his house, they kiss, and he promises to tell their classmates on Monday that they're a couple. But as the weeks wear on, Jacob consistently ignores Monday at

school but sees her on the weekends. Monday insists to Claudia that Jacob is a good guy and will eventually be more open about their relationship, but Jacob's actions suggest otherwise. When Monday confronts Jacob, he makes it seem like Monday is seeking him out because she's overly promiscuous—and then he insists that Monday and Claudia are sexually involved. He's also the one to encourage Monday to dye her hair to look like Beyoncé, which yields disastrous results. Claudia believes that because of the way Jacob messed with Monday's head and strung her along, he's partially to blame for her death. Monday often said that she didn't give up on Jacob because she hoped things would be "better" if they were involved, suggesting that she was trying to use their romantic relationship to escape abuse at home. Following the discovery of Monday's body, Jacob is distraught—his photo at the funeral is the one that ends up on the cover of *Time* magazine. Claudia refuses to forgive him and seems to believe that he's going to experience guilt over his role in Monday's death for years to come.

**Ms. Valente** – Ms. Valente is Claudia's favorite teacher at school. She teaches seventh-grade English, and taught fourth grade prior to that. Ms. Valente fosters a spirit of openness and honesty with her students, and she makes a point to not hide that she's married to a woman. Claudia loves her for her honesty—and for the fact that Ms. Valente worked with her after school when she was in seventh grade. In the "Before" timeline, Ms. Valente is the only teacher who takes Claudia's concern about Monday's disappearance seriously. She asks the school office to check in several times and even goes with a police officer to Monday's house once. She believes that something is terribly wrong, and she makes several calls to the police and to social services. Not long after the authorities discover Monday's body, Ms. Valente and her wife move back to New York. Throughout the novel, Ms. Valente offers important insight into how kids suffering neglect or struggling with learning disabilities fall through the cracks. Most of her reports to the authorities go uninvestigated, and she confides in Claudia that when she first suspected Claudia had dyslexia, the school didn't want her to investigate further. She suggests that schools are too focused on their rankings, to the detriment of students like Monday and Claudia.

**Detective Carson** – Detective Carson works at the police station near Ed Borough. When Claudia comes to the station to ask someone to check in on Monday, he listens to Claudia's story. While Claudia is initially thrilled to be taken seriously, Carson soon shows her that he thinks she's overreacting—he suggests that Monday probably just ran away and informs Claudia that only parents can file missing persons reports for their children. He also makes Claudia feel guilty by insisting that by bringing up Monday, she's taking precious time and resources away from girls who have been confirmed missing. Later, Carson is visibly shaken to see Claudia when he and his

partner, Detective Woods, come to Claudia's house after the authorities find Monday's body to question Ma and Daddy. Though Claudia feels some satisfaction from the fact that Carson will have to live his life regretting that he didn't take Claudia seriously when she asked for help months ago, he becomes a real villain in her eyes when he insists on collecting Monday's journal as evidence—Claudia's last remaining tie to her best friend.

**Megan ("High Bun")** – Megan is a girl in Claudia's Group Five dance class; until Claudia learns her name, she refers to her as "High Bun," after her hairstyle. From Claudia's first class, Megan stands up for Claudia's right to be there. While the other girls seem to imply that Claudia isn't mentally sound enough to be in the class, Megan shushes them and shuts down their bullying attempts. As time goes on, she befriends Claudia, helps Claudia with her solo routine, and even invites Claudia to a sleepover. The sleepover turns out to be a cover for going to a high school party, where Megan and Claudia's group runs into Michael. Megan insists to Michael that Claudia will never heal if she's never allowed to act her age and do fun teenage things. Though Claudia thinks of Megan as being significantly older than she is, the novel implies that Megan is only older by a year or two, if at all.

**Ms. Orman** – Ms. Orman was the nurse at Claudia and Monday's school; she retires over the winter break the year that Monday goes missing. Eventually, she moves to Florida, where her daughter cares for her as her Alzheimer's disease gets worse. Claudia learns that Ms. Orman knew that Monday suffered abuse at home and had filed reports with CFSA while she still worked at the school. When Claudia calls her in the "After" timeline, Ms. Orman also says cryptically that she "had to get her out"—suggesting that she was doing everything in her power to get the Monday taken away from Mrs. Charles.

**Mr. Hill** – Mr. Hill is the guidance counselor at Claudia and Monday's charter school. To Claudia, Mr. Hill is mostly an antagonist: he's the one to first talk to her about her failing grades in the "Before" timeline and runs the meeting in which Claudia and her parents learn that she's dyslexic. Like many adults in the novel, he promises Claudia to check in on Monday but never follows through.

**Ms. Walker** – Ms. Walker is an elderly lady and a member of Claudia's church. She tutors Claudia, and she also happens to be Michael's grandmother. Ms. Walker never appears in person in the novel, but she seems to care deeply about Claudia. She even arranges for Michael to encourage Claudia to skip a tutoring session to accompany him to the mall, since Ms. Walker believes that Claudia needs a friend. Ms. Walker gives Claudia colored plastic dividers to use to help her read, which is significant for Claudia in learning how to navigate her dyslexia.

**Ms. Roundtree** – Ms. Roundtree is one of Monday's neighbors in Ed Borough. Claudia meets her at the end of the novel when she goes to Monday's house to gain closure. Ms. Roundtree

helps Claudia gain closure by sharing how she reframed the buzzing noise Mrs. Charles's freezer made, which she can also still hear: instead of thinking of it as a haunting buzzing sound, she tries to think of it as someone humming a song.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Ashley Hilton** – Ashley is Shayla Green's best friend; together, they bully Monday and Claudia.

**Trevor Abernathy** – Trevor is a bully in Claudia and Monday's grade. He torments the girls about being romantically involved and, when Claudia returns to school after the discovery of Monday's body, bullies her in the cafeteria, precipitating Claudia's mental breakdown.

**Carl** – Carl is a boy in Monday and Claudia's class. He and Trevor are both bullies.

**Ms. Manis** – Ms. Manis owns and teaches at the dance studio where Claudia dances. She makes a point to choose her advanced dancers' music for their solo performances, as she believes it's important for the dancers to not just dance to their favorite songs.

**Aunt Doris** – Aunt Doris is Monday's aunt. She cares for April and Tuesday after the authorities arrest Mrs. Charles.

**Detective Woods** – Detective Woods is Detective Carson's partner. She comes to Ma and Daddy's house to question them about Monday's final days.

**Ms. Swaby** – Ms. Swaby is an elderly woman who comes to the church's soup kitchens. She's recently been evicted from Ed Borough.

**Uncle Robby** – Claudia's Uncle Robby plays in a go-go band with Daddy.

**Ms. Clark** – Ms. Clark is the secretary at Claudia's school.

**Kam** – Kam is Megan's boyfriend and Jacob Miller's half-brother.

**Ms. Moser** – Ms. Moser is the new, young nurse who replaces Ms. Orman.

**Shannon** – Shannon is a fellow dancer in Group Five.

**Kit Kat** – Kit Kat is a fellow dancer in Group Five.

**Paris** – Paris is one of Megan's school friends.



## 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.



## CHILD ABUSE

*Monday's Not Coming* follows 13-year-old Claudia, who returns from a summer away from home excited to start eighth grade with her best friend, Monday. But Monday doesn't return Claudia's calls or show up at school—and though Claudia spends the next several months searching tirelessly for Monday, it seems that nobody knows or cares where Monday went, or if she's okay. The following spring, Claudia discovers that while she was gone over the summer, Monday was the victim of a horrendous crime: Monday's mother, Mrs. Charles, murdered Monday and her little brother, August. With this discovery, things that once seemed a bit odd to Claudia suddenly become significant: Monday's bruises supposedly acquired falling out of the bed and her affinity for novels about child abuse, for instance. *Monday's Not Coming* shows that it's shockingly for outside onlookers to explain away evidence of abuse, which only allows the abuse to continue and, as in Monday and August's case, escalate.

*Monday's Not Coming* shows how easy it can be for a person with privilege to incorrectly interpret signs of abuse and neglect, in part because abuse is so far from their own lived experience. The novel's "One Year Before the Before" timeline is peppered with asides and observations that, once it's revealed that Monday is being abused at home, read as extremely sinister: Monday has bruises that "look like she's been beaten by an army of trolls"; she comes to school once smelling of urine, obviously dehydrated (as evidenced by her white tongue and chapped lips), and unable to concentrate; and, at times, Monday seems more afraid of Mrs. Charles than Claudia thinks is normal. But Claudia also lives a comparatively privileged life, and so it never seems to cross her mind that these might be signs of abuse. So while she finds Monday's massive bruise concerning, for instance, she tells herself that kids play rough and sometimes bruise and scar. Or when she notices Monday's fear of Mrs. Charles, she tells herself that all kids are afraid of their parents to some degree. And Claudia makes no effort to try to explain away Monday's state when she comes to school smelly, dehydrated, and out of it. She simply can't come up with any plausible reason why Monday would be in such a state—but still, she doesn't seem to suspect abuse.

The novel portrays adults in powerful positions ignoring evidence of abuse—adults who, the novel suggests, have more power than Claudia to intervene. For instance, in the "Before" timeline, Claudia eventually comes to realize that the school administration has known for at least a year that Monday's home situation was unsafe and neglectful. Ms. Orman, the school nurse, even went so far as to file a report that resulted in Monday and her siblings being temporarily removed from the house for their safety. But when Monday and her siblings were returned to Mrs. Charles a month later, the school seemed to mostly drop the issue. This shows that the school had the ability

to protect the Charles children but didn't continue to follow up after the matter was supposedly resolved. Claudia's favorite teacher, Ms. Valente, even calls the school out on its failure to follow up with the Charles children when they don't show up to school in the "Before" timeline. She icily tells the secretary that "back in New York, when a student doesn't show up for class nor register for school, the school follows up. Is that not the case here?" But the secretary, Ms. Clark, brushes off Ms. Valente's comment and insists that plenty of students didn't return for the current school year because their families could no longer afford the rising rents in the area. This suggests that the school is willing to offer simplistic—though perhaps, not untrue—explanations for what might otherwise be a concerning disappearance. Because Monday's disappearance happens in the midst of *many* other students not returning to school, it's easy for the school to come up with a plausible explanation. Further, even the police seem unwilling to acknowledge evidence of neglect and abuse when Claudia goes to the local station for help. Detective Carson insists that girls like Monday often run away rather than ask for help—and it's not his responsibility to try to track them down if their parents don't report them as missing. Wherever Claudia goes, she finds that people are quick to provide simplistic answers to what might have happened to Monday rather than considering that Monday was in danger and needed their help.

Ultimately, the novel shows that because so many people were willing to look the other way, the abuse that Monday and her siblings suffered was able to continue—and ultimately resulted in August and Monday's deaths. When Claudia finds it concerning that Monday seems to have suddenly vanished without a trace, the adults in her life come up with all sorts of seemingly plausible explanations for Monday's absence: she's with her father, she's with her aunt, she's homeschooling, or she just doesn't want to be Claudia's friend anymore. Years of ignoring or superficially acknowledging that Monday was suffering abuse and neglect means that the school and the Charles family's social workers are willing to buy seemingly any explanation that would be reasonable for a family without a documented history of neglect. With this, the novel underscores that child abuse is uncomfortable to think about, which makes it easy to ignore. But the novel shows that in order to keep abuse from escalating and to keep children safe, it's essential to take signs of abuse and neglect seriously when they emerge—no matter how comforting a simpler explanation might be.



## FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND RESPONSIBILITY

Within weeks of starting school and not being able to locate her best friend, Monday, Claudia knows that something is wrong. But though Claudia throws herself into her project of finding Monday and asks teachers,

counselors, her parents, and even the police for help, most people seem unconcerned about and uninterested in Monday's disappearance. Several adults, including Claudia's Daddy, even tell Claudia she shouldn't be so curious or worried—whatever's going on with Monday is “private family business.” And the local detective Claudia speaks to, Detective Carson, informs her that only a parent can report Monday as missing, if she even is missing to begin with. Through this widespread indifference—and the eventual revelation that Monday's mother murdered her—the novel raises a key question: whose responsibility is it to speak up and help someone who's experiencing abuse and neglect, especially when a person's abuser is a family member? *Monday's Not Coming* suggests that the idea that families should be a person's only line of defense is misguided at best and, at worst, dangerous. Rather, it suggests that keeping children safe and healthy is a community responsibility, but one that can be extremely hard to navigate in an increasingly individualized society.

That Claudia seeks out help from so many different community resources suggests that she's been led to believe that it's the community's responsibility to worry about a child's welfare. Claudia seeks help first from her parents and then from Monday's mom, Mrs. Charles, and Monday's sister, April. Her family or Monday's family, she reasons, should be able to quickly solve the mystery of what happened to Monday. But Daddy refuses to check in on Monday, insisting that her whereabouts and wellbeing aren't his responsibility. And Mrs. Charles and April give unhelpful, cryptic answers—and scold or yell at Claudia for expressing her concern. Through their responses, they suggest that Claudia that Monday isn't their responsibility or Claudia's, either. When family fails, Claudia turns to the school system and, ultimately, the police. But every time Claudia asks for help, she gets unclear or incomplete answers, or she's told that the inner workings of Monday's family aren't any of her business. These responses suggest that it's inappropriate to worry about someone the way that Claudia worries about Monday, something that goes counter to how Claudia has been raised to see parents, schools, and the police.

While both the school and the police insist to Claudia that it's inappropriate to get involved, the novel reveals that these institutions aren't properly equipped to follow through with kids in trouble, even when they want to. For instance, the novel implies that Claudia's school works directly with Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) in cases of suspected neglect or abuse. But through the school has passed along several reports of suspected neglect over the years, CFSA consistently fails to appropriately investigate those concerns. Claudia and one of the teachers who's raised concerns, Ms. Valente, seem to believe that had the CFSA caseworkers properly investigated Mrs. Charles, she would've lost custody of her children immediately—and perhaps, Monday and August's murders could have been prevented.

Claudia also discovers that the police and child protection services aren't set up to effectively respond to more complicated child abuse situations. When Claudia goes to the police to ask an officer to check in on Monday, she discovers that she has no standing to report Monday as missing—only a parent can do that. This suggests, too, that even if the school had expressed more concern about Monday's whereabouts, they, too, may have been stymied by protocol and bureaucracy. The detective Claudia speaks to, Detective Carson, also suggests that it's not uncommon for girls like Monday (by which he means poor, young Black girls with difficult home lives) to run away rather than ask for help—and unless parents report their children as missing, Detective Carson doesn't see it as his responsibility to pursue them. In this way, Detective Carson and the law enforcement system he represents effectively absolve themselves of any responsibility to care about Monday and other kids in similar situations—unless their parents are willing to come forward.

*Monday's Not Coming* offers no neat answers to these structural issues that prevented the police or the school stepping in when it was clear that Monday and her family were experiencing problems. In a news clip covering Monday's daddy, Tip's, multimillion-dollar wrongful death lawsuit against the city for not preventing Monday and August's murders, a city official encapsulates one of the case's (and the novel's) primary questions. He says, “I think it boils down to one question: who's really responsible for your well-being—your family, the government, or your community?” Claudia's initial hope that families, the government, and the community would be able to work together to protect Monday and her family may represent an ideal that, the novel suggests, doesn't always exist in reality, but is one that's worth working towards for the good of society's most vulnerable members.



## GROWING UP, INDEPENDENCE, AND FRIENDSHIP

When Claudia returns from spending the summer at her grandmother's house and prepares to start eighth grade, she has a clear idea of what the next several years of her life will look like. She believes that she and her best friend, Monday, are going to survive eighth grade, be accepted into the prestigious Banneker High, and be by each other's sides as they meet every challenge life has to offer. But when Monday goes missing, Claudia finds her vision of the future no longer fits—for the first time in her life, Claudia has to make decisions for herself and navigate school, relationships, family, and puberty without her best friend's help. As Claudia adjusts to life without Monday, the novel examines both the value and potential dangers of friendship and independence.

In the “One Year Before the Before” chapters, the novel shows that a close friendship can be an extremely valuable source of support and safety. For instance, because of their close

friendship, Monday and Claudia are able to effectively navigate a difficult bullying situation at school. Because they have each other to lean on, they usually find that it's not even worth it to respond to their classmates' taunts—they'll never have to try to befriend them, anyway. Further, though Claudia doesn't realize it until the end of the novel, the girls' friendship offers Monday an important and necessary escape from the abuse and neglect she suffers at home. At Claudia's house, Monday is able to see what a healthier relationship between two parents and between parents and children looks like; she's able to eat full meals and have a clean, warm place to sleep; and perhaps most importantly, she's temporarily safe from Mrs. Charles's abuse. Michael, Claudia's boyfriend in the "After" timeline, even suggests outright that Claudia saved Monday for years, simply by lessening the amount of abuse that Monday could have otherwise suffered.

However, the novel also suggests that such a close friendship can cause problems, as Monday and Claudia never learn to exist without the other's support. The most obvious example of this is Claudia's dyslexia. Monday and Claudia have suspected for years that Claudia is dyslexic, but because they believe that people will treat Claudia differently if they find out she's "stupid," Monday goes to great lengths to help Claudia cover up her learning disability. Monday does Claudia's writing assignments for her, reads novels and packets aloud to her, and proofreads everything that Claudia writes—meaning that Claudia's teachers never have the chance to identify her dyslexia and get her the help she needs until Monday is gone. To outsiders, Claudia looks like a high achiever when really, Monday is the high achiever.

Claudia doesn't learn the negative effects of their friendship on Monday until long after Monday is dead. From Monday's older sister, April, Claudia learns that Monday never felt comfortable expressing who she truly was because she was afraid of alienating or angering Claudia. She never shared, for example, that her favorite color wasn't actually pink—it was purple, like Claudia, but she thought Claudia would resent it if their favorite colors were the same. She also hid her sexual relationship, believing that Claudia wouldn't approve. Monday essentially felt like she had to fit a very specific mold in order to be Claudia's friend, which the novel suggests is one of the many reasons she never told Claudia about the neglect and abuse she suffered at home. She feared Claudia would pity her, something that, according to April, Monday couldn't tolerate.

Despite the implication that friendships can be suffocating and can cause problems, the novel also shows that the alternative—total independence—comes with its own set of issues. Without Monday to sit by Claudia in classes and help her with her schoolwork, Claudia's grades suffer, and her classmates' bullying intensifies. For the first time in years, Claudia dreads going to school, where she's friendless and fears that people will bully her even more if they discover she

has a learning disability. Claudia's fears turn out to be well-founded—her friendship with Monday shielded her from an extremely hostile school culture, where being at all different or not having anyone to sit with at lunch turns a student into an easy target. And having had only Monday as a friend for years, Claudia also doesn't know how to go about making new friends. This puts her in an impossible situation where her classmates bully and punish her for not having any friends—but Claudia also doesn't have the skills to make friends to help alleviate the effects of the bullying.

However, *Monday's Not Coming* ultimately suggests that in order for young people to grow up and succeed, it's necessary that they achieve some degree of independence. While it certainly doesn't diminish the pain and suffering Claudia goes through when she's finally diagnosed with dyslexia, even she acknowledges that if it weren't for Monday's absence, she never would've had the opportunity to learn tricks to help her read more easily. The independence may have been forced on her and may have been traumatizing, but Claudia nevertheless emerges from the experience able to genuinely succeed in school—something she wasn't doing when Monday was doing all her work for her. Similarly, as Claudia finally remembers that Monday is dead in the "After" timeline and takes concrete steps toward recovering (both from her grief and from repressing her memories), she also comes to a more nuanced understanding of her friendship with Monday. Claudia recognizes that she may have stifled Monday in certain ways—and takes great pains to atone for the damage she may have done, as she does at her dance recital when she dances in a pink costume and imagines Monday dancing alongside her in lavender. This symbolizes how Claudia is learning to think of Monday as a person distinct and separate from her, a discovery that the novel suggests is one of the best ways to honor Monday's memory. While it's too late for Claudia to change her behavior in a way that might have allowed Monday to achieve more independence in life, *Monday's Not Coming* nevertheless shows that it's important to achieve a sense of balance between independence and friendship—finding this balance, the novel suggests, is what will allow children to grow into competent, self-sufficient adults.



## SECRECY AND SHAME

Both Monday and Claudia's lives are marked by huge secrets that they perceive to be extremely shameful. Monday lives in an abusive household and doesn't feel like she can tell anyone about the situation at home—she's not only ashamed, she's also afraid that social services might separate her and her siblings if they were to be placed in foster care. Claudia, meanwhile, has trouble reading and writing and seems to know that her troubles are related to dyslexia. Monday is the only person who knows about Claudia's learning difficulties, but they keep this a secret so that Claudia

won't end up "in the stupid kids' class" or won't be able to accompany Monday to one of the most prestigious high schools in Washington, D.C. By exploring how these two secrets impact Claudia and Monday's lives, *Monday's Not Coming* suggests that secrets—and the shame they create—can keep kids from getting the help they need.

Both Monday and Claudia see their respective secrets as an absolute necessity. Claudia's reasoning is simple: if people were to find out she has dyslexia, she wouldn't just have to suffer through "the stupid kids' class" (i.e., the Learning Center where kids with learning disabilities get extra help at school). She'd also be in a different class than Monday, and given how close the girls' friendship is, being separated from one another is simply unthinkable. The only way for the girls to stick together and protect each other from the bullying they suffer is to keep Claudia's difficulties with reading a secret.

Monday takes much the same view as Claudia does when it comes to the secret that Mrs. Charles is neglecting and abusing Monday and her siblings. Monday fears that if adults with authority were to find out, she and her siblings would be removed from the house and put into foster care—not necessarily together. And this fear is well-founded: April explains to Claudia at one point that when the siblings were temporarily removed from the house a while back, they were split up among three different living situations. And to make matters worse, Tuesday, who was a toddler at the time, was at risk of being adopted and then gone forever. From Monday's perspective, it's preferable to stay with Mrs. Charles with her siblings and where she's guaranteed to not have to leave Claudia than it is to turn her life upside down by revealing her secret.

Aside from the girls' practical reasoning, it's their paralyzing sense of shame that motivates both of them to keep their secrets. Claudia, for instance, is deeply embarrassed about her dyslexia. In her understanding (and in Monday's as well), having trouble reading makes her "stupid." If she admits she has a problem and needs help—even if doing so might help her overcome her dyslexia—Claudia believes she'll be accepting that she's inferior and, therefore, deserves her classmates' bullying. This is why, when Claudia is finally diagnosed with dyslexia, she takes a long, winding path to the Learning Center to try to prevent her classmates from finding out that she receives tutoring. And it's not long after Monday's death that Claudia realizes that Monday also harbored feelings of shame. April, Monday's older sister, shares that Monday didn't let Claudia in on the abuse and neglect she was suffering from at home because she didn't want Claudia to pity her. The abuse, in other words, was the lesser of two evils in Monday's mind—she'd rather suffer in silence than have Claudia pity her.

In both girls' situations, *Monday's Not Coming* shows that secrecy and shame keep people from getting the help they need—sometimes, with deadly consequences. When they're

finally told about Claudia's dyslexia, Ma and Daddy are appalled that it took until Claudia was 13, in eighth grade, and preparing to apply for competitive high schools before her dyslexia was identified. In effect, Claudia has by this point lost out on years' worth of education: Monday did all of Claudia's homework and reading for her, so Claudia never had to work through the material herself. And though Ma and Daddy suggest that this is in part the school's fault for not paying closer attention and identifying the problem earlier, Claudia's shame meant that she also took careful, calculated steps to obscure her troubles from those who could've helped her.

Ultimately, though Claudia is eventually forced to reveal her secret and grapple with the shame, the novel shows that it's actually a positive thing to be able to overcome one's shame—but this isn't a privilege afforded to everyone. Indeed, though the novel doesn't blame Monday for her mother's actions, the fact remains that because Monday felt that Mrs. Charles's abuse and neglect was something to be ashamed of, she kept it under wraps and never felt comfortable asking for help. And not getting help when Monday had the chance ultimately created the circumstances where Mrs. Charles was able to murder her daughter.

With this, *Monday's Not Coming* suggests that it's imperative to dismantle harmful narratives about what's considered shameful. As Claudia's friends and family tell her over and over again, dyslexia is nothing to be ashamed of—it doesn't make her any less intelligent than anyone else, it just means she needs a little extra help. Similarly, the novel implies that, had someone been able to impress upon Monday that being a victim of abuse isn't something she needed to be ashamed of, Monday's murder might have been prevented. Creating environments where it's not shameful to talk about one's troubles or trauma, the novel suggests, might save another child from grappling with these problems alone.



## POVERTY, SOCIAL SUPPORT, AND DESPERATION

Monday's family's poverty, as well as the impending closing of the Ed Borough housing projects, form the backdrop of *Monday's Not Coming*. Claudia, as a relatively privileged narrator, doesn't necessarily recognize the significance of Monday's consistently threadbare clothes or what it might mean for Monday's family to lose their home. The novel shows that poverty, desperation, and a dissolving community form the roots of Monday's family's problems and help create a closed-off, dangerous environment where the Charles family's violence takes place and Monday's disappearance can go unnoticed.

*Monday's Not Coming* suggests that the possibility that Monday's family will lose their home in the present is a product of years of racism and discrimination. Claudia explains that Ed

Borough, the low-income housing complex where Monday and several other classmates live, was first built in the 1940s. It was supposed to be a place where low-income Black families could realize their dreams by giving them a safe, welcoming place to live. And for decades, that's what Ed Borough was: a close-knit community of Black families where, as one of the elderly church ladies says, it was normal to see one's neighbors and family members regularly for Sunday dinners.

However, this community gradually fractured over the decades before Claudia's story begins. Claudia notes that it didn't take white developers long to realize that Ed Borough sits on a prime piece of real estate by the river and decided to figure out how to move the complex's Black residents off the land. She says that in the 1980s and 90s, it was "convenient" that the crack epidemic hit Ed Borough hard—implying that white developers, at least, didn't see the crack epidemic as something to solve for the sake of the affected communities. Rather, they saw it as an easy excuse to break up what suddenly seemed like a dangerous, lawless neighborhood in Washington, D.C., and redevelop the land. In all three of the novel's timelines, this fight is still ongoing. While crack is no longer the issue it was a few decades ago, the city is nevertheless moving forward with plans to evict the Black and low-income Ed Borough residents within the next few years. This subplot highlights the fear that Monday's family could lose their home at any moment. And this fear becomes increasingly real as Mrs. Charles loses her job and can't find another one—something she attributes to being Black.

*Monday's Not Coming* also illustrates how Monday's family's poverty leads to desperation. Because Mrs. Charles can't financially support the family with just her babysitting jobs, Monday's older sister, April, steps in to help by engaging in sex work. With the money she earns, April is able to buy Monday and August their school uniforms, ensuring that they'll be able to attend school and get an education. The novel doesn't go into great detail about this sex work, but it does suggest that April is unfairly punished for engaging in work that she sees as a necessity. Everywhere April goes, her peers stare at her and make snide remarks about her promiscuity, with seemingly no understanding of how or why April's poor reputation exists in the first place. In this way, April—and, by extension, her entire family—are made to suffer even more for their economic struggles.

Finally, the novel suggests that the combination of a fracturing community and desperate measures create a situation where Monday's disappearance can go unnoticed. One of the reasons why Claudia and Monday's school neglects to follow up when Monday doesn't return for eighth grade is because *many* kids from Ed Borough aren't registering for eighth grade—Monday isn't an outlier. The secretary explains to Claudia and Ms. Valente that many kids had to move out of town with their families when the rent increased, so the same thing probably

happened to the Charles family. In this way, the novel illustrates how Ed Borough's closing creates a situation where it's all too easy for kids to slip through the cracks and simply disappear.

An Ed Borough resident named Ms. Roundtree explains that this also happens at the community level. At the end of the book, Claudia asks Ms. Roundtree why she didn't say anything when she suspected something happened to Monday. Ms. Roundtree explains that, these days, it's not abnormal for kids to move around, get busy, and seem to disappear—but usually, that's not an indicator that anything is wrong. She didn't see any reason for concern given that there were so many plausible explanations for Monday's whereabouts aside from death. In this way, *Monday's Not Coming* acknowledges that Monday's disappearance and death are tragic—but in some ways, are perhaps unsurprising. The novel bleakly suggests that when a city sees its poor Black residents as a problem to solve, not as people deserving of care and dignity, and when a community accepts as fact that children will disappear for perfectly legitimate reasons, it shouldn't come as a surprise that few seem to care when a Black child goes missing.



### MEMORY, REPRESSION, AND TRAUMA

*Monday's Not Coming* is told in three distinct timelines: "One Year Before the Before" takes place a year before Monday goes missing, "The Before" covers the year after Monday goes missing, and "The After" takes place two years after the police discover that Monday and August were murdered. However, this structure isn't clear until the end of the book. As a result of the trauma of discovering her best friend was murdered, Claudia represses her memories of the discovery—and so she spends the two years after the discovery tirelessly trying to unravel the mystery of Monday's disappearance all over again. Memory, the novel shows, is fragile and fleeting when it's intertwined with trauma, as trauma can cause a person to misremember or repress their memories. But the novel also suggests that it's only through remembering that a person can understand their trauma and ultimately heal from it.

The novel shows that traumatic experiences can cause a person to repress and misremember uncomfortable truths, even though doing so is ultimately unhelpful. For instance, after it's revealed that Mrs. Charles murdered Monday and August, Claudia shares a secret with readers: on some level, she knew all along that Monday was dead—but she hoped that Monday had been murdered by a stranger, not by her mother, which is why she repressed the truth and kept searching for answers. It's far more palatable for Claudia to simply forget that Mrs. Charles brutally murdered Monday and kept her body in the freezer for almost a year than it is to spend years searching for a different outcome. And Claudia has other reasons for refusing to accept the truth: accepting that Monday is gone means that Claudia would have to put Monday's memory to

rest, which Claudia can't bear to do. Further, accepting Monday's death would mean that Claudia would also have to accept that she's on her own in life—a wildly uncomfortable prospect for her, given that Claudia relied on Monday for everything. Overwhelmingly, then, the novel suggests that Claudia buries the fact that Monday is dead in an attempt at self-preservation. The truth is far more difficult and uncomfortable to face than the prospect that Monday might still be out there, waiting for Claudia to rescue her.

However, *Monday's Not Coming* makes the case that because Claudia represses that Monday's disappearance has been solved, Claudia is unable to grow or form new social connections. Because the two years between the "After" timeline's present and the discovery of Monday's body effectively don't exist in Claudia's mind, she believes she's still only 13 years old—and as a result, she consistently undervalues and underestimates herself. She doesn't believe she's old enough or good enough to dance in the upper-level dance class, for instance, and she thinks of herself as immature and inexperienced compared to her new dance friends, Megan, Shannon, and Kit Kat. In reality, Claudia is about the same age as these girls—but because she legitimately believes they're years older, she blocks herself off from forming relationships with them. Though Claudia does this unwittingly and as a result of her trauma, her inability to connect with people her own age keeps her stuck eternally at age 13, in a sort of limbo where Monday will never be found and where Claudia will never be able to progress through the rest of her adolescence.

As *Monday's Not Coming* comes to a close, it suggests that a person can only recover from past trauma if they can remember it—and if other people can help them remember. One of the reasons that Claudia isn't able to remember that Monday's body has already been discovered is because, for the last two years, Ma and Daddy have played along with Claudia's insistence that Monday is still missing and never outright countered Claudia's version of history. The novel suggests that they did this in the hope that Claudia would eventually remember that Monday's body has been found all on her own, but they ultimately realize that hope isn't enough to make Claudia remember.

Once Ma and Daddy realize that Claudia will need help to remember and heal, they take several important steps. First, Daddy gives Claudia an iPhone, which gives Claudia the ability to revisit the media coverage of Monday's death two years ago. Having the proof right in front of her that Monday is indeed deceased and that the authorities have taken Monday's murderer, Mrs. Charles, into custody decreases the likelihood that Claudia will forget again. Then, Ma also insists that the entire family seek therapy. While the novel doesn't go into detail about what this entails, Claudia does note that her therapist suggests she do something to help her find closure. Claudia follows this advice by finding out, once and for all, what

happened to Monday by listening to a podcast's recording of Mrs. Charles's confession. In her confession, Mrs. Charles calmly goes into graphic, shocking detail about how exactly she murdered Monday and Monday's little brother, August. Though heartbreaking for Claudia to hear, Mrs. Charles's chilling confession solves the mystery of exactly what happened to Monday, leaving no more mysteries for Claudia to solve. With this, *Monday's Not Coming* highlights the importance of facing one's trauma: only by facing it, and taking concrete steps to put it in the past, can a person recover and move forward.



## SYMBOLS

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



## THE LIBRARY

The library across the street from Claudia's house represents Monday and all the parts of her life that she didn't share with Claudia. The library's association with Monday is, at first, very straightforward: the library was Monday's favorite place, which is unsurprising given that Monday was a voracious reader and a good student. To Claudia, the symbolism seems obvious, and it only seems right that she thinks of Monday every time she sees the library.

However, after Monday goes missing and Claudia starts to piece together what Monday's life was actually like, the library starts to take on a different meaning. The library was, in many ways, a place where Monday could escape her abusive situation at home and even try to ask for help. Monday believed that the government was tracking the books she checked out, so she regularly checked out novels about child abuse like *Flowers in the Attic* and *Perks of Being a Wallflower* in the hopes that someone would understand that this was a silent cry for help. But the librarian explains that the government *doesn't* have access to this kind of data—and nor does anyone else besides the librarian, since this information is confidential. In this way, the library comes to represent all of the parts of Monday's life that Claudia didn't have access to or know about.

This association between Monday and the library is made all the more tragic because of Claudia's dyslexia. Up until Claudia's dyslexia is identified and she begins to get help for it, she relies on Monday to interpret books and other written materials for her. In other words, Monday mediates and interprets books for Claudia, and Claudia has to trust that Monday is rehashing the information accurately. Likewise, up until Monday disappears, Claudia simply trusts that Monday is telling the truth when she talks about her home life. But as Claudia eventually finds out, Monday often omitted or exaggerated information about her home life in order to keep her abusive situation a secret.

Significantly, it's only when Claudia's own reading abilities improve that she's better equipped to piece together what was really going on in Monday's life. It's no accident, for instance, that Claudia only understands the significance of Monday's affinity for *Flowers in the Attic* once she's been getting consistent help for her dyslexia—she's finally in a place where she can interpret the information in front of her for herself, rather than relying on Monday's mediation. Thus, while Claudia continues to associate the library with Monday, Claudia is finally able to understand the written word—and Monday herself—all on her own.

city is trying to dismantle. So to the people who one might think would be best poised to help find her—the police and the government more broadly—Monday is fairly insignificant. She's just one of many low-income Black people, living in an area where the city doesn't want low-income Black people living in the first place. The city's "sun," in this instance, is development and profit—not the safety or health of the city's most vulnerable residents.

## Chapter 2. The Before Quotes

☝ Mondays were Monday's favorite day of the week, and not just 'cause she was named after it. She loved the day itself. She'd be at school, early as ever, brighter than sunshine, even in the dead of winter with wind that could freeze our eyelids shut. She'd stand outside the gate, bundled in her thin coat and mismatched scarf, waiting for the doors to open.

