

A Man Called Ove



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF FREDRIK BACKMAN

Fredrik Backman was born in Söderort, Sweden (the suburbs south of Stockholm) on June 2, 1981. As a young man he wrote for the Swedish newspaper *Helsingborgs Dagblad*. He started a blog in 2009, which is where early material for *A Man Called Ove* first appeared. *A Man Called Ove* was Backman's first book. His second book, *Things My Son Needs to Know About The World*, has not been translated into English, but has received positive reviews in Sweden. *A Man Called Ove*, on the other hand, became an overnight success. Since its publication it has been translated into over 25 languages and was made into a movie in 2015. Backman has written several books since then and continues to update his blog. He lives in Sweden with his wife and two children.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Ove gripes about a number of things that are marks of changing times in Sweden: for instance, although Ove finds debit cards ridiculous, they're a far more common form of payment than cash in Sweden, and young people in particular tend to avoid cash. Iranian immigrants like Parvaneh make up nearly 2% of the Swedish population, and the Swedish parliament legalized same-sex marriage in May of 2009. All of this is to say that the historical event of greatest importance to Ove is not one event, but rather the sum of all the changes and innovations that have made up the tide of modernization, right down to the invention of the iPad. Much of the conflict in the novel, however, has to do with Sweden's system of caring for elderly people like Rune. Because Sweden has socialized healthcare, it falls to municipalities and local government to provide elder care services for their citizens. Although most elderly people in Sweden get in-home healthcare services from public providers, many municipalities have begun using private companies. The number of private care providers increased dramatically between 1995 and 2005, and by 2013 private companies provided care for 24% of all elderly citizens requiring care. However, many of the private companies have been accused of prioritizing profit over quality of care, and there have been a number of media investigations into the issue.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Fredrik Backman has said in interviews that he is particularly interested in characters that are either very young or very old. Several of Backman's other books are also about the

relationships between young and old characters, most notably *My Grandmother Asked Me To Tell You She's Sorry*, which follows the journey of a young girl after the death of her grandmother. Novels like *Still Alice* by Lisa Genova deal directly with Alzheimer's and memory loss, and *Ove* also shares broad thematic similarities with classic novels that examine the consequences of holding onto memories like Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Finally, it is impossible to ignore the similarities Ove bears to Ebenezer Scrooge of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** A Man Called Ove (En man som heter Ove)
- **When Written:** 2009-2012
- **Where Written:** Sweden
- **When Published:** The novel was first published in Sweden in 2012. The English translation was published in 2013.
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Contemporary fiction
- **Setting:** An unnamed town in Sweden, early 2010s
- **Climax:** Ove has a heart attack
- **Antagonist:** The men in white shirts
- **Point of View:** Third person limited

EXTRA CREDIT

Chapter length. The length of chapters in *A Man Called Ove* is intentional. Each chapter is written to be about the same length as an average magazine article, which Backman has said in interviews makes the book more readable.

"Please Ove, just let it go!" Backman borrowed Ove's name and grouchy character from another blogger, Jonas Cramby. On his blog, Cramby recounted being in line at a museum behind an angry old man named Ove who fought with a docent about the correct pronunciation of a painter's name. Ove's wife sighed, led him away, and asked him to let it go.



PLOT SUMMARY

The story moves back and forth between Ove's childhood and his life as a fifty-nine-year-old man in Sweden. Ove's mother died when he was eight, so Ove lived with his father and began working at the railway with him. One day, Ove is sent to clean out a railway car with Tom, a mean and selfish coworker. Ove finds a wallet with money in it, and decides to turn it in rather than keep it. The railway director gives Ove's father a **Saab**, and

Ove and his father spend Saturdays repairing the car. Ove's father dies when Ove is 16 and leaves him only his **house** and the Saab. Ove quits school to take his father's job at the railway. When he starts receiving letters informing him that the city wants to buy his house and demolish it, he decides to get a job at a construction site and learn how to build houses so he can renovate his house. Tom accuses Ove of stealing money, and because Ove refuses to accuse Tom, Ove loses his job. The director hires Ove back on as a night cleaner on a long-distance train. Ove finishes renovating his house and weeks later, it catches fire. Men in **white shirts** stop Ove from putting the fire out.

Ove rents a room in town. Days after his house burned down, Tom confronts Ove at work and steals his father's watch. Ove punches Tom, takes his watch back, and Tom never bothers Ove again. Ove tries to sign up for the military but is denied entrance when he learns he has a congenital heart defect. Soon after, he meets Sonja on a train. She is riding to school to become a teacher. Ove spends three months riding the train with her until she asks him out to dinner. Although he admits to lying about his reasons for riding the train with her, she doesn't care. She insists he start an engineering course so he can build houses. When Sonja and Ove have been in a relationship for three years, Sonja's father dies and Sonja is distraught. Sonja's childhood cat, Ernest, dies a week after her father. Sonja tells Ove she is pregnant and insists they buy a house. They move into a row house on the same day as a couple named Rune and Anita. Anita is also pregnant, and she and Sonja become best friends. Rune and Ove share tools and built cribs for their babies.

Ove and Sonja take a bus tour to Spain. On the way home, the bus crashes. Sonja miscarries and becomes paralyzed from the waist down. Ove insists on rebuilding the house himself to make it wheelchair accessible. Sonja takes a job teaching troubled students and teaches them all to read Shakespeare. Ove fights with "men in white shirts" over his wife's health until Sonja makes him stop. After Rune's baby boy is born, Ove and Rune begin fighting over everything—from how to mow the lawn to which heating system to install in the houses. The feud spans nearly forty years and the last straw is when Rune buys a BMW after his son moves to America. After Rune buys the BMW, he is diagnosed with Alzheimer's. Four years before the present, Sonja is diagnosed with cancer. She works as long as she can and Ove continues to fight men in white shirts, but she dies anyway.

In the present, six months after Sonja's death, Ove's boss at the housing office forces him to retire. He decides to commit suicide and join Sonja. He makes his morning inspection of the neighborhood as usual and notices that Blond Weed's dog is harassing a cat. He yells at Blond Weed and scares the cat away. Later, as he is installing a hook in his ceiling so he can hang himself, his new neighbors, Patrick and Parvaneh (who is

very pregnant), back their moving trailer right into Ove's house. Ove goes outside to yell at them, and maneuvers the trailer for them. Later, their children, Nasanin and the seven-year-old, bring Ove dinner. Ove decides to wait to hang himself until the next day. The next day, Ove confronts a teenager named Adrian and his friend Mirsad about an improperly parked woman's bicycle. Patrick and Parvaneh bring Ove cookies and ask to borrow a ladder and an Allen wrench. Ove angrily fetches the items for them and is annoyed when Anita shows up in his yard. She says that the council is going to take Rune away from her, but Ove insists that that will take years. Patrick notices wheel marks on Ove's floor, and Anita tries to explain to Patrick that Sonja had been in a wheelchair, but Ove yells at Anita. Ove slams the door and tries to hang himself, but his rope breaks.

The next morning, Ove kicks the cat while he's inspecting the neighborhood as usual. As he's walking back to his garage, a man in a white shirt drives a Škoda (a type of car) drives through the residential area, almost hitting Ove—who yells at the car as it drives off. Ove notices Blond Weed looking suspiciously satisfied while her dog barks, and Ove sees that Patrick is preparing to climb the precariously positioned ladder. Ove worries about the cat but continues with his new plan: to kill himself using car exhaust. As he sits in his car and lets the fumes fill it, he hears an ambulance and then someone banging on the garage door. Ove finally opens the garage door hard into Parvaneh's nose. She asks him to take her and her daughters to the hospital to see Patrick, who fell off the ladder.

At the hospital, Ove argues with the parking attendant about the price of parking. Parvaneh leaves Ove to watch the children, and Ove punches the hospital clown who tries to do a magic trick with one of Ove's coins. Nasanin thinks Ove is fantastic, but Parvaneh and the seven-year-old are less impressed. Ove drives them back home and Parvaneh asks Ove to help with fixing her radiator. Ove agrees.

The next morning, Ove goes to the train station without noticing a cat-shaped hole in a snowdrift outside his house. Ove studies people on the platform, and as the train approaches, a businessman faints and falls onto the track. Ove curses and pulls the man off the track. Ove thinks he'll let the train kill him, but then he makes eye contact with the young train conductor and decides it would be rude to ruin his day. When Ove gets home, the man in the white shirt almost runs him over again. Ove finally notices the frozen cat in the snowdrift. Parvaneh notices as well and yells at Ove to save the cat. She insists on taking the cat into Ove's house to warm it up. Jimmy, Ove's overweight young neighbor, joins them in Ove's living room. He warms the cat up with his body heat. Parvaneh sees Ove's kitchen and realizes that Sonja had been in a wheelchair. Jimmy has an allergic reaction to the cat, and Ove has to take him to the hospital. Parvaneh convinces Ove to keep the cat, and Ove takes it to visit Sonja's grave the next day.

Later that week, a journalist named Lena pesters Ove for an

interview about saving the man at the train station. Ove ends up briefly locking Lena in his garage, but is discovered by Parvaneh. Parvaneh tells Lena to call her. Ove agrees to take Parvaneh to the hospital to get Patrick and Jimmy. On the trip home from the hospital Jimmy insists on stopping at McDonald's. Parvaneh asks Ove to teach her to drive so she can get her driver's license. When they return to their street, Parvaneh gives Ove Nasanin's drawing of him, which is done in riotous **color**.

