



### Before you start

1. What happened to George Floyd in Minneapolis in 2020? How did people around the world react?
2. Systemic racism means that unfair advantage is given to some people while others are treated unfairly and are even harmed. The BLM movement seeks to make a change. What changes do you think can be made?
3. There have been many protests in support of the BLM movement. How can protests help a cause? Many protests become destructive and violent. Is this acceptable?
4. *Running Riot* is set in Portland, Oregon at the time of the protests. As you read, make a note of what these characters believe.



Character	Beliefs
 Ruby	
 Melvina	
 Tina	
 Darius	

5. Who do you most agree with? Why?



Ruby looked in the mirror at the hair salon. Then she nodded with satisfaction. Her **undercut** hairstyle with the top dyed dark red – like a *real* ruby – was exactly what she wanted. “Nice,” she said to the hairdresser, picking up a hand mirror and examining the shaved back of her head. “Too bad looking cool is so expensive,” she thought, paying \$125. It was a lot of money, especially for a nineteen-year-old living in her mother’s basement. Serving meals in a retirement home didn’t pay much. Even worse, she had to follow a dress code: white blouse and black pants – and no visible piercings or tattoos. So, she wanted to at least express herself in some way. The hair was a reflection of her *authentic self* – and worth the price.

On the bus ride to the Parkside Retirement Community, Ruby’s stomach was **growling**. From the bus window, she saw the Japanese restaurant downtown. Her mouth watered as she

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**18 undercut** a type of haircut where your hair is shaved at the back and sides but it’s left long on top – **30 to growl** to make a low noise, in this case the noise your stomach makes when you are hungry

imagined the taste of a spicy tuna sushi roll – something that wouldn't be served at Parkside in a million years. "But still closed," thought Ruby, "so I couldn't stop, even if I had the extra money."

The Japanese restaurant wasn't closed due to Covid-19. It was closed because of **vandalism**. Ruby noted the graffiti and the boarded up windows. "Whatever," she thought without much emotion. "We're fighting injustice. And it's only a restaurant – and some other businesses." Ruby looked up and down the street at the similarly damaged storefronts. In her opinion, rioting was destructive but it led to change.

For over a year, there had been regular protests in Portland, Oregon. At first, Ruby joined the **Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement**, calling for an end to police brutality and racial **inequality**. How could she stay quiet after the death of George Floyd? A police officer killed him, kneeling on his neck for over eight minutes, just because he passed a **counterfeit** \$20 bill at a liquor store. It was an **outrage**. As a result, protests began, occurring in over two thousand cities in the U.S. They also happened in sixty other countries in the world. People wanted justice for Floyd and other Black individuals treated horribly by the police. Ruby – a young, **privileged**, light-skinned woman – couldn't look in the mirror if she remained silent. She heard the call for action and had to answer it.

At work, Ruby sat in the **employee lounge** eating a bowl of chicken noodle soup and a soft roll. The food was a bit boring, prepared for the elderly residents. But she was very hungry and it tasted okay. Sam, the kitchen manager, entered the room, noticed

**vandalism** intentional damage to property – 13 **Black Lives Matter movement** a social movement which protests against racially motivated violence and police brutality – 15 **inequality** unfairness – 17 **counterfeit** fake – 18 **outrage** shocking – 22 **privileged** sb who has an advantage that other people don't have – 25 **employee lounge** a place where workers can eat their meals and relax on their breaks

Ruby, and **frowned**. "According to the dress code," said Sam, "if your hair is dyed, it still has to be a *natural* color."

"But it *is* natural," explained Ruby. "It's *ruby*-red like the gemstone. Rubies come from the Earth... So, totally *natural*." Sam let out a deep sigh. Although Ruby was a reliable worker and the residents liked her, she sometimes had trouble following the rules.

"Please cover it with this," insisted Sam, handing her a paper hat. "And if I get one complaint about the server with the *ruby*-red hair, then you'll dye it some shade of brown, like *surface* of the Earth, before you come to work again."

Why did Ruby get her hair cut like that?