"Why you so happy to go to school?" I would grumble, missing the warmth of my bed. "No one is happy to go to school. Especially on Mondays."

She would shrug. "I love school."

I'd roll my eyes. "School don't love us."

**Related Characters:** Monday Charles, Claudia Coleman (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 23

### Explanation and Analysis

When Ma reminds Claudia that Monday loves Mondays and so will be at school the following week, Claudia shares a flashback memory in which Monday explains why she loves school so much. There's a lot of information packed into this passage. First, Claudia notes that Monday wears a "thin coat and mismatched scarf"—but doesn't question why Monday is dressed like this. Monday's inadequate and worn clothing suggests that Mrs. Charles can't afford to clothe her children properly for the freezing weather, which is one clue that Monday comes from difficult economic circumstances.

Claudia's lack of critical thinking about Monday's circumstances persists. Though she does ask Monday why she likes Mondays and school so much, she doesn't seem to accept Monday's answer or consider it more deeply. This reflects Claudia's privilege and the fact that she's not aware that Monday is suffering abuse and neglect at home. For Claudia, being at school means she's not at home in bed, where she'd rather be. In Claudia's case, being at home is



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the HarperCollins edition of *Monday's Not Coming* published in 2018.

### Chapter 1. September Quotes

☝ I know what you're thinking. How can a whole person, a kid, disappear and no one say a word? Like, if the sun just up and left one day, you'd think someone would sound an alarm, right? But Ma used to say, not everyone circles the same sun. I never knew what she meant by that until Monday went missing.

**Related Characters:** Claudia Coleman (speaker), Monday Charles, Ma

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 1

### Explanation and Analysis

In the novel's opening chapter, Claudia introduces the novel's premise (that her best friend, Monday, disappeared for over a year) and acknowledges that it may seem impossible that this could happen without anyone noticing or caring. Ma's saying that not everyone circles the same sun explains how this happened.

For Claudia, her world quite literally revolves around Monday. The girls do everything together: Monday helps Claudia with her homework, they make up dances together, and Monday spends more time at Claudia's house than she does at her own. So it makes sense that Claudia would be extremely concerned when Monday goes missing—the "sun" that Claudia orbits suddenly disappears.

But the fact that few other people care or worry about Monday's absence draws on some of the racial and economic issues that form the story's backdrop. Monday is a poor Black girl living in public housing projects that the

comfortable and safe—but this isn't true for Monday. So for Monday, school is preferable to being home. There's heat, food (the novel later implies that Monday receives free lunch at school), and she's nowhere close to her mother and her mother's abuse. This shows that if Claudia were looking for the clues and able to see them for what they are, she might be able to put it together that Monday doesn't want to be at home because she fears and/or faces abuse there. But the novel underscores that because abuse and neglect are so far outside of Claudia's lived experience, she's blind to them.

## Chapter 4. One Year Before the Before Quotes

☝ Monday lied with matter-of-fact precision, in a self-preservation type of way. I could never manage it, even to save my own ass.

“Dang, Ma’s gonna be so mad.” I hated the idea of disappointing her.

Monday grunted, staring off. “She never gets that mad.”

**Related Characters:** Monday Charles, Claudia Coleman (speaker), Mrs. Charles, Ma

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 31

### Explanation and Analysis

When Claudia and Monday discuss how to save Claudia from having to read aloud in church, Monday insists that Claudia should just lie to Ma about not wanting to be involved in church anymore. Once again, this passage reveals how different Claudia and Monday's home situations are. Claudia implies that in her home, her worst fear is making Ma angry and disappointing her. Simply by virtue of listing these worries, the novel implies that Claudia isn't worried about Ma potentially hurting her or severely punishing her for any transgressions. This may also explain why Claudia is such a poor liar. Though disappointing Ma is uncomfortable, doing so isn't uncomfortable enough for Claudia to have to get good at lying.

For Monday, though, it seems likely that Monday lies “in a self-preservation type of way” exactly for self-preservation, especially given what Claudia eventually learns about Monday's home situation. As the novel wears on, Claudia discovers that Monday was being abused at home and had been for years—and the abuse culminates in Mrs. Charles murdering Monday and Monday's little brother, August. In

Monday's situation, lying was a way to protect herself, and so for her own safety, it's something she perfected.

Monday supports this reading even further when she stares off and grunts that Ma never gets *too* mad. She implies that she's seen Ma get mad when she says this. And though Ma's anger may terrify Claudia, Ma's anger seems to be nothing like that of Mrs. Charles. Monday is covertly reminding Claudia that it could be so much worse when she says this—and she knows this from experience.

☝ The Capitol Housing Authority built the Ed Borough housing projects during World War II on land originally given to freed slaves during the 1800s. It was meant to be a place of community, a place to start again, a place for the American dream.

Later on, developers realized how valuable the land was, sitting right on the river, with easy access to the city. Too valuable for black folks to have.

How convenient that crack would ravish the area developers wanted most.

**Related Characters:** Claudia Coleman (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 38

### Explanation and Analysis

Here, Claudia gives readers some background on the Ed Borough housing projects, where Monday and her family live, to help readers understand the circumstances affecting Monday's family and other tenants in the area. The impending closure of Ed Borough forms the backdrop of *Monday's Not Coming*.

Claudia makes it clear that Ed Borough started out as a hopeful place. It was meant to foster community amongst D.C.'s recently freed Black residents—and for a time, Claudia implies, Ed Borough did just that. But as time went on, the value of the land became more apparent, and as the crack epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s hit Washington, D.C., things changed. The insistence that the land is “Too valuable for black folks to have” suggests that the city no longer values supporting its Black residents with safe, affordable housing when it could make more money by developing the land differently. Money, in other words, guides the city's choices and priorities when it comes to land use.

This is why, ultimately, it's “convenient” when crack hits Ed

Borough so hard. This reveals that the city doesn't see the crack epidemic as something to fix for the sake of the people affected. Rather, the prevalence of crack in the area becomes a convenient excuse to justify closing down and redeveloping the area—presumably, for better-off white people.

Through this, Claudia shows that Washington, D.C., doesn't value Black residents—and specifically, doesn't value Monday or her family. In the city's eyes, they don't add as much economic value to the city, and their presence in Ed Borough presents an obstacle to redeveloping the area. Because of this, Monday's family lives in perpetual fear that they're going to lose their home—something that would land them on the streets or in a homeless shelter and deny them any sense of purpose or dignity.

## Chapter 5. October Quotes

●● Red flags.

Not blush red, orange red, wine, or ruby red. No, bloody red flags. Did you see them, Claudia? Did you?

*Did you see any red flags?*

That's the question they asked me over and over again, hoping to find answers. Hoping to understand what no one could. Signs. Were there any signs Monday was in trouble? Did you see anything out of the ordinary, anything unusual?

No. Nothing.

In so many words, they called me a liar. That hurt more than losing my best friend.

If Monday were a color, she'd be red. Crisp, striking, vivid, you couldn't miss her—a bull's-eye in the room, a crackling flame.

I saw so much red that it blinded me to any flags.

**Related Characters:** Claudia Coleman (speaker), Monday Charles

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 41

### Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Claudia explains that after “they” (presumably the police) found Monday, there was a huge effort to retroactively identify any red flags that might have tipped people off to the fact that Monday was being abused and neglected at home. And since Claudia was Monday's best friend, she seems like the perfect person to be able to help the police piece together what happened.

When Claudia says that she “saw so much red that it blinded [her] to any flags,” it's play off of saying that one can't see the forest for the trees. In the case of not being able to see the forest for the trees, it means that a person in question is getting so caught up in small details that they're not able to put those details together into a bigger picture. In Claudia's case, she implies that Monday herself was a walking red flag. But because Claudia was so accustomed to seeing Monday with bruises, unhappy to go home, and afraid of her mother, those things seemed normal. What might have been red flags in any other situation didn't seem so worrying to Claudia, since she was so desensitized to what those flags actually meant.

More broadly, this speaks to how easy it can be to miss signs of abuse and neglect. Claudia may have been extremely close to Monday, but she certainly wasn't the only person who could've seen signs of abuse for what they were. Ma, for instance, saw Monday at close quarters multiple times per week and admits at various points throughout the novel that she suspected Monday was being neglected (if not abused) at home. Other teachers at school, like Ms. Valente, also saw Monday at various points when she was clearly unwell, dirty, and dehydrated—and at least as far as Claudia knows, those teachers didn't actually report what they saw as a potential indicator of neglect. So while Claudia takes a lot of the blame here, the novel shows that ignoring the signs that Monday was being abused was easy to do—many people did the exact same thing.

## Chapter 6. The Before Quotes

●● “I know I've only been in this school for a couple of years, but back in New York, when a student doesn't show up for class nor register for school, the school follows up. Is that not the case here?”

“A lot of students didn't return this year. Most had to move due to rent going up and stuff. But I'll pass a note along.”

**Related Characters:** Ms. Clark, Ms. Valente (speaker), Monday Charles, Claudia Coleman

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 49

### Explanation and Analysis

When Claudia brings it to Ms. Valente's attention that Monday hasn't been in school, Ms. Valente immediately heads to the office for answers—but the secretary, Ms. Clark, doesn't have a satisfactory answer for her.

Ms. Valente's question shows that, from her perspective, schools should take an active interest in their students' health, safety, and wellbeing. If a student doesn't show up, the school should worry about them and follow up, no matter how inconvenient it might be or how unlikely it seems that the student is in real trouble. At the very least, she implies, the school should confirm that the student is registered elsewhere or is indeed homeschooling. In other words, Ms. Valente expects the school to take accountability for its students, because she sees it as the schools' responsibility to care for them.

Ms. Clark, though, suggests that it's a waste of time to follow up on what may have been dozens of students who didn't return (at least for this particular school). This is especially true since she knows exactly why so many kids didn't return to school. So when it comes to Monday's mysterious absence, Ms. Clark seems to assume that Monday is just one of these many students who probably had to move due to the rent hikes. This explanation is, for Ms. Clark, more than enough to make her feel okay not following up more diligently.

On the whole, this passage presents two opposing ways of thinking about who's responsible for a child's health and safety. To Ms. Valente and Claudia, it's a community effort—while to Ms. Clark, it's each family's responsibility to care for their own family members.

## Chapter 9. One Year Before the Before Quotes

☝️ Even though it looked like an army of trolls had beaten her with baseball bats, how could I *not* believe? She was my best friend. If she was lying, it had to be for a good reason.

Right?

**Related Characters:** Claudia Coleman (speaker), Mrs. Charles, Monday Charles

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 69

### Explanation and Analysis

During one of Claudia and Monday's sleepovers, Claudia notices a massive bruise on Monday's back. Monday explains that she fell out of bed again, though Claudia knows that Monday usually sleeps perfectly still—so she suspects, on some level, that Monday is lying about where her bruise came from.

This is one of the red flags that Claudia admits she didn't really see in the "October" chapter. Given the later

discovery that Mrs. Charles murdered Monday after years of abusing and neglecting her and her siblings, it seems likely that Mrs. Charles is the one who inflicted this bruise on Monday. But because Claudia trusts Monday so fully, she's willing to buy Monday's story, at least outwardly. She thinks that Monday must have her reasons for keeping the truth a secret—and later, Claudia learns that Monday's primary reason for keeping this abuse a secret was shame. She was ashamed to be a victim of abuse and neglect, and she didn't want Claudia to pity her or feel bad—or even try to help.

Though Claudia of course has no way of knowing at this point, this passage drives home how much damage her close friendship with Monday did. Because the girls trusted each other so intensely and Claudia was so willing to buy Monday's lies and omissions, Claudia never took action that could've prevented further abuse and ultimately, Monday's death. Monday's shame may have kept her from speaking up about her abuse, but Claudia's willingness to keep Monday's secrets and believe her when the evidence suggested she shouldn't also contributed to Monday's tragic fate.

## Chapter 12. Two Years Before the Before Quotes

☝️ “Anyway, are you going to talk to Dedria’s mother tomorrow or what?”

I stopped, peering over the banister.

Ma shook her head. “Patti, she got to leave on her own terms. It ain’t my place!”

Mrs. Charles glared at her. “Janet, that man is going to *kill* her one of these days! Are you going to be able to look yourself in the mirror when he does?”

**Related Characters:** Ma, Mrs. Charles (speaker), Shayla Green, Monday Charles, Claudia Coleman

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 90

### Explanation and Analysis

In a flashback to two years before Monday's disappearance, Claudia recalls watching Mrs. Charles insist to Ma that they needed to intervene on Shayla's mom's behalf to stop her husband from abusing her.

Mrs. Charles is essentially advocating for the community to step in and protect vulnerable people. She insists that it's a community responsibility to do so, and moreover, it's what people have to do in order to live with themselves and call

themselves moral citizens. Ma, on the other hand, proposes that even in situations where abuse is obvious, it's the couple or family's problem and it's rude for other people to step in. From her perspective, family matters are private and should remain so—even when domestic abuse is concerned.

Overwhelmingly, though the novel suggests that Mrs. Charles's vision of the community stepping in to help people in dangerous situations actually represents an ideal, the novel on the whole shows that Ma's ideas of how communities handle domestic abuse is far more prevalent. When it comes to Monday's abuse and murder, Ma and Daddy both insist that whatever's going on with the Charles family isn't any of their business—even though the evidence is right in front of them that Monday was being neglected before her disappearance. Similarly, the school and the police absolve themselves of any responsibility, leaving Claudia to solve the mystery mostly on her own.

This passage is especially chilling because, about two years after this moment, Mrs. Charles murders Monday—months after murdering her younger son, August. Though the novel only gestures at how or why Mrs. Charles ultimately becomes the very murderer she wanted to stop years earlier, it nevertheless suggests that people should pay attention and be aware when things or people change. Given that she overheard this conversation, it may have never crossed Claudia's mind that Mrs. Charles was even capable of murdering her children. But in the "Before" timeline, Mrs. Charles's frightening, violent, and threatening behavior shows that something changed.

## Chapter 16. The Before Quotes

☝☝ Daddy sighed. "Janet, it's their family business. It ain't none of ours."

"But we—"

"Just stay out of their drama, will you?" he sighed. "I don't wanna get mixed up in their mess."

**Related Characters:** Ma, Daddy (speaker), Monday Charles, Mrs. Charles, Claudia Coleman

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 110

### Explanation and Analysis

Around Thanksgiving, Ma asks Daddy to try to track down Tip Charles's phone number so they can check in on Monday, something Daddy is reticent to do. Here, Ma

seems to have taken to heart the idea that community members should look out for each other, especially in cases of suspected abuse or neglect. As Mrs. Charles suggested in the last "Two Years Before the Before" chapter, keeping people safe from abuse is a community responsibility. It's not inappropriate, she now seems to believe, to take an interest in a child's safety—it's a way to show kindness and concern.

Daddy, on the other hand, maintains that families should be left alone to figure things out on their own, even in cases of suspected abuse or neglect. It's somewhat unclear why he feels this way, given that Ma eventually reveals to Claudia that she and Daddy called 911 and expressed concerns for Monday's safety at home not long before Monday disappeared. That in and of itself shows that Claudia's parents knew something wasn't right at home—but it doesn't explain why Daddy now refuses to follow up on the report he made.

Though Monday is already dead at this point and it's impossible to save her life, Daddy's unwillingness to try to check up on her shows how apathy and unwillingness at the community level to care about other people created the situation where Monday was missing for almost a year. It's nearly impossible to keep kids safe, the novel suggests, when adults with power and authority refuse to take responsibility for children's wellbeing.

## Chapter 17. One Year Before the Before Quotes

☝☝ "You gonna do everything that bamma tell you. You could've broken your leg or something. You can't dance on no broken leg."

She rolled her eyes and giggled. "I was fine. I've done it before...when I had to."

That's weird, I thought. Why the hell would she have to climb out a window? Maybe they practice for fire drills or something.

**Related Characters:** Monday Charles, Claudia Coleman (speaker), Jacob Miller

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 114

### Explanation and Analysis

When Monday comes to Claudia's house early one morning after being out all night with Jacob, Claudia scolds her, mostly for her method of sneaking out of her house: climbing out of the second-story bathroom window onto trash cans below. Claudia doesn't understand why anyone

would willingly climb out of a second-story window, especially when it doesn't seem necessary. In Claudia's mind, this is a reason to be skeptical of Jacob: he can clearly convince Monday to do things that are dangerous, and Claudia is aware that Monday could end up hurt because of that.

More sinister, though, is Monday's admission that she's snuck out her bathroom window before, "when [she] had to." She doesn't give any explanation as to why she "had to" sneak out, but the pause (as evidenced by the ellipses) before "when I had to" suggests that she doesn't want to share her reasons. Given that Monday is being abused at home, the novel implies that she has to sneak out sometimes to escape Mrs. Charles's abuse. And if Monday feels she has to sneak out of the house—and do so in a fairly dangerous way—to avoid whatever's going on at home, it speaks to the intensity of the abuse and the danger she feels she's in. But in Claudia's mind, there aren't really any reasons a person would voluntarily leap out of a window. Abuse is so far outside of her lived experience as to not even cross her mind, and boys are still "nasty" to her at this point, so sneaking out to meet a boy doesn't seem at all compelling. All she can come up with is a fire drill—but this again reflects Claudia's comparatively privileged life, where the only reason to do anything remotely dangerous is to practice to do it safely.

## Chapter 20. One Year Before the Before Quotes

💬 "I said come on!" Mrs. Charles barked. "I ain't got all day!"

Monday flinched, her eyes closing as tears ran down her face. With slumped shoulders, she dragged her feet after her mother.

Ma and I watched them walk off in silence, my nerves prickling. The fear Monday had of her mother didn't seem normal. The fear I had *for* Monday didn't seem normal. Nothing about the moment felt normal.

**Related Characters:** Claudia Coleman, Mrs. Charles (speaker), Ma, Monday Charles

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 139

### Explanation and Analysis

After Claudia and Monday get into a fight at school, Claudia notices that Monday seems more afraid of Mrs. Charles than she thinks is normal. This is one of the few moments in the "Before" timeline when Claudia trusts her gut that

something is wrong with Monday's situation. Though Claudia insists at several points throughout the novel that it's common for kids to be afraid of their parents, she also recognizes that there's a limit to what's normal and healthy. Her own fear of any consequences from Ma, for instance, seems healthy and fine to her—but she also knows that the worst Ma will do is give her chores or tell Daddy. Monday seems to fear something far worse, hence her tears and clear reluctance to follow Mrs. Charles home.

But even though Claudia realizes there's something amiss here, she still doesn't say anything about it—and Ma, who's standing with Claudia watching Monday walk away, doesn't say anything either. Many people, this shows, ignored evidence that Monday didn't trust her mother or feel safe around her. And ultimately, this created a situation where Mrs. Charles was able to murder Monday because nobody spoke up in time to get the kids removed from the house and from the threat of Mrs. Charles's violence.

## Chapter 21. The After Quotes

💬 "For the last time, there's no such thing as 'stupid kids' class.' The Learning Center will be good for you. You just...need a little extra help, that's all. Ain't no shame in that, Sweet Pea."

The name *Sweet Pea* felt like a pacifier—a rattle shaking in my face. She was so busy treating me like a baby that she wouldn't even try to understand that walking into the Learning Center was school suicide.

**Related Characters:** Claudia Coleman, Ma (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 142

### Explanation and Analysis

Around Christmastime, Claudia tries to tell Ma that she's not going to go to the Learning Center at school, since it's where the "stupid kids" go. This moment illustrates both how mature Claudia is becoming and how immature she still is. It's significant that Claudia is trying to stand up to Ma and that she takes so much offense to Ma's use of the pet name "Sweet Pea": she wants to be treated like an adult and, in her mind, being forced to attend the Learning Center is an insult to her intelligence, age, and maturity. If she's growing up, Claudia reasons, she should be able to make this choice for herself rather than be forced into it.

But at the same time, Claudia also appears childish and naïve here. She doesn't grasp that, by receiving tutoring at

the Learning Center, she'll ultimately be able to be more independent in her schoolwork—which will give Claudia the agency she craves. Claudia is also still very concerned with what other kids think of her, hence her insistence that it's "school suicide" to be seen going to the Learning Center. In her mind, it's way more important to not stand out to her classmates so she can avoid bullying than it is to get the help she needs to be able to read independently.

However, it's important that this exchange takes place in the "After" timeline—so Claudia is actually 15 and isn't attending school right now; Ms. Walker is homeschooling her. She's still so caught up in the trauma of being bullied and losing Monday that she's unable to move on, even though it's been years since her dyslexia was first identified and she was first sent to the Learning Center. This trauma, in other words, continues to haunt her two years later, and it prevents her from growing or maturing.

☝ Couldn't believe she'd just ditch me like this. She knew I needed her, knew if she wasn't around teachers would find out about me. She was carrying me worse than Jacob ever carried her. How could she do this to me? Why hasn't she called?

And why do I feel so alone?

**Related Characters:** Claudia Coleman (speaker), Michael, Monday Charles

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 154

### Explanation and Analysis

While Claudia and Michael are at the mall people watching, Claudia thinks to herself about how horrible Monday is for leaving her. Michael intercepted Claudia on her way to a tutoring session with his grandma, Ms. Walker, so she resents that more people than just her parents, the school, and Ms. Walker might find out that she has dyslexia.

Claudia demonstrates here how fully she relied on Monday to help her with her schoolwork. The worst thing that could happen, in Claudia's mind, is that teachers find out about her dyslexia—and now that Monday is gone, that's exactly what happened. Because Claudia is so overwhelmed with grief, fear, and self-consciousness, it's not much of a stretch for her to blame Monday for the way she feels right now. And it's probably true that, had Monday not left, Claudia's dyslexia may have gone undiagnosed for quite a while. For Claudia, the pain and the trauma of having people know she

struggles to read and write is matched only by how alone she feels and how hurt she is by Monday's seeming absence.

In reality, though, Monday has been dead for at least two years by this point—Claudia is 15, and her dyslexia was identified two years ago, when she was 13. She doesn't remember any of this, though, because she's repressing the memory that Monday was murdered. This illustrates how much Claudia's trauma is ruling her life and keeping her from moving on. Even in a situation that should be fun, like people watching at the mall with a cute boy, Claudia can't settle in and enjoy it. Her thoughts are consumed by Monday and by the fear that people are going to discover her dyslexia and think less of her for it.

## Chapter 22. The Before Quotes

☝ "I tried to bring it up before, but folks just told me to keep you moving. Everything about this school is driven by our ranking. No one has time to just take a moment and really be with our students. You're old enough to know this now, but sometimes, all you are to this school is a score that adds up with the overall score. And the higher the score, the better the reputation. You know what I mean?"

**Related Characters:** Ms. Valente (speaker), Claudia Coleman

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 162-163

### Explanation and Analysis

When Ms. Valente catches Claudia taking a circuitous route to prevent her classmates from finding out she attends the Learning Center, she apologizes for not doing more to identify Claudia's dyslexia earlier. Ms. Valente situates her decision within the greater context of how the school looks at its students as scores, not necessarily as people deserving of care and extra help. Mr. Hill's insistence to Claudia's parents earlier that they'd get her to graduation reinforces this—graduation rates are what's most important to the school.

So Ms. Valente paints a picture of a school system that's focused on getting kids as high of grades and as much success as possible. Before, when Monday was helping Claudia with all her homework and was even doing a lot of it for Claudia, the school was happy—Claudia was contributing to the school's score and making it better. Ms. Valente implies that by identifying Claudia's dyslexia and

getting her the help she needs to succeed without Monday's help, the school actually harms its score in the interest of helping Claudia. And while Claudia needs the help and, arguably, is never going to be successful without it, she's now considered a liability for the school, not an asset.

“Over the last few months we've had dozens of girls around here reported missing, close to fifty in one week. Alleged kidnappings when most of them just run off away from home 'cause they can't do what they want.”

“But shouldn't you still be looking for them anyways?”

He opened his mouth, then closed it, clearing his throat.

“Yes, but Claudia, I want you to remember, when you come into a police station, claiming your friend is 'missing,' it means us officers have to take our focus away from *these* girls. Girls who could really be in trouble.”

Tears prickled, and I avoided his glare.

“Now, if your friend's really missing and she's not on this board, then only a parent can file a missing persons report. And if her mother won't, the only person left would be her father or a legal guardian.”

**Related Characters:** Claudia Coleman, Detective Carson (speaker), Tip Charles, Mrs. Charles, Monday Charles

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 166-167

### Explanation and Analysis

Since it seems like nobody else wants to help her find Monday, Claudia goes to the police station to ask an officer to check in on Monday. There, Detective Carson guilt-trips Claudia for asking for help in the first place and lays out some disturbing ideas about how to handle reports of missing girls.

First, Detective Carson situates Monday's disappearance within a much larger trend of young Black girls—like those on the missing persons board—disappearing as well. It's perhaps shocking that he's not surprised Monday is missing, in addition to his clear lack of concern for Monday or empathy for Claudia. To him, Monday is just a number—she's just one of many missing girls.

Detective Carson also lays out some troubling criteria for what makes a missing girl actually “missing” in the eyes of law enforcement. He implies that in order for him to consider a girl missing, a parent needs to file a missing persons report. This implies that parents know their

children are missing, trust the police to take their reports seriously, and want their children found. In Mrs. Charles's case, it's no wonder she didn't report Monday missing—she's the one who murdered Monday, so of course she doesn't want the police figuring that out. So Detective Carson's criteria essentially doesn't help kids who have abusive or uninvolved parents. He only has to care about kids who are reported missing—and he doesn't even seem to think that all of them deserve his concern. When he insists that most of the girls just ran away because they couldn't do what they wanted to do, he essentially shifts the blame onto those girls. Claudia underscores that those girls could be in real trouble, but because of the circumstance surrounding their disappearances, Detective Carson feels okay blaming them for whatever happens to them.

By shaming Claudia for coming in and asking for help at all, Detective Carson also ensures that in the future, she will be less willing to trust the police to take her concerns seriously if she ever does need help. Detective Carson is teaching her that the police aren't here to help her—they're here to make her feel bad for trying to track down her friend for legitimate reasons. With this, Claudia learns that she doesn't really have anywhere to turn for help. No one, she finds, is particularly interested in Monday's disappearance—except for her.

## Chapter 23. Two Years Before the Before Quotes

“Ma had four babies up in heaven waiting for her. On earth, all Ma had was me, and some days I wondered if I was good enough to quench her longing. Maybe I wasn't good enough. Maybe they wanted a better version of me—a version that could read and write with no problems. Maybe that's why they kept trying and failing. I hated seeing Ma in pain as much as I hated not being enough for her.”

**Related Characters:** Claudia Coleman (speaker), Monday Charles, Daddy, Ma

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 172-73

### Explanation and Analysis

Two years before Monday goes missing, Ma experiences her fourth miscarriage. This is difficult for everyone in Claudia's family, as Ma is going through the intense physical and emotional pain of losing another pregnancy. For Claudia, though, it's not just hard to see her mother in pain—it also brings up her fears that she's not good enough for her parents and that they're trying to replace her with a more

“normal” younger sibling.

This speaks to how ashamed Claudia is of her dyslexia. Having a learning disability, in her mind, means that she’s not good enough for her mom in particular—something that’s extremely difficult to comprehend, given how much Claudia loves her mom and wants her to be happy. Claudia’s shame, in this sense, severely impacts her self-worth and makes her feel lesser and worthless.

With this, the novel encourages readers to examine what society considers shameful and to work toward destigmatizing things like learning disabilities. As Claudia’s parents and Michael tell her at various points throughout the novel, dyslexia is nothing she needs to be ashamed of—it just means she learns a bit differently and needs some extra help reading.

## Chapter 24. January Quotes

☛☛ Maybe I’m not the best person to talk about the bruises.

See, I’d seen a couple on Monday, here and there. But I never gave them much thought. They were always followed by the most practical excuses. I mean, kids bruise. We roughhouse, we jump, we run, we fall, and then we bruise. Sometimes we even scar. So if I did see a bruise or a cut, it meant nothing. Just another star in the sky.

I read a report that said there were over two dozen scars on Monday’s body when they found her.

**Related Characters:** Claudia Coleman (speaker), Monday Charles

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 177

### Explanation and Analysis

In introducing the “January” segment of the novel, Claudia explains that she’s not the best person to talk about Monday’s bruises because, to her, the bruises didn’t seem like anything to worry about. In Claudia’s experience, it’s normal for kids to get bruises doing normal kid things like playing, jumping, and running. This is, to her, the only way that kids get bruises aside from legitimate accidents—the thought that an adult would purposefully hit a child hard enough to leave a bruise isn’t something that even crosses Claudia’s mind. So even though the novel heavily implies that Mrs. Charles hits Monday and the rest of the Charles children, this possibility never even enters Claudia’s mind.

However, once the police find Monday’s body, it’s

impossible to ignore that Monday didn’t bruise like most kids bruise. Instead, Monday had suffered enough physical trauma to leave more than 24 visible scars on her body—a record of the severe violence she suffered at Mrs. Charles’s hands. This also shows how easy it can be for people to ignore signs of abuse. The novel implies that it’s easy to explain away bruises as normal kid stuff, just like Claudia did—but sometimes, this simplistic answer obscures an uglier, dangerous truth.

Importantly, the fact that Claudia uses the word “body” here when she talks about what the police found is the first real indicator that the authorities don’t find Monday alive. The construction of this sentence makes Monday seem like an object rather than a person—which is a way that people talk about deceased people, not those who are still alive.

## Chapter 30. February Quotes

☛☛ Rumors are born with legs that can run a mile in less than a minute.

Rumors eat up dreams without condiments.

Rumors do not have expiration dates.

Rumors can be deadly.

Rumors can get you killed.

**Related Characters:** Claudia Coleman (speaker), Monday Charles

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 223

### Explanation and Analysis

As Claudia introduces the chapters in which the photo circulates online of Claudia and Monday supposedly having oral sex in the bathroom, she explains why rumors can be so dangerous. This becomes especially important once Claudia and Monday find out about the picture, as they see firsthand the damage that rumors can do.

Rumors, Claudia notes, move quickly. She later explains that the picture and the attending rumors spread to more than 1,000 people in a single weekend—which includes most of Claudia and Monday’s class. And because of the picture, Claudia and Monday find themselves even more alone at school than usual—and even worse, Claudia is still dealing with the effects of this particular rumor a year later, after Monday is already gone. She continues to face relentless bullying until her last day of school, and that bullying is what ends up pushing her over the edge to a mental break.

All of this explains why Claudia is so caught up in trying to seem normal to her classmates and not attract any attention. She knows how much damage a rumor can do—she saw it happen firsthand and doesn't wish to repeat the process.

## Chapter 39. The After Quotes

☝ I loved her. Well, I mean, not like that. I didn't love her in a way a girl loved a girl, like romantically. I loved her more like a soul mate loved a soul mate. Who makes up the rules for who your soul belongs to? But what if April was right? What if I didn't really know Monday? It'd explain why she'd leave me like this.

**Related Characters:** Claudia Coleman (speaker), Monday Charles

**Related Themes:**     

**Page Number:** 276

### Explanation and Analysis

As Claudia works on homework at the library one afternoon, she thinks about her relationship with Monday and how or why Monday might've left her. This passage takes place in the "After" timeline, so Monday is dead and her murder has already been solved—but Claudia is actively repressing that traumatic memory and fixates on the idea that Monday is still alive somewhere, waiting for Claudia to rescue her.

Here, Claudia has to acknowledge the uncomfortable fact that just because she and Monday were extremely close and were even soulmates doesn't mean that she knew everything about her friend. Indeed, everyone keeps secrets to some degree, even within romantic relationships. But for Claudia, it's difficult to believe that she and Monday were soulmates while also acknowledging that Monday may have lied, outright and by omission, about various aspects of her life. Indeed, Claudia knows that Monday lied about her bedroom, whether or not Mrs. Charles hit her, and what happened to August when he disappeared.

Claudia doesn't seem to realize that just as she kept her dyslexia a secret out of shame, Monday may have done the same thing about her home situation. April later confirms that Monday was ashamed of the abuse she suffered and didn't want Claudia to know about it, so lying was more emotionally comfortable than telling Claudia the truth. But Claudia isn't quite ready to accept this yet, as accepting this would require Claudia to also accept that she didn't always

act as kindly and without judgement as she perhaps should have.

## Chapter 46. The Before Quotes

☝ "Where the hell have you been?" Ma screamed, marching out of the kitchen. "Your father's out there looking for you now! What, you think you're grown now, that you could go off on your own and don't tell nobody? You got everybody calling everybody looking for your behind!"

Notice the difference: I'd been missing for two, maybe three, hours tops, and Ma had half the congregation out looking for me. Monday had been missing for months and no one even considered it strange.

**Related Characters:** Claudia Coleman, Ma (speaker), Monday Charles

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 339

### Explanation and Analysis

Claudia has just returned from the Charles house, where she ended up having to hide under the bed for hours when Mrs. Charles unexpectedly came home early. She didn't tell Ma where she was going before she went, so she was stuck there without anyone knowing where she was.

Claudia has just had an extremely traumatic experience. She feared for her life while trying to hide from Mrs. Charles—April made it clear that Claudia would've been in real danger had Mrs. Charles discovered her. And knowing that Mrs. Charles is dangerous and violent, it seems especially ridiculous that no one seems to care that Monday is missing. So Claudia struggles to see that Ma cares about her and that's why she's so angry—it throws into sharp relief that nobody is angry about Monday's disappearance.

Claudia doesn't examine all the differences between herself and Monday, but she can easily see how ridiculous it is that she can only disappear for a few hours before people get upset while Monday can be gone for months with no reaction. But Claudia also lives with two parents who love her, she's part of a church community that cares about its members, and her parents make sure Claudia gets the help she needs at school. Monday, on the other hand, doesn't live in a supportive home, doesn't have the robust community outside of her family and school that Claudia does, and, because Monday is just another poor Black girl to the police, the city seems to believe that she's not worth looking for. Here, Claudia starts to realize what makes Monday

vulnerable—and why the chances of Claudia suffering something horrible like Monday did are so slim in comparison.

## Chapter 50. May Quotes

☝☝ Can I tell you a secret? I knew she was dead. I just hoped she'd be in the trunk of a car, chopped up, and buried somewhere. Not in a freezer, hiding in plain sight. That aggravated the pain felt by anyone who ever laid eyes on her.

**Related Characters:** Claudia Coleman (speaker), Mrs. Charles, August Charles, Monday Charles

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 397

### Explanation and Analysis

After the police find Monday's body stuffed into a freezer alongside her little brother, August, Claudia admits to the reader that she always knew Monday was dead. With this, Claudia speaks to one of the most uncomfortable truths about abuse and violence: it's easier to blame strangers, while it's emotionally painful to consider whether one's neighbors or friends could be capable of killing someone. And this is true even though statistics generally suggest that people are far more likely to be killed by someone they know, especially a family member, than they are to be killed by a stranger. So the main shock for Claudia isn't that Monday is dead—it's that Monday's mother is the one who killed her. Mrs. Charles is someone Claudia knew and spent time with when she was a kid. And earlier in the novel, she described Mrs. Charles as being like the color yellow in that she's bright, happy, and sweet. This makes it seem like Mrs. Charles isn't the sort of person one would expect to murder her children.