The next day, Ove lets the cat out and considers killing himself using Sonja's painkillers. When he hears the cat screaming in pain, he goes outside and finds Blond Weed about to kick the cat. Blond Weed stalks away, and Ove goes to Rune and Anita's house to borrow some corrugated iron and rigs a trap for Blond Weed's dog that will electrocute it when it tries to pee on his paving stones, but the cat gives him a look and he disassembles it. Later, Adrian brings Ove's mail to the door and tells him that Sonja had been his teacher. Ove offers to help Adrian fix his bike and bring it to the cafe where Adrian works. Ove then goes to see Parvaneh and sets a time for their first driving lesson. The lesson starts badly: Parvaneh didn't want to learn to drive a manual transmission. At the first red light, Parvaneh stalls the car and rolls back into an SUV driven by rude men with neck tattoos. She panics and gives up. Ove yells at the SUV drivers and gives Parvaneh a pep talk.

The next day, Ove and Parvaneh drive the bike to the cafe where Adrian works. Ove is officially introduced to Mirsad, Adrian's boss. When Ove notices makeup on Mirsad's face, he uses offensive words to ask Mirsad whether he's gay. Ove brews his own filter coffee and helps Adrian fix the bike. Adrian asks Ove to not tell Amel, the owner of the cafe, that Mirsad is gay. The next day, Ove gets out a rifle to kill himself, but is interrupted when Parvaneh asks to use Ove's bathroom and then puts him on the phone with Lena. Ove sees the man in the white shirt driving to Rune's house, and Ove yells at him. The man seems unconcerned about Ove. Ove asks Patrick if he can borrow his trailer, and Ove parks it to block the man's Škoda. Later, the man confronts Ove about it and Ove insists he did nothing. Anita tells Ove that the council is taking Rune later that week, and Ove locks himself in his house and cries. Later that night, Ove takes his clothes off and prepares to shoot himself. Mirsad and Adrian appear at Ove's door and ask whether Mirsad can stay over because Mirsad had come out to his father, Amel, who in turn kicked Mirsad out. Ove agrees and thinks that Sonja would've liked having Mirsad stay. The next morning, Mirsad accompanies Ove on his morning inspection. Jimmy joins them and tells Ove that they're taking Rune this week. He reveals that Anita has spent the last two years petitioning to keep Rune but didn't want Sonja to know. Patrick fetches their neighbor, Anders, who has a towing company. Anders tows the man's Škoda and shares that he has broken up with Blond Weed.

Ove and his neighbors spend the next few days planning. Finally, Ove makes a phone call. On the day of Rune's "transfer into care," the man in the white shirt shows up to take Rune away, but the neighborhood stands behind Anita. Lena gives the man a pile of records showing improper conduct, and the man backs down. Ove finally agrees to an interview with Lena. Ove has dinner with Parvaneh and Patrick, and learns that the seven-year-old loves houses. The next day, he goes to speak to Amel and encourages him to accept Mirsad's homosexuality. The seven-year-old invites Ove to her birthday party and tells him she wants nothing but an iPad, so Ove asks Jimmy to help him purchase an iPad. After the birthday party, Ove discovers burglars at his neighbor's house and has a heart attack. Parvaneh lists herself as next of kin and laughs when the doctor tells them that Ove's heart is too big. When Ove comes home from the hospital, Parvaneh helps him put Sonja's things away. Parvaneh gives birth to a baby boy later that night.

Over the next few years, Mirsad and Jimmy get married and adopt a daughter. Four years after Patrick and Parvaneh moved in, Ove dies. He leaves Parvaneh's children and Jimmy's daughter a million kroner each (roughly \$100,000), and Parvaneh and Patrick start a charity for orphaned children with the rest of Ove's money. Over 300 people attend Ove's funeral. Later that night, Parvaneh shows Ove's house to a couple. The wife is pregnant and the husband drives a Saab.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Ove – Ove is the 59-year-old protagonist of the novel. As a boy he lost his mother and then as a teenager, his father died. From his father Ove inherited a Saab, a rundown **house**, and a belief that doing the right thing is extremely important. He believes that men should do things—not just talk about them—and he distrusts the internet and people who work from home. He also believes that people should do things for themselves rather than use automated systems: for example, he believes that automatic cars aren't "real" cars and is troubled that computers are taking the place of people. Ove is incredibly loyal to his job, his wife, and his car brand. He drives nothing but **Saabs** over the entirety of his lifetime. As a young man, Ove decided that he liked houses because they were honest and fair. When **men in white shirts** prevented Ove from putting out the fire in his childhood home, it also began to instill a distrust of bureaucracy in Ove that follows him through the rest of his life. When he met Sonja, Ove set aside some of his principles for his relationship with her, particularly his derision for people who can't be on time. When Ove and Sonja were involved in a bus accident that paralyzed Sonja and caused her to miscarry, Ove became extremely angry that he had been unable to protect his wife and unborn child. He also engages in an ongoing feud with his neighbor, Rune, over everything from lawnmowers to

heating systems to cars—but the feud is really about Ove's inability to forgive Rune for giving up on his family. When Sonja dies, six months before the novel starts, Ove is extremely lost, but he truly suffers when his boss at the housing office forces him to retire early. He feels like he's not useful for the first time in his life and sets about trying to commit suicide so he can join Sonja in the afterlife, though he worries she'll be disappointed that he's unemployed. When the cat and Parvaneh enter his life, Ove is faced with the undeniable fact that he *is* needed:

Parvaneh needs rides to the hospital and someone to teach her to drive, and the cat needs protection from Blond Weed's dog. Despite Ove's grouchy demeanor and the overwhelming sense of disappointment he feels about where his life has led, he proves himself to be an undeniably good-natured person. His inability to end his life in the face of a community that relies on him is a testament to his basic selflessness and the power of human connection.

Sonja – Sonja is Ove's late wife, who dies six months before the start of the novel. She was very beautiful and loved **color**, chaos, and the humanities. She also loved talking, and Ove loved listening to her talk. She grew up with her father and a massive cat, Ernest, and met Ove when she moved to town to study to be a teacher. Right after she and Ove got married and moved into their row house, they went to Spain on a bus tour. There, they were involved in a bus accident that paralyzed Sonja from the waist down and caused her to miscarry her pregnancy. Rather than spend the rest of her life grieving, Sonja threw herself into teaching troubled students to read Shakespeare. Sonja worked to make life as bright and lively as possible, though Ove was constantly bewildered by her refusal to adhere to his carefully laid travel plans or routines and insisted she didn't understand his desire to live according to principles. After she dies of cancer, Ove visits her grave weekly and leaves pink flowers on her headstone. Ove draws on the memory of Sonja to encourage him to do the right thing—since he fears that she'll be upset with him if he shows up in the afterlife having left something done incorrectly on earth.

Parvaneh / “The Foreign Pregnant Woman” – Before learning her name, Ove refers to Parvaneh as “the Foreign Pregnant Woman,” as she's Iranian and pregnant. Parvaneh moves in across the street from Ove with her husband Patrick and her two children, Nasanin and the seven-year-old. She inserts herself into Ove's life by asking to borrow tools and then asking for rides to the hospital when Patrick falls off a ladder. She laughs in a way that reminds Ove of Sonja, and Ove begins to like Parvaneh when he notices that she shares his disdain for IT consultants and her husband's ineptitude. Parvaneh regularly yells at Ove for being rude and forces him to do the right thing, like save the cat and bleed the radiators for her and the neighbors. When Ove teaches her to drive, he pays her a very high compliment when he says that she's not a complete twit. She names herself Ove's next of kin when Ove has a heart

attack and ends up in the hospital, and after that, she treats Ove as family.

Patrick / “The Lanky One” – Ove refers to Patrick as The Lanky One. He's Parvaneh's husband and works as an IT consultant. Ove finds Patrick ridiculous and infuriating: though he's over six feet tall he drives a tiny automatic Toyota, he doesn't know how to drive properly, and he knows nothing about performing basic house maintenance like unjamming windows or bleeding radiators. He falls off a ladder while trying to unjam a window and spends much of the novel in body casts. He's particularly awkward and has a habit of making observations that are either extremely obvious to Ove or beyond Ove's comprehension, as when he tells Ove that his house looks like a scene from the show *Dexter*.

Jimmy – Jimmy is a young overweight man who lives in the house between Ove and Rune. He lived there with his mother until her death, which occurred a few years before the start of the novel. Jimmy is perpetually happy, kind, and unbothered by Ove's grumpiness. He programs iPhone apps and loves to eat. He's also extremely fond of cats despite being allergic to them. In the epilogue he marries Mirsad and the two adopt a daughter.

Anders – Anders is Ove's neighbor across the street who owns a towing company. He drives an Audi and dates a woman that Ove refers to as the Blond Weed. These factors lead Ove to ridicule him and refer to him as “the fop Anders.” Later, he earns Ove's seal of approval by towing the man in the white shirt's Škoda. He breaks up with Blond Weed and begins a relationship with Lena.

Blond Weed – Blond Weed is Anders' girlfriend. Ove never learns her name but refers to her as Blond Weed because she's blond, tall, and wears very tall high heels. She has a small dog named Prince, and Ove dislikes them both because Prince urinates on Ove's paving stones when Blond Weed lets him off his leash. Ove's dislike for Blond Weed becomes personal when Prince begins fighting with the cat, starting a feud with Ove. This feud reveals that Blond Weed is exceptionally cruel, as she tries to harm the cat on a number of occasions.

Rune – Rune and Ove moved into the neighborhood with their wives on the same day. When their wives, Anita and Sonja, became friends, Rune and Ove became friends to appease their wives. Rune is a lot like Ove: he doesn't say much, he has principles, and is handy around the house. He also shares Ove's love of fighting bureaucracy—the two of them set up the neighborhood steering committee and fight to keep the forest behind their houses from being cut down. His only fault in Ove's eyes is that he drives a Volvo and upgrades to a sporty **BMW** after his adult son leaves for America. Not long after, Rune becomes very ill with Alzheimer's disease and requires intensive home care.