What is Ruby's opinion of the protests?

### Think about it...

What do you think about the Black Lives Matter movement?

Why do you think Ruby felt she couldn't remain silent?

1 to **frown** to lower your eyebrows to show disapproval



In Parkside's dining room, Melvina sat at a table by the window and looked out at the rain. At the age of eighty-one, she'd been **retired** for sixteen years from her job as a mail carrier. "Thank goodness," she thought, "I'm not going out in this weather. I don't know how I did it." Melvina ate a spoonful of chicken noodle soup and then spread butter on her roll. "I **paid my dues**, though," she muttered. Melvina remembered decades of walking wet routes and driving her mail truck through steady downpours. "Portland has one hundred sixty-four rainy days a year," she laughed to herself. "But not a drop is falling on me now."

On the whole, her life at Parkside Retirement Community was very comfortable. Melvina's first-floor apartment was tiny, but it had a view of an emerald-green hillside and tall trees. She enjoyed the company of the other residents, and the workers were very kind. Recently **widowed**, she'd made the difficult decision to leave

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19 **retired** when sb stops working normally due to their age – 22 **to pay your dues** to do sth you don't want to do in order to get sth you want – 31 **to be widowed** when sb has been widowed, their husband or wife has died

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her own home. It really wasn't safe to live alone anymore. Her knees and hips were bad, and she'd fallen a few times. At Parkside, she could get help – and it was time in her life to accept it.

Melvina's only son, Darius, lived about forty minutes away. He'd invited her to move in with him, his wife, and teenage children, but she didn't want to impose. Besides, she liked her independence, reading, watching TV or playing cards when she felt like it. And she wasn't **neglected**. Her son kept in touch, calling her every day and visiting most weekends. Their arrangement worked well. For Melvina, it was better than everyone living under the same roof. "How do you like the soup today, Melvina?" asked Ruby, interrupting her thoughts.

"I've had worse," Melvina laughed. "They're **stingy** with the salt, aren't they?"

"That's for sure," Ruby agreed, smiling.

"But I suppose it isn't good for people – like *me* – on low-sodium diets," stated Melvina. Then she adjusted her glasses and took a closer look at Ruby. "Child... What on *Earth* is happening under that hat?"

"Well, unfortunately, you're not getting the full effect," replied Ruby. "But it's called an **undercut**. And the top is dyed to match my name – and to show the world that I'm sort of a **badass**." Melvina quickly swallowed a piece of her roll and smiled.

"So, exactly what does that awful word mean?" she asked with amusement, setting her spoon down.

"It means that I'm, you know, a rebel, an agitator, a fighter..."

"Uh-huh," said Melvina, **snorting** audibly. "So, exactly what are you fighting for – or against?" Ruby hadn't expected a question like this from Melvina or anyone else in the Parkside dining room. She felt **flustered** and didn't know what to say. At that moment, her face was almost the same color as her hair.

8 **to be neglected** to not get enough care or attention – 13 **stingy** not generous – 22 **badass** (informal) sb who is rebellious – 27 **to snort** to make a noise made by breathing air in through your nose – 30 **flustered** confused and under pressure

"Um, excuse me, Melvina," she said, pushing her food cart away from the table. "Duty calls. I'll be right back with your **meatloaf** and mashed potatoes," she added. "But I'd really like to continue our conversation. Another time?"

"I'll look forward to that," Melvina answered. "And when you come back, can you please bring me an extra packet of the salt substitute?"

"Of course," said Ruby. "I'll bring it right over." Once Ruby was **out of earshot**, Melvina laughed out loud.

"Ruby the **badass**," she said quietly. "Now I've heard everything."

Why did Melvina move into a retirement home?

What exactly is Ruby fighting for?

### Think about it...

Do you think Melvina made the right choice by moving to a retirement home? Why?

Would you have your hair cut radically or get a tattoo to send a message?

2 **meatloaf** a dish made with ground meat, which is cooked in a dish, and then cut into slice – 8 **to be out of earshot** to be too far away to hear sth