Throughout the novel, Claudia and many adults in her life expect that Monday is fine, that she may have a difficult home life but that it's not unmanageable. Few people seemed to suspect that Monday was actually at risk of incurring serious injuries or dying, and that expectation led directly to Monday's death. Her death could have been prevented, perhaps, if only people had seen the signs, recognized them for what they were, and spoken up when they had the chance.

## Chapter 51. The Before Quotes

☝☝ “Why didn't she tell me anything?”

“She didn't want you feeling sorry for her,” she said.

“I would've tried to help her.”

April shook her head. “How? And she wouldn't have wanted you to anyways.”

“Didn't matter what she wanted! What was she gonna do, hate me? At least she'd be alive!”

**Related Characters:** April Charles, Claudia Coleman (speaker), Monday Charles

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 393

### Explanation and Analysis

Several days after Monday and August's funeral, Ma takes Claudia to visit April. April explains why Monday was unwilling to tell Claudia about the abuse she suffered at home.

To Claudia, being abused is nothing to be ashamed of. The way she sees it, if a person is being abused it's essential that they reach out and get the help they need. Or, if the victim isn't willing or able to do so on their own, others who suspect abuse need to speak up on the victim's behalf. This is why she insists she only would've helped Monday. She wouldn't have thought less of Monday or not wanted to be her friend anymore—she would've done everything in her power to help Monday.

But April makes the case that when a person is being abused, they're often overcome with shame. For Monday, it seemed better to keep things the way they were than it did to say something, invite Claudia to pity her, and face the possibility that her family would be split up.

The novel underscores that Monday isn't to blame for her own murder, but that she *did* actively keep the fact that she was being abused a secret. And because of this, Monday missed out on getting help that may have turned her life upside down (e.g., caused her siblings to be separated and sent to different foster homes), but may also have saved her life and August's. It's essential, the novel suggests, to work to change what society considers shameful. It will be easier for people in Monday's position to speak up if they don't fear people's pity or that they'll be looked down on for having been victims.

## Chapter 52. The After Quotes

“But I didn’t save her,” I said, bursting into tears. “I couldn’t save her.”

“You did save her, Claudia! You saved her from that house for years and you didn’t even know it.”

**Related Characters:** Michael, Claudia Coleman (speaker), Monday Charles

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 399

**Explanation and Analysis**

After Claudia rereads all the media coverage surrounding Monday’s death two years ago, she calls Michael and asks why nobody ever spoke to her about Monday. It’s worth considering that though both Claudia and Michael are right here, they’re working with two very different definitions of saving Monday. In Claudia’s mind, she didn’t do nearly enough because she wasn’t able to prevent Monday’s murder. She fears that she’s at fault for not noticing red flags for years that would’ve indicated to a trained eye (or perhaps a less trusting one) that Monday was being abused. And in this sense, Claudia is right—though it’s also worth keeping in mind that she’s not the only one who ignored red flags. Claudia, as a naïve young girl, is perhaps less at fault than the trained school officials, police officers, and social workers who weren’t able to identify that Monday needed to be removed from her home before her mother killed her.

Michael, though, proposes that Claudia needs to take a more holistic view of Monday’s life in order to live with herself and move on. Claudia might not have been able to prevent Monday’s death, but he essentially encourages Claudia to consider how much worse Monday’s life would’ve been had she *not* had Claudia as a friend. Claudia gave Monday a shoulder to cry on and, since the girls spent so much time at Claudia’s house, Monday didn’t spend as much time at home where Mrs. Charles could hurt her as she could’ve. In this way, Claudia improved Monday’s quality of life while Monday was still alive, something that Michael insists Claudia should be proud of.

## Chapter 57. Later On Quotes

“Wait! How’d you get rid of the buzzing?”

Ms. Roundtree smiled, folding her hands together. “It’s all about the way you look at it. You got to decide what something is or isn’t. It may have been buzzing, but I decided it’s humming. Someone is just humming a song in my ear. A pretty song.”

Glancing at the house one last time, I gave Ms. Roundtree a hug. “Thank you.”

“Sure, baby, anytime.”

I jumped in the car, kissed Michael, and we drove off, cranking up Daddy’s newest song.

With Monday humming along.

**Related Characters:** Ms. Roundtree, Claudia Coleman (speaker), Michael, Monday Charles

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 434-435

**Explanation and Analysis**

In order to get closure, Claudia asks Michael to drive her to Monday’s house so they can listen to Mrs. Charles’s confession and Claudia can visit the place where Monday died one final time. There, Claudia meets Monday’s long-time neighbor, Ms. Roundtree.

From Ms. Roundtree, Claudia discovers that she’s not the only one haunted by the buzzing sound of Mrs. Charles’s freezer—Ms. Roundtree heard the freezer all the time from her house next door, and the sinister sound was disturbing for her, too. This helps Claudia realize that she doesn’t need to be ashamed of how her trauma manifests—while everyone’s experiences with trauma are a little bit different, she understands that everyone is dealing with some of the same core issues. And fortunately for Claudia, this gives her the opportunity to talk to Ms. Roundtree about how to get rid of the buzzing sound in her head. Ms. Roundtree insists that it’s a matter of perspective—Claudia can think of the buzzing as the freezer that held her best friend’s body, or she can try to reframe the sound for herself and make it into something happier.

It’s worth noting that Claudia demonstrates that she’s taken massive steps forward by speaking to Ms. Roundtree about the buzzing at all. She doesn’t seem ashamed of this problem, which is a major difference from how she talked about and thought of her dyslexia throughout the novel. Now, Claudia seems aware that she doesn’t need to feel ashamed about things that everyone experiences—shame only keeps her from getting the help she needs to successfully move on.



## 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. SEPTEMBER

What follows is the story of how Claudia's best friend disappeared. Nobody noticed the disappearance except Claudia, and nobody seemed to care until they found Claudia's friend—a year later. It may seem impossible that a kid can disappear like this, but as Claudia's Ma says, "not everyone circles the same sun." Claudia only learned what Mama meant when Monday disappeared. It may also seem strange that this could happen in Washington, D.C., where some of the most powerful people in the world live. It's "the president's backyard." Everyone in Claudia's neighborhood (the Southeast) thought the same thing.

According to Claudia's doctor, she shouldn't be talking about this anymore. But recently, there's been a podcast re-examining what happened. Everyone sees the story differently, just like how everyone sees color differently—for the color pink, for instance, some people see rose or magenta, while others see salmon. But it's still just pink. This story begins the day before Claudia starts eighth grade. It's supposed to be her and Monday's last year of middle school, and Claudia thought it would be "the best year of [their] lives."

## CHAPTER 2. THE BEFORE

The moment Claudia steps out of her gate at the airport, she asks Ma if she's seen Monday. Ma laughs. Every summer, Ma sends Claudia to stay with her grandmother in Georgia. Claudia and Monday usually spend the summer writing letters. But this summer, Monday never wrote back. It made the two months in Georgia seem to drag on forever.

Ma drives over the bridge, onto Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue, and turns onto Good Hope Road. There, Claudia notices old posters on an old building that read "SAVE ED BOROUGH! It's home!" Ma tenses up and locks the car doors—she doesn't feel safe in the city. Claudia distracts Ma by mentioning that Monday never wrote back. Ma just shrugs and suggests that Monday couldn't make it to the post office. This doesn't make sense, though: Claudia and Monday bought enough stamps and they promised to write, even though Claudia hates writing. Ma assures Claudia that Monday will visit soon.

*Ma's insistence that "not everyone circles the same sun" introduces the idea that society cares more about some people than others—that is, some people aren't seen as being as worthy of concern or resources. By suggesting that Claudia didn't learn this until after Monday disappeared, it suggests that Claudia begins the story naively believing that everyone is treated the same.*



*Claudia insists that there are many different ways to look at the story to come. The most prominent, however, is Claudia's version and interpretation of events. Her story, then, will be filtered through her experience as a young teenage girl who's looking forward to spending eighth grade with Monday. Claudia's age and naiveté suggest that she won't be a reliable narrator.*



*Many details in this passage suggest that, under normal circumstances, Claudia and Monday are inseparable. Claudia asking about Monday before even greeting Ma illustrates how close the girls are, which also underscores how odd it is that Monday never wrote back.*



*The signs begging people to "save" Ed Borough reveal that the neighborhood is in danger—though Claudia doesn't necessarily seem aware of this. When Ma comes up with excuses as to why Monday never wrote back, it begins to show Claudia that she is, at least for now, on her own in her worries about Monday. Claudia also makes it seem like writing to Monday at all is a sacrifice for her, since she hates writing.*



Ma turns left at the Anacostia **Library** and then turns onto U Place, stopping in front of the house. Claudia leaps out of the car. She runs for the phone and dials Monday's number. She'll forgive Monday for not writing, but she has so much to tell her. After one ring, a recorded voice says that Claudia has the wrong number. This can't be right: the only two numbers Claudia has memorized are her own and Monday's. When Ma comes inside a moment later, she suggests that the phone is just off the hook at Monday's house.

*Claudia clearly relies on Monday, as evidenced by having so much to tell her friend. Getting the wrong number message is puzzling, and it only increases Claudia's sense that something weird is going on. Having the phone disconnected may suggest that Monday's family is currently in a tough spot financially and may not be able to afford the bill right now.*



Ma insists they need to deal with Claudia's fuzzy, unkempt braids, so Claudia races upstairs to her room. Her purple room hasn't changed a bit—the tent made of sheets that she and Monday slept in during their last sleepover is still there. Claudia grabs her comb and notices that Daddy left her a new coloring book. Hours later, when Claudia goes to bed with fresh hair, she ignores her feeling that something is wrong.

*Ma's insistence on fixing Claudia's braids suggests that she may be very caught up in appearances; she wants to make sure Claudia looks well cared for and put together. The fact that the tent is still set up in her bedroom only reminds Claudia that Monday isn't around—it seems like she's disappeared out of thin air.*



The next morning, Ma yells for Claudia to hurry up. She always makes a pancake breakfast on the first day of school, but Claudia plays along and acts surprised. Mama reminds Claudia to hurry so she's not late for school—Claudia doesn't want to keep Monday waiting. Claudia asks if Monday can come over after school and Ma agrees, as long as Claudia checks in with Ms. Paul first at the **library**. Ma assures Claudia that Ms. Paul isn't a babysitter, and that it's "Always good to leave breadcrumbs." Claudia huffs that this wouldn't be an issue if she had a cellphone.

*Claudia's desire for a cellphone indicates that she's growing up and is beginning to crave some independence. This is also why she resents having to check in with Ms. Paul. Ma's desire for Claudia to leave "breadcrumbs" contrasts with how unconcerned Ma seems about Monday. Ma wants to ensure her own daughter's safety—but isn't so concerned with other girls in the community.*



Claudia grabs her new purple bookbag. Monday has the same bag in pink, her favorite color. Ma drives Claudia to school, which she always does on the first day. At school, Claudia doesn't see Monday, even though Monday is usually there hours before anyone else. Ma soothes Claudia, but Claudia can't get out of the car if Monday isn't there. The car behind starts to honk, and Ma asks Claudia if she's nervous. Claudia decides she can't act like a baby and says she's fine, but Ma rolls her eyes. She tells Claudia to catch up with the rest of her "friends." To Claudia, though, those people are enemies. Mama doesn't know Monday is Claudia's only friend.

*Just like Ma, Claudia wants to give the impression that she has everything together—and specifically that she has lots of friends. When she has Monday's support, acting this way isn't so hard. But without her around, Claudia can't pretend she feels comfortable walking into schoolyard with all her enemies. Claudia's fears also make it harder for her to act mature, but she doesn't want Ma to think of her as a baby in need of hand holding.*



Claudia kisses Ma and puts on a brave face to get out of the car. She reminds herself that Monday never misses school. But as she gets closer to the other eighth graders, Claudia gulps. Everyone looks so mature. Ashley Hilton and Shayla Green whisper and giggle as they see Claudia, and Trevor Abernathy laughs that the "dyke bitch" is here. The other kids goof off and Claudia thinks they're immature. She reminds herself that next year, she and Monday will be going to high school together and won't have to deal with these "dummies" anymore.

*The taunting that Claudia faces suggests that she doesn't just feel alone at school—she's the victim of bullying. But Claudia is able to get through this uncomfortable moment because she trusts that Monday won't miss school. It's significant that she refers to her current classmates as "dummies," as it suggests that she sees herself as smarter and more mature.*



To pass the time, Claudia checks her reflection in her hand mirror. She and Monday had decided to wear grown-up styles instead of braids, but without Monday here, Claudia feels self-conscious. The bell rings. Claudia doesn't see Monday's siblings, August and Tuesday, either.

Claudia has Ms. O'Donnell for homeroom and first period English. She's supposedly the meanest teacher in the school—and over the year, Claudia will come to hate her. Ms. O'Donnell calls roll and skips right over Monday Charles's name. After school, Claudia calls Monday's house five times and gets the same automatic message. When she tells Ma, Ma assures Claudia that Monday will show up. Claudia knows she has to be careful: if she acts too concerned, it'll be obvious that she has no other friends.

Monday doesn't show up the first week of school. Finally, Claudia works up the nerve to ask one of Monday's neighbors about her. Darrell Singleton hasn't seen her all summer and assumed she was with Claudia. He says he has seen Monday's mom, though, "next door"—the place in the complex to buy drugs. He can't recall seeing Monday's siblings, either.

Finally, Claudia decides to go to Monday's house. She knows something is up. Monday once had the flu and was gone for a month, but illness wouldn't explain the disconnected phone or her siblings' absence. Claudia rides her bike to the Ed Borough Complex, a big public housing complex. It's "the hood," according to Daddy. Claudia has never been inside Monday's house; neither Monday nor Ma would allow that. Claudia will only find out why later.

Claudia knocks. She can hear *The Simpsons* blaring inside and thinks that Monday hates *The Simpsons*. After a minute, Mrs. Charles comes to the door. She acts like she doesn't know Claudia and positions herself in the doorway so Claudia can't see inside. Claudia asks after Monday, Mrs. Charles shouts for her to stop asking questions—Monday isn't here. Claudia can smell alcohol on Mrs. Charles's breath.

*For Claudia, stepping outside of her comfort zone (here, by trying to look more mature) is extremely uncomfortable when she doesn't have Monday by her side to bolster her confidence. It's even more concerning when Monday's siblings don't show up for school, either. It suggests that there may be something amiss with Monday's whole family.*



*Skipping Monday's name during roll call would suggest that Monday is, at the very least, not in the same class as Claudia. This is a major change for Claudia—she's so used to having Monday around all the time. But again, Claudia feels like she has to act cool and not tip Ma off to the fact that she doesn't have any other friends.*



*It's even more concerning for Claudia when Darrell hasn't seen Monday, either. But it's telling that he hasn't thought much of it, since Monday is usually with Claudia. This may mean that there are others who also haven't noticed or worried about Monday's disappearance because they expected her to be safe and happy with Claudia.*



*In Claudia's mind, she's handling this whole thing very logically. She knows what will and won't reasonably explain Monday's absence, and she's not willing to accept answers that don't make sense. The aside that Claudia won't find out until later why she wasn't allowed to go to Monday's house ominously foreshadows that there's something seriously wrong with the house or the environment inside.*



*Claudia knows a lot about Monday, and so she knows that Monday wouldn't appreciate having to watch a show she hates. Even before Mrs. Charles says Monday is out, this small detail about *The Simpsons* tells Claudia that Monday isn't around. The alcohol on Mrs. Charles's breath combined with her shouting turns Mrs. Charles into a frightening figure. This behavior may explain why Claudia wasn't allowed in the house before.*



Claudia doesn't feel like she can leave without finding out where Monday is, but when she asks if something is wrong, Mrs. Charles lunges at Claudia. Claudia trips and falls as she tries to back away, and Mrs. Charles looms over her to scream for Claudia to go home. Mrs. Charles pulls a leg back as though to kick Claudia. But she straightens up, gives Claudia a glare, and tells her to leave. Once Mrs. Charles is back in the house, Claudia wonders how Monday lived with "such a monster."

Daddy gets home on Saturday. He's a truck driver for a car factory and is gone for weeks at a time, delivering new cars to dealerships. As soon as he walks in, he lifts Claudia up and gives her a raspberry. He insists she'll always be his baby girl when she resists. Then, he goes to Ma at the stove and kisses her—they're like "lovesick teenagers." They met at a truck stop and married less than a year later. Daddy was 29, and Ma was 19.

When everyone is seated for dinner, Daddy asks how school was. Claudia shares that Monday wasn't there and she hasn't been able to get ahold of her friend. She hasn't told Ma about her visit to Monday's house; she knows Ma would be too upset that Claudia paid a visit to Mrs. Charles to care about how the woman acted. Claudia wonders if Mrs. Charles was just in a bad mood and asks Daddy if he'd drive her to check in on Monday tomorrow. He insists he's tired and explains he has band practice. (He plays in a go-go band with Uncle Robby.) Ma also reminds Claudia that they have church tomorrow.

Ma points out that Monday loves Mondays, so she'll probably be at school on Monday. Monday always showed up to school early and happy on Mondays, and insisted that she loved school. Monday once said that the best part of Mondays is that at school, she and Claudia get to be together all week.

On Monday morning, Claudia hops off the bus and waits for Monday with a slice of cake. But Monday never arrives. After school that day, Claudia calls Monday's house again, feeling ready to scream. She knows everything about Monday—her favorite foods, her favorite color, her allergies. Something is wrong.

*Mrs. Charles's behavior here is threatening, and she seems willing to kick a child (or at least threaten to do so) where the neighbors could see. Unlike Ma and Claudia, Mrs. Charles doesn't seem concerned with keeping up appearances. Thinking of Mrs. Charles as a "monster" shows that Claudia considers her a clear antagonist.*



*Ma and Daddy seem to have a healthy, loving relationship, and they treat Claudia with this same kindness—a sharp contrast from the way that Mrs. Charles just treated her. Though it's impossible to tell what Mrs. Charles is like in her own home, her behavior with Claudia earlier suggests that Monday lives in a tumultuous or even outright dangerous home environment.*



*Claudia decides to explain away Mrs. Charles's frightening behavior from earlier that day. She doesn't seem to expect adults to behave that way normally—so in her mind, Mrs. Charles must've been having a bad day. Claudia also realizes she's on her own in this search for Monday, since Ma and Daddy won't be pleased about the actions she's taking to find her friend. This secrecy seems necessary to Claudia, as it means she won't get in trouble—and perhaps so she won't have to grapple with the shame of disappointing her parents.*



*Given the way that Mrs. Charles threatened Claudia, it's possible that Monday may have other reasons for loving school aside from the academic and/or social elements. School may be a place to escape her mother's wrath.*



*To Claudia, it's obvious that something is wrong with Monday. She seems to believe that Mrs. Charles wouldn't have been watching The Simpsons if Monday were home, and it's unusual for Monday to skip school.*



## CHAPTER 3. THE AFTER

Claudia loves how a colored pencil feels when she touches it to paper. It feels like the start of something new. She feels like she does nothing but color since Daddy read about coloring being therapeutic. Fortunately, he buys her coloring books with complex designs now, not kiddie books. Claudia takes her time choosing the right shade of blue. The wrong shade can ruin the whole picture. And without Monday, Claudia feels “ruined” as well.

Ma appears with a load of laundry and asks Claudia if she has work to do. Claudia notes that it’s Saturday as she sits with her book and some music on the couch. She’d rather watch TV, but the TV is broken and Daddy hasn’t fixed it. The phone rings. Claudia leaps up to get it, but it’s just Sister Burke from church calling for Ma. From the couch, Claudia can hear Ma say that Claudia’s doing well but needs prayers. The women discuss the pies Ma is making; she started a catering business a few years ago.

Claudia realizes she chipped a nail running for the phone and runs to fix it. She loves painting nails and is great at it. She’s even thought of opening her own shop, but Ma brought home college pamphlets when Claudia voiced that idea. Claudia finds the appropriate polish color, devil’s plum. It’s the same color of the journal that Monday gave her last Christmas. The journal was a weird gift, since Monday knew how much Claudia hates writing. But because Claudia has so much to tell Monday, she opens the journal and writes, “Dear Monday, Were are you? I got a new bra wit Grandmma. Are we the same sise now?”

## CHAPTER 4. ONE YEAR BEFORE THE BEFORE

As the girls walk home from school, Monday pulls a pillared scarf tighter and shivers in a jean jacket that Claudia gave her. She whines that it’s cold and dark, but Claudia asks if Monday is listening—the pastor wants *Claudia* to read the scripture on Sunday. Monday shrugs and suggests that Claudia pretend to be sick, but Claudia can’t. She also has a performance that day with her dance ministry. With a smirk, Monday teases Claudia and says that she could join dance ministry too, skipping ahead and spinning.

*It’s unclear in the “After” chapters exactly when they take place (e.g., how many days, months, or years have passed) and what particular event they come after. The aside that Claudia’s coloring books are therapeutic suggests that some sort of stress or trauma has occurred between the “Before” and “After” chapters, but it’s not clear if this refers simply to Monday’s absence or something more.*



*It’s impossible to tell at this point if Sister Burke is just being polite when she asks after Claudia. But Ma’s response that Claudia needs prayers gives the impression that something bad has happened, and Claudia needs the congregation’s support to get through it.*



*Claudia’s journal entry offers some clues into why she mentioned in the second chapter that she hates writing. Writing is clearly difficult for her, as seen from all of her misspellings. But right now, reeling from Monday’s absence, Claudia feels that she has to get her thoughts out somehow, and writing is her only outlet. Monday’s absence may force Claudia to figure out how to communicate in new ways, even if it’s just through writing out her thoughts and feelings.*



*Monday’s scarf is pillared, and she wears a jacket from Claudia—suggesting that Monday might not have access to new, warm clothes on her own. Claudia, though, doesn’t seem to take note of this or consider the possible significance of Monday’s threadbare clothing. Claudia’s fears about reading in church suggest that her issues with writing extend to reading as well.*



Claudia laughs, but Monday suggests they add the move to their dance routine later. Then, the girls stop at Mr. Chang's carryout for a snack. As they wait in line, they discuss how Claudia can get out of reading in church and embarrassing herself. Monday insists that Claudia has to stop going to church altogether. Claudia knows she's right, but Ma will kill her. Monday tells Claudia to lie about why she wants to quit, but Monday regularly lies "in a self-preservation type of way." When Claudia insists that Ma will be angry, Monday insists that Ma doesn't get *that* mad.

Monday places their order. Claudia isn't shy, but Monday is better at talking to strangers. Sometimes Claudia hates it—she doesn't like sharing Monday. Monday realizes she forgot her wallet and asks Claudia to cover the bill. A group of boys enters the restaurant. The girls recoil and, in their secret language, Claudia says she's fine—and Monday notes that one of the boys is cute. The boys stare at Monday and Claudia and ask if they're twins. Usually the girls love that question, but not tonight.

As Monday leads Claudia out of the restaurant, one of the boys blocks the door. The girls link arms, dodge to the left, and make it out. After two blocks, Monday sighs that the boy was cute. Claudia tells readers that over the last year, boys have suddenly become real—now they talk about having crushes on neighbors and classmates instead of celebrities. Claudia brushes off Monday's teasing as they skip into the **library** to say hi to Ms. Paul. Ms. Paul used to watch Claudia every day after school at the library until Ma got off work. These days, Claudia and Monday can go home as long as they check in with Ms. Paul first—"Breadcrumbs" are important to Ma.

Claudia and Monday eat in Claudia's room and when they're done, Monday grabs a Barbie and a Ken doll. She asks if the boys were interested in them and makes Barbie and Ken kiss. Then, the girls plug in an iPod and start their rehearsal. This is how they spend most afternoons, making up routines to their favorite songs. Monday is an exceptional dancer, but Mrs. Charles can't afford to send her to classes. Instead, Claudia teaches her what she learns in her dance classes—and Monday does them better. This is the girls' world, with their own language. It's a bubble that nothing can pop.

*It seems likely that Monday and Claudia have very different ideas of what's normal at home. Claudia seems genuinely concerned about facing Ma's wrath—but Monday saying that Ma doesn't get too mad suggests that however Ma acts, it's not as frightening as how Mrs. Charles acts. The aside that Monday lies "in a self-preservation type of way" raises the question of why Monday would have to lie regularly to protect herself. Claudia's lack of concern reflects her naiveté; Monday's lies might just be normal to her.*



*Claudia and Monday have definite roles in their relationship: Monday talks to strangers (suggesting that she's the more outgoing one), while Claudia funds their snack purchases (suggesting that she has more money). The aside that Claudia doesn't like sharing Monday speaks to how important their relationship is to her—Claudia feels threatened when there's any chance that another person might interfere in their dynamic.*



*While the novel frames this boy's actions as somewhat predatory, Monday nevertheless seems somewhat smitten with him, raising the question if she has unhealthy expectations surrounding romantic relationships and intimacy. And the aside again that Ma requires Claudia to leave "breadcrumbs" suggests that Claudia has the kind of support network where it would be impossible for her to go missing, as Monday is in the "Before" timeline.*



*The aside that Mrs. Charles can't afford to enroll Monday in dance classes is another indicator that the family is struggling financially. But Claudia doesn't seem to question why the family is struggling or how that may affect Monday's home life—to Claudia, Monday's poverty is just a fact of life. This suggests that while she may be superficially aware that she and Monday come from very different economic backgrounds, she might not realize that's something that can affect their relationship or Monday's home life.*



Monday turns down the music and suggests they go to cheerleading tryouts—Ms. Valente already talked to Shayla and Ashley about it. Claudia wonders why Monday talked to Ms. Valente alone, and reminds Monday that the plan was to try out for the dance team when they got to high school. Monday insists they can do both, but Claudia refuses—they have enough problems with Shayla and Ashley as it is. She also knows that once the other girls see how Monday can dance, they’ll steal her. But she keeps this quiet and says they need to concentrate on their routines, since *America’s Dance Challenge* is going to hold auditions in D.C. soon. Monday perks up, agrees, and suggests they get started on homework—she has a whole packet to read to Claudia.

People in Southeast talk about crack regularly. In the 80s and 90s, D.C. turned into a “city of zombies,” leading to murder and destruction. Eventually people rebuilt the community, but the memories remain. Back in the present, Claudia, Monday, and their families are at the annual Ed Borough Recreation Center block party. Mrs. Charles plays cards and Ma sells her pies. Monday and Claudia play with August. This block party, Claudia thinks, is proof that Southeast is just like everywhere else—people here love good food, music, and friends.

But the Ed Borough projects, built after World War II on land formerly given to freed slaves, are in trouble. The projects were intended as “a place for the American dream,” but eventually, developers realized how valuable the land was. It was “convenient” that crack would take over the area.

As Claudia and Monday dance, a bee buzzes Claudia’s ear. The girls buzz at each other until Ma calls for them to come get pie. Mrs. Charles jogs over too and offers to take pie to some men, insisting that the girls don’t need sugar. Monday reaches for a piece of pie and Mrs. Charles slaps her hand away. Mrs. Charles growls that Monday never listens and is greedy. Ma’s brow furrows as Monday backs up and links pinkies with Claudia, tears in her eyes. In their secret language, Claudia asks if Monday is okay. Monday nods.

*Earlier, Claudia noted that she becomes very jealous when Monday talks to other people. Here, she articulates even more clearly why this is: she’s afraid that Monday would find new friends—and replace Claudia—if she spent more time with other people. Claudia can’t allow this happen for several reasons. She needs Monday to endure Shayla and Ashley’s bullying, she needs the emotional support that Monday supplies, and she also seems to need Monday to help her with her homework (given that Monday is going to read her a homework packet). Monday seems to accept that Claudia decides what they do, suggesting a power imbalance in their relationship.*



*Offering some of the city’s history with the crack epidemic suggests that Claudia’s neighborhood is still struggling with the epidemic’s legacy. The neighborhood may, in some ways, still seem dangerous like it was back then. But Claudia also encourages readers to see that the people who live here are people, just like anywhere else, and are thus deserving of respect and kindness.*



*Saying it was “convenient” that crack took over Ed Borough suggests that the white developers didn’t see crack as a problem to solve for the sake of the complex’s residents. Rather, it was an easy way to justify displacing Ed Borough’s residents to take the land for themselves.*



*At first, Mrs. Charles’s concerns about the girls’ sugar intake seems reasonable for a mom. But when she slaps Monday and berates her, things seem decidedly more sinister. This is especially true given how afraid Monday seems of Mrs. Charles—she may perceive some real danger here.*



## CHAPTER 5. OCTOBER

Over and over again, “they” asked Claudia if she saw any red flags. They were looking for answers and looking for signs that Monday had been in trouble. They asked Claudia if she noticed anything unusual. Claudia hadn’t noticed anything. When they called her a liar, it hurt more than losing Monday did. Claudia thinks that if Monday were a color, she’d be a bright, vivid red. Maybe Claudia saw so much red that she couldn’t see the flags.

*Claudia confirms here that Monday was being abused—that’s why “they” (presumably, the police) were looking for red flags. They seem to imply that the red flags should’ve been obvious. But when Claudia says that she saw so much red that she couldn’t see the flags, it suggests that she didn’t notice any evidence of abuse because it seemed so normal to her.*



## CHAPTER 6. THE BEFORE

Monday doesn’t show up at school all through September. The last time Monday and Claudia were separated for this long, Monday had a bad case of the flu and gave it to her whole family. Ma wouldn’t let Claudia near Monday, since Monday’s fever was 104. Claudia tries to stay busy coloring, watching football with Daddy, and tailgating. School is lonely, though.

*Though Claudia recognizes that there are reasonable explanations for Monday being gone in general—the flu, for instance—that doesn’t seem to explain why Monday is gone without a trace right now. And while Claudia may have known during that month that Monday would be back, she has no promise of Monday returning here.*



One day, Shayla leans over Claudia’s desk and teases that Claudia’s girlfriend isn’t here, so they can’t get busy in the bathroom. Claudia is trying to finish her English packet, and ignoring Shayla is hard. Shayla sweeps the packet onto the floor and stomps on it. When Claudia leaps up, Ms. O’Donnell tells Claudia to focus on her packet and stop talking with her friends. When Claudia squeaks that Shayla started it, someone mutters “Snitch.” Shayla snaps loudly that Claudia doesn’t have any friends. Ms. O’Donnell tells Claudia to finish the packet today. Everyone else is done, but Claudia is only three pages in.

*This passage makes it clear that Claudia doesn’t have any support at school without Monday. Her classmates jeopardize her progress, and Ms. O’Donnell doesn’t give Claudia any leeway or assistance. Noting that she’s only on the third page of a packet everyone else has finished is another clue that Claudia has trouble with school, and particularly reading—troubles that it seems Monday was helping her cover up.*



Since Monday isn’t here, Claudia skips lunch and seeks out Ms. Valente, her seventh-grade English teacher and her favorite teacher. Ms. Valente greets Claudia warmly and asks why she isn’t eating with Monday. Claudia explains that Monday hasn’t been at school and she doesn’t know where she is. Concerned, Ms. Valente leads Claudia to the office. On the walk, they talk about Ms. Valente’s wedding and honeymoon with her wife, and Claudia’s summer in Georgia. Ms. Valente shares that she’s teaching fifth grade this year and assures Claudia that Ms. O’Donnell will prepare her well for high school.

*Ms. Valente is the first adult to take Claudia seriously when she brings up Monday’s absence. This suggests that Claudia simply hasn’t been looking for help in the right places yet—she’ll possibly have more luck if she asks the school for help. Ms. Valente, unlike Ms. O’Donnell, also seems to genuinely care about Claudia. This is why she assures her that Claudia will be fine in Ms. O’Donnell’s class: she wants Claudia to know that things will improve.*



When Ms. Valente notes that Claudia and Monday might be together in high school and asks where Claudia wants to go, Claudia says Banneker. This is where Monday decided they'd go. Ms. Valente asks if she has a second choice. Claudia doesn't and says it depends on what Monday wants. Ms. Valente chuckles and refers to the girls as "a two-headed horse."

In the office, Ms. Valente asks the secretary, Ms. Clark, to check for Monday. Claudia can barely contain her excitement. After a few clicks, Ms. Clark says Monday isn't registered. Neither August nor Tuesday are registered, either. When Ms. Clark asks if the family moved, Claudia notes that Mrs. Charles is still at the same house. Ms. Valente says that in her experience, schools follow up in situations like this. Ms. Clark explains that lots of students moved due to the rent hikes, but she promises to pass on a note.

## CHAPTER 7. THE AFTER

In her journal, Claudia writes another note to Monday with many misspellings. She writes that Ms. Manis moved her into Group Five for jazz, which means she's in class with the high school girls. The other girls in class are on traveling dance teams. To celebrate, Ma and Daddy took Claudia to Chili's. Claudia wishes Monday were here, too.

As Claudia stretches, the other girls in her dance class wonder out loud how Claudia ended up in the class, given that she's "like, twelve." A girl with a high bun insists that Claudia is older than that and a great dancer. Claudia tries to focus on stretching. Another girl starts to say why Claudia should be in class with little kids, but the girl with the bun cuts her off—Ms. Manis said to leave Claudia alone. The first girl grumbles that Claudia had better not make them look stupid at their recital.

Claudia feels her confidence slipping. Maybe she doesn't belong in Group Five, and she's not sure she can take another class of girls hating her. As the other girls discuss what song Ms. Manis will give Claudia for her solo, Claudia tells herself she can go the whole season without talking to the other girls. She's not good at making new friends and always had Monday. But now, Claudia feels Monday's absence everywhere. She wonders what Monday would do.

*Though Ms. Valente laughs here, the fact remains that Claudia is lost without Monday. She's never had to think about what she'd like to get out of her future high school experience, aside from spending more time with Monday. And Claudia seems either unwilling or unable to think for herself either without Monday around to guide her.*



*Ms. Valente seems to share Claudia's suspicion that something is wrong. But Ms. Clark insists that there's a very plausible, simple explanation for Monday's absence: she, like so many other local kids, is part of a family that can't afford the rising rents in the area. So in her mind, Monday's absence isn't concerning. As Ms. Valente implies, the school might follow up in other circumstances—but not when it seems like this is a pattern prevalent among many families.*



*The copious misspellings and stilted language in the journal entry once again reveal that Claudia has trouble writing. Claudia's note that she's now in dance classes with high school girls suggests that she sees them as fundamentally different from her—and perhaps, therefore not as possible friends.*



*Once again, Claudia finds herself surrounded by girls who seem intent on making her life miserable. The way they talk about Claudia suggests they might know something that readers don't—for instance, the supposed reason she should be in a little kids' dance class. But this is intentionally left unclear for the reader, as Claudia doesn't know what's going on either and is intent on ignoring their rude remarks.*



*Because Claudia has never had to make friends before thanks to Monday's constant presence, she doesn't have the skills to start making friends now. For now, at least, it seems preferable to be alone, with just Monday's memory for company, than it does to try to start making friends.*



Ms. Manis arrives and calls the class to attention. Claudia follows carefully from the back and ignores the other girls watching her. At the end of class Ms. Manis starts to teach the girls the first parts of the routine they'll perform at their June recital. The recital is a big deal—even the mayor and senators come to see the only all-Black dance school in D.C. In addition to the Group Five routine, each girl will perform a solo. This will be Claudia's first solo. As each girl takes turns with the new routine, Claudia watches. When it's her turn, she shows off with an extra twirl. Her classmates stare, and she overhears High Bun telling another girl that Claudia's good.