Anita – Anita is Rune's husband and lives two houses down

from Ove. She and Rune moved into the neighborhood at the same time that Ove and Sonja did, and she and Sonja became quick friends. Anita and Rune had one son, though they did want to have more children. When the story takes place, Anita has spent the past two years fighting the city council to keep Rune, who is struggling with Alzheimer's, from being put into assisted living. Ove describes her as tiny and ashy and certainly not up to the task of caring for her husband by herself.

The Man in the White Shirt – Though there are many "white shirts" in the novel, this particular white-shirt-wearer is the Škoda-driving man who wants to place Rune in assisted living. He refuses to follow the rules of Ove's neighborhood and drives his car through the residential area, leaving cigarette butts when he does. He has a great deal of power and he knows it, and he tries to use it for his own gain, but he backs down when the neighborhood bands together with Lena to uncover evidence that he had been breaking rules that could lead to a public investigation if exposed.

The Cat – The cat is a mangy creature that begins lurking around Ove's house after Patrick and Parvaneh move in across the street. Ove rescues the cat from the Blond Weed's dog and Parvaneh insists that Ove keep the cat. The cat is standoffish and acts superior, but sleeps with Ove and accompanies him everywhere after Ove agrees to keep it. Ove often interprets the cat's facial expressions to be judgmental, and in this way the cat seems to encourage Ove to do the right thing and not be cruel.

Nasanin – Nasanin is Parvaneh and Patrick's three-year-old daughter. Ove finds her toddler language perplexing and her boundless energy tiring. She thinks that Ove is the funniest and most exciting person she's ever met and because of this, she draws pictures of Ove using wild colors. She tries very hard to form a relationship with the cat, though the cat is entirely uninterested in being friends with a toddler. Nasanin also teaches Ove the proper way to read storybooks.

Mirsad / "The Young Man" – Mirsad is a young man in his early 20s who works in a cafe with Adrian. He's supposedly the boss, but seems unsure of his authority. Ove refers to him as the "young man" before learning his name. Mirsad is gay and comes out to his father, Amel, who then kicks Mirsad out. Ove reluctantly takes Mirsad in and has a conversation with Amel to convince him to accept his son. Mirsad later marries Jimmy and the two adopt a daughter.

Adrian / "The Youth" – Adrian is a teenager who is in love with a girl that lives on Ove's street. Adrian meets Ove while trying to fix the girl's bicycle. Ove refers to him as "the youth" before learning his name. Adrian is kind but awkward, which Ove finds infuriating. Adrian works as a mail carrier and also has a job in a cafe to save money to buy a car. He was one of Sonja's students before her death. Ove teaches Adrian to fix the bike, helps him buy a proper car, and leaves him the Saab after his death.

Lena – Lena is a reporter with Ove's local paper who wants desperately to interview Ove following his heroic rescue of the "suit" who fell onto the train tracks. She is incessant and drives Ove to desperate measures to try to avoid her, including locking her in his garage. Lena accepts a deal with Ove and Parvaneh to dig up information on the man in the white shirt who wants to put Rune in assisted living in exchange for an interview with Ove. Later, she moves in with Anders, though the two "don't believe in the institution of marriage."

Ove's Father – Ove's father was known for being almost too kind, though Ove never saw why this was a problem. He had a knack for working on cars and fixed them as favors for the higher-ups at the train station. The higher-ups gifted Ove's father a Saab when Ove was a child. He taught Ove how to work on cars, to behave honorably, and to do things rather than just talk about them. He died in a train accident when Ove was sixteen years old.

Sonja's Father – Sonja's father was a solitary man who lived in the far north. He didn't like people much and only went into town once per month. He was also a devoted Scania driver, which enabled him to bond with Ove. The cat, Ernest, liked to fish with Sonja's father. Both died a few years after Ove and Sonja met.

Tom – Tom is an employee at the train company where Ove's father and Ove both worked. He has a reputation for being exceptionally mean, selfish, and violent. He never forgives Ove for deciding to turn in a wallet he found with a large sum of cash in it and later tries to steal Ove's watch.

MINOR CHARACTERS

The Seven-year-old – The seven-year-old is Parvaneh and Patrick's oldest daughter. Ove finds her sour and snotty at first, but soon learns that she too loves houses. They bond over this shared love and Ove buys her an iPad so she can use specific drawing programs for drawing houses.

Amel – Amel is Mirsad's father. Ove describes him as short and square. Amel curses frequently like Ove does, but in a different language. When Mirsad comes out as gay, Amel kicks him out, but Ove later convinces him to accept his son.

Ove's Mother – Ove's mother died when Ove was eight years old. She was a happy person and a regular churchgoer. Ove and his father continued going to church after her death as a way of remembering her.

Ernest – Ernest is Sonja's childhood cat, named after Ernest Hemingway. He is described as being the size of a moped (almost certainly an exaggeration) and likes to go fishing with Sonja's father. He dies after getting hit by a car less than a week after Sonja's father dies.

Man in the suit – The man in the suit sells Ove phony homeowner's insurance for his childhood home.

José – José runs the hotel in Spain where Ove and Sonja stay on their bus tour. He gives them free food after Ove fixes a car to help get an old woman to the hospital.



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.



MEMORY AND GRIEF

When Ove first appears in the novel, he's a man driven to suicide by his memories and grief over Sonja, his late wife. Ove attempts to make his memories of Sonja perform the same actions as she did while she was alive—motivating and inspiring him to do the right things—and though Ove's memories of Sonja are powerful, they aren't enough to pull Ove out of his grief. In this way, the novel sets out to explore the potentially disastrous consequences of dwelling on memories to the extent that Ove dwells on his memories of Sonja.

The novel makes it very clear from the beginning that memories are inescapable and necessary to understanding who a person is. Nearly half the book consists of flashbacks of Ove's life, spanning from his childhood to the day his boss forced him to retire the day before the novel begins. This structure allows the reader to learn about Ove through his memories, and shows how Ove uses memories to form his conception of the world. For example, Ove uses the memories of his father's kindness and honesty to guide his actions as he goes through life. He remembers what people said about his father and endeavors to behave in such a way as to inspire people to talk about him in the same way. Through Ove's other memories, many of which are exceptionally sad, the reader learns that Ove isn't indiscriminately mean for no reason. Rather, Ove is often unkind because he is mired in grief and sad memories, and haunted by the times that people tricked and humiliated him.

Although memory works positively as a teaching tool for characters as well as for the reader, the novel also offers several situations in which memory is used in ways that aren't useful or helpful. Most of these situations are ones in which elements of grief and anger are added to memories, making it difficult for Ove to move on from his memories and live his life. The novel states several times that Ove is a man made for a time long gone. Although he lives in the twenty-first century, he mentally inhabits a world that simply doesn't exist anymore, where a man is only a man if he works outside the home, where there are clearly delineated gender roles for men and women, and where people in general do things for themselves rather

than use automated systems (one of Ove's greatest pet peeves is that people drive **cars** with automatic transmissions). Because Ove lives entrenched in his memories of how the world used to be, his memories lead him to develop disdain and hatred for everyone in his life who doesn't feel the same way he does.

Individuals like Patrick then become prime targets for Ove's scorn. Patrick works from home as an IT consultant, drives an automatic transmission, and can't perform "simple" tasks like unjamming a window or bleeding a radiator. Ove feels angry and superior when he encounters people like Patrick, which in turn isolates Ove even further from the greater community. Similarly, rather than use his memories of Sonja as positive reminders to love others and engage fully with the world as she did, Ove's grief keeps him seeking a relationship with her that no longer exists after her death. Rather than allowing his memories of Sonja to remain in the past, as Ove did when his father died, he remains fully committed to trying to keep Sonja's memory alive at the expense of everyone and everything else—including his own life. He does this by refusing to remove any of Sonja's things from his home and buying flowers for her grave from her prepaid debit card on a weekly basis. Similarly, although his suicide attempts are all unsuccessful, they're meant to keep Ove from having to relegate Sonja to memory: he believes that when he dies, he will be reunited with her in the afterlife.

Following Ove's own death, Parvaneh and Patrick offer an alternative to how Ove tried to honor his memory and deal with their own grief. Rather than keep Ove as a private memory, they engage with the community to start a relief fund for orphaned children in Ove and Sonja's name. It is noteworthy that the pages following Ove's death are overwhelmingly positive and happy—not because people are happy Ove is dead, but because they choose to celebrate his life. The friends he leaves behind choose to honor his memory by doing good things that will benefit future generations. In doing so, the novel presents the possibility that memories can be harnessed to create positive change in the world—not just to hold people back from life.



RULES AND ORDER

Ove is obsessive about enforcing rules and creating a sense of order for himself. The narrator states that he "just had a sense of there needing to be a bit of order in the greater scheme of things." However, the novel offers several different ways to think about rules and order by offering three distinct systems for consideration: Ove's system, which is inflexible and often self-serving; the systems employed by government bureaucracy and the "white shirts," which is a similarly inflexible system but often seems to stand in direct opposition to Ove's system; and Sonja's system, which is flexible, adaptive, and works primarily to help others.