*Ms. Manis put Claudia in the Group Five class, which suggests that she believes in Claudia's abilities and considers the class a suitable match for her. And Claudia shows here that she does have the skills foundation to be in this upper level class. It's unclear, then, why the other girls are underestimating her so much. But when Claudia is able to show them that she belongs, she starts to develop some confidence in herself—without Monday's help.*



## CHAPTER 8. THE BEFORE

As Claudia dances to one of Daddy's albums in the living room, she can't help but think that she and Monday need to practice their dancing. As soon as Monday comes out of hiding, they need to work so they can be the co-captains of the high school dance team. Claudia catches sight of herself in the hall mirror and tries to twerk. She used to laugh when Monday tried, but now, Claudia sees that the move makes her a "hot girl." She screams when Ma laughs.

*This passage suggests that Claudia thinks Monday is in hiding. Using a term like this implies that Monday is absent of her own volition—not that something awful has happened to her. The novel implies that this is a naïve view, given that Claudia is either unwilling or unable to consider an alternative. On another note, that Claudia suddenly finds twerking "hot" suggests that she's growing up and developing. And because Claudia and Monday used to dance together, this moment again draws attention to her absence.*



On Saturday, Ma takes Claudia grocery shopping. Claudia leans against the cart and studies a *Seventeen* magazine as Mama orders from the meat counter. Suddenly, something catches Claudia's eye: Monday, in the denim jacket Claudia gave her. Claudia watches Monday disappear down an aisle. She races after her, calling her name. But when Claudia gets close, it's not Monday—it's Monday's older sister, April. April flinches when Claudia says her name. Her face is almost unrecognizable. She looks old, like a mother instead of a 16-year-old.

*Again, noting that Claudia gave Monday the denim jacket might suggest that Monday didn't have access to a lot of new and/or warm clothes at home; she perhaps had to rely on Claudia for a lot of her wardrobe. Seeing April looking so old and worn down implies that April is going through a difficult time, and that the amount of responsibility or stress she's facing has transformed her from a teenager into a worn-out adult.*



Claudia asks where Monday is. April says that she's with their aunt. Claudia takes note of the items in April's cart. There's peanut butter in there, but Monday is allergic to peanut butter. Claudia points out that Monday has already missed a month of school and asks for the aunt's number, but April insists their aunt doesn't have a phone. Claudia desperately asks when Monday will be back. April gives Claudia a dark look, tells Claudia to stay away, and walks off. Claudia figures that April knows she came by. Monday must know too—so why hasn't she called?

*Seeing the peanut butter in the cart is, for Claudia, another clue that Monday isn't at home, just as hearing *The Simpsons* on TV at the Charles's house was a clue. April's behavior doesn't make sense to Claudia because Claudia doesn't believe there should be any reason to keep Monday's whereabouts a secret. This moment begs the question of why April is being so cagey if Monday is indeed safe and sound.*



## CHAPTER 9. ONE YEAR BEFORE THE BEFORE

Claudia and Monday are in the **library**. Monday is aghast that Claudia doesn't have a crush on any boys. Claudia is tired of talking about boys, but Monday is obsessed with them. To Claudia, boys are still "nasty and stupid." Monday asks if there's a girl Claudia likes and insists she's just playing when Claudia is offended. Then, Monday says that her crush, Jacob Miller, sits next to her in history class. Jacob is the best-looking boy in school and knows it, which makes him cocky. Monday has loved him for years.

Monday says that she heard Jacob talking to a teacher about going to Banneker. It'd be awesome if they all went to Banneker—Jacob will play on the basketball team, and the girls will be on the dance team. She and Jacob will be "THE couple," so it's essential that they find Claudia a boyfriend. Claudia notes that Jacob and Monday don't even talk, and Monday reminds Claudia that she's supposed to be helping change that.

Claudia gives Monday her essay to edit. As Monday reads, she stiffens. She snaps that Claudia has to be careful. They won't get into Banneker, she warns, if they put Claudia "in the stupid people class." Monday's anger shocks Claudia and tears fill her eyes. With a sigh, Monday offers to rewrite the essay, which is what Claudia wanted in the first place. She reasons that the idea of going to high school with Jacob is driving Monday mad. Claudia hesitantly says that even if she doesn't get into Banneker, Monday could go to high school with Jacob. But Monday reminds Claudia that they have a plan.

Little August calls for Monday and comes running in the girls' direction, juice box in hand and his braids undone. He says happily that Ms. Paul gave him juice as Monday asks what happened to his hair. She pulls him into her lap and combs his hair. He cries in pain, but Monday snaps at him to shut up. When August asks to go swimming, Monday swats him and says he doesn't swim. To Claudia, Monday and August's relationship looks like "a mother-son dictatorship." Monday finishes August's braids quickly. Claudia, impressed, suggests that Monday could make money doing boys' hair at school.

At school the next day, Monday gazes at Jacob and some other boys. Claudia is nervous and can't believe Monday is going to do this, but Monday touches her intricate hairdo, reminds Claudia that this was her idea, and approaches the boys. She asks the boys if any of them would like their hair done for \$7. A boy named Carl agrees. He reminds his skeptical friends that Monday is a girl, and her hair and August's hair look amazing.

*The difference in the girls' interest in boys reflects that they're at different stages in their sexual development and maturity. Claudia is, in many ways, still a child—boys are "nasty and stupid," and thus not worth associating with. But for Monday, boys are exciting and desirable. And since the girls have very different things they want to talk about, this disconnect starts to cause a rift in their friendship.*



*Monday doesn't seem to see any issue with inviting a new person into her and Claudia's dynamic. She may desire more friends in her life, and dreaming about Jacob may be the most effective way to get around Claudia's insistence that it should just be the two of them.*



*Though the specifics surrounding Claudia's struggles with reading and writing are still unclear, what does shine through here is Claudia's shame about being a poor writer. Both she and Monday seem to believe that whatever challenges that Claudia faces with writing makes her "stupid," which likely increases her shame. Claudia offers to give Monday more room to be independent when she suggests that Monday can go to Banneker with Jacob without her. Monday's refusal, though, shows that she's just as committed to their friendship as Claudia is.*



*Here, Claudia express some discomfort with the way Monday talks to August when she describes their relationship as a "mother-son dictatorship." The fact that Monday is seemingly mothering August may suggest that she has more responsibilities at home than most 13-year-old girls, and it also harks back to the earlier mention that Monday and August's older sister, April, looked stressed and worn down and far older than a teenager.*



*Claudia is generally hesitant to share Monday with everyone else. She may be nervous because of Monday's end goal (wooing Jacob). But it also seems possible that Claudia is uncomfortable because she fears that if Monday asserts herself as a skilled braider, Monday will rise in popularity—possibly leaving Claudia behind as she climbs the social ladder at school.*



Monday and Carl sit at a bench and the other boys stand in a semicircle around them. Shayla and Ashley stand nearby to watch. A half hour later, everyone is in awe of Monday's work, and other boys ask if they can be next. Later that evening, Monday and Claudia enjoy a snack in Claudia's makeshift tent. Monday reasons that she can do four boys' hair per week and suggests that Claudia start doing people's nails. They toast to their business partnership with Cokes.

Monday and Claudia decide to change into sweats and go watch a movie. Monday pulls her sweater off and Claudia's mouth drops open at the sight of a huge purple bruise on her back. Monday looks terrified. After almost a minute of silence, she says she fell out of bed—she sleeps “crazy” after all. This is a lie; Monday always sleeps like a rock. Claudia shakes her head, says, “Again,” and suggests that Monday move to the bottom bunk.

Monday's bedroom is a mystery to Claudia. Whenever Claudia asks Monday to describe it, Monday gives a vague answer and insists it's not big enough. Claudia imagines it as big, with cream and pink furnishings and an iPod speaker. She's not sure why—maybe she just wants what's best for Monday.

Monday asks what movie Claudia wants to watch and suddenly things are back to normal. Claudia wonders how she could *not* believe Monday's explanation. Monday's her best friend and if she's lying, she must be lying for a good reason—right?

## CHAPTER 10. THE BEFORE

Claudia's stomach clenches as she stares at the essay prompt asking why she wants to attend Banneker. The only answer Claudia has is that Monday wants to go. Claudia's guidance counselor, Mr. Hill, calls for her attention. He reminds her that Banneker is tough and requires recommendation letters, a high GPA, and an interview. Claudia doesn't know why Monday wanted to go, but she's sure Monday had been prepping. Mr. Hill asks how Claudia's doing, since her grades are slipping. With Monday gone, it's too hard to finish papers and read books. But she tells Mr. Hill that everyone is struggling with the difficult coursework.

*Monday is making it clear that her braiding business doesn't need to drive a wedge between her and Claudia. If Claudia starts doing people's nails, they can use this collaborative business venture to deepen their friendship. Talking about this in Claudia's tent, where the environment is cozy and familiar, speaks to the girls' desire to keep things warm and friendly between them.*



*This bruise seems likely to be one of the red flags that Claudia admits she missed in the “October” chapter. A bruise like this is concerning, especially when the explanation for how Monday got it is clearly a lie. Claudia shows that she's ignored bruises like this before when she says “again”—meaning that Monday's bruises are relatively common.*



*The aside about wanting the best for Monday suggests that Claudia is, on some level, aware that Monday's home life isn't good. Imagining the best for her is an act of love—but by showing Monday her love in this way, Claudia also chooses not to act on possible signs of abuse and neglect.*



*Here, Claudia explains why she ignores signs of abuse and neglect. She trusts Monday completely, and she specifically trusts Monday to only lie if she has a “good” reason. It doesn't seem to occur to Claudia that Monday might be lying out of shame, and that to Monday, this is a good reason.*



*Claudia reveals here just how much she relied on Monday to help her complete her schoolwork. Without Monday around, it's too hard to finish anything school related. Importantly, though, Claudia doesn't want adults to find out she struggles with reading because she's ashamed. This is why she insists to Mr. Hill that she's not the only one struggling. And while it may be true that other kids are struggling, it seems unlikely that they're all struggling with unidentified learning difficulties.*



Mr. Hill notes that the Learning Center is offering peer tutors after school, but Claudia leaps up at the mention of the Learning Center. She promises to do better, and then asks if Mr. Hill knows why Monday isn't in school. Mr. Hill thinks she moved. When Claudia mentions that Monday's phone is disconnected, Mr. Hill promises to dig up his second number for Monday's house and call. He offers again to put Claudia in touch with the Learning Center, but Claudia quickly departs.

*Mr. Hill makes the case that there's help for kids struggling with school if they want it—but they have to consent to the help. Because of Claudia's shame, she has no intention of going along with this suggestion to seek tutoring. Turning the conversation to Monday is a way for Claudia to keep bugging school officials and try to make them care that Monday is missing, but it's also a convenient way to distract Mr. Hill from the matter at hand.*



In the lunch line, Claudia tells herself everything will be okay. She feels like her bubble is caving in on her, and she'll suffocate if Monday doesn't return. From behind, Claudia hears kids gossiping about Mrs. Charles sending Monday away because she and Claudia are lesbians. One kid says that Monday's a "ho," just like her sister. The conversation turns to the city closing Ed Borough. Kids say that the city is going to let residents move back once they build new houses, but another said that won't happen.

*Again, this passage makes it clear that Claudia's school environment is ruthless. Kids are willing to bully their classmates for any perceived difference—and because Claudia is now on her own, the bullying hurts more. But when the kids discuss Ed Borough closing, it shows readers how precarious these kids' living situations might be. It's unclear where the families who are forced to move out are going to go.*



After school, Claudia heads for the **library**. She thinks that "the library held millions of stories in a glass house." Claudia's bubble feels that way—like her secrets will leak out if someone punctures it. She greets Ms. Paul, who asks where Monday is. Claudia lies that Monday is just busy. Ms. Paul says she thought she moved, since she usually sees Monday all summer at camp. This shocks Claudia; Monday always insisted she hung out at home over the summer. Ms. Paul continues that she only asks because Monday has an overdue book. This is unusual for Monday. The book is *Flowers in the Attic*. Claudia promises to tell Monday and runs to the media room. Monday checked that book out a week before Claudia left for Georgia, and she checked it out often. Why would Monday still have it?

*Equating herself with a glass library shows how precarious Claudia thinks her situation is as she tries to keep her difficulties reading a secret. In addition, she's also trying not to seem too desperate to find Monday. Lying to Ms. Paul about Monday's whereabouts, though, indicates that Claudia doesn't want to accept that Monday is missing and might be in trouble. As a librarian, Ms. Paul might be able to help track Monday down—but only if she knew Monday might need help. In this way, Claudia unwittingly walls herself off from someone who could possibly help her.*



Monday and Claudia have been trick-or-treating together in matching costumes since third grade. The plan was to go as sexy cops this year. Now, a week before Halloween, Claudia sits at the kitchen table laboring over a history project. She and Monday used to do projects together; Monday put together the content, while Claudia made the projects look good. Claudia thinks of her daily check-ins with Mr. Hill to see if he called Monday's house yet. It feels like he's never going to call.

*With Monday gone, Claudia has to adjust a new normal where she has to do everything by and for herself. And in the case of the history project, Claudia also has to do things by herself that she's never had to do before, like come up with the content. This kind of independence is very uncomfortable for her, in part because it also forces her to feel Monday's loss.*



Ma sighs that things have been so busy that she totally forgot about Halloween—she only knows it’s Halloween because of a party she’s catering. Claudia sighs and focuses on her project. She pulls phrases out of the textbook, even though she knows it’s cheating. Her written words don’t “look right,” either. Ma chatters on and asks if Claudia is too big for a Halloween costume. Claudia feels like her bubble is boiling. When Mama finally asks what’s wrong and reminds Claudia that she and Monday used to love Halloween, Claudia loses it. She sobs that she’s not excited because Monday’s gone and she doesn’t have anyone else to go trick-or-treating with.

Soothingly, Ma rubs Claudia’s back and says that Claudia does have friends. She ignores Claudia saying she doesn’t and dishes up ice cream. Ma suggests that after church, they could go by Monday’s house to chat with Mrs. Charles. She says they can go if Claudia joins the teen ministry. Claudia initially refuses—it’ll just make her more of a target at school—but when Ma says that this is the deal, Claudia agrees.

## CHAPTER 11. THE AFTER

Claudia writes another note to Monday, lamenting that they won’t be sexy cops this year—Claudia can’t wear that to church. She asks if Monday has her orange cardigan and tells her how disappointed she is to go to the church Halloween party. Many words are misspelled.

Claudia stands by the refreshment table in the church basement, enjoying Ma’s apple pie and observing the boring party. Suddenly, a voice scares her, asking if she’s going to stand there the entire night. The voice belongs to a tall, muscular boy behind Claudia. Claudia doesn’t recognize him at first, but when he introduces himself as Michael, she remembers—this is Mikey. Michael insists he doesn’t use Mikey anymore. He was always the chubby kid, but over the last summer he’s grown into a giant.

Michael jokes that he’s here to help with the DJ equipment and asks if Claudia has any requests. She doesn’t remember him being so funny and requests several go-go bands with good dance songs. At this, Michael lights up and asks if Claudia is going to join the dance ministry again. Claudia insists she’s too busy. She’s confused as to why Michael is acting so friendly—and wonders when he got so cute.

*The way that Claudia describes how she’s putting together her project clarifies some of the issues she has with reading and writing. The note that her words don’t “look right” suggests she knows what correct writing looks like, but she can’t mimic it. Ma’s cheer seems somewhat forced and as though she doesn’t totally realize how much Claudia is struggling. Some of this may be because Claudia is very carefully avoiding making it a big deal as to not arouse suspicion.*



*Ma’s insistence that Claudia has friends highlights how little she knows about her daughter. The passages of the novel that take place at school make it clear that Claudia is right: Monday was her only friend. In her absence, she’s totally alone.*



*The girls’ costume idea indicates that they are starting to grow up and experiment with their sexualities. With Monday gone, Claudia doesn’t feel comfortable engaging in that kind of experimentation all on her own. This points back to her first day at school without Monday, when she felt uncomfortable wearing her hair in a more mature style without Monday there to bolster her confidence.*



*Though Claudia feels totally alone, Michael’s willingness to approach her offers hope that this won’t be the case forever. Having to attend the church party instead of trick-or-treating, meanwhile, is a major departure from previous years, and it again forces Claudia to feel the sting of Monday’s absence.*



*In this passage, Claudia’s confusion mirrors the reader’s. In the “Before” timeline, Claudia is still a part of the dance ministry at church, so it seems like she quit sometime between the “Before” and “After” timelines. Further, Claudia seems oddly suspicious of Michael’s friendliness, as well as how he suddenly got more attractive.*



Claudia asks Michael about high school and, when he mentions he's on the football team, asks if he lost weight that way. Michael asks why Claudia hasn't been to a harvest party before. Claudia is at a loss and doesn't know how to explain Monday's sudden absence, but says that she used to go trick-or-treating with a friend. Michael's eyes go wide, but Claudia insists that's kid stuff. When Michael suggests they hang out sometime, Claudia grows suspicious. Michael says she could use a friend. Claudia snappily asks if Ma put him up to this. She doesn't let him respond before storming away.

*Because Claudia has really only had Monday as a friend for years, she doesn't have the skills to make friends on her own. This explains why she asks Michael questions that come off as rude and struggles to connect with him. Claudia is also trying very hard to look mature, which is why she refers to trick-or-treating as kid stuff. But she's also struggling with Monday's disappearance, and that seems to be contributing to her awkwardness.*



## CHAPTER 12. TWO YEARS BEFORE THE BEFORE

Mrs. Charles grins and tells Claudia and Monday, dressed as matching bees, to let her check their candy for razor blades and drugs. The girls buzz at each other as Ma greets April, who stayed with baby Tuesday while the girls went trick-or-treating. Ma touches Tuesday's cheek with a faraway look in her eyes and says she's perfect. Claudia rushes to Ma, pulling her out of her trance, and asks if Monday can sleep over. Ma agrees.

*It's hard to tell if Mrs. Charles is joking or not about looking for razor blades and drugs in the girls' Halloween candy—here, the novel makes it unclear if she's just a concerned parent, or if she's prone to believing in conspiracy theories. Meanwhile, Ma's faraway expression when she looks at baby Tuesday suggests that she misses having a baby around—something that will come up again later in the novel.*



In the kitchen, Monday watches Mrs. Charles closely in case she steals candy while August plays under the table. Monday and Claudia skip to the fridge. In low voices, Mrs. Charles asks if Ma saw Shayla's mom's face—it looked like her husband kicked her. Ma says she'll pray for her, but Mrs. Charles insists they have to do more. They argue about whether that sort of thing is "private married folks' business," as Ma insists, or whether they should contact a doctor. Mrs. Charles asks Ma to talk to Shayla's mom's grandma, who attends the same church. She asks if Ma would want Claudia seeing her like that.

*Here, Mrs. Charles suggests that it's a community's responsibility to protect its members from danger and abuse. This is why she begs Ma to intervene on Shayla's mom's behalf. To Ma, though, domestic violence is a private concern between two spouses and it's not her place to intervene. (Later in the novel, both Ma and Daddy will take this same perspective as it relates to Monday's home life.) But mentioning that they could contact a doctor about the abuse shows that these women do have access to a system that will help them intervene.*



Ma and Mrs. Charles don't like each other, and Ma's eyes narrow. To relieve the tension, Claudia asks if she can use the computer. Ma sniffs that it has a virus still, and Mrs. Charles insists the government tracks people through computers—it even monitors what books people check out from the **library**. Claudia asks why anyone would care. Mrs. Charles says they want to get inside people's heads, but Ma cuts her off and sends Claudia and Monday upstairs. Monday darts away but comes back and hesitantly kisses Mrs. Charles when she asks.

*Here, Mrs. Charles shows that she is indeed prone to buying into conspiracy theories. Claudia is rational, though, so she recognizes that the government doesn't care what she checks out from the library. It's worth noting that Monday seems to not want to kiss her mother before running upstairs, which implies that she and Mrs. Charles don't have a very affectionate relationship.*



Claudia dawdles, afraid to leave Ma and Mrs. Charles alone. The women continue to discuss contacting Shayla’s grandma, and Ma insists it’s not her place—even when Mrs. Charles spits that Shayla’s dad will kill her mom soon. She insists that Ma has a responsibility to help. Ma looks up in time to see Claudia, so Claudia races into her bedroom. Monday says that even though Shayla says her mom had an accident, it was actually a punch. Claudia insists there’s no way to know for sure, but Monday says they can’t know that it *didn’t* happen, either.

*Mrs. Charles insists that there’s a clear, moral reason to intervene: they will, on some level, be responsible if Shayla’s dad kills her mom. This suggests more broadly that keeping people safe is a community endeavor. Monday’s insistence that Shayla’s dad definitely hit her mom raises questions about how she’s able to say this with such certainty. It suggests she might have firsthand experience with abuse (and can thus recognize the signs of it), which Claudia has indicated is true in the “October” chapter.*



Monday stares out the window and asks if Claudia really thinks the government is tracking their **library** books. Claudia shrugs; even if they’re being tracked, they’re just checking out “kiddie books.” The next day at church, Ma talks to Shayla’s grandma. After Shayla’s grandma talks to the school, Shayla’s dad goes into hiding.

*Claudia has nothing to hide, so it doesn’t matter to her if the government is tracking her library books. This begs the question, then, of why Monday is so curious about whether the tracking is real. When Shayla’s dad goes into hiding, it shows that speaking up for someone suffering abuse can have meaningful, positive consequences.*



## CHAPTER 13. NOVEMBER

If Mrs. Charles were a color, she would be bright yellow, like a banana, pineapple, or dandelion. But Claudia notes that a single drop of another color will spoil the yellow—and “dandelions are nothing but pretty weeds.”

*Here, Claudia suggests that Mrs. Charles isn’t all bad. But saying that dandelions are just pretty weeds suggests that Mrs. Charles is actually a sinister character—it implies she’s a “weed” existing amongst other flowers.*



## CHAPTER 14. THE BEFORE

If God is listening to Claudia’s prayers, he’d make sure her grades get lost in the mail and keep her parents from discovering she’s failing everything but biology. Everything will go back to normal once Claudia finds Monday, but she needs help now, so she seeks out Ms. Valente.

*Claudia feels that finding Monday would solve everything that’s going wrong in her life. This underlines just how much Claudia relied on Monday to get through the school day, as it seems her grades are slipping exclusively because Monday can’t help her anymore.*



Ms. Valente offers Claudia half her sandwich and, after a few minutes of stilted conversation about school, Ms. Valente asks what’s wrong. Claudia asks if she ever found out any info about Monday. Ms. Valente is surprised that Monday is still missing. She drops her sandwich and leads Claudia to the office.

*When Ms. Valente acts surprised about Monday’s absence, it suggests that there’s a major disconnect between the different parties trying to track down Monday. But the fact that Ms. Valente goes back to the office suggests that bureaucracy may prevent her from effectively being able to follow up on Monday.*



At the office, Ms. Valente asks Ms. Clark about Monday. Ms. Clark shares that the phone is out of service, but a social worker asked CFSA to follow up. Ms. Valente notes that that happened weeks ago. Claudia asks what CFSA is, and Ms. Valente says it stands for Child and Family Services Agency. Ms. Clark says the social worker is having a personal emergency, so it'll be a bit before they can check in.

Ms. Valente leads Claudia back to the classroom. Claudia asks why Monday has a social worker, and Ms. Valente says that some families need extra help. She says this is probably a case of missed emails, and there's no reason to worry. Claudia tries to keep her imagination in check, but when she thinks of social workers, she thinks of child abuse. Monday would've told Claudia if she was being abused—right?

*Ms. Clark's excuses for the social worker show that the social workers might not be taking Monday's case as seriously as they could be. As far as Claudia's concerned, Monday needs to be checked on now—not when the social worker is back from their emergency. This passage also emphasizes that Monday isn't a priority to CFSA.*



*Ms. Valente acknowledges outright that bureaucracy can make it difficult to get kids the help they need. Learning that Monday has a social worker transforms Claudia's thinking and makes the possibility that Monday is in real trouble seem even more likely. But again, Claudia trusts Monday so fully, it's almost inconceivable to think that Monday wouldn't have told her about any abuse.*



## CHAPTER 15. THE AFTER

Claudia notes that people probably associate dance with colors like pink and white. She thinks of simple colors like gray and charcoal, since she tries to look like “shadows on a page” when she dances. Claudia and Ms. Manis are the only ones in the studio. Ms. Manis calls Claudia over to talk about her solo. She explains that she chooses songs for the pieces to challenge her students, so they don't stay in their comfort zones with their favorite music. Then, she puts on a song: Adele's “All I Ask.” Claudia listens for a minute and then notes that it's slow—most jazz dancers stick to faster music. Ms. Manis explains that this is the perfect song for healing. Claudia is disappointed. She can't use the moves that she and Monday came up with on a slow song.

After the lesson, as Claudia heads for the locker room, she accidentally slams into High Bun. The girl apologizes, opens a locker, and reminds Claudia her name is Megan. Megan asks if Claudia got her solo song yet. When Claudia says it's an Adele song, Megan says it'll be pretty and heads into the studio.

*Talking about color like this is a way for Claudia to help make sense of the world around her. It seems that, given her struggles with the written word, color and dance help her to put things in perspective and understand the world around her. On another note, when Ms. Manis explains her reasoning for choosing her dancers' music, she shows that she's interested in helping her students grow and mature. To her, a slow song will help Claudia grow and “heal.” This, of course, begs the question of what exactly Claudia is healing from. For Claudia, though, this is ridiculous—she doesn't want to mature in this way if it means she has to leave behind everything she choreographed with Monday.*



*Though Claudia has vowed to not connect with the girls in her dance class, Megan shows her that she's not actually as stuck up and different as Claudia seemed to think she was. She even seems supportive of Claudia—suggesting that if Claudia makes the effort, the dance girls may be future friends.*



## CHAPTER 16. THE BEFORE

It takes two weeks, but Ma finally agrees to stop by Monday's house after church. For some reason, Monday's house seems colder and scarier than the others around it. Ma checks in with Daddy before they go to the door to leave "breadcrumbs," and Claudia knows that Ma doesn't feel safe in Monday's neighborhood. Ma knocks on the door and Claudia looks up at a curtain flapping. Claudia says, "Monday?" as Ma calls out to Mrs. Charles. Claudia can tell someone is watching from upstairs and taps Ma's arm. This just annoys Ma—and Ma jumps as the locks click open.

Mrs. Charles appears in the doorway and stares out with narrow eyes. Ma sighs as Mrs. Charles notes that people are starting to get eviction notices so the city can build condos here. Ma shares that the pastor wants to form a coalition to help those affected, but Mrs. Charles huffs that he probably just wants people's money. Ma assures her the pastor would help anyone. Mrs. Charles says they'll need help—the landlord is about to close down Jak and Co, the complex where she works. No one else will hire a Black woman and it seems like the city just wants her house.

Ma says that they stopped by because Claudia misses Monday. With a laugh, Mrs. Charles said that she told Claudia that Monday is with her daddy last time Claudia stopped by. Ma gives Claudia a scorching look. Mrs. Charles says Ma knows how kids are, and reminds Ma that she could only have one child. Ma sucks in her breath and asks Mrs. Charles to say hi to Monday. She drags Claudia to the car and once they're inside, tells Claudia to be quiet.

Ma likes to use Daddy as a threat, so instead of telling him that Claudia went to Monday's, she forces Claudia to help her prep for Thanksgiving. Claudia cleans the house and then works in the kitchen. Daddy gets home from his last delivery, kisses Ma, and looks at Claudia. He knows if she's in the kitchen, she's in trouble. Ma and Daddy chat as Claudia grates cheese. Claudia thinks how strange it is that Monday is with her dad, since she never talked about him. He left after Tuesday was born. It doesn't make sense why Monday is there without her siblings—or why they have a social worker.

*Claudia and Ma's consistent attempts to leave "breadcrumbs" highlight the differences between their family and Monday's. The breadcrumbs are supposed to mean that Daddy can track down Ma if she doesn't return in a matter of hours, whereas few people seem particularly concerned that Monday has been gone for months now.*



*Mrs. Charles shows here that she's in an impossible position. She might lose her home due to rising rents and the fact that the city wants her house, and she might not be able to afford the rising rent if she can't get another job. In this way, Mrs. Charles and her entire family are stuck. Because of racist, exclusionary policy at the city level, the Charles family and other families in similar situations may end up with nowhere to live.*



*Claudia previously acknowledged that Ma and Mrs. Charles don't like each other, and Mrs. Charles's comment that Ma could only have one child again speaks to this dynamic. With this comment, Mrs. Charles attempts to make Ma uncomfortable with ever coming back and talking to her again. This separates the families even further from each other, and makes it less likely that Claudia's family will be able to help find Monday.*



*Because Claudia is so logical, she's able to see the holes in Mrs. Charles's story. Recognizing this is a step in the right direction for Claudia, as it shows that she's developing critical thinking skills—and, by extension, growing up and maturing.*



Nonchalantly, Ma asks Daddy if he knows Tip Charles and if they're still in touch. Daddy frowns and asks why she cares. Ma says that Monday is supposedly with him, and she wants to check on her. Claudia realizes Ma doesn't believe Mrs. Charles's story. But Daddy sighs that this is the Charles's family business and he doesn't want to get mixed up in it. Ma smiles, but Claudia knows she's angry. Daddy refuses to track down Tip's number until Ma finally snaps and shouts at him. Daddy agrees to try.

*Though Ma doesn't seem as intent on finding Monday as Claudia is, she nevertheless shows here that she thinks it's her family's responsibility to check in on Monday's wellbeing. Daddy seems to propose that the Charles family should deal with their own business privately. But this passage also harks back to the idea that Shayla's mom escaped her husband's abuse only because people in church intervened and spoke up on her behalf.*



## CHAPTER 17. ONE YEAR BEFORE THE BEFORE

Claudia is half asleep when she hears pebbles hitting her window. She tiptoes downstairs to let Monday in. Monday slips off her wet clothes and says she has something to tell Claudia: she's been out all night with Jacob Miller. Claudia screams. The girls get bowls of cereal and run upstairs to their tent. Monday tells Claudia everything: she snuck out of the bathroom window because Jacob asked her to meet him. She says the jump was fine, she's done it before. Claudia thinks that's weird, but reasons Monday has just been practicing fire drills.

*The fact that Monday has had to jump out of the bathroom window before is significant, because it suggests that she often has to escape her home life. But because abuse is so far outside of Claudia's lived experience—and because she trusts Monday so fully—she has to come up with a more palatable explanation for Monday's behavior. Having to climb out of windows to practice for a fire might make sense for Claudia's comparatively idyllic life.*



Monday says that Jacob wanted her to do his hair, but not around anyone else. His mom was out, so they hung out in his living room. Monday did his hair and then they put on a movie—and kissed. Claudia buries her face in a doll's hair and asks if they did it, but Monday says they didn't. She doesn't want to until he tells everyone at school that they're together. Then Monday says she's going to tell her mom she was at Claudia's, since "she won't know the difference."

*Insisting that Mrs. Charles "won't know the difference" suggests that Mrs. Charles doesn't keep close tabs on her daughter. Monday could, it seems, be going all manner of places—but Mrs. Charles won't investigate as long as Monday can lie that she was with Claudia. This detail points back to the earlier mention that Monday is capable of lying as though out of self-preservation, which implies that lying to her mother is necessary.*



Claudia asks what kissing was like. Monday describes it as being just like it looks in movies, which seems gross to Claudia. She feels jealous as she thinks of Monday kissing boys and doing big things—all without her. Monday notices this and asks Claudia what's up, but Claudia brushes it off. Monday insists they just need to find Claudia a boyfriend now. She'll ask Jacob—he'll know someone. Claudia asks what'll happen "if they find out that...you know?" Monday insists the boys are too dumb to tell.

*The fact that Monday was out kissing a boy without her throws it into sharp relief that Monday is maturing, while Claudia isn't there yet. She also shows here that she may struggle with getting to know anyone else aside from Monday, given that she's so afraid of someone discovering her learning disabilities.*



The next morning, Claudia gets to school early, eager to see Jacob announce that he and Monday are together. Monday did her hair in a twist and Claudia painted her nails. With a bit of makeup, Monday looks like a different person. Jacob stands across the yard. His hair looks great—but he doesn't look away from his friends. On the way to History, Carl asks who did Jacob's hair. With a shrug, Jacob says it was just a girl in his neighborhood. Monday looks to Claudia, who whispers that he must just be nervous. But Jacob doesn't say anything all day and ignores Monday.

*As a good friend, Claudia does what she can to make Monday feel better and assure her that everything is going to work out with Jacob. But Claudia can only help so much when Jacob is so rudely brushing Monday off. Indeed, this behavior suggests he's not honestly interested in dating her.*



## CHAPTER 18. THE BEFORE

After Thanksgiving, Mr. Hill requests a special meeting with Ma and Daddy. Claudia's grades never showed up—either God was listening or the school held them back for terrifying reasons. Claudia waits outside Mr. Hill's office and jumps when he walks by. She notices that he has a big folder with her name on it. If Monday were here, she could help. Claudia pesters Mr. Hill about contacting Monday, but Ma and Daddy arrive, cutting off the conversation.

*Claudia continues to fixate on what would be better if Monday were still around. This meeting, Claudia implies, is Monday's fault—she'd still be quietly getting by in her classes if Monday could help her with her homework. But now, Claudia is on her own, and this is wildly uncomfortable. It also feels like a betrayal.*



Everyone enters the conference room. Ms. O'Donnell is already there, and Claudia wants to vomit. Mr. Hill says everyone knows Claudia has been struggling, but Ma sharply says she has no idea. Ms. O'Donnell passes Claudia's work to Ma and Daddy. Ma mutters that Claudia's letters are backwards, and Mr. Hill says most of Claudia's work is like this. Ms. O'Donnell asks if Ma and Daddy helped Claudia with her homework in years past, since this seems to be a new problem. Ma bristles at the implied accusation—but admits that Claudia used to do all her homework with a friend.

*Finally, it comes out that Monday has been propping Claudia up in terms of schoolwork for years. When Ma makes it clear that she had no idea Claudia was struggling academically, it suggests there may be some issues with how the school communicates with parents. Mr. Hill implies that he expects Ma and Daddy to know—which shows, perhaps, that the school expects to work with highly involved parents and struggles to serve parents who aren't as involved as possible.*



Mr. Hill says they believe Claudia has dyslexia. The word seems to burn Claudia. She's been avoiding it for years and now, it seems like a needle popping her bubble. Ma asks how this is possible when Claudia just aced a math test, but Mr. Hill explains that the math teacher prints her tests on blue paper—colored paper can make it easier for kids with dyslexia. Daddy asks why they didn't catch this before now. Mr. Hill and Ms. O'Donnell don't have an answer, but Mr. Hill suggests this could explain Claudia's other behavioral issues.

*The aside that Claudia has been avoiding the word "dyslexia" for years suggests that she's known for some time that she struggles with this particular learning disability. The fact that it burns highlights how shameful she feels dyslexia is. Daddy's question of why this diagnosis took so long suggests that the school doesn't take as much time to get to know their students and help them succeed individually.*



Incensed, Ma asks if Mr. Hill is referring to the picture spread over the internet, or the boy who touched Claudia's butt. Mr. Hill reminds Ma this isn't the *only* fight Claudia's been in and Ma looks down. Daddy asks what's going on, but Ma says they'll talk later. Mr. Hill says the next step is to formally identify Claudia as a student with learning disabilities, which will entitle her to extra help. Ms. O'Donnell says this is a good thing, since knowing is half the battle. Mr. Hill assures Ma and Daddy that they'll get Claudia to graduation, while Ms. O'Donnell says they'll get her resources.

Daddy says they need to speak in private and leads Ma and Claudia out to the car. Ma gripes about how rude Mr. Hill and Ms. O'Donnell were, and how ridiculous it is that they didn't catch the dyslexia sooner. It seems like the school is just worried about their ranking, not Claudia. Daddy asks Ma what she's keeping from him. He starts the car. As they pass Ed Borough, Claudia thinks this wouldn't have happened if Monday were here to help. She asks if Daddy got in touch with Tip, but Dad tells Claudia to forget about Monday until her grades improve.

## CHAPTER 19. DECEMBER

Claudia says she saw Jacob Miller a while ago. They hadn't seen each other since "it" happened and the police were questioning everyone about Monday. After they found Monday, Jacob switched schools, drank, and smoked. People say that what happened to Monday changed him, but Claudia doesn't believe it. She thinks he's still using Monday—and she hopes it messed with him the same way he messed with Monday. Ma encourages Claudia to forgive him. This is why Ma would be pink if she were a color. She's sweet and loving. But when Ma doesn't get what she needs, she becomes white, "a color aching in want."

## CHAPTER 20. ONE YEAR BEFORE THE BEFORE

Claudia and Monday are in the school bathroom. Monday moans that Jacob swore he was going to say something. She and Jacob have been seeing each other on weekends for three weeks now, but he still hasn't said anything at school. Monday says she's stupid, but Claudia assures her it's not her fault. Secretly, she thinks Monday should've expected this, but that seems mean. Claudia hugs Monday, but Monday yelps. Monday pulls back, sizes Claudia up, and then pulls her collar down to expose her shoulder. It's chewed and bright red. Claudia can see teeth marks. Monday explains that August has been having tantrums—but she's more concerned about what to do about Jacob. She insists she can't just forget him.

*In this passage, Ms. O'Donnell and Mr. Hill both talk about how the school will handle Claudia's diagnosis, but their methods contrast sharply. Mr. Hill is concerned with assuring Ma and Daddy that Claudia will graduate, while Ms. O'Donnell wants them to know that they'll help Claudia as much as they can. Ms. O'Donnell shows here why some students love her and appreciate her: she genuinely wants to get her students the help they need so they can succeed, even if she's not as warm and outwardly caring as a teacher like Ms. Valente.*



*Here, Daddy is upset that Ma has apparently been concealing Claudia's fight from him. But the way he's spoken about Monday the last few months to Claudia is driving her to be more secretive. With this, the novel shows that Daddy doesn't always behave in a way that encourages his family members to be truthful with him, even if he prizes the truth.*



*Finally, Claudia reveals that "they" did find Monday at some point. But she also implies that the circumstances surrounding Monday's discovery were traumatizing, given how Jacob responded. Claudia doesn't want to forgive Jacob because she's so loyal to Monday, and Jacob hurt her by blowing her off at school. The note that Ma is sometimes "aching in want" suggests that Ma hasn't gotten everything she wants out of life—and maybe takes her disappointments out on others.*



*Claudia is starting to mature and think critically about how to be a good friend here. She realizes that the last thing Monday needs right now is to feel even worse about the Jacob situation, which is why Claudia soothes Monday instead. Her attempts to comfort Monday, though, aren't as successful as they might be otherwise because of this most recent injury. It's telling that Monday "sizes Claudia up" before showing her the injury, suggesting that Monday doesn't feel entirely comfortable being honest about her home life and perhaps doesn't think Claudia can handle the truth.*



Monday says she has to know as the bell rings. She storms into the hallway with Claudia close behind. They approach Jacob. His hair is freshly done, and he's talking to a girl. Claudia grabs Monday's arm and in their secret language, says he's not worth it. Monday rushes ahead and tells Jacob they need to talk. She asks if he's going to pretend they didn't do anything over the weekend. Jacob brushes Monday off, but Monday tells him to tell everyone who does his hair. She tells him to say that he calls her to tell her to come over. A crowd forms around them.

Trevor asks Jacob if he's been sleeping with Monday. Jacob says he doesn't kiss and tell, but he's not going to lie that Monday came over. Monday's eyes grow huge. Shayla interjects that Monday totally slept with Jacob—she's a “ho,” just like April. Monday says she didn't and Claudia tries to drag her away. Monday pleads with Jacob to tell the truth. Grinning, he says they didn't have sex—but only because Monday admitted she prefers having sex with Claudia. Everyone laughs as the girls look at each other, confused. They're just friends.

Monday snaps, though Claudia doesn't understand why. She rushes Jacob, hits him, and slaps him with her books. Jacob fights back and throws Monday down. Claudia pummels his back. Claudia notices the pure rage in Monday's eyes. No one in the hallway moves as Monday slams Jacob's head again and again. A teacher finally breaks up the fight and drags Monday and Claudia to the principal's office. Claudia assures Monday that Mrs. Charles will understand, but Monday says she won't. Her mom will kill her.

Claudia has only been in the principal's office once, when a boy touched her butt and Ms. Valente saw it happen. Ma had been ready to burn the school down. Now, Claudia expects Ma to come in ready to kill. But Mrs. Charles is there first. She gives Monday and Claudia a look that could kill and Claudia notices Monday go pale. The principal steps out and explains what happened. The girls will be suspended for fighting. Without flinching, Mrs. Charles asks the girls for their story. Claudia says that Jacob spread lies about having sex with Monday and wouldn't stop. Mrs. Charles tells the principal that Monday wouldn't hurt someone without a reason; she trusts Monday.

*Jacob seems to be using Monday so that he can improve his appearance and woo other girls at school. There's a lopsided power dynamic here: Jacob is the best-looking boy at school and seems pretty popular, and though Monday may be useful to her classmates because of her braiding skills, it also doesn't seem like she and Claudia have many friends. This may be a dangerous choice socially for Monday to call Jacob out in public.*



*When Shayla describes April as promiscuous (using a derogatory term for a prostitute), it shows that April's reputation is widespread. It's not just something that follows April when she's around her peers—even kids several years younger know about her reputation. For Monday, this presents a major problem. She seems to want Jacob to insist that she's not doing anything untoward and to acknowledge that he's asked her to come over, but instead, Jacob chooses to hurt her. And not just that, but damage her reputation even more by insisting that she and Claudia are romantically involved. This, the novel suggests, will make them into even easier bullying targets.*



*In Claudia's experience, parents might get angry, but they will also be rational and safe to talk to. Given Monday's response and what readers know or suspect at this point in the book about abuse she suffers at home, Monday doesn't seem to have the luxury of a safe, rational parent. Claudia seems to believe that they fought Jacob for valid reasons, so it won't be hard to convince their parents of this.*



*Claudia is getting mixed messages here. Mrs. Charles gives a look that terrifies Monday, which may support that she's abusing her daughter or won't take her seriously. But then, Mrs. Charles also insists to the principal that she trusts Monday and expects Monday to defend herself if necessary. Claudia seems to take Mrs. Charles's attempts at rational conversation more seriously, while Monday's terror implies that readers should take Monday seriously instead.*



The principal insists that Monday made the first move and says that anyway, there are rules about fighting in school. Mrs. Charles asks if he's going to let Jacob spread lies about her daughter. Suddenly, something catches Mrs. Charles's attention. She marches to Monday and pulls her collar down to reveal the bite mark, which is now bleeding. Claudia, desperate, says that Jacob did it. Mrs. Charles screams at the principal until Ma arrives. The principal dismisses the girls and doesn't mention suspension again.

Outside, Ma asks for someone to tell her what happened. Ma scolds Claudia for fighting, but Mrs. Charles insists that girls fight. When Ma says *her* daughter doesn't fight, Mrs. Charles is offended. Claudia realizes that Ma expects behavior like this from Monday, but not her. Mrs. Charles hisses for Monday to follow her. Claudia doesn't think that Monday's obvious fear of Mrs. Charles seems normal, but Ma tells Claudia to be quiet and follow her home.

Claudia does chores all weekend and can't get ahold of Monday. On Monday morning, Monday arrives at school stumbling, with glassy eyes and white lips. Her clothes are filthy and her hair is a mess. Worst of all, she smells like urine. Kids heckle her until Ms. Valente takes her to the nurse for fresh clothes.

## CHAPTER 21. THE AFTER

In her journal, Claudia writes to Monday. She writes that Ma hired Ms. Walker as a tutor and may even "let them put [her] in the Learning Centr!" Claudia asks where Monday is and how she can just disappear.

*The bite mark, of course, came from August and not Jacob. But because Claudia is so intensely loyal to Monday, she sees it as her responsibility to do whatever she can to protect Monday from her mother's wrath. It's also worth considering that if the school does suspend Monday, she'll be stuck at home with Mrs. Charles—something that would put her more at risk of suffering abuse. Being at school keeps her safe.*



*There's a clear class difference between Ma and Mrs. Charles, which manifests in having very different expectations for their daughters. Ma expects Claudia to be able to go through life without getting physical; Mrs. Charles wants Monday to be able to defend herself. When Claudia picks up on the fact that Monday is so afraid of her mother, it shows that she's becoming more attuned to the clues that something is seriously wrong in Monday's household.*



*Coming to school smelly, dirty, and dehydrated (having white lips is a symptom of dehydration) implies that something terrible happened to Monday over the weekend. The school, though, is unconcerned and ignores that these are possible signs of abuse—and only Ms. Valente takes steps to help Monday.*



*Claudia has lots of reasons to be upset that Monday is gone, but one of the most difficult parts is that now, Claudia has to confront her shame about her dyslexia. Claudia's emotional turmoil surfaces here when she implies that Monday has disappeared of her own volition—disappearing is something, Claudia implies, that Monday did to Claudia.*



As Ma preps a tray of cookies for the church Christmas auction, Claudia begs not to be put “in the stupid kids’ class.” Ma insists that the Learning Center just gives Claudia extra help, but Claudia knows the Learning Center will doom her socially. Claudia refuses to go, but Ma threatens to call Daddy and heads for the car, leaving Claudia to follow. In the car on the way to church, Ma says that she and Daddy want what’s best for Claudia and thought she wanted to go to high school. Claudia thinks it doesn’t matter what she wants now that Monday isn’t here to help and protect her. Ma says that Ms. Walker knows all sorts of tricks and that Claudia’s lucky to get the help.

Ms. Walker lives about three blocks from the church. Claudia goes three days per week. The first day, Ms. Walker gives Claudia colored plastic filters to help her read. They play educational games that are sometimes fun and sometimes hard. Eventually, Ma asks Ms. Walker to help Claudia with her Banneker essay.

When Claudia arrives at Ms. Walker’s to work on her essay, she finds Michael waiting for her on the stoop. He says that Ms. Walker is his grandma. Claudia huffily tries to keep her secret; she doesn’t want Michael thinking she’s stupid. She turns and hurries away, insisting she got her days wrong. Michael steps in front of her to stop her and puts his hands out—and Claudia’s breasts hit them. He begs Claudia not to tell Ms. Walker and then invites her to join him at the mall. Claudia agrees.

Claudia isn’t sure how to explain this to Ma, but she just needs an escape. And Michael isn’t the kind of guy to arouse suspicion. At the customer service counter, Michael returns a pair of shoes for Ms. Walker and wins over the checker with his politeness. Claudia asks if he’s always so friendly but before he can answer, he shouts hellos to two girls passing. Claudia jokes that he’d be good on a go-go mic, shouting out to people in the crowd. Then, someone else greets Michael. It’s a tall guy named Kam—and Megan from dance class is with him. She looks panicky and averts her gaze.

As Michael and Kam banter, Claudia studies Megan. She looks away still, and Claudia wonders if Megan is embarrassed to know her. The guys discuss that Michael is going to hook up a TV for Kam and Claudia thinks Kam seems familiar. But Megan is watching her watch Kam with a chilling look. Michael introduces Claudia as a fellow churchgoer, which offends Claudia. She feels a jolt of electricity when Kam recognizes Claudia as “Monday’s homegirl.” The two couples part ways and Claudia wants to chase Kam and asks where he’s seen Monday.

*Without Monday, Claudia’s life feels purposeless. This is especially true since Claudia feels so much shame about her dyslexia and the additional help she needs to learn how to live with it. This highlights how much Claudia shaped her life around Monday and around covering up her dyslexia. Now that she has to exist on her own and confront her learning disability, she’s going to have to come up with new goals and a new purpose.*



*It’s telling that Claudia notes that the educational games are sometimes fun. This shows her that there is hope that life will improve if she gets help with her dyslexia. And getting help with her Banneker essay also offers hope that Claudia will still be able to carry out Monday’s dreams, even without Monday around.*



*Even with the evidence that getting help for her dyslexia is a good thing, Claudia is still deeply ashamed of having a learning disability. Now that the adults in her life know she has dyslexia, it becomes even more important to her to keep this fact from her peers. However, Michael shows no signs of thinking less of Claudia, so her fears that people will think she’s stupid may be unfounded.*



*Claudia desperately wants to feel normal, and going to the mall with a boy seems like an easy way to achieve this. But more importantly, going to the mall with Michael shows Claudia that she can connect with other people aside from Monday. It may be somewhat awkward and anxiety-inducing, but if Claudia persists and accepts Michael’s offers of friendship, she may be able to make another friend.*



*Claudia doesn’t think she’s normal, even though she desperately wants to be. So it follows that when she looks at Megan, she immediately jumps to thinking that Megan is ashamed or embarrassed to know her. This is, of course, only one possible explanation of many, and it reflects how self-conscious Claudia is of her learning disabilities and of Monday’s absence.*



Michael, oblivious, leads Claudia to two more stores, greeting people everywhere. He finally notices Claudia is angry on the escalator and tries to offer her food or his phone to call Ma. Claudia stops in front of a Starbucks and hisses that she wants to stop here—for hot chocolate, not coffee. Once they get their hot chocolates, Michael pours packets of brown sugar into his. Claudia yelps that his teeth will fall out and Michael calls her “Grandma.” No one but Monday calls Claudia that.

Claudia and Michael sit on a bench and people watch. Claudia can’t believe that Monday just ditched her. Michael interrupts to ask what Ms. Walker is asking Claudia to do and what high school Claudia wants to attend. He wrinkles his nose when she says she wants to attend Banneker. She doesn’t tell him the real answer: Monday wants to go. Michael points out that *any* school can help Claudia get into college and shares that he wanted to go to Banneker, but they don’t have football. He trained all summer with his dad until his dad left.

Michael explains that his dad retired from the air force and now lives in Dubai, fixing planes and making “crazy money.” He’s going to buy Michael a car, but he won’t be home for three years. Claudia asks if Michael misses his dad. Michael does, but they’re in contact all the time over FaceTime and text. Finishing his hot chocolate, Michael says they need to get back—he told Ms. Walker he’d have Claudia back. Claudia suspects that Ma made Michael do this, but Michael laughs that Ms. Walker asked him to spend some time with a sad student who could need a friend.

Claudia gulps. Michael suddenly seems sexy and she spins away to hide her blush. She asks what else Ms. Walker told him, afraid she’s telling people that Claudia can’t read. Michael assures her his grandma just said Claudia is sad and maybe depressed. Claudia snaps that she’s not depressed and snarls that Mr. Popular should be able to cheer her up. Michael just laughs and says seriously that Claudia can talk to him. He gives her his cell number. Claudia takes it and walks away. She likes Michael—but he seems like a needle that could pop Claudia’s bubble and hurt her. The same thing hurt Monday.

## CHAPTER 22. THE BEFORE

It’s obvious to everyone in the school when a student is heading for the Learning Center, also called the TLC. Claudia takes a circuitous route so people won’t know she receives tutoring. At the TLC, there are teachers to help kids with homework, and twice a week a teacher observes Claudia’s classes. Claudia tries to keep her resentment to herself and thinks that if Monday came back, they could work on their essay without the TLC’s help. Claudia has to find Monday.

*Claudia wants to be appreciated and have the kind of close friendship she had with Monday, so it’s frustrating when Michael seems to distance himself from her. It’s then very unsettling when Michael uses a nickname for Claudia that Monday used, as it drives home for her that Monday isn’t here anymore. She’ll have to get used to having relationships with other people in Monday’s absence.*



*Again, Claudia seems to think that Monday “ditched” her on purpose, as though Monday is actively trying to make her life miserable. There’s no evidence that Monday left Claudia on purpose, so it’s more likely that this reflects how much Claudia is struggling with her sudden independence. Michael also implies here that Claudia doesn’t have to do everything Monday did or wanted to do—she can make her own choices and still find success.*



*When Michael reveals that Ms. Walker asked him to spend some time with Claudia, it shows Claudia that she has a robust support system that cares about her. Though Ms. Walker never appears in person in the novel, she clearly cares deeply for Claudia’s overall wellbeing and not just her academic progress. The personalized care and support that Ms. Walker gives Claudia contrasts sharply with the school’s indifference towards Monday and Claudia’s concerns about her friend’s disappearance.*



*For Claudia, getting involved with a boy seems extra fraught after Monday’s experience with Jacob. So even though she finds herself attracted to Michael and appreciates his kindness, she’s intent on emotionally protecting herself. Mentioning her bubble—the bubble she shared with Monday—shows that Claudia is still trying to live inside that small, insulated space and isn’t ready to step outside of it.*



*Claudia doesn’t yet see the value in being able to independently work on her Banneker essay. It’s more important to her to be able to retreat to her comfort zone, where Monday propped her up by helping her with (or by doing) her homework and where her dyslexia was a carefully kept secret.*



Claudia's route from the TLC is so long that she's going to be late for class. As she runs up the stairs, she slams into Ms. Valente and scatters the teacher's papers. Claudia helps Ms. Valente gather the papers and, with prodding, admits that she just came from the TLC. Ms. Valente says she knows Claudia is getting help, since the school sent a memo to teachers last week. Claudia is beside herself. She doesn't want other kids seeing the memo and knowing she's stupid. Claudia collapses on the stairs and struggles to breathe. Ms. Valente rubs Claudia's back as Claudia sobs. How is Monday able to breathe without her?

Ms. Valente says that Claudia needs to talk to someone and starts asking questions. Claudia explains she's taking this route because she doesn't want kids to know she's "in the stupid kids' class." Ms. Valente says that there aren't any stupid kids in the TLC; the kids who insist there are just aren't brave enough to ask for help. When Claudia insists she doesn't need help, Ms. Valente says she failed Claudia. She suspected last year that Claudia had a problem, which is why she worked with Claudia one on one. But she was too busy with everything else to act on it.

Claudia says that Ms. Valente thinks she's dumb too—and besides this, everyone thinks Claudia is a lesbian. Ms. Valente grabs Claudia and tells her that she's letting rumors run her life, that being a lesbian is fine, and that Claudia cares too much about what other kids think. She takes a breath and tells Claudia that she just learns differently. If Ms. Valente had said something sooner, Claudia might not be in so much pain now. She laments that when she brought it up with the administration last year, no one would listen. The school only cares about rankings and doesn't encourage teachers to get to know the students.

Claudia insists that there's nothing wrong with her; she just has a lot in her mind with Monday gone. Ms. Valente is shocked that Claudia hasn't heard or seen from Monday at all and has news to share. She says that Mrs. Charles pulled Monday out of school to homeschool. When Claudia spits that Monday isn't even home, Ms. Valente says that Monday is home—a social worker saw her. Claudia thinks that Monday would've called her if she was actually home—right?

*Sending out the memo to teachers suggests that the school wants teachers to be able to support students. When teachers know that certain students are getting extra help and why, they are better equipped to work with those kids and meet their needs. But because Claudia feels so ashamed of her dyslexia, the memo is just more proof that everyone knows she's "stupid." Asking how Monday can breathe without her speaks to how alone and upset Claudia is—she can barely breathe without her best friend.*



*Though Ms. Valente doesn't contradict Claudia outright on her insistence that Claudia doesn't need help, she implies that it would've been better had Claudia's dyslexia been identified last year. In addition to giving Claudia another year to learn strategies for reading, an earlier diagnosis would've allowed her some independence from Monday, since Claudia wouldn't have been so dependent on Monday when it came to homework.*



*Ms. Valente stresses that Claudia is so caught up in what other people think of her that she's unable to see that her differences aren't the end of the world. She also explains why the school didn't identify Claudia's dyslexia sooner: the school, like Claudia herself, is too caught up in looking successful and prestigious to actually care about its students. There are consequences, this shows, to not doing what's best for the students.*



*It becomes even more confusing for Claudia when she learns that Monday is supposedly home. But the way that Ms. Valente frames it suggests that the adults involved know better than Claudia does.*



After school, Claudia stops at the police station near Monday's house. Nobody else will help her, and the social worker's story seems fishy. The police seem like the only option. Claudia puts on her best adult voice and tells the man at the desk that she's here to request an officer check in on a friend who's in trouble. The man asks if the friend is missing, and the word seems to pulse in Claudia's mind. Claudia says she's not missing like that.

*Claudia has been raised to think that the police are helpful when people are in trouble, which is why she involves the police once the school has disappointed her. It's uncomfortable for Claudia to consider that Monday might be missing, as in dead or kidnapped. And because that's so uncomfortable, she's unwilling to even consider the possibility.*



At that moment, a tall man steps up, introduces himself as Detective Carson, and takes Claudia to his office. Claudia tells him everything. After a few questions, Detective Carson asks if Mrs. Charles has filed a missing person's report. Claudia says she's "not that type of mom." She insists Monday wasn't having trouble at home, and recoils when Detective Carson asks if Monday might've run away.

*Detective Carson explains the protocol when a child is missing. In his mind, if that protocol isn't followed, the alternative is that the child in question probably just didn't want to live at home anymore and chose to run away. With this, the novel exposes a major flaw in the system, begging the question of what happens to children in danger whose parents are, as Claudia says, "not that type" of parent.*



Detective Carson takes Claudia to a bulletin board covered in missing persons flyers. The missing people are all girls who look like Monday, but Monday isn't on the board. Detective Carson says that most girls reported missing just ran away. He tells Claudia that by coming in here and asking officers to care about Monday, it takes their focus away from other girls who need their help. He says that if Monday is missing, a parent can file a report. Claudia holds back tears. She's the only one looking for Monday.

*Seeing this bulletin board suggests that Monday is not the only one in her situation—lots of young Black girls are missing, in danger, and/or suffering from abuse. And to Detective Carson, it's not worth it to care about girls who may have run away, or those with parents unwilling or unable to file a report. But as the novel shows through Monday, this attitude leaves many kids in potentially dangerous situations.*



Later, Claudia sits in the living room as Ma hangs ornaments on their Christmas tree. She grouses that Daddy always gets a huge tree and then never helps decorate it. Claudia pulls ornaments out of boxes and hands them to Ma on the stepladder. Monday used to help them decorate. Claudia wonders if Monday is really missing. She has to be home.

*Monday was such an important part of Claudia's life that it's painful to be doing these things without her. This reflects how uncomfortably alone Claudia feels, since Monday's absence seems to poison this decorating session.*



Claudia asks Ma if she can be homeschooled. Ma is shocked and says it's out of the question—even if Monday is homeschooling. Claudia slumps down and looks into the ornament box. There are only four left: the prettiest ones, but the ones "with the ugliest history." Claudia tries to ignore the ornaments and wonders if she should break them this year. She knows Ma wouldn't forgive her if she did.

*Being homeschooled would perhaps allow Claudia to feel like she's following in Monday's footsteps, thereby helping her feel connected to her friend. Mentioning these four ornaments in this way suggests that Claudia doesn't want to remember whatever these ornaments commemorate.*



Ma tries to brighten the mood by asking where Claudia's Christmas list is. Claudia doesn't want anything but Monday. Ma asks for the next ornament, but gasps when Claudia says there are only four left. With a sigh, Claudia takes out the last four crystal angels. They're "for the four angels we lost." Ma hangs the ornaments and then goes to bed, tears in her eyes. Claudia leaves the mess for Daddy to clean up.

*Here, the novel reveals that the ornaments are for four babies that Ma lost from miscarriages. This ties back to how Claudia described Ma as being pink unless she doesn't get what she needs—then she turns white. Ma seems to have wanted another baby, and she may still be grieving these babies' losses.*



## CHAPTER 23. TWO YEARS BEFORE THE BEFORE

As Claudia and Monday sneak up the stairs with pizza, Monday asks what's wrong with Ma. Ma is on the couch, staring at the muted TV. In Claudia's room, Claudia explains that Ma lost the baby. Monday says, "Dang, again?" and then apologizes. Claudia starts to cry. Ma has four babies in Heaven now, and Claudia fears she's not enough. Ma must want a baby who can read and write, and Claudia hates seeing Ma in pain. Monday rubs Claudia's back and says that siblings will mean Claudia has to share, but Claudia says she already shares with Monday. Monday says darkly that Claudia is better off without siblings.

*The babies are a sore spot for Claudia in part because she sees them as proof that she's not good enough for her parents. But this is also confusing for her because she knows a baby would alleviate some of Ma's pain, which Claudia wants. Though Monday is doing what she thinks is necessary to protect Claudia's emotions, her dark insistence that Claudia shouldn't want siblings suggests that Monday somehow feels that hers are making her life worse.*



Changing the subject, Monday says she got Claudia a Christmas present. She pulls two matching journals out of her bookbag. One is pink, the other is purple, and they both have matching keys. Monday looks thrilled—this is the first time she's been able to buy Claudia a gift—but Claudia wants to throw the book. Claudia snaps that she's horrible at writing. Monday says that they'll both do it, and with practice, Claudia will improve. Claudia tosses the journal onto her desk.

*Monday doesn't seem like she bought the journals to intentionally hurt Claudia. Claudia's reaction suggests that she expects Monday to know better and cater to her likes and dislikes. But it's significant that Monday got a journal for herself—suggesting that Monday wants to write and doesn't want to exclude Claudia.*



When Claudia wakes up in the morning, Monday is gone. Claudia expected this since she ignored Monday all night, but now she won't be able to apologize before she leaves for Georgia. She hears giggles from downstairs. From the top of the stairs, Claudia sees Monday snuggled with Ma, watching TV. Ma sees Claudia and calls her to join. Claudia sits on Ma's other side and Monday passes Claudia her half-eaten bowl of cereal. It's an offer and an apology, and Claudia accepts it.

*Again, Claudia expects a lot from Monday and seems unwilling to forgive this perceived slight easily. This implies that Claudia wants Monday to behave in a specific way and might not be open to any deviations. However, Claudia nevertheless appreciates Monday's friendship enough to accept Monday's apology.*



## CHAPTER 24. JANUARY

Claudia acknowledges that she's might not be the best person to talk about Monday's bruises. She saw a few, but they never worried her. Monday always had good excuses, and kids do lots of things that cause bruises and scars. So Claudia didn't think anything of it when she saw cuts or bruises on Monday. But after they found Monday, Claudia read a report saying that there were more than 24 scars on Monday's body.

*Using the word "body" here implies that when they found Monday, she was dead. The report's findings about Monday's scars suggest that she suffered abuse and physical trauma for some time before her death—abuse and trauma that Claudia presumably wasn't aware of.*



## CHAPTER 25. ONE YEAR BEFORE THE BEFORE

Monday stumbles into Ms. Valente's homeroom. She's trembling, her braids are a mess, and her tongue is white, but she tells Ms. Valente she's fine. Claudia asks Monday if she's okay, but Monday doesn't respond. All day, Monday acts like a zombie. Claudia is confused—Monday sounded fine when Claudia called from Georgia on Christmas. After school, Claudia hurries to the **library**. She realizes that Monday is following her and asks where August is. Monday looks terrified and stammers that he's sick.

Monday improves over the next month, but August doesn't. When Claudia asks about him one day, Monday insists he's still sick—and nastily tells Claudia it's none of her business. She insults Claudia and tells her to leave it alone. Confused and hurt, Claudia says she cares about August because he's Monday's brother. Monday tells Claudia to stop worrying about *her* brother just because Claudia doesn't have one of her own. Claudia gasps and Monday apologizes, but Claudia runs ahead to the **library**. This is the girls' first fight, and Claudia doesn't know what she did to cause it.

*The way that Monday looks and acts when she gets to school suggests that something horrible happened at home over the holidays. Her white tongue in particular is an indicator that Monday is dehydrated and perhaps has been for some time. Given that the "January" chapter confirmed that Monday was being abused, Monday's terror when Claudia asks about August takes on additional weight, as it raises that possibility that something horrible happened to him.*



*In Claudia's mind, she's just expressing concern by continuing to ask about August. It's a way to show that she cares about Monday and her siblings—hence her confusion when Monday is seemingly offended. However, it's significant that Claudia doesn't question why Monday responds so nastily to her concern. Claudia may again be ignoring a clue that Monday and August are suffering at home.*



## CHAPTER 26. THE BEFORE

It's Martin Luther King Day, which means that Claudia's church is hosting its annual soup kitchen. Ma is in charge of the kitchen, so Claudia has to help. Claudia thinks that Monday used to help every year as she cuts carrots. Ma tells her to smile, since the folks waiting for food have way more to worry about. She pulls Claudia over to look at the line of people outside. She says that some of the families have homes but don't eat well and tells Claudia to focus on the fact that she's doing something kind. Claudia's heart sinks when she sees some kids from Ed Borough. She pictures Monday out there. Ma says that a roof doesn't make a home and opens the doors.

The line stampedes in. People are so thankful and happy. Ma talks to everyone, and Claudia busies herself filling people's drinks. As Claudia sees little kids running in circles, she thinks of August and Tuesday. She grabs some crayons and some paper to entertain the little kids. She misses Monday, and she also misses August. Daddy stops by and tells Claudia that Ma is looking for her.

*When Ma essentially tells Claudia to be thankful her good fortune, it suggests that Ma knows what some of the other families lined up outside are going through. Claudia may be missing her friend, but she has food, a warm place to sleep, and parents who love her. The insistence that a roof doesn't make a home underlines the fact that simply having a place to stay isn't enough—a person needs community and love in order to feel truly at home.*



*Fetching the crayons and paper is one of the first things Claudia does of her own volition. This is a major step for her, since before Monday's disappearance, Claudia didn't do anything without consulting Monday first. Claudia is beginning to develop some comfort with independence.*



Ma tells Claudia to take over for a woman on the buffet line and to grab a tray from the kitchen. The woman compliments Claudia on getting the kids to draw and asks where Monday is. Claudia says that Monday is with family and rushes back out to the buffet. It feels like a lie, even though that's what everyone told Claudia.

*It's telling that saying Monday is with family feels like a lie to Claudia. Claudia knows something isn't right here, and she senses that this answer is too simplistic. But because Claudia is so young, she doesn't have any power to push any further for answers.*



The line thins out and Ma greets an old woman near the end, Ms. Swaby. Ma hasn't seen Ms. Swaby since Thanksgiving, and Ms. Swaby explains that she was evicted from Ed Borough. Ma offers to help the pastor figure out how to help Ed Borough's residents. Before Ms. Swaby moves on, Ma asks if she's seen Monday recently. Ms. Swaby asks if Monday has "crazy blond hair," but Ma sighs that that was a while ago. Claudia can tell Ma is worried.

*Meeting someone who's already been evicted from Ed Borough reminds Claudia that life for Ed Borough's residents is precarious right now, given the city's push to redevelop the land. Especially when Ma notes that the pastor is going to help other Ed Borough residents, it implies that Monday's family may be one of those in trouble.*



At home that night, Ma sends Claudia to get ready for bed. Claudia starts the tub but hears Ma's voice downstairs. She creeps to the top of the stairs and listens to Ma and Daddy discuss Monday. Ma's worried, but Daddy insists they have bigger things to worry about. When Ma keeps pushing, Daddy suggests that maybe Monday doesn't want to be friends with Claudia anymore, especially after what happened last year. He says Claudia should make new friends and that disappointment is part of life.

*Given the way that Daddy frames his argument, he implies that it's none of his family's business what's going on with Monday. Indeed, the respectful thing to do would be to accept Monday's silence—especially if Monday truly doesn't want to be Claudia's friend anymore. However, Daddy also seriously underestimates how much Claudia relied on Monday. For Claudia, making new friends isn't an easy task, because she's never had to try before.*



Claudia thinks about Daddy's words at school the next day. She slips into the bathroom to cry at lunch, wondering if Monday really doesn't like her anymore. She wonders if "that picture" changed them. But Shayla's shrill voice interrupts Claudia, asking who's crying. When the girls outside the stall realize it's Claudia, they say that she's probably missing having sex with Monday. Claudia tries to leave the bathroom, but Shayla won't let her. Shayla taunts Claudia for being dumb and needing the TLC and says that in "the picture," it looked like Monday was going down on Claudia. Claudia tries to punch Shayla, but Shayla moves away. Shayla tries to shove Claudia's face in the toilet and only stops when Ms. Valente runs into the bathroom.

*Though this passage leaves the picture's exact contents ambiguous, Shayla reveals that in the picture, it looks like Monday and Claudia are sexually involved. So Claudia is afraid now that Monday was just as insistent on fitting in as she is. More broadly, Shayla's bullying shows why Daddy is wrong to assume that Claudia should be able to just move on and make new friends. The only girls at school that Claudia mentions by name are Shayla and Ashley, suggesting that Claudia is far more focused on these bullies than she is on other girls who could become friends.*



Ms. Valente roars for Shayla and Ashley to leave and then turns to Claudia. She asks if Claudia really hit Shayla and scolds Claudia for trying, even if it was about "the picture." Ms. Valente sends Claudia to the nurse. In the nurse's office, though, a pretty blond woman greets her instead of old Ms. Orman. The woman introduces herself as Ms. Moser; Ms. Orman retired. Claudia lies that she ran into the wall in gym and tells Ms. Moser her name is Monday Charles.

*The fact that even Ms. Valente knows about "the picture" suggests that it circulated among everyone in the school—it wasn't just between Claudia, Monday, and their bullies. By telling Claudia that it doesn't matter that Shayla brought up the picture, Ms. Valente tries to get Claudia to not worry so much about what other people think of her.*



Ms. Moser opens up Monday's file. After a quick scan, the nurse's mouth drops open. She closes the door and asks if Claudia has any other bruises or injuries she needs checked out. Claudia says she's fine but asks for her dad's number. It's not in the file, so Claudia says she feels fine. Claudia accepts aspirin and asks where Ms. Orman went. Ms. Moser says she's in Florida and confirms that "Monday" still has Ms. Orman's phone number. Claudia says she lost the number and asks for it again.