Ove creates systems for himself that make him feel safe and secure. He has the same meal for dinner every night and follows a daily routine that leaves little room for error, lateness, or surprises. This system first comes into conflict with bureaucracy when Ove's childhood home catches fire. Because it's on an unclear municipal boundary, the fire department needs permission and paperwork from various government entities to be able to save the burning structure, so instead they simply watch it burn—and prevent Ove himself from extinguishing it. Not long after, Ove is kicked out of the military for a congenital heart defect that makes him ineligible for service. In both situations, the “white shirts” explain their reasoning to Ove by stating simply that “rules are rules.” Although Ove resents every person in a white shirt who tells him this, his own love of and respect for rules means that he sees and accepts the logic of this explanation. These experiences create in Ove an early distrust of bureaucracy, and of the people he deems “white shirts” who support it: government employees who insist on following rules to the letter, even when the rules don't help anyone.

The narrator says that Ove began to truly live when he met Sonja. Although Sonja respects Ove's love of rules and order, she loves things that don't follow clear guidelines. She adores the humanities (which Ove hates because there are no clear answers) and enjoys dancing, which Ove considers “haphazard and giddy.” Sonja's entrance into Ove's life shows Ove that even though rules and systems can certainly bring comfort, there's also something to be said for being spontaneous and living life to the fullest rather than fixating on rules and regulations.

Despite Sonja's love of spontaneity and activities that Ove would deem foolish, their relationship also sees them both attempt to follow the “proper” structure as they start their family. When Sonja reveals that she's pregnant, she and Ove marry and decide to move into a row house because they believe that's simply where it's best for children to grow up. However, following the rules isn't enough to guard against the unpredictable nature of life: the bus accident that robs Sonja of the use of her legs and causes her to miscarry her unborn child drives home the fact that any order or sense of control humans create for themselves is fragile and illusory. Rather than using the accident to realize this, Ove compensates for and deals with his grief by writing letters of complaint in which he tries to get the white shirts to take responsibility for the bus accident and its consequences. When Ove writes these letters, however, they change nothing and only make him angrier. Finally, Sonja tells Ove to stop writing them. She understands that his reliance on the bureaucratic system to make things right isn't going to serve them and will only continue to make him feel angry.

Ove finally gets to put his love of rules and order to good use nearly 40 years after Sonja's accident when he learns that his long-time friend and rival, Rune, is going to be placed in an

assisted living facility against his wife, Anita's, wishes. Ove uses his newfound community to enforce the rules of the neighborhood and keep Rune in his home: their neighbor Anders tows the illegally parked **car** of the man in the white shirt who is in charge of Rune's medical care, while their journalist friend, Lena, digs up unsavory information on the man that could lead to a public investigation and ruin his reputation. The neighborhood's collective victory of keeping Rune in his home comes about because Ove decides to bend the rules and use them for good—exactly as Sonja encouraged Ove to do while she was alive.



LOVE, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY

Although the novel initially portrays Ove as a perpetual loner, it soon becomes apparent that Ove is a person driven by love for his family as represented by Sonja, his late wife. After her death, Ove becomes unmoored and suffers as a widower until he begins allowing others in his community to enter his life and begins to form a new family of sorts with them. In this way, the novel takes a careful look at how communities function, the consequences of loneliness, and the positive effects of community on an unhappy and lonely individual like Ove.

The novel begins by insisting that Ove is a loner and despises everyone except for his wife. Through the flashbacks that follow, however, the reader learns that this characterization of Ove is entirely false: Ove spent much of his life since meeting Sonja building a family and a community. Within the span of a year, Sonja had become pregnant, she and Ove had moved into their house and befriended their neighbors, Anita and Rune, and Ove and Sonja had gotten married. Although Ove and Rune are both quiet and stoic men, they formed a friendship to appease their pregnant wives, who quickly became best friends. This shows Ove building a family and working on a friendship of his own—and he's notably happy doing so. Rune becomes a person Ove can discuss principles and lawnmowers with, things that Sonja gets tired of hearing about.

However, disaster strikes not long after Sonja and Ove are married, when the two are involved in a bus accident that paralyzes Sonja from the waist down and causes her to miscarry. Sonja is able to recover physically and emotionally from this blow—she adjusts to life in a wheelchair and throws herself into teaching struggling students. These students become stand-ins for the biological child she never had, and her relationship with Anita remains strong in the following years. Ove, on the other hand, remains devoted to Sonja, but is never able to forgive Rune for not getting along with his own son as the years go by. Having turned his back on his friend and neighbor, Ove seems also to reject the possibility of community beyond his marriage with Sonja. Her death therefore represents the death of the only person with whom he has ever felt true love and community, and leaves him completely alone.

In the present, Ove is left entirely without a community, and the effects of his loneliness are devastating. Rather than return to the existence he had before Sonja where he was alone and reasonably satisfied with life (though not happy, per se), Ove attempts suicide so he can continue his relationship with Sonja in the afterlife. The fact that Ove's loneliness drives him to suicide for those particular reasons makes it abundantly clear that even if Ove himself won't admit it, family and community are essential to his happiness and wellbeing.

As the story unfolds, Ove is forced to accept the community on offer as his new neighbor, Parvaneh, inserts herself into Ove's life, introduces him to new faces in the community while reminding him that old friends like Rune still exist, and regularly spoils his suicide attempts. Ove accepts his new community in part because many of the people in it remind him of Sonja, or are people he knows that Sonja would like. Ove then uses the collective power of the community he builds to save Rune from being placed in an assisted living facility (and thus removed from the community).

Ove's life makes a final turn for the better when he's at his worst: after suffering a heart attack, Parvaneh lists herself as Ove's next of kin and advocates for him in the hospital as a family member would. Ove lives for another three years and acts as a grandfather to Parvaneh's three children and Jimmy and Mirsad's adopted daughter. The community that surrounds Ove at the end of his life is robust, diverse, and makes Ove's final years worth living. Essentially, the community shows Ove that life is indeed worth living when one has a community to call on for love and support.



PRINCIPLES, FAIRNESS, AND LOYALTY

As a boy and a teenager, Ove learns from his father that fairness and loyalty are two of the most important qualities in a man. He learns that it's extremely important to act fairly and honorably, even if the outcome is less desirable because of it; Ove believes in the importance of a job well done or a thing done correctly over getting ahead. Though this belief is certainly a part of Ove's conception of rules and structure, it also has a distinctly personal element to it, as it's primarily how Ove structures his relationships with people and objects in his life.

Particularly when it comes to Ove's principles, he genders them as a specifically masculine quality. For Ove, firm principles make men better and are something that men understand; he consistently says that women don't understand doing something just for the principle of it. This is true of both Sonja and Parvaneh, the two women Ove has the most contact with throughout the novel. While Sonja respects Ove's desire to do a job well for the sake of doing it well, she also regularly discourages Ove from arguing with people solely for the principle of whatever they're arguing about. Parvaneh doesn't understand why Ove engages in yelling matches with parking

attendants over hospital parking fees, and Ove insists she simply doesn't understand principles when she offers to pay for parking herself. It's important to note that as a general rule, the female characters in *A Man Called Ove* move through life with much more ease than Ove does, as do the male characters that Ove feels are less masculine like Patrick and Jimmy. While Ove's principles make him feel better about himself and more masculine, they don't necessarily make his life any easier.

The novel explores ideas of fairness and loyalty primarily through the characters' relationships to vehicles. Ove is a devoted **Saab** driver, while Rune is a Volvo driver who late in life buys a sporty BMW. Before that point, the cars serve two purposes. First, they show that both Ove and Rune are loyal to their chosen brand, while the particular models they choose demonstrate their loyalty to their families. Ove buys vehicles that can accommodate Sonja's wheelchairs, while Rune buys cars appropriate for one child and then the possibility of more, though he and Anita don't end up having any more children. Ove finally stops purchasing new Saabs when GM acquires Saab in 1989—he'd rather drive his car from the late 1980s than purchase from a company who hasn't shown loyalty to devoted customers like Ove. Rune, on the other hand, purchases a BMW sports car after his adult son leaves his parents and Sweden for America. Ove sees Rune's purchase as the ultimate betrayal of loyalty. In his eyes, it represents Rune giving up on his family and for Ove, who values nothing more than loyalty and principles, this is an unforgivable offense and signals the end of his friendship with Rune.

Ove's belief in fairness can also be understood through the way he thinks about **houses**. He believes that you get out of a house what you put into a house, in that if built well and properly maintained, a house will fairly serve its inhabitants. Ove applies this idea to every aspect of his life. He goes to work every day and expects nothing more than to get to keep working; he cares for Sonja and expects only that she stay alive and in his life; and he's fanatical about properly maintaining his string of Saab cars over the years. He also uses this theory to try to keep Sonja's memory alive after her death. Rather than make the house his own, he spends the six months after her death living among her things, from hair clips and post-it notes to her piles of coats and clothing. Ove believes that this is a way for him to remain true to her and their marriage, particularly as he formulates his plans to commit suicide. He believes that he's putting in his time and his care into their shared home together, and he'll get to spend eternity with Sonja in return.

After her death, Sonja becomes a voice in Ove's head that encourages him to look outside his firm principles to see the bigger picture. While he still does things the way they should be done for no other reason than that's the way it should be, he does begin to adopt a more Sonja-like view on how and why things should be done. When he allows Parvaneh to pay for parking and decides not to set a trap for the dog that regularly

urinates on his paving stones, it shows that Ove learns in his old age that while his decidedly masculine principles may make him right, honest, and admirable, sometimes principles for principles' sake aren't the most important thing in life.



SYMBOLS

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



WHITE SHIRTS

White shirts appear repeatedly throughout the book as a symbol of corporatism, incompetence, and the inhumanity of bureaucracy. Men in white shirts prevent young Ove from extinguishing his childhood **home** when it catches fire. Ove fights with other “men in white shirts” over his wife’s health, and repeatedly yells at yet another man in a white shirt about his driving. In every case, the men who wear white shirts remain nameless and featureless, but they all share something in common: they are bureaucrats. For Ove, the white shirts symbolize the loss of common sense and decency that go hand-in-hand with the loss of human connection. Increasing levels of bureaucracy, it seems, have left people unable to treat one another properly or extend even the most basic levels of care and respect to one another. The white shirts echo the blankness and anonymity of bureaucracy in their very appearance. Though Ove does make a distinction between “suits” and white shirts, the two represent very similar ideas in that they both take actions that go directly against what’s actually best for Ove’s family. However, when Ove saves the “suit” from an oncoming train after the suit faints at the train station, it stands as an action which stands not only as a testament to Ove’s deep sense of compassion, but as a rebuke of the lack of compassion exhibited by the men in suits and white shirts themselves.



CARS

Throughout the book, different makes of cars are used to signify different characters’ values and temperaments. For instance, Saabs: when Ove’s father dies, one of the only things he leaves for his son is the Saab he was given by his boss at the railroad—a reward for his loyalty and good character. Ove and his father spent many Saturdays working on the car together, and Ove remains loyal to that particular car manufacturer for the rest of his life, owning only Saabs. Not only does Ove seem to see the car as having a conservative (rather than flashy) design, but it’s also a Swedish manufacturer—meaning that Saabs represent modesty, sensibleness, and arguably even a type of conservatism or nationalism. BMWs and Škodas—both foreign cars—are cast in

a different light. The man in the white shirt, who is portrayed as a bureaucrat and a jerk, is associated with the Škoda he drives. When Ove’s neighbor, Rune, buys a BMW after his adult son leaves Sweden for America, Ove seems to see it as a sign that Rune has lost integrity, noting that he used to drive only Volvos (another Swedish car). Furthermore, the BMW is a two-seater and can therefore only accommodate only Rune and Anita, which stands as a rejection of Rune’s extended family and community. Ove sees Rune’s BMW as a symbol of Rune giving up on his family and on life, and therefore takes it as an unforgivable offense. The trajectory of Rune’s health supports Ove’s assessment: within a year of buying the BMW and symbolically rejecting his community, Rune is diagnosed with Alzheimer’s and slowly loses his connections to his community as he loses his memory. In this way, cars are used to indicate a wide variety of aspects of different characters’ personalities.



HOUSES

Ove loves building and fixing houses because they’re fair and predictable: you get out of a house what you put into it. Because of this, houses function as a symbol for Ove’s love of fairness and loyalty. Ove and Sonja’s house in particular functions this way after Ove rebuilds it to accommodate Sonja’s wheelchair. By making it so Sonja can move freely through the house and continue her normal activities, Ove demonstrates his loyalty to Sonja and her quality of life.



COLOR (PINK)

The narrator asserts that Ove lived his life in black and white before he met Sonja. After meeting her, she brought color into his world by adding love and life to his existence. In this way, color comes to represent love, life, and the connection Ove has to Sonja. After her death, the only color Ove sees are the pink flowers he brings to her grave every week. They function as a reminder of the life and vivacity that Ove once experienced, though they die and don’t last. Nasanin’s drawings of Ove, on the other hand, are done in riotous color. When Ove agrees to accept Nasanin and her family into his life and puts her drawings up on his fridge, he regains the color and love in his life.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Washington Square Press edition of *A Man Called Ove* published in 2015.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☝☝ Every morning for the almost four decades they had lived in this house, Ove had put on the coffee percolator, using exactly the same amount of coffee as on any other morning, and then drank a cup with his wife.

Related Characters: Sonja, Ove

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

Here the narrator explains Ove's morning routine, which hasn't changed despite the fact that his wife, Sonja, has been dead for six months at the start of the novel (though this crucial information isn't yet revealed at this point). The fact that Ove hasn't changed his routine speaks to several things. First, it's indicative of Ove's fear of moving on from Sonja's death. More than anything, Ove fears forgetting her, and continuing to prepare coffee for her and check the radiators is his way of keeping her memory alive. It allows Ove to feel as though he's living with her, even though she's gone. Ove's routine, and the fact that it doesn't change, also points to Ove's love of routine in general. Routine makes Ove feel secure in life and in the world; it's one thing that he can, almost without fail, control. Even with Sonja gone, Ove can feel safe and secure by making coffee for her, exactly as he's done for the last 40 years.

☝☝ Ove didn't really care who was parked in the guest parking area, of course. But it was a question of principle. If it said twenty-four hours on the sign, that's how long you were allowed to stay.

Related Characters: Ove

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator describes Ove's practice of checking the license plates of cars parked in the guest parking area to discover if any of the cars are parked improperly, even though he doesn't really care if they are. Ove values following the rules more highly than anything else. He's

convinced that if people don't follow rules, no matter how arbitrary or silly the rules are, the world will descend into chaos. By taking an active role in enforcing rules, even when he doesn't care about them, Ove feels he's doing his part to keep the world in order. It allows him to take more control over his life and the world around him, which is something he craves particularly after Sonja's death.

☝☝ Because nowadays people are all thirty-one and wear too-tight trousers and no longer drink normal coffee. And don't want to take responsibility. A shed-load of men with elaborate beards, changing jobs and changing wives and changing their car makes. Just like that. Whenever they feel like it.

Related Characters: Anders, Ove

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

On Ove's first afternoon of forced retirement, he looks out his window, watches his neighbor Anders jog, and thinks about how different his younger coworkers are. Anders is in many ways a symbol for the younger generation that Ove despises: he's divorced and has a younger girlfriend, and Ove doesn't know what his job is but assumes it's not something that he'd approve of. Ove is very uncomfortable with how the world has changed since he moved into his row house 40 years ago. Ove believes that members of the younger generation don't have the same sense of fairness and principles that he has. He sees them as flighty and irresponsible because they don't remain loyal to their job, spouse, or home for 40 years as Ove has done. Because of this, Ove sees them as unreachable and wholly different from himself—giving himself a justification to not engage with his community.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☝☝ But Ove isn't bloody arguing. He just thinks right is right. Is that such an unreasonable attitude to life?

Related Characters: Sonja, Ove

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

Ove stands at Sonja's grave and has just explained to her that he wasn't going to pay a surcharge for using a debit card instead of cash. His tone of voice makes it seem as though he's arguing with her.

The assertion that Ove isn't arguing; he just thinks right is right begins to draw a line between arguing for arguing's sake (which many characters, Sonja included, thinks Ove does) and being right, which Ove believes is just the way things should be. Ove's principles dictate that it's far more important to be right than it is to be anything else, and by hanging onto this idea, Ove is able to justify being as gruff and grumpy as he is. Holding onto these firm principles makes it so that Ove never has to question anything deeper than whether one is following rules or not; it shields him from asking deeper questions about what it means to be right, or why being right is so important in the first place. For Ove, there's comfort in being right, regardless of why something is considered right or not.

useless. In this way, Ove wonders what his own value is now that he can only do practical things and doesn't understand how the world works today.

☞ He was a man of black and white.
And she was color. All the color he had.

Related Characters: Ove

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator describes Ove's early life and how Sonja fit into Ove's conception of the world. The two are portrayed as exact opposites: Ove loves rules, structure, and concrete things, while Sonja loves beauty, spontaneity, and art. Throughout their relationship, Sonja encourages Ove to think outside his rigid ideas of how the world should be and embrace nuance and difference. This is how she brings color to Ove's life, and until Ove finally embraces Parvaneh's family at the end of the novel, Sonja truly is all the "color" Ove has. Ove's poor state of mind after Sonja's death suggests that "color" as defined by what Sonja brought to Ove's life is absolutely necessary to live happily.

Chapter 5 Quotes

☞ And if you could just go and buy everything, what was the value of it? What was the value of a man?

Related Characters: Ove

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator explains that Ove is of a generation that simply doesn't understand how today's generation can possibly take pride in the fact that they can buy everything rather than make it themselves. This belief differentiates Ove from younger people and further, allows Ove to feel superior about his own practical skills. It also makes a direct connection between the value of a person and what that person can do. This explains why Ove thinks so poorly about people like Patrick and Jimmy: he sees that their work (as an IT consultant and an app programmer respectively) isn't actually anything physical. You can't hold an app, and as far as Ove is concerned, nobody knows what IT consultants actually do. Therefore, Ove sees their work as utterly

☞ "Engines give you what you deserve," he used to explain. "If you treat them with respect they'll give you freedom; if you behave like an ass they'll take it from you."

Related Characters: Ove's Father (speaker), Ove

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

Ove's father explains to Ove how engines either give a person joy and freedom, or take it away. Notably, what an engine gives a person is dependent on how the person treats the engine. This sets up Ove's belief that if he puts justice and fairness into everything he does, he'll get the appropriate, expected, and positive result. Ove's black-and-white view of the world isn't always particularly useful, as life isn't fair, and people treat him very poorly even when he

does treat them respectfully. Ove never acts horribly to Tom, though this doesn't stop Tom from stealing from Ove and accusing him of theft; Ove truly enjoys the man pretending to be an insurance agent and pays him cash, though the man still steals Ove's money and leaves him without insurance. However, Ove understands that his father's words do have truth to them. The problem is that people simply aren't reliable like engines.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☝ Since his father's death he had begun more and more to differentiate between people who did what they should, and those who didn't. People who did and people who just talked. Ove talked less and less and did more and more.