*The fact that Claudia's lie is successful makes it clear that the school administration is doing a poor job of communicating about students. Given that Monday isn't registered, Ms. Moser should be able to find out quickly that Claudia is lying. This raises questions about what else the school is missing due to miscommunications.*



## CHAPTER 27. THE AFTER

Claudia writes to Monday in her journal. She says she knows now why the Group Five performance last year made it onto *Good Morning America*: Ms. Manis works the girls *hard*. Claudia isn't sure if she can keep up and knows Monday would tell her to quit if she were here. But without Monday around, dance is all Claudia has.

*Here, Claudia implies that without Monday, she has to lean more heavily on outlets like dance classes. In this way, she's becoming more independent and learning that she can look for support and socialization from places other than just Monday.*



Claudia takes her place in Ms. Manis's Group Five class. Shannon and Megan whisper about Claudia not saying much, and another girl—Kit Kat—asks why Michael was asking about Megan. After class, Claudia changes before the other girls and tries to sneak out, but Megan is waiting for her at the elevators. She calls Claudia into an empty classroom to talk and asks if Claudia told anyone she saw her at the mall. Megan admits that she told her mom she was taking an extra lesson so she could hang out with Kam. Claudia laughs, and Megan smiles too.

*Claudia isn't yet comfortable trying to make friends with any of her fellow dancers. This is perhaps unsurprising, given how much they whisper about her. But when Claudia and Megan share the smile at the end of this passage, it offers hope that Claudia could start to see these girls as potential friends. Realizing that Megan was also not supposed to be at the mall with a boy shows Claudia that they may have some things in common.*



## CHAPTER 28. ONE YEAR BEFORE THE BEFORE

Monday desperately wants to be popular, so she decides to dye her hair. She insists to Claudia that Mrs. Charles won't care, but Claudia notes that Ma would kill her for asking. Monday looks faraway for a moment, but then says she wants to dye her hair blond like Beyoncé. Claudia lends Monday money for hair dye and relaxer. Claudia checks in multiple times on Sunday. Monday is struggling; she's never relaxed her hair herself before.

*When Claudia quips that Ma would kill her for asking to dye her hair, Monday suddenly becomes distant—yet another clue that she's suffering from abuse. But Claudia nevertheless tries to be a good friend by checking in on Monday to help her as much as she can with her hair.*



On Monday morning, Claudia waits by the lockers. Monday comes in wearing a pink bucket hat, her eyes glassy. She pulls the hat off and Claudia almost screams. Monday's hair is fried and bright orange. Claudia assures her it's fixable, offers Ma's help, and leads Monday to homeroom. Ms. Valente tries to control her shock, but the other kids don't. Trevor screams that Monday looks like a Muppet, while Jacob says nothing. Monday runs out of the room, crying, and Ms. Valente sends Claudia after her.

*Though Monday wants to be popular, her classmates' reactions suggest she's going to have a hard time achieving this goal. Specifically, when Jacob still ignores her at school, it shows that he has no intention of ever standing up for Monday or going public about their relationship—no matter what he promises on the weekends. In this sense, Monday and Claudia are on their own to support each other at school.*



Claudia finds Monday sobbing in a bathroom stall. When Monday won't open up, Claudia crawls under the door. It makes Monday laugh. After a minute, Monday says Jacob said he'd "want to be with [her] for real" if she looked like Beyoncé. She starts to cry and says that she thought things would be "better" with Jacob. She won't tell Claudia what she means and collapses, sobbing, with her head in Claudia's lap. Claudia tells her to forget about Jacob. They giggle when Monday blows her nose on Claudia's skirt—but just then, a bright flash blinds them. They can't figure out where it came from. That weekend, Ma takes Monday to the salon to fix her hair. The girls have no idea what they'll find on Monday morning.

*When Ma takes Monday to get her hair fixed at a salon, it suggests again that Mrs. Charles isn't able to or interested in helping Monday navigate mistakes like this. It's also worth noting that this salon trip is no doubt expensive, suggesting that Ma is both willing and able to help Monday out financially as needed. In this way, Ma takes some responsibility for the other kids in the community.*



## CHAPTER 29. THE BEFORE

Claudia is at Uncle Robby's house, watching Daddy's band practice for a new set. Since Ma won't let Claudia actually go to the show, she has to settle for this—though she'd give anything to go. When the band wraps up, Daddy leads Claudia to the car. He says she seems quiet and asks about the lump on her forehead. Claudia tells him she ran into a wall, but he doesn't believe her. He thinks a boy hurt her. As Daddy starts the car, he reminds Claudia that she can tell him anything. Claudia responds that disappointments are part of life, revealing that she heard her parents' conversation not long ago.

*Having recently learned that Daddy thinks she just needs to just get over Monday's absence and move on, Claudia doesn't feel as willing to trust him. So though Daddy tells her here that she can talk to him about anything, he's also sending mixed messages since he clearly doesn't want to hear any more about Monday. Claudia once again ends up keeping secrets from her parents in order to please them.*



Claudia continues to refuse to tell Daddy what's wrong, insisting he'll think she's a baby if she speaks up. They drive in silence the long way home, past the D.C. monuments. Close to home, Daddy asks if he ever told Claudia about the day she was born. Claudia knows that Ma was in labor for 19 hours, but she's never heard about Ma's pregnancy. Daddy says that Claudia wanted to be born badly. She kicked incessantly, and Ma was sick for months and had fake contractions all the time. They went to the hospital twice for bleeding. Even though Claudia was born too early, it was a relief that Ma didn't have to be pregnant anymore.

*Daddy makes Ma's pregnancy sound both uncomfortable and dangerous. Mentioning that they went to the hospital for "bleeding" suggests that Ma may have been at risk of miscarrying her pregnancy with Claudia, just as she miscarried the four other babies after her. Telling Claudia about it is a way for Daddy to show her he trusts her with heavy, painful information like this.*



Claudia realizes that Ma was suffering the entire time she was pregnant. Daddy admits that Ma didn't want Claudia to know how hard it was because she doesn't want Claudia to blame herself—and this has nothing to do with Ma's other miscarriages. Daddy says that regardless, Claudia came into the world to make everyone else happy, and he wants her to keep living—even without Monday around. Thrilled to have made Claudia feel loved, Daddy suggests they get fried rice at Mr. Chang's and not tell Ma.

*Claudia wants Ma to be happy and well, so it's uncomfortable to learn the truth about Ma's pregnancy. But by learning this history, Claudia can better make sense of her own story and develop empathy for her family members. And when Daddy brings this around to remind Claudia that she should be happy, it suggests he thinks she'll be able to achieve a happier life by learning these uncomfortable truths.*



When Claudia steps into the restaurant, she bumps into April. Daddy greets April happily and little Tuesday comes out from behind April to hug Claudia. As Claudia embraces the little girl, she notices that she smells like a dirty diaper. April looks ready to run, but when asked, she tells Claudia and Daddy that Monday is back home. Claudia asks Tuesday if she's been playing with Monday, and Tuesday says she is—but Monday is "always hiding in the closet." April looks spooked and says Tuesday is playing; Monday's at Tip's. Daddy doesn't notice April's trembling hands or Claudia's anger. Tuesday asks Claudia if she'll come and play and Claudia promises she will.

*April very clearly doesn't want to talk to Daddy and Claudia, especially about Monday. Daddy, however, seems oblivious to this. Daddy's reaction may explain why Claudia simply accepted for so long that Monday's life at home was fine—Daddy modeled for her that she should take people at their word and not examine what may be concerning signs. In this case, it's concerning that Tuesday smells like this—it could indicate possible neglect and/or that the Charles family doesn't have the resources to stay clean.*



## CHAPTER 30. FEBRUARY

Rumors, Claudia says, are deadly things that are born ready to run, eat dreams, and never die. There's a rumor that D.C. was built on a swamp—that's why it's so humid. Once, Ma assured Claudia the rumor wasn't true. She assured Claudia she researched it before choosing to raise her baby here, and told Claudia it's important to find things out on one's own.

*Claudia explains here why exactly she's so worried about what other people think of her. She's afraid of the rumors that will run wild, consume her dreams, and seemingly persist forever, just like the rumor that D.C. was built on a swamp.*



## CHAPTER 31. THE BEFORE

Claudia goes to school every Monday hopeful that Monday will be there. But that hope turns to dread every day that Monday isn't there. Finally, she seeks out Ms. Valente after school one day. Claudia sits on a desk, looks down, and asks if Ms. Valente is still mad at her. Incredulous, Ms. Valente says she's not mad—just disappointed and concerned for Claudia's safety. Claudia promises to not fight again and then asks Ms. Valente for a favor: go by Monday's house. She insists that something's wrong. Nobody's stories about Monday's whereabouts match up, and Claudia just needs to know that Monday's okay—even if Monday's mad at her. Monday being angry is the only reason she can come up with for Monday's absence. Ms. Valente promises to check it out.

*Monday has been gone for at least five months now, since the beginning of September. Given the amount of time that's elapsed, it makes no sense to Claudia why nobody can give her a good explanation for Monday's absence. It's worth noting that Claudia brings this to Ms. Valente because she cares so deeply for Monday. Also, Claudia has been learning over the last few months that Monday may have been keeping the truth about her home life a secret, so she realizes now she may have been wrong to assume Monday was fine.*



## CHAPTER 32. THE AFTER

Nothing adds up about Monday's whereabouts, so Claudia decides to find out why. She hides in the tent in her bedroom and dials the number Ms. Moser gave her. Ms. Orman's daughter, Giselle, answers. Giselle is angry that Claudia has this number and reminds Claudia that Ms. Orman has Alzheimer's. Claudia says she's trying to track down Monday. After arguing, Giselle puts her mother on the phone.

*Hiding in the tent in her bedroom helps Claudia feel secure and closer to Monday, since the girls used to spend so much time in the tent together. The fact that Ms. Moser gave Claudia Ms. Orman's phone number shows again that the school offices communicate poorly with each other when it comes to kids in trouble.*



Ms. Orman doesn't seem to recognize Claudia, but she seems very concerned when Claudia says she's looking for Monday. Claudia says she figured Ms. Orman might know, since she helped Monday so much when Monday was sick. Ms. Orman says that Monday was never sick. She says "It was all smoke and mirrors. I had to get her out." But Ms. Orman seems to forget her train of thought and becomes very upset. Giselle takes the phone back, tells Claudia not to call again, and asks to speak to Claudia's parents. Claudia hangs up—and immediately, the phone rings again. It must be Giselle calling to talk to Ma. Claudia figures that no matter how much trouble she's in for making this phone call, hearing that Monday was never sick might convince Ma to help her.

Claudia hears Ma pick up the phone elsewhere in the house and wonders how to defend herself. But Ma shouts that it's Michael calling for Claudia. Claudia answers the phone and Michael invites her to come with him to a basketball game—he already got Ma's permission to take her. Claudia giggles and accepts.

### CHAPTER 33. ONE YEAR BEFORE THE BEFORE

As soon as Claudia and Monday get to school on Monday, Trevor snickers and asks if they're really gay. Normally Claudia would ignore his teasing, but something seems off. Trevor pulls out his phone and shows them a Facebook picture. It's of Claudia sitting with Monday's head in her lap in the bathroom—and given the angle, it looks "confusing." It's been shared almost 300 times and liked 1000 times. Monday asks who took it and they notice Jacob staring. Claudia realizes that while she and Monday enjoyed their weekend, everyone else spread rumors about them.

Ma and Daddy come to the school and threaten to sue if the school won't launch an investigation. Ma fields calls from neighbors concerned about Claudia's sexuality. Monday and Claudia hide in Claudia's room, trying not to worry. Monday thinks Shayla took the picture, but Claudia suspects Jacob—he started the rumors that they're gay, after all. Monday insists that's not something he'd do.

### CHAPTER 34. THE AFTER

Ms. Manis stops Claudia in the middle of her solo routine and asks if Claudia is okay. She tells Claudia that she's dancing without emotion—and she's unsure if Claudia's ready for a solo. Claudia says that the song is just too slow, but Ms. Manis says that Claudia won't always get what she wants.

*Ms. Orman's comments about Monday are cryptic, but she nevertheless suggests that there's more to the story than Claudia knew. Confirming that Monday was never sick and saying that she had to "get [Monday] out" suggests that Ms. Orman was aware of bigger issues concerning Monday's home life and her family. It also shows that the school nurse, at least, was aware that something was off with Monday and took active steps to help her. However, the novel positions Ms. Orman as a somewhat unreliable informant, given her advanced Alzheimer's symptoms.*



*Claudia finds herself caught between the past (her search for Monday) and the future (her date with Michael). She's growing up and maturing—whether or not Monday is still around to grow up with her.*



*Given what readers have already learned about this photograph, it presumably looks like Monday is performing oral sex on Claudia. Readers will remember that this wasn't actually the case: Claudia was just comforting Monday as she cried in the bathroom stall. But their school culture is intent on punishing any deviance from the norm, so Monday and Claudia are now the victims of increasing abuse. This explains why Claudia so desperately wants to be normal—at her school, the alternative is deeply painful.*



*It's impossible to tell who took the picture, but Monday is quick to give Jacob the benefit of the doubt. In this situation, Claudia seems to be taking the more impartial view by looking critically at the evidence they have. Emotion clouds Monday's ability to do so.*



*Claudia wanted a fast song so she could use some of the moves that she and Monday choreographed. But being given a slow song for her solo means that Claudia has to figure out who she is as a dancer without Monday's help, something that's very uncomfortable for her.*



In a letter to Monday, Claudia asks if Monday took all of her clothes. She's trying to figure out what to wear and hears Monday's voice in her head, telling her that the outfits make her look too young. She begs Monday to not be upset that she's going to a game without her.

Claudia is sweating and it's the middle of winter—she never imagined going to her first high school game without Monday. Ma pulls up at Cardozo High School, where a few volunteers pass out flyers about the need to save Ed Borough. Claudia is suddenly gripped with fear, but Michael taps on the window and leads Claudia into the school.

In the bleachers, Claudia blushes and tells herself it's not a date. Michael helps her out of her coat and grazes Claudia's neck with his fingers, making Claudia feel sparks. They chat nervously about sports, and Claudia wonders what Monday would think. Who will she talk to about boys if Monday doesn't return? Then, the dance team takes the court. Claudia spots Megan in the back and thinks that what's missing from her own solo routine is fun. As the dancers finish, Claudia thinks that soon, she and Monday will be out there dancing.

Suddenly, Claudia notices a sweater she gave Monday last year—on April. April is sitting on a lower level with a boy whispering in her ear. The boy gets up and forcefully guides April into the school. April looks defeated. Claudia leaps up and follows, crossing the court to do so and getting in the way of the game. She races into the school, shouting for April. She finally hears April's voice coming from a classroom. April tells the guy, Keith, to stop, but in a light, giggly voice that Claudia finds confusing.

Claudia peeks into a classroom and sees April laying on a desk, the boy with his pants down between her legs. She pushes the door open, startling April and Keith. Claudia can't fathom why April would do this when she knows how much it embarrasses Monday. Michael runs up to join Claudia and seems to know Keith. He explains that Claudia is just a girl from church, which offends Claudia. Michael sighs that April doesn't even go here and is just here to have sex. He starts to ask if she's too old, but stops suddenly. Both he and April look to Claudia to see if she noticed anything. April shrieks for Michael and Claudia to go back to the game and Keith tells April he's leaving. The way he brushes her off reminds Claudia of how Jacob treated Monday.

*Claudia doesn't just miss Monday—she also doesn't want to leave Monday behind by taking part in these coming-of-age activities without her best friend. Claudia is growing up, but doing so without Monday at her side feels wrong and like an act of betrayal.*



*Again, Claudia is afraid because she's never even considered that she'd do something like go to a basketball game without Monday around. Michael's arrival, though, shows Claudia that there is a way forward if she's willing and to make some new friends. Meanwhile, the flyers about saving Ed Borough ensure that readers don't forget how precarious Ed Borough residents' living situations are at the moment.*



*Claudia is so caught up in what Monday would think or feel that she's barely able to consider what she thinks or feels. When she's only able to consider her own thoughts or desires upon seeing the dance team, it suggests that dance is helping Claudia develop her independence and understand both herself and the world around her. But this doesn't mean that Claudia has totally divorced her love of dance from Monday—in her mind, dancing and Monday still go together and always will.*



*Chasing after April like this illustrates how dedicated Claudia is to tracking down Monday. She has no qualms with crossing a basketball court during a game and getting in the way if it means getting one step closer to solving the mystery of where Monday went.*



*Because Claudia loves and cares for Monday so much, it seems obvious to her that April should stop having sex if doing so would make Monday's life easier. April and Michael's exchange is also confusing, especially when Michael asks if April is too old and seems concerned that Claudia might have noticed something. Though readers won't figure out why they act this way until later in the novel, this confusion encourages readers to be on the lookout for other instances where things don't seem to add up.*



Once Keith leaves, Claudia asks to talk to April alone. Michael heads back to the gym, angry. Claudia apologizes and then asks if Monday has been by. April laughs, asks Claudia if she's still "at this," and says she'll play along: Monday is at her aunt's. Claudia, confused, says that Tuesday said Monday was at home. April stops cold and snarls at Claudia to leave Tuesday alone. Claudia asks if April misses Monday at all and says that she knew Monday better than anyone.

*Again, April's reaction to Claudia's questions seem odd—but they're intentionally confusing, as this moment is meant to be as jarring and confusing to Claudia as it is to the reader. To Claudia, it seems as though April doesn't love Monday enough to care about where she went. In comparison, Claudia thinks she loved Monday more and better, which is why she starts to berate April here.*



April tells Claudia she's wrong: Monday's favorite color wasn't pink, for instance; she agreed to pink because Claudia and Monday couldn't both love purple. And Claudia was Monday's only friend, so Monday did whatever Claudia wanted. The only other person she had was "that dude she fucked"—April says it wasn't Jacob. Claudia tells herself that April lies and notices a burn scar on her wrist. April refuses to tell her anything about it and walks away.

*April starts to poke holes in Claudia's conception of Monday. She suggests that Monday was desperate to keep Claudia as a friend and so was willing to subsume her own desires to please Claudia. This reveals that Monday might not have been the person Claudia thought she was.*



## CHAPTER 35. THE BEFORE

Ma kneads bread in the kitchen and snaps that she doesn't know where Daddy is. Daddy strolls into the kitchen at that moment and explains that the band van broke down. Daddy says that he ran into an old high school buddy who happened to know where Tip Charles works—and passed along his phone number. Daddy says his buddy called Tip right there to ask about Monday, but Tip hasn't seen Monday or any of the kids in over a year. Ma is incensed, but Daddy explains that Tip owes Mrs. Charles a lot of child support and it's easier to just disconnect. Tip doesn't make a lot of money and doesn't want to get arrested.

*Daddy discovers here that sometimes, a person has to have a certain amount of money to think they have the right to care about someone. Tip feels unable to check in on his own kids because he can't afford the child support. This deprives Monday of one more person who could help her—and specifically, one person who could file a missing persons report. To Ma, this is ridiculous, but the novel implies that her attitude reflects her privilege.*



## CHAPTER 36. THE AFTER

As Claudia helps Ma load pies for church into the car, Ma observes that Claudia hasn't said anything about the game. Claudia is too busy dwelling on April's words—she can't believe Monday would've lied about her favorite color. As they get into the car, Ma wants to know how it felt to be in a high school and if Claudia might want to apply to Cardozo. She insists it's good to have options, but Claudia wonders what options Monday has.

*To Ma, Claudia's basketball game represents the future—and she seems very interested in making sure Claudia is thinking about the future. But for Claudia, it's hard to think about going to high school and growing up without Monday around. Their dreams for the future were too intertwined.*



Ma takes a wrong turn and explains that she agreed to drive Michael to church. Claudia wants to scream—Michael didn't say anything to her after the conversation with April last night. Michael gets in the car and Claudia only greets him when Ma glares at her. At church, Michael rushes in ahead and Claudia refuses to tell Ma what's going on with them. Claudia watches Michael greet others, but she thinks she's the only one who can tell he's stressed and tired. Ma leads Claudia and Michael to the car after the service and invites Michael to stay for dinner.

Michael insists on carrying Ma's groceries inside for her when they get home and stares at the TV. Claudia explains that it's broken and Daddy hasn't fixed it yet. Michael spends the next hour with Daddy's tools, putting it back on the wall. Ma hisses for Claudia to offer Michael water. As Michael accepts it, he asks for the Wi-Fi password. Claudia explains that it doesn't work—so Michael fixes it. He's about done when Daddy walks in, confused to see Michael there and the TV fixed. Michael introduces himself, but Daddy heads into the kitchen with a scowl. He and Ma argue loudly—Daddy doesn't think Claudia needs an older boyfriend, but Ma tells him to stop fussing.

Daddy helps Michael lift the TV onto the wall and discovers that Michael plays football. For the rest of the evening, Michael and Daddy talk about football and Claudia sulks. After dinner, Ma and Daddy clean up while Claudia and Michael eat dessert. Claudia breaks the awkward silence and asks if Michael wants an apology. He says that Claudia did a dumb thing, "Chasing after that 'ho like that." Claudia tells him to not talk about her best friend's sister like that, but Michael points out that April isn't her friend. Michael says that he's not really mad at Claudia; he's just disappointed that they didn't get to hang out like he wanted. He says he only said that Claudia was a girl from church to protect her from rumors.

Claudia writes a letter to Monday. She says that Daddy played a new song last night and she taught Ma to dance. Michael came over since it was Presidents' Day and Daddy brought home crab legs for a crab boil. Claudia thinks that Monday would like Michael—but she assures Monday she only likes him like that a little bit. She says she saw April, and April told some very odd lies. Claudia asks why Monday left without saying anything.

*Claudia feels she's the only one who can see that Michael is struggling emotionally at church, which suggests that their relationship has deepened over the last several months, whether Claudia is aware of it or not. This also suggests that Claudia is learning to befriend and care about a person other than Monday, something that will help her move forward and heal in Monday's absence.*



*Michael doesn't have to fix Claudia's family's TV and internet—but because he's good at this sort of thing, he sees it as his responsibility. He models how different community members can care for each other by playing to their strengths and offering their skills when the right situation arises. While Ma sees Claudia and Michael's budding relationship as a good thing, Daddy isn't so sure. The prospect of seeing his daughter grow up is difficult for him, even if Claudia growing up is normal and expected.*



*The way that Michael describes April (using the derogatory term for prostitute) shows even more clearly how set April's reputation is. People think of her only in terms of her promiscuity. But to Claudia, April is more than her sex life—she's Monday's big sister. She, unlike seemingly everyone else, sees April as a full person. When Michael reveals why he always said Claudia was a church friend, it shows that he's in tune with Claudia's preferences—he knows how intent she is on avoiding rumors.*



*At this point, Claudia can't believe that Monday would've lied to her, so her only option is to believe that April lied instead. This shows how caught up Claudia is in her conception of Monday: she doesn't feel able yet to consider that there was more to Monday than she knew about.*



## CHAPTER 37. THE BEFORE

At some point, Claudia starts to like the Learning Center. The TLC tutors offer her books on CD, and it's like how Monday used to read to her. She finally feels like her old self—her grades are better, her Banneker interview is next month, and she feels more or less good about life. But then, Ms. Valente rushes into the room and pulls Claudia out. Ms. Valente leads Claudia quickly into the teacher's lounge, closes the door, and says Claudia was right—she went by Monday's house yesterday and there's definitely something wrong with Mrs. Charles.

Ms. Valente says that Mrs. Charles wouldn't let her in, but she saw a little girl—Tuesday—in dirty underwear. She called 911, but apparently social services has seen Monday and believes she's fine. Ms. Valente doesn't believe it. Then, Ms. Valente says that last year, when Monday was absent for a few weeks, she wasn't sick. Monday and her siblings were taken out of the house for neglect, and Mrs. Charles had to take parenting classes to get the kids back. Monday never mentioned this to Claudia.

Ms. Valente asks Claudia if Monday ever seemed terrified of Mrs. Charles. Claudia insists that *everyone's* afraid of their mother, but she also thinks back to Monday's terror when Mrs. Charles came to deal with the girls' fight at school. Ms. Valente assures Claudia that Monday is probably fine, but she makes Claudia promise to never go to Monday's house again. Something is wrong there. Claudia promises, but she intends to break it.

## CHAPTER 38. MARCH

Claudia used to think that March was her favorite month. Her birthday's in March, as are Easter and Good Friday sometimes. April was supposed to be born in March, but she was born on April Fool's Day instead and hasn't stopped lying since birth. She'd be gold if she were a color. She's like jewelry; people form her into different shapes and are drawn to her beauty. But when April's not quite gold, she "can turn your skin green."

*Claudia is starting to move on from Monday's disappearance. It's telling that she starts to feel this way only once she gets a handle on her dyslexia, as this shows just how much Claudia's dyslexia was holding her back prior to her diagnosis. When Ms. Valente—an adult and someone whom Claudia trusts—insists that something is wrong with Mrs. Charles, it confirms Claudia's fears that something very wrong is happening at Monday's house.*



*Ms. Valente's unsatisfactory call to social services suggests again that the different organizations that could help Monday aren't communicating with each other effectively. This means that Monday could've fallen through the cracks. Revealing that Monday and her siblings were previously taken away for neglect confirms that Monday was suffering at home—and that Monday kept secrets from her.*



*Claudia tells Ms. Valente that Monday wasn't afraid, but Claudia also seems to instinctively know that she's lying. Monday did seem more terrified of Mrs. Charles than is normal. And given that Monday was taken out of her house for neglect, Claudia may now have her answer as to why Monday was so afraid of Mrs. Charles.*



*By comparing April to the color gold, Claudia suggests that April isn't really her own person—she's whatever other people want her to be. Again, while Claudia doesn't question why this might be, it's worth considering that April is living in the same abusive household that Monday is and thus may be able to lie just like Monday for self-preservation.*



## CHAPTER 39. THE AFTER

Instead of doing Mrs. Walker's worksheets, Claudia sits in the library, looks through one of her colored gel filters for dyslexia, and listens to "All I Ask" on her iPod. Adele is singing to a lover, begging for one last moment. Claudia tries to think of anyone she'd beg for another moment with—but she can only think of Monday. Claudia knows she loved Monday, not romantically but like a soulmate. But what if April was right that Claudia didn't really know Monday? That might explain why Monday left.

With a huff, Michael slams his bookbag onto the table and sits down. Claudia asks what he's doing here, feigning annoyance, but Michael begs to not act like this today—his dad wants to stay in Dubai. The money is too good. Worst of all, there's no football. Claudia knows how much football means to Michael, so she suggests he find a family member to stay with. She suggests Ms. Walker, and Michael thanks Claudia for the good idea.

Laughing, Claudia tells Michael that he wrote the wrong year in his notebook. He gulps, crumples the page, and then asks Claudia what she's up to. He says there's a kid on the football team who goes to the TLC, and he does better on tests than anyone else. He admits he knows what the gel sheets are for. Claudia panics and asks if he's told everyone. Though he assures her he never would, Claudia runs away crying. She's worked so hard to keep this secret and feels humiliated Michael now knows.

Claudia goes to the dance studio on Saturday afternoons. Dancers can practice on their own—but most of the older girls chill with boys on Saturdays. As she stretches, Claudia thinks that she *can* read and she's getting better. She just doesn't want people to think she can't. When she's ready, she plays "All I Ask" on repeat. Claudia dances, feeling like she's moving heavily. Megan's voice interrupts Claudia from the doorway, saying she has to smile. Megan drops her bag and tells Claudia to relax, demonstrating one of the turns.

Claudia follows along, but Megan laughs again for Claudia to loosen up. They smile and practice the turns, trying to make each other laugh. After a bit, Megan says she has to go. Claudia is disappointed for the afternoon to end, but Megan invites Claudia to a sleepover later.

*Claudia realizes that love doesn't have to be romantic; platonic love can be just as meaningful and fulfilling as a romantic relationship. But now, she also has to question everything she thought she knew about Monday after what April said. Doing this also means that Claudia has to question her own actions—and why Monday might not have told her the truth to begin with.*



*When the situation calls for it, Claudia knows how to be a good friend. She supports Michael here by helping him problem solve how to deal with his dad wanting to stay in Dubai. This shows that Claudia has the skills to make new friends and move forward, she just might not realize that's what she's doing.*



*It's odd that Michael gulps when Claudia calls him out on getting the date wrong—it raises suspicions about what the date actually is and who's actually right here. When the secret of Claudia's dyslexia comes out, it feels like the end of the world to her. With everything else about her life falling apart, this was the one thing she could hold onto of her "Before" life. Losing control of this secret feels again like losing some of Monday.*



*Claudia realizes that there's a huge difference between not being able to read and worrying about what people think of her reading abilities. She's becoming more confident—if only when she's by herself. As Megan joins Claudia's practice, Claudia begins to see that she can have fun dancing with people other than Monday, and that other girls may also have something to teach her.*



*It's a big step for Claudia to be disappointed that the afternoon is ending. This shows that she's starting to enjoy other people's company, branch out, and recover after Monday's disappearance.*



In the car on the way to Megan's, Ma says that Claudia will have so much fun. She suggests that Claudia could have a sleepover party for her birthday and invite her new friends. Claudia asks if Monday can come, and Ma's eyes widen. She says they can talk about it later, but Claudia knows this is the perfect test. Monday adores birthdays and if she doesn't come, Claudia won't speak to her again. Ma stops in front of Megan's house and tells Claudia to try to forget everything else. Claudia knows the subtext: forget about Monday.

Claudia grabs the cookies Ma made and walks up to the door. Megan answers with a smile, accepts the cookies, and says the pizza just arrived. She introduces Claudia to the other attendees: Shannon and Kit Kat from dance, and Paris from school. As Claudia accepts her pizza, the other girls talk about boys. Claudia adds nothing to the conversation until Shannon asks who wants to do her nails. Claudia volunteers and pulls out her nail kit. Shannon looks nervous and says she definitely wants her nails to look good for "later." Claudia settles into her work.

As Claudia paints Shannon's nails, Kit Kat asks why Claudia chased after April at the game. Everyone goes silent when Claudia says April is her best friend's sister, as though they can't believe Claudia has a friend. Claudia says that she and April aren't close, and Shannon says that's good—April's a "ho." Megan tells Claudia to be careful. People will think Claudia is like April if they hang out. Claudia wonders if she should defend April and wonders what Monday would do, but Monday's not here. She abandoned Claudia. So Claudia giggles. It's nice to feel like she belongs to a group.

Claudia does everyone else's nails over the next hour. They laugh, drink soda, and gossip. Megan's mom bustles downstairs, introduces herself to Claudia, and tells the girls to be good—she's off for the night shift at the hospital. As soon as she's gone, the atmosphere changes immediately. Paris and Shannon strip to their lacy underwear and start to change into sexy clothes. Megan puts on a tight dress and Kit Kat pulls out a skirt and top for Claudia. Megan says they wanted to make sure Claudia was cool before they told her they're going to a party.

*Again, Ma seems almost more excited about the sleepover than Claudia does—for Ma, it's exciting to her to see Claudia moving on from Monday. But though Claudia is looking forward to spending time with Megan, she can't forget about Monday yet. She and Monday are still too close, and she's still struggling with Monday's absence.*



*Even though Claudia isn't participating in the conversation, it's still worth noting that the conversation is about boys—just like Claudia and Monday's conversations. Hanging out with other girls, Claudia is finding, might not be so different than spending time with Monday, offering hope that she may find it easier than expected to move forward.*



*Importantly, when Claudia says that the other girls seem not to believe that Claudia has a friend, this is only Claudia's perception. There's no way of knowing what the other girls think in this passage, though their silence suggests that there's something odd about Claudia being friends with April's little sister. Then, when Claudia chooses to laugh at April's expense, she essentially chooses life after Monday and begins to move on, if only temporarily.*



*When Claudia discovers that she and her new friends are actually going to a party, it impresses upon her that this isn't a kids' slumber party. She's hanging out with older girls who wear tight clothes and sneak out when their parents leave the house. Megan's insistence that she wanted to make sure Claudia was cool seems to make Claudia feel like she has to continue be cool as to not alienate her new friends.*



An hour later, Claudia steps out of the cab. She knows Daddy would kill her if he could see where she was and how she's dressed. Megan leads the group to the back of a house to a door to the basement. She whispers in a guy's ear at the door, and his eyes fall on Claudia. Claudia is certain he knows she doesn't belong here, but he lets the group in. The basement is full of high school kids and Paris's boyfriend instantly finds her. Kit Kat leads everyone else to get drinks. Claudia is terrified that someone knows her parents and will tell on her. When Kit Kat puts a drink in Claudia's hand and tells her to not be a baby, Claudia tells herself to be cool.

Claudia spits her drink out when she hears Michael ask what she's doing here. Megan says that she brought Claudia, and Claudia is never going to be ready for this sort of thing if people keep babying her. Michael asks if Ma knows Claudia is here, and Claudia asks if Michael's parents know he's here. He sulks away and Megan leads Claudia to a smelly sofa. Claudia sits, watches Michael, and wonders how to tell Monday about this. Megan whispers that Michael likes Claudia, but Claudia insists they're just friends. Megan smirks that he doesn't act this way with other girls at school. She also says that Claudia will be popular with the boys when she gets to high school.

The DJ turns the music up and Megan leads everyone onto the floor. A boy jumps into the middle of the circle, doing the moves that Monday and Claudia used to practice. Claudia whispers that she could do that, so Kit Kat pushes her into the middle. The alcohol makes Claudia feel light and she dances her heart out. The DJ puts on a go-go song next and then, Kam arrives. Claudia dances on her own until she feels a boy push up behind her. Megan nods to Claudia that it's okay, so Claudia keeps dancing. It feels good and she wonders if Michael is watching.

The boy whispers that he didn't know Claudia could dance like this. It's Jacob. Claudia leaps away and runs, her stomach heaving. Jacob chases her and says he needs to tell her the truth. Claudia refuses—he's going to spread lies about her. Jacob realizes that Claudia is here with Megan and reveals that Kam is his brother. Claudia asks what the truth is, and Jacob says that Monday gave him a blowjob once. His mom said she was "too fast." The words burn Claudia; Monday would never do that. She reminds Jacob that he told everyone they were lesbians. He said he went to apologize to Monday right after school ended, but Mrs. Charles chased him away—and even though he expected to see Monday at swim lessons all summer, she never showed. And now she's gone.