Related Characters: Ove's Father, Ove

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 73

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator describes how Ove changed in the months and years following his father's death. Ove's father believed in fairness and doing the right thing, and was the single most influential figure in Ove's life growing up. Because of this influence, Ove decides to try to be as much like his father as possible, which leads him to become quiet, judge people, and do as much as he can. These priorities make Ove the person he is in the present and particularly explain why Ove despises individuals like Patrick, who works in IT. As far as Ove is concerned, Patrick is a failure at being a person and specifically at being a man. Patrick can't unjam a window or fix his radiators, and Ove has no idea what an IT consultant even does. This makes Ove feel superior, as he's capable of doing tangible things and does what he sees as the right thing. It justifies Ove's scorn for everyone else but himself.

Chapter 10 Quotes

☝ He'd discovered that he liked houses. Maybe mostly because they were understandable... Houses were fair, they gave you what you deserved. Which, unfortunately, was more than one could say about people.

Related Characters: Ove

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 90

Explanation and Analysis

After Ove finishes renovating his parental home, he realizes that building houses makes sense to him more than anything else. Ove's feelings about houses recalls his father's feelings about engines, in that they give back what you put into them. This plays into Ove's sense of fairness and principles. Ove finds this structure comforting, as he knows what he can expect out of a house. When Ove properly cares for his radiators, they properly heat the house; when he properly oils his countertops, they'll last for many years. People, on the other hand, are unpredictable and don't follow the same sense of rules and structure that Ove does, which makes them foreign and difficult for him to deal with.

Chapter 11 Quotes

☝ Straight lines, even edges. People don't shovel snow that way anymore. Nowadays they just clear a way, they use snow blowers and all sorts of things. Any old method will do, scattering snow all over the place. As if that were the only thing that mattered in life: pushing one's way forward.

Related Characters: Ove

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 98

Explanation and Analysis

Ove shovels the snow off his walkway carefully and thinks about how horribly other people accomplish the same task with snow blowers and little care. This places Ove squarely in a time that no longer exists (and perhaps never existed) and further develops his idea of rules and structure. He finds it comforting and right to shovel snow so that it's carefully and squarely done. He takes pride in doing it right because he thinks it's the right thing to do and he enjoys the task itself. He recognizes that others see shoveling snow as a means to an end and don't take pride or joy in the process at all. This plays into Ove's overwhelming attitude of "kids these days," in which he laments that they don't believe the same things he does. This in turn alienates him from his community, as he can't bring himself to do anything but look down on his younger neighbors and coworkers for not valuing the same things that he does.

☹☹ It wasn't supposed to be like this. You work and pay off the mortgage and pay taxes and do what you should. You marry. For better or for worse until death do us part, wasn't that what they agreed? Ove remembers quite clearly that it was. And she wasn't supposed to be the first to die. Wasn't it bloody well understood that it was his death they were talking about? Well, wasn't it?

Related Characters: Sonja, Ove

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

Ove is trying to commit suicide using car exhaust, and as he sits in the smoke, he thinks about how his life hasn't turned out at all how he expected it to. As Ove thinks through each step in life, he allows the reader a glimpse into his personal beliefs about how life should be lived. It follows a very distinct structure and rules that, until Sonja died, Ove believed to be unbreakable. His beliefs about structure and how life should be lived were entirely upended when Sonja died and it became obvious that it wasn't just *his* death that he and Sonja made promises about. This shows how much Ove struggles when his beliefs run up against the unpredictable nature of the real world. Rather than adapt and try to function within a world that's unpredictable, Ove tries to take himself out of it. However, even his suicide attempts don't work the way Ove wants them to. Life is unpredictable and he keeps getting interrupted, which only works to further develop the idea that Ove's principles have a place, but not necessarily a place in his death.

Chapter 13 Quotes

☹☹ "And you can't let the girls freeze to death tonight, Ove, right? It's quite enough that they had to watch you assault a clown, no?"

Related Characters: Parvaneh / "The Foreign Pregnant Woman" (speaker), Nasanin, Patrick / "The Lanky One", The Seven-year-old, Ove

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 127

Explanation and Analysis

When Ove and Parvaneh return from the hospital, Parvaneh asks Ove if he'll help her with her radiators, while looking concerned about Ove's possible suicide attempt. As

she talks to Ove, Parvaneh manipulates the fact that Ove needs things to be right. It would offend Ove's sense of right and wrong to leave children freezing in their home, and Parvaneh realizes that this is the case. She doesn't understand, however, that this particular aspect of Ove's right and wrong is also linked to what he thinks Sonja will feel about it when he meets her in the afterlife. Essentially, Ove goes through much of the present part of the novel using Sonja's beliefs as his test for what's right and wrong, rather than his own. He uses the family and community he had with Sonja to influence how he builds a community now, and indeed, the fact that he builds a community at all is largely due to her influence.

Chapter 14 Quotes

☹☹ And now she stood outside the station with his flowers pressed happily to her breast, in that red cardigan of hers, making the rest of the world look as if it were made in grayscale.

Related Characters: Sonja, Ove

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 133

Explanation and Analysis

On Ove and Sonja's first date, he brings her flowers, and even though she arrives late to their meeting point, it doesn't stop him from thinking that she's beautiful and makes the world look dark and colorless in comparison. This shows how much life Sonja brought to Ove's life—while Ove obviously noticed color in a literal sense before he met Sonja, she brought color in the form of hope, vivacity, and happiness to his life. She refused to adhere completely to his black-and-white principles and beliefs about the world, and instead encouraged him to compromise on his principles so that he could experience some of the color and happiness of life. In this way, the two of them built their relationship and developed their routines, which represented a compromise of their two very different ways of moving through life.

☹☹ She wanted to get married, so Ove proposed. She wanted children, which was fine with him, said Ove. And their understanding was that children should live in row housing developments among other children.

Related Characters: Sonja, Ove

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 136

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator briefly describes the trajectory of Ove and Sonja's life after meeting each other. These particular decisions and agreements are notable in that they represent the moments in which their relationship seeks to truly follow a very classic structure, despite Sonja's love of spontaneity. Even though Sonja doesn't necessarily care that much for Ove's insistence that they follow strict rules for rules' sake, here she expresses a wish for their child to grow up in an environment that represents nothing but traditional structure. Ove's willingness to go along with Sonja's desires is indicative of his love for her, as he doesn't feel particularly strongly about having children or not, but feels very strongly that Sonja should have what she wants. This shows the profound effect that Sonja had on Ove's life: she was able to convince him to think outside his strict boundaries in order to make her happy.

Chapter 17 Quotes

☝☝ As if the kitchen had been built for a child. Parvaneh stares at them the way people always do when they see it for the first time. Ove has got used to it. He rebuilt the kitchen himself after the accident. The council refused to help, of course.

Related Characters: Sonja, Ove, Parvaneh / “The Foreign Pregnant Woman”

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 163

Explanation and Analysis

When Parvaneh enters Ove's kitchen to heat water for the freezing cat, she sees that Ove's counters in the kitchen are low to accommodate a wheelchair and begins to understand that there was more to Sonja than she thought. The fact that Ove rebuilt the counters for Sonja shows again how much he loved her, and what form that love took. It took the form of action and doing things, rather than just telling her he loved her. This plays into Ove's love of structure,

fairness, and his belief that men are what they do, not what they say. Using Ove's metric, he's a good husband because he does things for Sonja that make her life easier and more enjoyable.

This also alludes to the issues that Ove had with the council, government, and the white shirts. They care only about following rules for the sake of following rules, not making Sonja's life easier. As such, Ove must do things himself rather than seek help from government offices that, in theory, are there to make his and Sonja's lives better.

Chapter 23 Quotes

☝☝ But everywhere, sooner or later, he was stopped by men in white shirts with strict, smug expressions on their faces. And one couldn't fight them. Not only did they have the state on their side, they were the state.

Related Characters: Sonja, Ove

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 204

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator describes what Ove ran into when he tried to get the council, the Swedish government, and the Spanish government to help make what happened to Sonja right. He ran into the grind of bureaucracy and simply wasn't able to fight it.

Though the white shirts operate under a very similar system that Ove does in regards to rules and structure, they have more power than Ove does. They can simply decide what's right and wrong or when a fight is over. Notably for Ove, when it comes to how Sonja intersects with his love of rules and structure, he wants the structure to mean something or do something to help her. They must have a purpose and not be arbitrary. The white shirts, on the other hand, follow arbitrary rules, timelines, and procedures that don't actually make anything better for Ove or for Sonja.

☝☝ Every human being needs to know what she's fighting for. That was what they said. And she fought for what was good. For the children she never had. And Ove fought for her.

Related Characters: Sonja, Ove

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 205

Explanation and Analysis

After Sonja made Ove stop writing letters, he installed a ramp at her school so she could work and allowed her, in effect, to fight for her students. This shows one of the primary differences between Ove and Sonja. Sonja saw the benefit of a community that was large and varied; she taught thousands of students and remained entrenched in her neighborhood community until her death. She had many people to fight for and form relationships with, and as such, always had people to call on when she herself needed help. Ove, on the other hand, doesn't trust or like people much except for Sonja. He then only has her to fight for and call on to fight for him in return. This is why Ove struggles so much after her death: he simply doesn't have the community to fall back on, because his one-person community died and left him alone.

Chapter 24 Quotes

☝☝ When she says that last bit she points at a figure in the middle of the drawing. Everything else on the paper is drawn in black, but the figure in the middle is a veritable explosion of color. A riot of yellow and red and blue and green and orange and purple.

"You're the funniest thing she knows. That's why she always draws you in color," says Parvaneh.

Related Characters: Parvaneh / "The Foreign Pregnant Woman" (speaker), Nasanin, Ove

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 212

Explanation and Analysis

Parvaneh gives Ove a drawing that Nasanin did in which all her neighbors are drawn in black except for Ove. Nasanin's use of color mirrors the way the narrator describes Sonja. Sonja was Ove's one source of color in the world; Nasanin's drawing suggests not just that she sees the world in a similar way that Ove does, but that he's her color in the world. This shows Ove that Sonja is not the only source of color in the world and foreshadows Nasanin's role in Ove's life going forward. Nasanin plays the crucial role of giving

Ove the tools to connect with his community by giving him first this tidbit of knowledge and inspiration. Later, she teaches him how to text and communicate with his community. For Ove, it also opens up the possibility that not everyone sees him as a mean curmudgeon. Nasanin thinks he's hilarious and sees through his gruff exterior to the kind heart inside.

Chapter 25 Quotes

☝☝ Both men, once as close as men of that sort could be, stare at each other. One of them a man who refuses to forget the past, and one who can't remember it at all.

Related Characters: Rune, Ove

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 218

Explanation and Analysis

When Ove knocks on Rune's door, Rune answers and recognizes Ove despite his Alzheimer's. Rune's Alzheimer's functions as a tool and a lens through which to examine the different ways that Ove and Rune deal with memory. While Rune is, as the narrator says, unable to remember the past, Ove remembers it strongly to a fault. Rune's generally happy demeanor despite his loss of memory, however, shows that one doesn't need to live so firmly entrenched in the past to enjoy the present. Later, though Rune doesn't get better, he lights up seeing Jimmy and Mirsad's daughter, even if he doesn't recognize her from one day to the next. At this point in the novel, Ove uses the past to justify remaining angry in the present. He uses his memories to trap himself in the past and not truly experience the present or the future.

Chapter 28 Quotes

☝☝ After the accident Ove bought a Saab 95 so he'd have space for Sonja's wheelchair. That same year Rune bought a Volvo 245 to have space for a stroller. Three years later Sonja got a more modern wheelchair and Ove bought a hatchback, a Saab 900. Rune bought a Volvo 265 because Anita had started talking about having another child.

Related Characters: Anita, Rune, Sonja, Ove

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 245

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator lists the cars that Ove and Rune bought over the years and their reasons for buying them as the narrator explains how Ove came to hate Rune. Prior to this, the narrator has listed some of the cars but not the reasons for their purchase. Here, the reader sees that both Ove and Rune were motivated by love and devotion to their families when they purchased specific cars: they bought cars to accommodate necessary wheelchairs and strollers, and possibly more children. The cars reflect the life and family structure of the families in question, and by purchasing these particular vehicles, the men can show the world that they care about their families. This is what makes Rune's BMW such a slap in the face to Ove—it stands as a rejection of everything that Rune spent years fighting for as he bought only Volvos. He didn't just ruin his relationship with Volvo cars; he bought a vehicle that couldn't accommodate his family.

☛ Rune and Anita's lad grew up and cleared out of home as soon as he got the chance. And Rune went and bought a sporty BMW, one of those cars that only has space for two people and a handbag. Because now it was only him and Anita, as he told Sonja when they met in the parking area. "And one can't drive a Volvo all of one's life," he said with an attempt at a halfhearted smile. She could hear that he was trying to swallow his tears. And that was the moment when Ove realized that a part of Rune had given up forever.

Related Characters: Rune (speaker), Sonja, Ove

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 246

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator explains the events that led to Rune's BMW purchase and Rune's emotions after the fact. Rather than buy a car that would've allowed Rune to remain faithful to his preferred car brand and to his family, he buys a car that rejects both. The car can't accommodate his son anymore; it no longer reflects the true makeup of his family.

Notably, Rune isn't necessarily happy about this purchase.

He purchases the BMW to try to make himself feel better about his son's departure, and it evidently doesn't work. This is part of why Ove sees the BMW as giving up and an unforgivable offense. Ove so firmly believes that cars serve a purpose and a function, and should be faithfully worked on and purchased so that a car may serve its owner properly. When Rune buys the BMW and no longer has his son around, he suffers the consequences, as he becomes ill and never even gets to drive the car much.

Chapter 32 Quotes

☛ When he almost imperceptibly takes a half step backwards into the hall...he notices, from the corner of his eye, the photo of Sonja on the wall. The red dress. The bus trip to Spain when she was pregnant. He asked her so many times to take that bloody photo down, but she refused. She said it was "a memory worth as much as any other."

Related Characters: Sonja (speaker), Adrian / "The Youth", Mirsad / "The Young Man", Ove

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 280

Explanation and Analysis

Ove steps back to allow Adrian and Mirsad into his house in the middle of the night after being reminded of what Sonja would do if she were in this situation. This moment shows Ove learning to engage with memory more like Sonja did, rather than how he usually does. Sonja felt that memories were worth remembering, even if they were unhappy or uncomfortable, because they serve as a reminder that life doesn't always go as planned. Ove, on the other hand, would've liked to bury unhappy memories like this one: he spends his entire life sad that he couldn't protect Sonja and the baby she's carrying in the photo. By shifting his way of thinking to align more closely with Sonja's, Ove is able to come to decisions in the present that allow him to build a community and form friendships. It shows Ove that you can use memories for good, not just as a reminder of where you failed in the past.

Chapter 33 Quotes

☛ He thinks about how Sonja would have taken it if she'd found out. If she'd known that her best friend had not asked for her help because Sonja had "enough problems." She would have been heartbroken.

Related Characters: Jimmy, Anita, Rune, Sonja, Ove

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 287

Explanation and Analysis

On his morning inspection, Ove learns that Anita has been fighting the council for two years to keep Rune living at home, but never told Sonja about it. In this moment, Ove remembers that nothing mattered to Sonja more than her relationships with people. When Anita decided to not allow Sonja to help or offer emotional support, Anita robbed Sonja of this thing that mattered most. It's this knowledge that spurs Ove to action and causes him to throw himself fully into helping Rune and Anita himself. It allows him to feel as though he's done something that would make Sonja proud, as she certainly wouldn't have allowed Rune to go unwillingly into assisted living were she still alive. Ove uses Sonja's memory and his knowledge of her sense of love and loyalty to behave in a loyal way himself, and build a community that lasts him to the end of his life.

Chapter 39 Quotes

☛ "They can call me whatever they like. No need for you to stick your bloody nose in."

And then he puts up the drawings one by one on the fridge. The one that says "To Granddad" gets the top spot.

Related Characters: Ove (speaker), The Seven-year-old, Nasanin, Parvaneh / "The Foreign Pregnant Woman"

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 330

Explanation and Analysis

After Ove returns from the hospital after his heart attack, he puts drawings from Nasanin and the seven-year-old up on his fridge and ignores Parvaneh's apologies that they're calling him "Granddad." This shows, finally, Ove accepting his community and creating a chosen family within it. Though

he spent his life robbed of a family consisting of more than Sonja, in his old age, Ove finally gets the opportunity to fill a grandfatherly role in someone else's life. Further, he conceptualizes this relationship as not Parvaneh's business; he sees his loyalty as being to Nasanin and the seven-year-old, not just to their mother. He doesn't allow Parvaneh to "stick her nose in" to the relationship he has with the children, and in doing so, provides them with a memory of him that's overwhelmingly good and positive.

Epilogue Quotes

☛ The woman is pregnant. Her eyes glitter as she walks through the rooms, the way eyes glitter when a person imagines her child's future memories unfolding there on the floor.

Related Characters: Parvaneh / "The Foreign Pregnant Woman"

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 337

Explanation and Analysis

After Ove's funeral, Parvaneh shows a young couple around Ove's house. The woman loves the house; the man is less sure. This final moment brings Ove's story full circle, as the young couple closely resembles Ove and Sonja. The couple hopes to bring family and happiness to the house and in return, get many happy memories out of it. When it mentions the woman imagining her child's memories in the house, it shows that people in the present make decisions about the future based not just on memories of the past, but of memories that haven't even happened yet. This shows again how important memory is and how deeply it influences every aspect of life. The possibility of memories is enough to show this woman that they need to buy this house.



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.

1. A MAN CALLED OVE BUYS A COMPUTER THAT IS NOT A COMPUTER

The narrator introduces Ove: he's 59 and drives a **Saab**. He's in an Apple store, holding a box and grumpily and suspiciously asking a young sales clerk about an "O-Pad." The clerk tries to explain that it's an iPad. Ove tries to ascertain if the iPad is a computer or not, but the clerk can't answer the question to Ove's satisfaction. Ove yells that he wants a "normal bloody computer," and the clerk tries to steer Ove towards a laptop.

Ove is obviously out of his element in an Apple store. This provides some early clues that Ove hasn't necessarily evolved with the times. He remains stuck in a past where iPads and such things don't exist, which makes it all the more puzzling why he's in an Apple store in the first place.



Ove continues to inspect the iPad and asks where the keyboard pulls out. The clerk nervously tells Ove that there is no keyboard and Ove crows that the keyboard must be an extra purchase. The clerk again tries to convince Ove to look at a MacBook. Ove asks if that's an e-reader. The clerk calls a coworker over to show Ove the laptops and the clerk says he's going to lunch. Ove snorts that lunch is all young people care about these days. Ove throws the box down and walks out of the store.

Ove seems to believe that salespeople are out to upsell things to him and take advantage of him. This opening passage introduces several of the primary questions of the novel: how Ove came to behave this way, and what happened to him that sent him to an Apple store. He expresses obvious disdain for young people, as shown in the are major generational differences between the clerks and Ove.



2. (THREE WEEKS EARLIER) A MAN CALLED OVE MAKES HIS NEIGHBORHOOD INSPECTION

Ove and the cat meet each other at 5:55am and immediately dislike each other. Just as he's done every morning for the last 40 years, Ove had woken up ten minutes earlier and brewed a proper cup of coffee to drink with his wife. While the coffee brews, Ove goes outside to inspect the street. He thinks that only "self-employed people and other disreputable sorts" live on the street now. Ove comes upon the cat sitting on a footpath and yells at it to scam before continuing his inspection.