*Claudia is still only 13, and Ma and Daddy for the most part don't seem keen for her to experiment with adult activities like partying and drinking. And for that matter, Claudia doesn't feel old enough to be here either—in her mind, it must be glaringly obvious to everyone in attendance that she's only pretending to be cool. She's not yet ready to grow up, though she's willing to experiment.*



*While Claudia's parents definitely don't encourage her to grow up before she's ready, it's also interesting that Megan implies they're "babying" Claudia. Again, this suggests that there's something more going on here, and this is intentionally confusing for the reader. As Claudia discusses Michael with Megan, she seems very uncomfortable with the prospect of admitting her crush on Michael. This may seem, to her, like she's leaving Monday behind again.*



*Having the opportunity to dance at the party helps Claudia feel a little more in her element in the midst of such an unfamiliar environment. The fact that she thinks it feels good to dance with a boy like this suggests that Claudia is growing up and maturing.*



*Realizing that Jacob was the one dancing behind her feels like a betrayal, given that Jacob strung Monday along for so long and hurt both Claudia and Monday. When Jacob says that Monday was "too fast," he implies that Monday was beginning to get a reputation like April's—where she was known for her promiscuity and wasn't chaste enough to please boys' mothers. Everything that Jacob says, though, seems odd, specifically that Monday's "gone" now. Jacob seems to know something Claudia—and readers—don't.*



Claudia mumbles that Monday never swam at the rec center, but Jacob says she was there daily. He says he keeps thinking about what happened and asks if Claudia misses her. Claudia sways. Just then, Michael comes up behind her, tells Jacob to back off, and leads Claudia to get some water. Claudia shares that she's here with fellow dancers, and Michael shares that he's here with guys from the team. Claudia smiles at him and leans into him. Michael says the other day, he was just trying to make Claudia feel better and as though she's like everyone else. Claudia stares up at him.

Suddenly, the energy seems to leave the room as April walks in with a group of guys. Everyone stares at her. Jacob sits down next to Claudia. Some people ask, loudly enough for April to hear, if she's sleeping with the entire group of guys. When April notices Claudia next to Jacob, she bolts. Afraid that she's going to tell Monday that Claudia was with Jacob, Claudia races after April. Outside in the cold, Claudia begs April to not tell Monday. April looks confused, but agrees angrily. Claudia asks if Monday can come to her birthday party. April gives Claudia a look and then laughs. She can't believe they're "still doing this." She says, in a dark tone, that Monday's not coming.

April spits that Claudia has nerve—she held Monday back from so much and now, she's out drinking and wants to throw a party. Claudia knows April is right and asks if she can apologize to Monday. April says that Monday is never coming back. Claudia doesn't understand and says that Daddy talked to Tip—he hasn't seen any of the kids in a year. April says it's been three. Claudia says she knows Monday didn't have the flu. April begs Claudia to let it go, and when Claudia persists, she says she has no choice but to tell her. Michael bursts outside, interrupting the conversation—and when Claudia turns back to April, she's gone.

Michael chuckles and asks if Claudia is following April again. Claudia says that April is like a big sister and ignoring her is stupid. Michael pulls Claudia into an intimate hug and apologizes. Claudia wants him to kiss her and, a moment later, he does. They kiss passionately against the house, but it feels sloppy. Claudia wonders if she should do more, like Monday did. She pushes Michael against the wall, drops to her knees, and fumbles with his belt. He tells her to stop, but she knows this is how she proves she's not a lesbian or a baby—and she'll catch up to Monday. When Megan calls for Claudia, it shakes Claudia out of her daze. She falls back and thinks that she's not acting any better than April does. She pushes Michael away and runs for Megan.

*Once again, Claudia has to face the possibility that she didn't know Monday as well as she thought she did. Here, she has to consider why Monday would've chosen to lie about swimming lessons at the rec center—but recall that on Halloween in the "Two Years Before the Before" timeline, Monday insisted she hated the rec center. She may have thought that Claudia didn't like the rec center, so she shouldn't either.*



*Again, April's reputation precedes her—and it causes other kids to openly hate her and be cruel to her. Claudia is extremely concerned with her reputation and with not offending Monday, which is why she chases after April to ask her to not tell Monday. April's confusion and her disbelief that they're "still doing this" again raises questions about what exactly is happening. Insisting that "Monday's not coming" in such a dark tone suggests that something horrible happened to Monday, and her comment takes on additional weight given that it's the title of the novel.*



*April seems to resent that Claudia kept Monday from experiencing everything the world has to offer. This is especially true since now, it seems to April that Claudia is out having the time of her life. It's a clue when April says that it's actually been three years since Tip saw any of his kids, since in the "Before" timeline, Tip told Daddy it'd only been one year. This starts to suggest that the "After" timeline may be taking place well after the events of the "Before" timeline.*



*Because Claudia struggles to separate her own experiences from Monday's, she feels compelled to engage in sexual activity here to "catch up" to Monday. This illustrates another consequence of the girls' close friendship—both girls may be pressured into doing things they don't really want to do, simply because they want to impress each other. For Claudia, though, this is especially confusing given that she actually does like Michael romantically. She's maturing and is on the cusp of maturing sexually too—but she's not yet comfortable taking all these different steps at once.*



## CHAPTER 40. ONE YEAR BEFORE THE BEFORE

The Facebook picture gets taken down, but distance grows between Claudia and Monday. Monday acts strange for weeks, skipping school some days and when she does come, she eats two plates of food, drinks at every fountain, and wears wrinkled clothes. She comes over sometimes and she and Claudia dance, but her dance is missing passion and soul. Claudia wonders what's happening to their friendship.

*Though Claudia wonders what's going on with her and Monday's friendship, the better question here is what's going on with Monday. Given how much Monday loves school, it's odd that she'd be skipping and seemingly neglecting her appearance. And drinking and eating so much also implies that she might not be getting enough to eat or drink at home, a possible sign of abuse and neglect.*



## CHAPTER 41. THE AFTER

According to the news, police found a body in Baltimore the morning after the party. As Megan, Claudia, Kit Kat, and Shannon get up, Megan asks Claudia if she's okay and says the pancakes will help. As Claudia chugs water, Megan tells her mom that they stayed up all night watching Netflix.

*Waking up to the news that the police found a body is sinister foreshadowing—it reminds readers that Monday doesn't make it out of this alive. Even if this particular body isn't Monday's, though, this also drives home how prevalent it is for girls to go missing—and be found dead.*



Megan's cellphone rings. Megan answers, grins, and hands the phone to Claudia—it's Michael, calling to check on Claudia since she wasn't at church. He says that Ma invited him for dinner and asks if she wants him to come. Claudia says she does and starts to apologize for last night, but he chuckles and says they're just friends who got a little drunk. Claudia mumbles a goodbye. She thought Michael wanted to kiss her, but maybe she was going too fast like Monday. She wonders if Jacob told her the truth. Claudia returns to the kitchen and tells her friends that Michael was checking on her. Kit Kat and Megan say Michael likes her. Claudia's heart flutters.

*In contrast to the previous passage, this moment offers hope that things are going to be okay for Claudia. Michael seems interested in friendship, even if he's not interested in romance—and this means that Claudia will have many people to rely on for support without Monday around. And if Kit Kat and Megan are correct, Claudia is also headed for her first romantic relationship—which again shows how much she's growing up and developing as the novel unfolds.*



## CHAPTER 42. THE BEFORE

It's the last day of March. After practicing what she's going to say to "her," Claudia zips her coat and heads toward the basketball courts near Ed Borough. Claudia almost walks right past April, who's sitting in the bleachers. Claudia bravely tells her she's looking for Monday. April's energy seems to disappear, but she insults Claudia and reminds her she's not supposed to be here. Claudia asks where Monday is.

*Now that the police, her parents, and the school have failed to help Claudia locate Monday, April seems like Claudia's last hope. April may be caustic and unreliable, but she's also Monday's sister and seems to know more about Monday than Claudia ever gave her credit for.*



With a sigh, April leans back and calls to Darrell, who's playing a pickup game on the court. She calls him over and asks if he had sex with Monday. He glares and grumbles that April doesn't have to tell everyone before running off. Seething, Claudia says that Monday would've told her if she and Darrell had had sex, but April insists she wouldn't have—Claudia is too stuck up and immature. Monday was afraid Claudia would judge her. Claudia says that regardless, she's not leaving until she sees Monday.

*April seems to bring up Monday's sexual activity to make Claudia angry. And she's successful—in Claudia's mind, Monday wasn't seeing any guys but Jacob and the possibility that Monday was seeing someone else but didn't tell Claudia about them is just insulting. But even with all of this, Claudia still loves Monday and to show her loyalty, insists on getting to the bottom of this.*



April leads Claudia to her house. She says Mrs. Charles is babysitting and opens the door. When Claudia smells a strange, pungent stench, her nerves light up. But April nods that Monday is inside, so Claudia steps in. She sees why Mrs. Charles always stood in the doorway: there's a huge chest freezer blocking the door from opening, buzzing. The living room is cramped and the kitchen is crawling with roaches. There are plastic bags taped over the windows, and eviction notices litter the counter. April leads Claudia upstairs, past the bathroom and a closet.

April leads Claudia into a bedroom. There are no bunk beds, just three twin beds arranged in a U. The sheets are dirty and there's garbage on the floor. Claudia can still hear the humming freezer, but she can't see Monday. April chuckles, says Monday is all over the place, and points to Monday's bed. Claudia can't believe it—Monday was a neat freak and did chores without being asked at Claudia's house.

Claudia sits on Monday's bed. The sheets feel like they haven't been used in a long time. April asks if Claudia wants something to remember Monday by. Voice cracking, Claudia asks if this means Monday's not coming back and starts to cry. She needs more time with her friend. Claudia's hand slips and she bumps into Monday's journal, hidden under her pillow. April explains that Monday still has the key. Claudia stuffs the journal into her bag and then begs April to tell her if CFSA took Monday, or if she's with her aunt. April looks ready to speak, but then the girls hear the front door open. It's Mrs. Charles.

## CHAPTER 43. ONE YEAR BEFORE THE BEFORE

One day, as Daddy pulls into Ed Borough to drop Monday at home, they see a group of protesters protesting Ed Borough's closure. Daddy pulls up to a man handing out flyers and the man explains that the "city passed the legislation." Monday points to April, standing with Tuesday and August.

Monday and Claudia jump out of the car to join April. April tells the girls that white people are trying to buy Ed Borough, and they can't do anything to stop it. Monday goes pale and asks if they're going to have to leave. April bends down and tells Monday it'll be okay. Claudia is jealous—she should be comforting Monday instead of April. She offers to let Monday come live at her house, but April snaps that they don't need help. Monday lets go of Claudia's hand and suggests she go home. Claudia is shocked; she didn't think she and Monday had any secrets.

*Seeing the state of the Charles's house confirms that Monday's home life was difficult and neglectful. When Claudia sees the eviction notices, she doesn't seem to feel anything. But the novel has given hints throughout that the Charles family has been living in fear of losing their home for some time. In this way, the entire family becomes victims of the city's policy of trying to close Ed Borough.*



*Seeing the bedroom in particular makes it clear to Claudia that Monday lied about a lot of things, though it's not clear why. Monday may have done chores at Claudia's house because she appreciated being in a clean house—something she never got at home.*



*Asking if Claudia wants something to remember Monday by suggests that Monday isn't coming back—and indeed, implies that she's dead. April even seems poised to tell Claudia the truth before Mrs. Charles gets home early, but Claudia isn't willing to accept it. She's looking for any reason to believe that Monday is still alive when everything points to her being dead.*



*"The legislation" is, presumably, the legislation that's allowing the city to close Ed Borough. Seeing April at the protest drives home that this legislation will affect the Charles family, so it's something they need to publicly oppose.*



*To Monday, the threat of losing their home is terrifying. To Claudia, though, this is just an opportunity to get Monday to come stay with her forever. She thinks this arrangement would be great—so it's perplexing when Monday doesn't agree. This shows Claudia that she doesn't understand what her friend is going through.*



April tells Monday she always takes care of it and glances over to a group of boys near the courts. She tells Monday to take Tuesday back to the house, but Monday looks to the boys and says, “don’t.” Claudia is confused. She sees something pass between April and Monday, but she thinks that’s impossible. She and Monday are the only two who have a bond like that. April says the kids’ uniforms cost a lot, so she’ll be home soon. Watching April leave, Claudia asks where she’s going. Monday sighs and starts to push Tuesday’s stroller home.

*Here, the novel implies that April is engaging in sex work to support the family. This may explain why April has a reputation for promiscuity—but it also reveals that all the people who taunt April for her reputation don’t understand that she may be acting out of necessity. Claudia is privileged and naïve enough that she doesn’t understand what’s going on here, but Monday clearly knows April is engaging in sex work.*



## CHAPTER 44. THE BEFORE

Mrs. Charles yells for April, but April closes the door and tells Claudia to hide under Monday’s bed. She sounds desperate, and Claudia can still hear the freezer buzzing downstairs. April says Mrs. Charles will kill both of them if she finds Claudia, and that doesn’t seem like much of an exaggeration. She admits that the last time she saw Monday alive, Monday was with Ma. Claudia gasps, but dives under the bed. The floor is covered in crumbs and mouse poop, and the mattress stinks.

*The more that Claudia learns about Monday’s home life, the more sinister Mrs. Charles seems. This is why, suddenly, it doesn’t seem like a funny joke or an exaggeration that Mrs. Charles might kill Claudia and April. Indeed, April as much as confirms here that Mrs. Charles could be to blame for Monday’s death.*



Mrs. Charles bursts into the room, seems skeptical when April says she was asleep, and tells April to come help with Tuesday. April leaves and closes the door. Shuddering, Claudia bumps into a book: *Flowers in the Attic*. Downstairs, she hears Mrs. Charles changing TV channels and Tuesday laughing. She listens through four episodes of *The Simpsons*. Then, Tuesday says she’s going upstairs to get her cup, ignoring April’s pleas to stay downstairs. Tuesday bursts into the bedroom and bounces on the bed. Claudia holds in her yelp as the bed squishes her, and she only breathes again when Tuesday leaves.

*Hearing *The Simpsons* again from downstairs shows Claudia that whatever April said, Monday isn’t here—Monday hated *The Simpsons*. Finding *Flowers in the Attic* under the bed, meanwhile, is further proof that Monday has been truly gone for a while, since Ms. Paul asked Claudia about this very book months ago.*



As three more episodes of *The Simpsons* play, Claudia realizes she didn’t leave breadcrumbs for Ma. She cries and mentally asks Monday how to get out. She remembers Monday saying she snuck out of the bathroom window—and realizes that Tuesday left the bedroom door open. Claudia tiptoes out, stuffs *Flowers in the Attic* into her bag, and creeps into the hall. The TV and the freezer are loud enough to cover up her noise as she sneaks into the bathroom, pulling the door halfway closed behind her. Like the rest of the house, the bathroom is filthy. Claudia notices a box of hair dye—the same one Monday used more than a year ago.

*Finally, Claudia realizes how important breadcrumbs are: if something happens to her here, Ma has no way of knowing where Claudia is or if she’s okay. In this case, Monday’s friendship offers Claudia much-needed support when she realizes how to get out of the house. This is also why Monday takes *Flowers in the Attic* in addition to Monday’s journal—she needs to take these “breadcrumbs” of Monday’s so she can feel close to her friend.*



Claudia climbs onto the toilet and tries to pry the window open. It's stuck—Monday was stronger. Suddenly, April yells and asks where Mrs. Charles is going. Mrs. Charles shouts back that she's going to the bathroom. Hearing Monday screaming in her mind, Claudia leaps into the shower and pulls the curtain shut. She curls herself into a ball as Mrs. Charles stomps in and sits on the toilet. The stench makes Claudia heave. Mrs. Charles shouts for April and tells her to get more toilet paper, but April notices Claudia and freezes. She runs away and returns with takeout napkins. Mrs. Charles spits at her to leave.

Claudia struggles to maintain her position, but the tub is slick. Mrs. Charles flushes and washes her hands—and Claudia slips. Her sneaker squeaks. She rolls into a ball, hoping Mrs. Charles didn't notice. Mrs. Charles stands still for a few seconds and then walks to the toilet. Claudia thinks this is it. But instead, Mrs. Charles heaves the window open and returns downstairs. Claudia scrambles out and peers out the window. She can't understand how Monday was able to survive the drop to the trash cans, but she starts to climb anyway. Then, Claudia notices Tuesday in the hallway, staring. After a moment, April and Mrs. Charles call for Tuesday. Tuesday wets herself, and Claudia drops onto the trash cans.

## CHAPTER 45. APRIL

Daddy would be forest green if he was a color. He's calm and can impart "refreshing wisdom." Michael would be brown, like bark. It's the color of earth, quiet and supportive. Claudia thinks of them as the tree that supports her, "The tree of life when surrounded by death."

## CHAPTER 46. THE BEFORE

Claudia "step[s] into the fire" just after midnight. Ma screams that Daddy and others are out looking for her and that she can't disappear without telling anyone. Claudia notices the difference: she's been gone for three hours and Ma has most of the church congregation looking. Monday has been gone for months and no one seems to notice or care.

*Now, Claudia understands why Monday snuck out the window when she had to—it's impossible to get past Mrs. Charles and the TV any other way. Having to hide from Mrs. Charles like this gives Claudia a small taste of what Monday might have dealt with daily and helps her develop empathy for Monday. April's clear concern for Claudia shows that April isn't a villain—she cares about Monday, so she cares about Monday's friends too.*



*This experience shows Claudia the dangers of venturing out on her own. She doesn't have her parents or Monday to protect her right now, and she's going to have to engage in some risky jumps to keep herself safe. But again, this also gives her important insight into what Monday had to live with.*



*Claudia implies here that she needs people like Daddy and Michael, especially as she comes closer to unraveling Monday's mystery. She has other people to lean on aside from Monday, if only she acknowledges them and leans on them.*



*Having seen what Monday lived with, it's no longer surprising to Claudia that nobody seems to care that Monday is gone. In contrast, Ma is angry and worried about Claudia—it'd be impossible, she realizes, for her to disappear like Monday has.*



Ma won't let Claudia talk until she notices that Claudia is bleeding and limping. Claudia says it must've happened in the fall. Exhausted by not getting answers for months, Claudia asks when Ma saw Monday last. Ma acts like Claudia slapped her, but says she saw her last before Claudia left for her grandmother's. Claudia insists that Ma saw her after that—and when Ma says she didn't, Claudia shouts for Ma not to lie. She says that Monday isn't with Tip, isn't with her aunt, hasn't moved, and she never had the flu. Claudia asks Ma if she knew about the flu, and Ma sighs that it happened right after she lost the last baby. Claudia remembers that she didn't leave Ma's side for days and wonders what she missed. Claudia says that she thinks something bad happened to Monday, and Ma agrees.

*When Ma admits that she knew Monday never had the flu, it confirms that she knew Monday suffered neglect and abuse at home—and never said anything about it. Claudia also realizes that she may be at fault here, since she was so caught up in Ma's last miscarriage to really notice what was going on when Monday was taken out of her home for neglect. As Claudia asks for answers, she also steps into a more mature, adult role with her mother. She asks Ma to treat her like an adult and stop coddling her.*



Ma cleans Claudia up and settles in her room to ice her knee. Claudia holds Monday's journal, feeling like the world might explode if she opens it. She catches sight of the keyhole and realizes that her journal must have the same lock. Sure enough, when she tries her key, the lock clicks open. Claudia sees that most of the pages are full and wonders what Monday felt she had to write instead of tell Claudia. Claudia doesn't know where to begin, but she decides to start at the beginning. But on the first page, Monday laments that Claudia can't read and wonders if she'd be better in "the stupid kids' class." Claudia throws the journal under her bed.

*Even after seeing Monday's home and how terrifying Mrs. Charles is, Claudia still wonders what Monday could've written about in her journal. She believes that she and Monday shared everything and were totally honest with each other, so it's a shock when the journal begins with Monday complaining about Claudia's learning disabilities. This seems to corroborate April's story that Claudia stifled Monday—and accepting this is uncomfortable. It makes Claudia question her entire friendship with Monday.*



## CHAPTER 47. THE AFTER

Claudia's days of school, dance, chores, church, and homework seem to blur together. Weeks pass and sometimes, something happens that reminds Claudia of Monday—and she remembers what's missing. She decides that Daddy is right. Monday is tired of her. Claudia decides to give up on Monday. One afternoon at the **library**, Michael whispers that Claudia seems quiet. Claudia snaps that she's never loud and works on her Baneker essay. She keeps flashing on Monday's journal entry. She wishes she'd never learned that Monday lied about so much. Whenever Claudia is alone without distractions, she remembers the buzz of the freezer and Monday's room.

*It may be less traumatic for Claudia to believe that Monday doesn't want to be her friend anymore than it is to believe that Monday is dead. And to make everything worse, Claudia is still trying hard to move on from the trauma of discovering that some things about her friendship with Monday weren't true, such as that Monday was wholly supportive of Claudia despite her dyslexia. The fact that Claudia still fixates on the freezer and Monday's room shows that she hasn't yet moved on from that traumatic evening at the Charles house.*



Claudia mumbles an apology to Michael and digs for a pen in her bag. *Flowers in the Attic* falls out, and she explains to Michael that it's Monday's. She keeps forgetting to give it to Ms. Paul. Interested, Michael flips through the book and asks why Monday would read it. When Claudia notes that Monday read it multiple times, Michael is aghast. He explains that they made a Lifetime movie about it, which is how he knows the plot. It's about four teens who are locked in the attic at their grandma's house, and the grandma tortures the kids. The teens eventually start having sex, and the mom tries to poison the kids.

*In Michael's understanding, *Flowers in the Attic* is a dark, uncomfortable, and disturbing book. When he asks why Monday would read it, though, he encourages Claudia to think more critically about Monday's motivations. This isn't something Claudia has done up until this point—she made a point in earlier chapters to take Monday at her word and to not ask questions like this about Monday's reasons for doing things.*



Claudia agrees that that's crazy and nasty and starts to ask what people would think if people saw Monday reading *Flowers in the Attic*. But then, she gasps and leaps up. She runs to the front of the library and shoves the book at Ms. Paul. She says it was Monday's and Ms. Paul stares at the book like it's disgusting. Claudia asks if there's a way to see all the books a person has ever checked out. Ms. Paul says it's an urban legend, but Monday asked her the same thing once. She explains that there's only a record if a person checks books out online or if they lose books.

Claudia asks if she can see what Monday took out. She tells Ms. Paul she wants to read what Monday read. Ms. Paul insists that info is private, but Michael comes up and says it'd really help Claudia. Ms. Paul huffs, says it's against policy, and types something. She says she's going to get a cup of coffee and asks Michael to check out something wrong on her computer. As soon as she leaves, Michael takes Ms. Paul's seat. Monday checked out *Flowers in the Attic* five times, in addition to many others that deal with child abuse like *Perks of Being a Wallflower* and *Sharp Objects*. Michael says that Monday must've been trying to tell people what was going on. Claudia realizes these are breadcrumbs—Monday thought the government was watching her.

Buzzing appears in Claudia's head, as though the freezer is sitting right next to her. Michael asks Claudia if she remembers anything and Claudia thinks about the upstairs closet. Monday must've been in there. Claudia yells that she has to go back to Monday's house. Michael suggests they talk to Ma and Daddy, but Claudia says they have to talk to Tip. He's the only person who can file a missing persons report, and he works at the Maryland House. Michael sighs and gets on his phone. After a few minutes, he says his cousin can drive them to the Maryland House on Thursday, and Tip can drive them home.

It's pouring on Thursday. Claudia and Michael climb out of the car at the Maryland House right off the highway. Claudia says she heard Tip worked at the gas station, so she and Michael head for the pumps. Claudia studies the attendants, but she doesn't recognize any of the men. Michael frowns. He thought she'd remember what Tip looks like. But an older white man waves and tells Claudia and Michael to move away. Claudia steps up and says she's looking for Tip—she's his daughter, Monday. The man looks like he's seen a ghost but explains that Tip doesn't start work until six.

*Claudia is still very concerned with what other people think; she wants both herself and Monday to look normal to others. But when it comes to Flowers in the Attic, Claudia realizes that Monday may have been concerned with the exact same things, for other reasons. Monday may have been trying to leave "breadcrumbs" by reading a book about child abuse, since all signs point to the fact that she suffered abuse at home.*



*When Ms. Paul allows Claudia to sneak a look at Monday's library history, it shows Claudia that she has lots of people in her life who want to help her—and, perhaps, who want to help Monday as well. Claudia realizes now that Monday took Mrs. Charles seriously and believed the government did watch what books she checked out. But because the government doesn't actually people's library history, Monday's breadcrumbs didn't have their intended effect.*



*Hearing the freezer buzzing in this moment is another indicator that Claudia is still experiencing trauma from her hours spent hiding in the Charles's house. When Michal suggests they talk to Ma or Daddy, it indicates that he sees them as trustworthy, helpful people when it comes to solving this mystery. But to Claudia, who cares so much about making sure Monday is safe, the only option is to go to seemingly the only person who can help Monday: her dad.*



*It's unclear why Michael would expect Claudia to remember Tip, since she's never given any indication that she's met him before. The man's reaction when Claudia introduces herself as Monday also suggests that something is off here. It implies that Monday is either still missing or that the mystery is already solved—and Monday shouldn't be able to come looking for her father so casually.*



Michael steers Claudia into the min-mart, which opens into the main mall-like building. They decide to get Phillips Seafood and Michael pays. As they eat, Claudia admits she told Ma that she had an extra dance rehearsal to cover up this trip. Claudia knows Ma would be furious, but finding Monday is too important to not risk it. Monday would do the same. Michael asks Claudia what she's going to say to Tip, but she says she's winging it and doesn't know.

Michael laughs and says he's always wanted to bring a girl to Phillips, though ideally not at a rest stop. His dad used to take his mom to Phillips, but now he just complains that there isn't any good seafood in Dubai. Michael says he's going to stay with Ms. Walker, but he's going to miss his parents. Changing the subject, Michael asks about Claudia's upcoming recital. Claudia brushes it off, but Michael has heard that it's a big deal. He tells Claudia she'll be fine, since she's a great dancer. Claudia explains that she's not excited because Ms. Manis chose a slow song for her, and she really wanted a fast song so she could use the dances she and Monday came up with.

Michael asks if this is why Claudia wants to find Monday, but Claudia says there's more. She knows Monday is in trouble. This doesn't feel like a lie. Claudia doesn't need Monday—but she knows Monday needs her help. Michael asks if Claudia ever watches instant replays during football games and suggests she try to slow some of the moves down. Claudia refuses, but Michael suggests she try some out right now. Claudia knows Monday would take the dare, so she gets up and performs one set of moves quickly. Then, she slows it down and thinks of Megan and dancing at dance ministry. It feels good.

With only a few minutes to go until Tip gets in, Claudia and Michael stand by the windows so they can watch for him. The storm picks up outside and Michael buys them both hot chocolate. Claudia teases Michael about putting sugar in the drink, but Michael says his coach made him stop. Claudia notes that it sounds like Michael has a bunch of people who are kind of like dads, so maybe his dad staying in Dubai won't be so bad. Michael says that his dad is his best friend, though. Claudia gets this—nothing feels like spending time with Monday. Sighing, Michael brings up the party. Claudia waves him off and reminds him that they were drunk, but Michael says he wasn't.

Just as Michael leans forward to kiss Claudia, Claudia sees a man who resembles Monday jump out of a truck outside. Michael and Claudia watch as Tip approaches the white man at the pumps and, after a minute of conversation, throw his hands up and return to his car. Tip looks terrified as he unlocks the car and drives away while Michael shouts at him. Claudia sighs and asks how they're going to get home now.

*Claudia is learning from her dance friends—using a dance rehearsal as cover is how Megan got to the mall with Kam earlier in the novel. Choosing to tell this lie to track down Monday, though, shows that Claudia is still holding onto the past rather than moving into the future by going on dates with boys like Megan does.*



*It's worth noting the difference between how smooth Claudia and Michael's conversation is here, and how stilted and awkward it was when they first met. This indicates that Claudia is becoming more comfortable connecting with people other than Monday and is learning the skills she needs to be able to make friends. Claudia also articulates here that she sees her dance solo as a way to commemorate her friendship with Monday. It feels impossible to do so to the song Ms. Manis chose for her.*



*Something has started to shift in Claudia. She no longer talks about how Monday must've left her for mean, selfish reasons—she understands that she has to search for Monday because Monday needs help and support. And with this, Claudia is able to effectively think of what Monday would do and perform the dance moves in the restaurant. It also helps that Claudia's friendship with Megan means that dancing isn't solely connected to Monday—Claudia now has other dance friends.*



*Michael and his many parental figures stand in contrast to Monday and her lack of support. While Michael has his dad, his coach, Claudia's parents, Ms. Walker, and even the pastor at church, Monday didn't have as many people looking out for her and pointing her in the right direction. This drives home just how disadvantaged Monday is—without that kind of a community to look out for her, it was all too easy for Monday to disappear.*



*When Tip's arrival interrupts Claudia and Michael's kiss, it drives home that for now, finding Monday is more important to Claudia than embarking on a relationship. Tip's reaction is disconcerting, especially since Michael truly believed that he and Claudia would be able to catch a ride home with Tip.*



It's now past 8:00 p.m. Claudia climbs out of the cab at the Baltimore train station and asks if they should call their parents, but Michael jokes that he'd rather let their parents kill them in D.C. than let their parents yell at them in a car. He grouches about Tip running away "like [they] were the police." Claudia is still in shock. She reads that the next train to D.C. leaves in 10 minutes, so Michael leaves Claudia at the track and runs to buy tickets.

Claudia wonders where to take her search next, and she can't figure out why Tip ran. She hears a newscaster's voice asking viewers to identify a teenage girl's body and looks up at a nearby TV. The newscaster says that it's unclear how long the body has been in a Baltimore park, but the victim seems to be between 14 and 16 years old. Suddenly, everything seems clear to Claudia and she gasps Monday's name. Michael returns with tickets and asks what's wrong. Claudia says Monday is dead, but Michael looks to the TV and assures Claudia that the girl on it isn't Monday. Claudia's ears begin to buzz.

Softly, Michael tells Claudia again that the girl isn't Monday. They find lots of people in that park, but Claudia notes that Tip ran from them. Maybe Mrs. Charles wasn't lying, and Monday did go to her dad's house—and maybe Tip lied to Daddy about not seeing Monday. Michael's face falls and he asks if she really doesn't remember anything. He jumps when his phone vibrates; the congregation is looking for Claudia. Claudia insists they have to go to the police; they can't identify Monday because no one knows she's missing. Sadly, Michael apologizes, says he didn't know, and says it's time to call Ma.

## CHAPTER 48. THE BEFORE

When Claudia wakes up in the morning, she's weak. By the time she's dressed, she has chills and a headache. Downstairs, Ma reminds Claudia that her Banneker interview is today; that's why she's not dressed for work. Ma explains that Daddy is on his way home and they're going to go check on Monday soon. Claudia sways; she's worried Ma is going to go missing too. Ma wraps Claudia in a hug but pulls back when she feels Claudia's skin. It's burning up, so Ma tucks Claudia back into bed and leaves to pick up some medicine.

*Michael is joking when he says he'd rather let their parents kill them in D.C.—but again, this kind of joke rings hollow given that Monday seems to be dead. Claudia's willingness to call her parents, though, shows that she sees them as trustworthy adults who will care for her even when she messes up.*



*Now that Claudia realizes Monday is dead, everything seems clear to her—she should've realized long ago that she was looking for a body, not a living person. Michael's reaction, though, is somewhat perplexing. He seems to be well aware that Monday is dead and, for instance, says with authority that the girl on the TV isn't Monday. It's unclear how he'd know this, or why he'd know already that Monday is dead when Claudia just figured it out herself.*



*To Claudia, everything suddenly makes sense and Michael's attempts to soothe her seem misguided and even rude. When he asks if she doesn't remember anything, though, it suggests that he and Claudia might not be operating with the same information—Claudia may have forgotten some important piece. Deciding to call Ma also suggests that Michael feels out of his depth here; he realizes that Claudia needs more support than he can give.*



*Because she's sick, it's hard to tell if Claudia is legitimately afraid that Ma is going to go missing or if that's just a consequence of her high fever. Regardless, the fact that she's afraid of this suggests that Claudia is now aware that there's danger in the world—and it can come for her loved ones at any time, just as it may have come for Monday.*



A bit later, Claudia hears sirens getting louder. Sirens are normal in Southeast, but not this many. Claudia looks out the window at the **library**, remembering how she'd skipped chapters to keep up with Monday when they read for school. Monday used to laugh about it being like "fast-forwarding a movie to the ending." Suddenly, Claudia dives under the bed and pulls Monday's journal out. She decides to start at the end; it's the best chance she has of finding Monday. Monday's last entry is two lines: that Claudia is leaving tomorrow, and that she's going to tell Ma "what happened." Claudia feels her dread gathering.

The phone rings. It's Ma, saying she's fine but is having a hard time getting back. All the cross streets near Ed Borough are blocked off. Claudia looks out the window and sees a cop car on her street. The cop is heading for Ed Borough. Claudia doesn't remember saying goodbye to Ma or putting her boots on. She gets on her bike and rides to Ed Borough. It's a warm spring day. When Claudia gets to Ed Borough, she cuts through the grass to Monday's house. There are barriers and a crowd right outside her house.

Claudia joins the crowd and pushes through. She sees a policeman stumble out of the front door and vomit on the pavement. Other officers and medics are moving slowly and a photographer arrives. Whispers start to whip through the crowd: they found dead kids in the freezer inside, and the police already took April away. Claudia's body goes numb. All she can hear is her racing heart and the buzzing freezer. Everything starts to spin, just like Claudia and Monday used to spin each other. As Claudia falls back, Daddy catches her. He picks her up and carries her home.

## CHAPTER 49. THE AFTER

As soon as Claudia and Michael walk in the front door, Ma embraces Claudia. Claudia insists they have to go to the police. Michael apologizes and says she thought seeing "him" would help Claudia remember. Ma says it's okay—Tip called a while ago. Claudia says this is proof Tip is to blame and tells Ma that nobody knows where Monday is, but they just found a girl's body in Baltimore. It must be Monday. She's spoken to Ms. Orman, and Monday never had the flu. Ma's eyes well up. She thought Claudia was getting better. Confused, Claudia says she's seeing Ms. Walker and going to the TLC; this isn't at all related.

*Now that Claudia is able to read on her own, she's also learned to think more critically about how she reads. This is why she's able to suddenly see the value in starting from the end of Monday's journal. Discovering that Monday planned to tell Ma "what happened" feels very sinister. But while it confirms that Monday kept secrets, it also shows that in the end, Monday did finally decide to put her shame aside and tell a trusted adult what was going on at home.*



*It's telling that people only seem to care about what happened to Monday now, when it seems like the police have found something. While Claudia has been focused on finding her friend for months because she cares about Monday, the crowd suggests that people are here as much for the spectacle as anything else.*



*Finally, Claudia puts all the pieces together: presumably, Monday was one of the dead kids in the freezer. This turn of events validates Claudia's belief all along that something was terribly wrong for Monday to disappear without a trace—and it implicates everyone else who assured her that everything was fine without properly following up. It's essential, the novel shows, to be concerned about vulnerable kids safe, long before something bad happens to them.*



*In Claudia's mind, it's clear what needs to happen here: she needs to help Monday. But since the police found Monday's body in the previous chapter, it seems possible that the mystery has already been solved. The way that Michael and Ma talk about Tip—as though they all know something Claudia doesn't—supports this. When Claudia assumes that Ma is referring to her dyslexia getting better, it shows how much Claudia still identifies herself with her dyslexia.*



Claudia insists that Monday was trying to leave breadcrumbs by checking out books about child abuse from the **library**, but Ma tells Claudia to sit down. Claudia screeches that no one will listen to her or believe her. Crying, Ma says that Claudia was right all the time—they should've listened and believed her when Claudia brought this up the first time. Ma says that Monday has been gone for two years now. Claudia is confused, but Ma gently says that Monday and August were murdered two years ago.

Claudia gasps and tries to back away. Ma explains that Claudia keeps having “episodes” where she forgets. Claudia asks how old she is—she’s applying for high schools and just turned 14. Ma sighs that Claudia is 16 and is applying for high school *again*; she and Daddy pulled Claudia after what happened on her last day. Claudia can’t remember what happened, and she doesn’t know where the last two years went. Claudia still hears the buzzing in her head.

Ma explains that Ms. Walker has been homeschooling Claudia for a year, Claudia has been dancing, and Michael has been around since the beginning. Ms. Valente moved back to New York just after “it happened.” Claudia falls. She can’t believe Monday is dead. Ma helps Claudia up and suggests she get some sleep. Claudia asks if April knows about her condition, and Ma says she does.

## CHAPTER 50. MAY

Claudia has a secret: she knew Monday was dead. But she hoped Monday would be in a car, chopped up, or buried somewhere—not in a freezer right in front of her. This makes the pain even worse. Now, instead of being red, Monday is dark onyx. In some ways, Claudia is glad Monday’s name wasn’t Friday. That would be too tragic.

## CHAPTER 51. THE BEFORE

In her journal, Monday writes that she wishes Mrs. Charles was like Ma. She writes that last night, Mrs. Charles beat August until he couldn’t stand and then said he deserved it. Later, when April tried to get August up, he wouldn’t wake up. Mrs. Charles wouldn’t let April try to save August—instead, she made April put him in the freezer. Monday writes that she’s terrified and wants to tell someone, but she’s afraid they’d split up her siblings and that she won’t be able to see Claudia again.

*It's maddening for Claudia when no one is willing to take her seriously. But when Ma shares that Monday and August have been dead for two years, it begins to illuminate when the “After” timeline actually takes place—this seems to be at least a year after the “Before” timeline, if not longer.*



*Revealing that Claudia has been repressing the memory that the police solved Monday’s murder shows just how traumatizing that information is for her. It’s less traumatizing to continue to search for Monday for years than it is to accept that Monday is gone. This also illuminates some of the more confusing passages earlier in the “After” timeline. People expected Claudia to remember that Monday was dead—and were shocked and confused when she didn’t.*



*It's significant that it's even more of a shock to Claudia to learn that Monday is dead than it is to learn that she's forgotten that fact for two years. Monday's death remains the most important and traumatic event of Claudia's life—and so she continues to try to process it by searching for Monday.*



*Here, Claudia underscores that it's uncomfortable to think about child abuse and violence, which is why it often goes ignored or uninvestigated. And it's far more comforting to think that strangers are dangerous than it is to accept the possibility that a loved one might be capable of murder.*



*Reading Monday's journal gives Claudia some of the clarity she craves. Presumably, Mrs. Charles murdered August right before Monday started behaving oddly in the “Before” timeline. And now, Claudia sees that Monday had good reason to keep his death a secret—telling the truth and consequently being separated from her siblings and Claudia seemed far more frightening than staying quiet.*



In another entry, Monday writes that August is still in the freezer. April is trying to find Aunt Doris, and everyone is talking about Ed Borough closing. Monday thinks they'll either get split up or they'll be on the streets. In the next entry, Monday says she almost told Claudia about August. She just messed up her hair. Monday says she wants to tell, but she's afraid that Claudia might tell someone. What will everyone think of them? Monday writes that she shouldn't be writing at all—Mrs. Charles would kill her if she found the journal.

When Tip has his press conference, he makes excuses and sobs. Claudia wonders why Monday's family is comforting him when they didn't bother to look for Monday. The police question April, Tuesday, neighbors, and school officials. Eventually, they figure it out. August has been dead for a year and a half—and Monday has been dead for at least 10 months. When the police came to evict Mrs. Charles, she wasn't there. Instead, the police entered and found two kids in the freezer. They took Tuesday from April and eventually found Mrs. Charles "next door," smoking. Everything seems to buzz.

Hundreds of people attend the televised funeral. People cry, even classmates who had taunted Monday and called her a whore and a lesbian. Monday's middle name is spelled wrong in the program. Daddy and neighbors carry Monday's coffin into the church; Tip is too upset to carry anything. He wears a shirt with Monday's face on it—a picture taken years ago. Since Mrs. Charles and Tip don't have many pictures of her, Ma supplies seven years' worth of photos. They cut Claudia out of every one, so she's nothing more than a "mysterious arm" in those pictures. Claudia sits in the third row, staring at the matching pink and blue coffins.

Ma sits next to Claudia, frowning. She realizes that none of the attendees knew Monday—and Claudia isn't sure she knew her friend, either. Pastor Duncan conducts the service and mispronounces Monday's middle name. Claudia stares at April's head and April's Aunt Doris in front of her. Michael stands to the side. Once Pastor Duncan is finished, he invites people to speak for the camera. Shayla and Ashley speak and sob until someone escorts them offstage. Claudia doesn't recognize anyone else who speaks aside from Ms. Valente. As the choir sings, Jacob puts a pink rose on Monday's casket—and later, his photo ends up on the *Time* magazine cover. All Claudia can hear is a buzzing.

*In this entry, Monday confirms that her family lived in fear of losing their home for years. Losing their home would've been devastating and put them on the streets, which shows how vulnerable the Charles family was because of their economic situation. And just like Claudia, Monday is afraid of what other people would think if they knew about the abuse she and her siblings suffered. This shame kept her quiet—and allowed the abuse to continue.*



*The Charles family can grieve for Monday and Tuesday's deaths. But at the same time, it's possible to implicate them in the children's murders and the fact that it took so long to locate them. When the police only discovered the bodies when they went to evict Mrs. Charles, it underscores that the city is driven by money. Had Mrs. Charles been able to pay rent, it's likely that Monday and August's murders may have gone unnoticed for much longer.*



*While Monday's death is obviously a tragedy, Claudia's description of the funeral suggests that a lot of people fixate on publicly looking upset rather than actually grieving for Monday. In Claudia's case, it seems to contribute to her trauma when everyone cuts her out of the photos of Monday, as it symbolically erases their friendship. No one else has to acknowledge now that Monday had a best friend who spent the last several months searching for her.*



*The funeral tells a story about Monday that Claudia finds unfamiliar and untrue. When Shayla and Ashley speak so emotionally, it may signal to others that they actually cared about Monday—when in Claudia's experience, they were bullies who made Monday and Claudia's lives miserable. The same goes for Jacob. He strung Monday along for months and helped make her life miserable at school—and yet, he's the one who makes it onto the cover of *Time* magazine. All of this minimizes Claudia's role in Monday's life, making her feel like she doesn't matter.*



Claudia explains that when a person wakes up from a nightmare, it's normal to find something grounding. Every morning after they found Monday, Claudia gets up and stares at the **library**. When it doesn't turn into a cave of flesh-eating rodents, she gets up and starts her day. Everything, even her toothbrush, feels heavy, and oatmeal makes her want to vomit. She panics on the bathroom floor until she can breathe.

Claudia sits up all night watching the cycling news reports. She knows now that she was right, but it doesn't give her any satisfaction. One morning, she turns on the news to watch more about Monday. She ignores Ma's attempts to get her to eat as the news says that authorities are examining Monday's body for signs of sexual trauma. At this point, Daddy yanks the TV off the wall.

A few weeks later, Ma explains that they're going to visit April. At Aunt Doris's house, Claudia and Ma ignore the news vans and hurry inside. It feels like a cave inside, but April sits outside in the sunny backyard, facing the back fence. Aunt Doris explains that April is having a hard time. She also says that she visited Tuesday in the hospital yesterday. Tuesday asked for Mrs. Charles and wanted to know when Monday is coming to play. The adults discuss the upcoming custody trial. The state wants to take parental rights from both Tip and Mrs. Charles, but Tip is fighting it. Ma passes Aunt Doris an envelope of cash from the congregation to help out.

Aunt Doris suggests that Claudia take April some lemonade so she can talk to Ma privately. Claudia heads into the backyard and puts the tray down next to April, but April doesn't look up. Ma gives Claudia a pleading look from the doorway, so Claudia says hi and pulls up a chair. They discuss that the funeral was bogus. Ma and Aunt Doris watch the girls like they're zoo animals—they might play or fight.

April asks if Claudia knows that she helped Mrs. Charles stuff August and Monday into the freezer. The buzzing starts, louder in Claudia's head, as April says that the freezer wouldn't close right since Monday was tall. April says that they should arrest her too. Mrs. Charles didn't even tell her to put Monday in the freezer; April just needed more time. She explains that she was trying to make a plan. When they spent the month away a year ago, the authorities split the kids up. April couldn't bear losing Tuesday if anyone found out. Claudia asks if April really hated Monday that much.

*Everything Claudia experiences here indicates that she's struggling to cope with immense trauma. The library helps her keep herself grounded in real life, and it reminds her of who Monday was. Monday loved reading and loved the library, and it's where she left the most obvious breadcrumbs for Claudia to follow.*



*Finally, the novel reveals how and why Claudia's family's TV is broken in the "After" timeline: Daddy broke it to stop Claudia from fixating on the news coverage of Monday's death. It's also worth noting that it doesn't seem like Claudia is getting anything meaningful out of these "cycling" news reports. Watching them is just a way to remind herself of Monday.*



*Monday and August's murders and the aftermath have been traumatic experiences for everyone. Tuesday seems to be suffering greatly from the trauma. Months ago, Tuesday told Claudia that Monday was hiding in the closet—but at that point, Monday was already dead. So Tuesday is, like Claudia in the "After" timeline, likely struggling to accept the reality of her sister's death. Claudia is in no way the only one struggling to cope with the trauma.*



*With Monday gone, Claudia and April may find that they have more in common. Talking about how horrible the funeral was is a start—they both recognize that the funeral was more about the publicity than it was about honoring Monday and August.*



*As April explains how desperate she was to protect her family, she shows how her desperation led to some truly horrifying actions. But at the time, they seemed necessary—April felt like she had to do what she did in order to save her own life and Tuesday's. Just as with Monday, April's shame and desperation kept her from asking for help because getting help far worse than having to figure things out herself.*



Enraged, April says she's given up *everything* to take care of her family, including Monday. Monday would've told the truth, and then the siblings would've been split up. With the eviction notices, April needed a plan. Claudia spits that Tuesday is "one step away from being one of them crazies on the Metro," so she's not better off. April says in a year she'll be 18, and then it'll be just her and Tuesday.

April asks if Monday ever told Claudia that April signed Monday up for the school lottery. This is another secret and makes Claudia flush. April says that Monday was smart, she was reading by age four. April filled out the paperwork at the **library**. Monday met Claudia and learned what life was supposed to be like. Now, April doesn't know whether to hate Claudia, but she never had a Claudia in her life as a kid. Claudia realizes that she and April hate each other because they're both jealous of Monday's relationship with the other: April and Monday were sisters, while Monday and Claudia were soulmates.

Claudia asks why Monday didn't tell her anything. April explains that Monday just didn't want Claudia to feel sorry for her, but Claudia says all she would've done was try to help. When April says that Monday wouldn't have wanted that, Claudia points out that it wouldn't matter—even if Monday hated her, Monday might still be alive. April cries and asks if Claudia is going to tell on her. Claudia thinks that April has always looked so much older. Now that she knows what April has been dealing with, it makes sense. But Monday is gone, and Claudia understands keeping a secret to protect oneself. She says she won't tell. They discuss Tip's interview, and then Claudia asks April if she can hear the buzzing.

## CHAPTER 52. THE AFTER

Daddy gently nudges Claudia awake. She looks to the **library** to ground herself as she comes up from her nightmare, and then throws her arms around Daddy and sobs. He soothes her and then says he has surprise. She opens a box to reveal an iPhone in a purple case. Daddy explains that he and Ma have had it for a while and have been trying to shield Claudia from what happened. But maybe if she has it, she'll be able to remember consistently.

*April's reasoning doesn't make any sense to Claudia, but the novel implies that this is because Claudia is comparatively privileged and has never had to do the kind of cost-benefit analysis that April did. Growing up in such a functional, loving home has shielded Claudia from having to consider what she might do in the same situation.*



*Here, April shows how she actually did help Monday succeed and got her to a place where Monday could escape the abuse at home. As Claudia realizes that she and April were both jealous of the other's relationship with Monday, she's able to feel more empathy for the older girl. With this, Claudia starts to grow and learns to look at the situation through a more mature lens.*



*Claudia proposes here that it would've been worth losing her friendship with Monday if it would have protected Monday from abuse and death. It's absolutely essential, she suggests, to place another person's wellbeing above her own selfish desires. But even as Claudia makes these leaps toward maturity, the buzzing she hears still shows that she's struggling to deal with the trauma. And now that the novel has illuminated how the timelines fit together, it's clear where all this trauma is leading: Claudia is soon going to forget again what happened to Monday.*



*Even two years after Monday's death, Claudia still associates Monday with the library and looks there for guidance and comfort from her friend. When Daddy gives Claudia the phone, it signals recognition that shielding Claudia from reality perhaps wasn't the healthiest option. They may have tried to shelter her to protect her—but now, Daddy realizes that Claudia has to continually face her trauma in order to heal.*



At 3:15 a.m., Claudia is still awake, perusing articles from two years ago. She clicks on an NBC video. The newscaster says that eight CFSA workers will be fired after failing August and Monday. In an interview, a police officer says he's never seen anything like this. The house was filthy and failed several safety codes. Then, the newscaster plays the recording of Ms. Valente's 911 call. In the call, Ms. Valente explains that Monday is missing and there's something wrong with Mrs. Charles. This call, the newscaster explains, wasn't the first one made on Monday's behalf—a nurse made a report a while ago. Now, city officials are exploring policy changes to stop this from happening to someone else.

In the next video, Claudia recognizes Monday's neighbors. Most of the neighbors say that Mrs. Charles loved her kids and never hit them. The newscaster says that residents of Ed Borough hope that this crime will stop D.C.'s redevelopment plan, which will put many residents in homeless shelters. Some people believe that Mrs. Charles suffered a mental break because she feared eviction. One neighbor says that of course Mrs. Charles "went crazy"—buses of white people drive around Ed Borough like they're on safari these days.

Claudia looks out at the **library**. She imagines Monday's ghost sitting there, the place she loved most, reading. Claudia finds Michael's number already programmed into the phone and calls him. Groggily, he asks her what's wrong. She asks why reporters didn't talk to her when they spoke to all Monday's neighbors. She wonders if they thought she wasn't smart enough, since she went to the TLC. Michael says Claudia doesn't get it. She knew from the beginning that something was wrong, so she's smarter than even those agents who got fired. She's not dumb because she has some trouble reading.

Michael says he doesn't know anyone as smart or as brave as Claudia. He recalls how ready she was to save Monday when she figured it out. Claudia bursts into tears and sobs that she didn't save Monday. Michael says she actually did: Claudia saved Monday from having to be at home, and she did that for years.

*As Claudia dives into the news coverage of Monday's death, she gains insight into how dramatically the systems that should've protected Monday failed in that regard. The firing of eight CFSA workers suggests that eight people failed to protect Monday, while it's clear that the authorities also ignored Ms. Valente's 911 call (which was presumably made after Ms. Valente visited Mrs. Charles, months before Monday's body was discovered). The aside that the city is hopefully going to change their policies offers hope that the city will take Monday's death seriously and work to patch up the holes in its reporting systems.*



*Here, the novel calls into question whether the Ed Borough community really would've been able to protect Monday and August—it seems that few of Mrs. Charles's neighbors are willing to say that they suspected her of such violence. But the novel also shows that Mrs. Charles's actions didn't happen in a vacuum—she was, perhaps, pushed over the edge by city policies that treated her like a problem to be removed, not a person.*



*Here, Michael makes the case that intelligence comes in many different forms. Being able to read without extra help, for instance, isn't what made Monday smart, while needing some extra help doesn't make Claudia unintelligent. What matters most, Michael suggests, is that a person can think critically and is willing to speak up when they see something wrong.*



*Michael makes another important point here: by being Monday's friend and giving her a safe space to escape to, Claudia may have lessened the abuse Monday suffered at home. Claudia should be proud of having done this, as she made Monday's life less miserable than it might have been otherwise.*



## CHAPTER 53. THE BEFORE

Ma scrubs the house all morning. When Claudia hears the doorbell ring, she comes downstairs. She stops short when she sees Detective Carson in the doorway with a woman. The detective's mouth drops open when he sees Claudia. The woman introduces herself to Ma as Detective Woods and introduces Carson. Ma introduces herself, Daddy, and Claudia, and Carson acts like he's never met Claudia. Claudia, angry, takes a seat next to Ma.

Woods pulls out some files and explains that Mrs. Charles is denying everything except for August's death—she insists Monday ran away and has no idea how Monday ended up in the freezer. Pointedly, Claudia says she wonders why Mrs. Charles didn't file a police report. Carson offers Claudia his condolences and asks if they can talk. Claudia wants to scream, but she knows he'll have to live with his guilt for the rest of his life.

Woods and Carson ask all sorts of questions about Monday. Finally, Carson asks Ma when she last saw Monday. Ma says that Monday stopped by a week after Claudia went to her grandmother's and seemed frazzled. She was wearing a pair of tribal-print shorts that Ma had originally bought Claudia; Monday often wore Claudia's clothes and it didn't bother Ma. Woods pulls out a photo and slides it to Ma. Ma gasps and asks if Monday was wearing those shorts when she died. The detectives can't say for sure.

Carson asks Claudia if he can help them figure out where Monday's journal might be; they found the key to it in Monday's pocket. Claudia initially refuses, but Carson says that April suggested Claudia might have taken it when she was at the house a few weeks ago. Ma screams at Claudia for going to the Charles's house and Claudia agrees to fetch the journal. Carson holds out a Ziploc bag. Claudia feels a fog lifting. The journal is the last of her best friend and the only way to know what Monday's life was really like.

Claudia asks if Carson will give the journal back. He explains that it's evidence. Trembling, Claudia says the journal is all she has, and Carson owes her. Daddy agrees that this isn't fair and Claudia collapses into Daddy, sobbing. Ma joins them and cries. After a minute, Daddy says it's time. Claudia drops the journal into the bag, feeling like she's dropping her heart in there as well. When Carson asks if Claudia has anything else, she thinks of *Flowers in the Attic*. But she tells him she doesn't have anything else.

*Seeing Claudia here impresses upon Detective Carson that he should've taken Claudia seriously months ago, when she came to the police station asking for help. Now, he has to confront the fact that, because of the dismissive way he treated Claudia, it took the police many more months than it should've to unravel the mystery of Monday's disappearance.*



*Claudia points out here how unhelpful it is that the police only accept missing persons reports from parents. As she implies, Mrs. Charles was never going to file a police report—it would've eventually led back to her. Other kids whose parents are abusive are at risk because of this policy.*



*When Ma assures the detectives that she was aware that Monday wore Claudia's clothes regularly, it suggests that she was aware that Monday was being neglected at home. Not saying anything about sharing clothes meant that she was quietly able to help support Monday without making a huge fuss about it, or getting involved in other people's "private family business."*



*Monday's journal represents the truth about Monday that Claudia never got to learn when Monday was alive. Letting it go means that Claudia will have to go on and accept that Monday's life will forever be a mystery to her. For the detectives, though, the journal is how they'll be able to retroactively identify some of the red flags that everyone missed while Monday was still alive.*



*Carson's inability to return Monday's journal shows that the police system can't support people as they heal after trauma. So Claudia feels her only method of holding onto Monday is to not hand over *Flowers in the Attic*. Since Claudia resents Carson so much, she feels justified in keeping the book from him—and at this point, it can't save Monday, anyway.*



Claudia gets to school 40 minutes late. Ms. Clark gasps and her eyes fill with tears; Mr. Hill nervously asks Claudia how she is. Claudia asks for a late pass and then Mr. Hill walks her to class. He promises to talk to her teachers about her grades and finals. Claudia already regrets coming to school, and this feeling deepens throughout the day. Wherever she goes, she hears people whispering that they found her best friend in the freezer.

At lunch, Claudia tells herself she should go home. A broken light flickers above and she can hear it buzz. She can almost smell Monday's dirty mattress and hear Mrs. Charles cackling. Suddenly, Trevor and Carl tap Claudia on the shoulder and grin at her. Trevor apologizes for Claudia's "girlfriend" getting murdered. Though Claudia turns away, Trevor insists on getting her attention. Carl shouts at Claudia too. Claudia tries to ignore them, but she hears a loud buzzing in her ears. Trevor calls Claudia a "dumb bitch" and says she was stupid for not knowing Monday was dead.

From the next table over, Shayla shouts at Trevor and Carl to stop. Carl cackles about thawing Monday's body like a turkey as the buzzing in Claudia's ears gets louder. Jacob steps over and shoves Carl. He shouts that it's not funny; they all knew Monday and now she's gone. "She's gone" rings like a bell in Claudia's head. In her and Monday's secret language, Claudia says, "she isn't dead," and that they have to save her. She screams until Ms. Valente comes over and holds her. The nurse finally sedates Claudia. This is her last day at school.

## CHAPTER 54. THE AFTER

Michael leads Claudia into Ms. Walker's house, laughing that he's never skipped school before. When Claudia asks, Michael reminds her that Ms. Walker is at the church retreat. Claudia mumbles; it's been a week since she found out and the shock hasn't worn off yet. She asks Michael when he moves in and he says he's already started. He says he found something she'll enjoy and leads her into his dad's childhood room. There, he pulls out his dad's old go-go mixes and pops a cassette into the stereo. After a minute, the singer mentions a Claudia in Southeast. Claudia is in awe of this collection. Monday would be too. Claudia's ears buzz.

*Having Claudia back at school forces the administration to confront how badly they failed to protect Monday. At this point, Claudia is struggling to get through the day and perform simple tasks like brushing her teeth. Seeing her in this state forces the school to see that by neglecting Monday, they inadvertently harmed their other students, too.*



*Claudia is unable to ignore the disturbing fact that Monday's body was in a freezer for months. The buzzing lights make it impossible for Claudia to move on—and her preoccupation with the buzzing also means that she's incapable of responding to Trevor and Carl. Trevor and Carl's bullying again stresses just how toxic bullying culture is at Claudia's school. They blame her for something that wasn't at all her fault—thereby contributing to Claudia's trauma.*



*When Shayla and Jacob stand up for Claudia and Monday, it offers hope that Monday's death will lead them to rethink how they treat their classmates. But because Claudia is still so traumatized, she doesn't process this. And it seems like this moment is the moment where Claudia starts to forget that Monday is dead, as it's too painful for her to accept.*



*Claudia is having to relearn everything now that she remembers Monday is dead. She has two years' worth of life to catch up on, and it's no doubt unsettling to know how severely she's been repressing her memories. But by sharing these old go-go mixes with her, Michael helps Claudia find meaning and purpose in the present. She hasn't totally let Monday go yet, but by remembering that Monday is gone, Claudia will be able to move forward and heal.*



Michael calls Claudia to him and asks what's up. She says she remembers her last day of school now and asks why he's so nice to her. He explains that the last time he saw Monday, she was in Ma's kitchen. He'd gone with his mom to drop off ribs before the church barbecue. He'd been shocked at how Monday had looked so much like Claudia, and he can't stop thinking about seeing her on her last day. He keeps thinking it could've been Claudia. Claudia leans in and kisses Michael.

When Claudia gets home, Ma scolds her for not calling to check in. Claudia apologizes and shares that she remembered her last day of school. Ma gasps and then calls Claudia into the kitchen for a talk. It's time Claudia knows the truth. Ma says that Monday came over right after Claudia left. Something was up, but Ma needed to get to Bible study. She offered to drop Monday at home, and once they pulled up in Ed Borough, Monday started to cry. Ma and Daddy then placed a call to social services. Now, Ma wonders if that call set Mrs. Charles off.

When Claudia hadn't heard from Monday, Ma figured that social services took Monday out of the house, and she didn't want Claudia to hate her for her involvement. Now, she knows she made a mistake. She said losing Monday felt like losing another child. Both Ma and Claudia say they loved Monday, and Ma says it's time for them all to get "some real help."

## CHAPTER 55. JUNE

Claudia says she'd be white if she was a color. White is virginal and pure—and boring. All the colors that came at her didn't "bleed into [her] canvas," which is why she couldn't remember this story. It's difficult now to see all she couldn't remember. But Claudia is willing to change. She's willing to appreciate and learn from all the colors she loves, and she's open to a new beginning.

## CHAPTER 56. THE AFTER

A news clip plays. The newscaster says that Tip Charles just filed a wrongful death lawsuit against the city. This suit is causing strife between the city council and community leaders. According to a representative from the D.C. Urban Development Coalition, the suit raises a big question: who's responsible for a person's wellbeing? Their family, their government, or their community?

*Now that Michael has seen what can happen when people don't have a support network, he thinks it's even more important to create a strong community and show his friends he cares. This, he realizes, is one of the most effective ways to keep what happened to Monday from happening to anyone else.*



*Finally, Claudia discovers that Ma and Daddy did care about Monday and were at least somewhat aware of what was going on. Ultimately, they did step in and try to protect her. But when Ma wonders if the call to social services set Mrs. Charles off, it shows that there can be some risk in doing what a person thinks is the right thing.*



*Ma kept quiet to protect Monday and then Claudia—but she knows now that keeping secrets doesn't actually help. Saying the family needs "real help" suggests she thinks it's time to seek therapy, something that would allow the family to face up to the trauma they've experienced and figure out how to move forward.*



*In this chapter, Claudia sounds much healthier and as though she's finally figuring out how to deal with her trauma. Saying she's willing to learn from her past offers hope that she now realizes how important it is to remember that past and internalize the lessons it has to offer.*



*The representative's question becomes one of the novel's central questions. Though the novel never definitively answers this question, it does suggest that, ideally, all three of these different branches will be able to work together to keep people safe. That may be an ideal and not reality, but it's worth working for.*



Claudia waits in the Starbucks line. When she gets to the front, April blinks. Claudia orders a hot chocolate and April calls that she's taking a break. They sit outside on a bench and Claudia asks how many times she's sought April out. April says this is the third time. Ma begged April to play along and take pity on Claudia, which April found ridiculous. Claudia asks why she did it then. Tearing up, April says that Claudia never stopped looking for Monday. The buzzing resumes in Claudia's ears as she asks about Tuesday. April says she's better. They're both in therapy now, and Tuesday's back in school. Claudia shares that she's going to start at Cardozo High in the fall, and she's also in therapy. With a smile, April hopes Claudia will remember longer.

Later, Claudia's backstage, waiting for the recital to begin. Daddy looks out of place as he tiptoes toward her. He tells Claudia that she looks beautiful and compliments her outfit. She admits she's a bit nervous. Then, Daddy says he has something for Claudia. He pulls out a manila folder. Inside are photocopies of Monday's journal, and Claudia immediately begins to read them. Monday writes that Claudia is an artist because of the way she paints nails, colors, and dances. She wishes Claudia wasn't so scared of people treating her differently. If people got to know her, they'd see that she's smart and cool. Monday can't believe that Claudia chose her to be her best friend. She writes that they're more like sisters.

Megan interrupts Claudia and asks if she's ready. Claudia is in heaven reading Monday's journal without too much trouble, but she puts the folder away and grins. Megan says she can't believe Claudia is here after everything—if Megan had been in Claudia's position, she doesn't know what she'd do. Claudia thinks that the only thing keeping her going is Monday and tells says that if Megan were in Claudia's position, she'd dance.

Claudia takes the stage, and as she dances, she feels Monday dancing next to her. Monday is in a lavender dress, smiling brilliantly. It feels like old times with their steps perfectly in sync. They're having fun. Claudia pours her love for Monday into every step and bows. Ma, Daddy, and Michael cheer from the front row.

*Even though April found Claudia immensely frustrating and naïve, she still couldn't really fault Claudia. April finds Claudia's emotional attachment to Monday admirable and moving. However, Claudia's attachment to Monday is also somewhat traumatizing for her, which is why the buzzing starts again in Claudia's head as she and April discuss this. But though Claudia is still experiencing trauma symptoms, being in therapy offers hope that Claudia is getting the help she needs to be able to move on from that trauma.*



*Though it's impossible to know for sure, the story leaves open the possibility that Detective Carson pulled some strings to get the journal for Claudia to try to make up for being so cruel to her earlier. And now, as Claudia reads, she sees that Monday contained multitudes. Monday may have been annoyed with Claudia's learning disabilities, but she also clearly loved and admired Claudia at the same time. Monday's frustrations don't make her evil—they make her human, just like Claudia.*



*Though Claudia attributes her ability to heal to Monday, it's also worth considering that Claudia also benefits from having another friend in Megan. While Claudia still feels a deep connection to Monday and to the past, Megan shows her that the future is something to look forward to and something she can enjoy.*



*Imagining Monday dancing in lavender, her true favorite color, is a way for Claudia to honor her friend. It shows that Claudia is becoming more comfortable accepting the person Monday actually was and now understands that it's impossible to know everything about her.*



## CHAPTER 57. LATER ON

In her journal, Claudia writes a letter to Monday. She says Monday should know why she hasn't written in a while, but she has to tell her about the block party last weekend. Daddy's band played and April and Tuesday came. Claudia writes that she's going to a therapist now, and her therapist thinks she needs closure. Claudia knows how to get it—but no one is going to like it. She asks Monday to notice how well she's writing now—she even helps out in the TLC.

Claudia is in the car with Michael, parked outside of Monday's house. The house is boarded up now. Michael asks if she's sure she wants to hear this, especially right here—it makes him queasy. Claudia insists they have to listen right here and kisses him. He asks if she still hears the buzzing. Claudia says she does, but she needs to know for sure what happened. With a sigh, Michael opens up his podcast app and presses play.

The podcast plays Mrs. Charles's voice. Mrs. Charles says that August kept touching girls and beating up his sisters. When she caught him biting Tuesday, she bit him and hit him back. She choked him until he died and told April to put him in the freezer. Mrs. Charles's voice is smooth and level. She says that Monday was "a fast-ass little girl," and had boys coming to the house looking for her. Monday might've even been messing with girls. One day, Mrs. Charles came home and Monday said she was leaving. Mrs. Charles grabbed her, punched her, and threw her in the closet for a few days. She went in and kicked Monday whenever she made too much noise. Eventually, Monday wouldn't get up. Mrs. Charles insists she doesn't know how Monday ended up in the freezer. She isn't sorry—she knows what she did.

Michael stops the playback and pulls Claudia into a hug. Claudia realizes she's been crying. She looks at the house, remembering Monday skipping up the path. Then, she slips out of the car. These days, she only wears blue and black—colors remind her of Monday, and she feels guilty whenever she sees pink. Over the last year, Ed Borough has become a ghost town because of the eviction notices. Monday's house is now known as "the House of Horrors."

*Though getting her dyslexia identified and going through tutoring at the TLC was traumatic for Claudia, she ultimately finds that it was all worth it. It's a privilege, this suggests, to be able to face one's shame, open up about any secrets, and figure out how to healthily deal with them. In this case, doing this propels Claudia closer to independent adulthood.*



*Listening to this podcast is presumably Claudia's method of finding closure. When she says she needs to know for sure what happened, it suggests that Claudia will only be able to heal when there's no more mystery to solve. It's essential that she doesn't leave herself anything more to question so she doesn't feel the need to keep searching.*



*What Claudia listens to in this passage is presumably a recording of Mrs. Charles's confession. With it, Claudia will learn once and for all what Monday's final days were like. When Mrs. Charles describes Monday as a "fast-ass little girl" and talks about Monday seeing boys and girls romantically, it suggests she took issue with Monday's burgeoning sexuality. In this sense, Monday was ultimately killed for growing up and becoming sexually active. But importantly, Monday thought things would be better if she and Jacob were involved—so being sexually involved with boys could've been another way to escape her home. This mirrors how April is consistently vilified for being promiscuous but was acting out of necessity.*



*Feeling guilty whenever she sees pink shows that as she heals, Claudia is acknowledging where she messed up in her relationship with Monday. By recognizing that she made Monday feel like she had to keep secrets, Claudia will hopefully be able to prevent repeating this in her future friendships.*



Claudia shuffles to the door, listening for the TV and the freezer. She doesn't hear anything and backs away, feeling relieved. A voice asks if Claudia is Monday's friend. Claudia jumps and notices an old woman sitting next door. The woman says Monday used to talk about Claudia like she was a twin and introduces herself as Ms. Roundtree. Ms. Roundtree explains that she's one of the last people left on this strip. Claudia looks up at Monday's bedroom window and reminds herself that Monday isn't inside.

Ms. Roundtree says that Monday used to sit on the stoop and cry. She knew something had happened when she hadn't heard Monday cry in a while. Claudia asks why Ms. Roundtree didn't say anything. Ms. Roundtree explains that she has grandkids that live only 20 minutes away. The kids' schedule is so busy and she's proud of them, even though she doesn't see them often. She doesn't think they're dead, and that's what she figured was going on with Monday—especially since Monday spent so much time at Claudia's.

Ms. Roundtree says that the community used to be close, but now people don't notice things. She admits that she sometimes has nightmares about what happened to Monday and August. Claudia shares that she has nightmares too, but she can only remember the buzzing. Ms. Roundtree says the freezer was up against the wall, so she heard it in her house. It took a long time for the sound to go away, even after the police found the bodies. They both stare at the door as if expecting someone to walk out.

Michael honks the horn, startling Claudia. Claudia says she needs to go, but then heads back to Ms. Roundtree. She asks how she got rid of the buzzing. Ms. Roundtree says it's a matter of perspective. The sound could be buzzing, but she decided it's someone humming. Claudia hugs Ms. Roundtree and thanks her. She races back to the car and Michael drives off. Daddy's newest song plays, and Monday hums along.

*Meeting Ms. Roundtree and learning that she's the last one on this block shows that the push to move people out of Ed Borough has persisted, long after Monday died. Even though the push to evict people may have contributed to Monday's death, the city seems still to be prioritizing its finances over the health and wellbeing of Ed Borough's citizens.*



*Ms. Roundtree paints a picture of a community where it's not out of the ordinary for kids to disappear for perfectly legitimate reasons. Indeed, her own grandkids disappear in a sense as they get busy with their own lives. This shows how Monday was able to disappear so easily—people didn't see any reason to worry when she disappeared, because it happens often and it's not usually anything to cause concern.*



*The community in Ed Borough has also fractured over the years, according to Ms. Roundtree. She suggests that it used to be close and people kept tabs on each other, but as people got caught up in their own busy lives, they stopped caring so much about their neighbors. This also contributes to an environment where Monday could disappear without a trace.*



*Ms. Roundtree tells Claudia that her recovery is partly about reframing things to make them more palatable. Claudia can be haunted forever by the buzz of the freezer, or she can decide that Monday is with her in spirit, and the buzzing sound is Monday humming a song. When Claudia chooses to take Ms. Roundtree's advice and hears Monday humming to Daddy's newest song, it offers hope that as Claudia moves forward, she'll be able to honor Monday's memory while not getting unhealthily caught up in the past.*





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