The fact that Ove has been following this routine for the last 40 years makes it clear that he needs this routine. His reaction to the cat then suggests that his routine is easy to upset with even the smallest thing. His thought about self-employed people suggests that the demographics on the street have changed a lot in the last 40 years. Note that it's suggested that Ove's wife is present with him and having coffee as well, though it's later revealed that this isn't the case.



Ove inspects the sign saying that cars aren't allowed in the residential area by kicking it. He checks his neighbors' garages to see if they've been robbed, checks the garage that houses his **Saab**, and then checks license plates in the guest parking area to see if anyone has overstayed the 24-hour parking limit. Nobody has overstayed today, but Ove regularly tracks down cars' owners and yells at them when they do, as a matter of principle. Ove then inspects the trash room to make sure the neighbors are sorting their garbage and recycling appropriately. Ove doesn't care about sorting garbage, but feels he must uphold the rules once they're in place.

Ove doesn't seem to care what the rules are, but primarily that people follow them. This suggests that Ove thrives on having control of everything around him, as evidenced too by his routine of inspecting the neighborhood every morning. It's unclear what purpose Ove's "principles" serve at this point other than providing him with a sense of control over his life and his environment.



The narrator notes that when Ove was the chairman of the Residents' Association, he tried unsuccessfully to get cameras installed in the trash room. Two years later, when Ove was no longer the chairman and the question of cameras came up again, Ove voted against cameras because he doesn't trust the internet, and the proposed cameras uploaded footage to the internet directly.

Ove once had power to create and enforce rules as the chairman of the Residents' Association, which seems a fitting role from what we know of his character so far. Here, we learn that Ove distrusts modernity and change, as represented by the cameras that utilize the internet.



Ove inspects the bike shed and puts an improperly parked bicycle into the shed. Then he walks back to his own **house** and leans down to check if his paving stones smell like urine (they do). He goes inside, drinks his coffee, and cancels his telephone service and newspaper subscription. He does small tasks around the house until 4pm.

Ove's neighbors don't seem to share his love of rules if they're parking bikes improperly and allowing their dogs to urinate on Ove's walkway. This begins to develop the idea that Ove is separate from his neighborhood and not a part of the greater community.



The narrator says that life wasn't supposed to turn out like this. Ove stands in his living room and watches his neighbor, Anders, jog outside. Anders drives an **Audi** and bought his house with a loan, and Ove thinks that Anders is probably a self-employed idiot because of this. Ove thinks that nobody wants to work anymore and remembers yesterday, when his boss asked him to retire. They'd said that Ove could take it easy, but Ove disagrees with their assessment.

Again, Ove very much looks down on how people live today versus how he lived his life years ago and still lives it. Times have changed; Ove hasn't. Further, Ove isn't just separate from his community—he actively despises other members of his community.



Ove looks at the **house** opposite his, where a family with children is moving in. He looks at his ceiling and decides that he's going to put a hook up today that will impress the real estate agents who Ove knows will be wandering through his house in a few days. One of his "useful stuff" boxes full of screws is next to him, and the narrator explains that Ove and his wife divide their house into useful things that are Ove's, and lovely things that are hers. Ove studies his ceiling and comes up with a plan to screw in the appropriate kind of hook while lamenting the fact that now that he's forcibly retired, he has no purpose. As he studies his ceiling, he's interrupted by the sound of something scraping along his outside wall.

Here the author sets up several plot points and creates tension. Ove will be vacating his house, as evidenced by the impending real estate agents, and it's very important that Ove install this hook in his ceiling. We also see that Ove is reeling from being forced to retire. This represents a major upset to Ove's routine and his conception of self. Notice that Ove believes that he has no purpose without a proper job. He defines purpose as having something to do outside of his home that receives monetary compensation.



3. A MAN CALLED OVE BACKS UP WITH A TRAILER

Ove looks out his window and sees a short foreign woman gesturing furiously at a very tall blond man driving a tiny **Japanese car** and trying to back a trailer in between the houses. Ove curses and storms outside. When he yells at the foreign woman, she yells right back and catches Ove off guard. Ove reminds the woman that you can't drive in the residential area and notices that she's quite pregnant.

Ove's rage is indiscriminate: he's willing to yell at pregnant women as much as he's willing to yell at cats. The Japanese car gives Ove more justification for his rage. His tone indicates that he doesn't think very highly of cars that aren't Swedish.



The woman's husband, whom Ove deems the Lanky One, gets out of the car and his wife, the Foreign Pregnant Woman, rages at him in Farsi. The Lanky One remains unfazed by his wife's yelling and tells Ove that scraping his house was only a "little accident." Ove fixes the Lanky One with a murderous stare and yells that the trailer is in his flowerbed. The Foreign Pregnant Woman seems unwilling to defend her husband, so he gets back into the car to try again. Both Ove and the pregnant woman mutter "Christ" at the same time, and Ove dislikes the woman less than he originally did.

The Lanky One backs the trailer over Ove's mailbox. Ove storms to the door of the car and yells at the Lanky One to get out. The Lanky One sheepishly agrees and Ove gets into the car, noting with derision that the **car** is an automatic. He thinks that people who drive automatics maybe shouldn't be allowed to vote. When Ove puts the car in reverse, it starts shrieking at him. The Lanky One jogs over to explain that it's the reverse signal and tries to explain other features to Ove, but Ove rolls up the window in his face and backs the car and trailer up perfectly between the two **houses**. The Lanky One thanks Ove for the help as Ove insults his driving abilities.

The Pregnant Foreign Woman grumbles that the Lanky One shouldn't be allowed to rewind a cassette, and thanks Ove. Ove reminds them that they can't drive in the residential area. As he heads back to his house Ove remarks out loud on the urine smell on his paving stones. The pregnant woman doesn't seem to understand why this is a surprise.

Ove goes into his **house** muttering about his new neighbors. He stares at his living room ceiling and loses himself in his thoughts. The ringing doorbell interrupts him. After three rings Ove throws the door open and knocks the three-year-old girl on the other side onto her bottom. The seven-year-old girl accompanying the little one hands Ove a container of rice and chicken. When Ove asks if she's selling it, the girl states imperiously that she lives here. Ove accepts the food and stares at the flapping three year old on his porch. The older one calls the little one Nasanin, and they walk to the Pregnant Foreign Woman across the street.

Ove puts the container in the fridge and returns to his living room. He realizes that it's gotten dark and he can't possibly drill after dark. Ove thinks that it's anyone's guess when the lights will be turned off again. Ove puts his box of useful stuff away and watches TV. He eats the food from the Pregnant Foreign Woman out of the container. He thinks that tomorrow, he's putting up the hook.

The Lanky One seems to be the exact opposite of Ove: he's very easygoing and cannot muster an appropriately penitent reaction to having backed the trailer into Ove's house. The Foreign Pregnant Woman, on the other hand, seems to be more like Ove than Ove would like to think. She's similarly unimpressed with her husband's driving and lack of understanding, and seems unafraid to yell right back at Ove. Note also Ove's tendency to define and even name the people he encounters based on their physical characteristics.



Ove's thoughts on automatic cars mirror how he thinks about work. He wants people to actually do things, make things, and have control of and fully engage in activities like driving. Ove demonstrates that he can do all these things when he backs the car perfectly. We see too that Ove is so disconnected from other people, he's unable to even graciously accept thanks and participate in standard scripts for social interaction.



The Pregnant Foreign Woman's grumbling suggests that her husband is truly the antithesis to everything Ove believes in, if he supposedly can't perform simple tasks like rewinding a cassette.



Ove shows again that he's very distrustful of people, including children. In his mind they must be selling him something, because he doesn't expect people to perform acts of kindness without looking for something in return. This raises the question of why he feels this way, especially since he doesn't seem happy or satisfied with his life and this outlook. This attitude also continues to separate Ove from his community, even as it reaches out to him.



Even if his reasons are unclear, Ove still has a very clear sense of order to his evening: drilling after dark isn't okay and the lights will be left on, which is puzzling and unclear but seems to make perfect sense to Ove. This alienates Ove from the reader, though it's later revealed that he's planning to kill himself and is trying to avoid causing any trouble or "mess" (like leaving the lights on).



4. A MAN CALLED OVE DOES NOT PAY A THREE-KRONER SURCHARGE

Ove gives his wife (whose name is later revealed to be Sonja) two plants, even though there was only supposed to be one. She doesn't answer anything Ove says, and he remarks that it's unnatural for him to be home alone all the time now. Earlier this morning, Ove had gone through his normal morning routine and also had gone around and checked that his wife hadn't sneakily turned up the radiators. Her turning up the radiators is his indicator that winter is coming, but Ove doesn't believe in giving the power company more money just because it's winter. Instead, he insists his wife use a diesel generator and a fan heater before bed.

Ove considers telling Sonja about the cat, which continues to stick around. Ove is wearing his navy suit, which his wife likes, as well as the watch he inherited from his father. That morning, Ove had unlocked his garage and then his **Saab** using real keys, not automated systems. As he drove through the parking area, he didn't return the Pregnant Foreign Woman's wave. Driving along rows of houses identical to his own, he remembered when there were only six houses in the area.

It usually takes Ove 14 minutes to reach the florist's, but today a black **Mercedes** tailgates Ove's Saab. Ove refuses to drive over the speed limit and the Mercedes starts honking at him before finally passing and making rude gestures at Ove. When Ove comes to a red light, he pulls up behind the Mercedes. When the light turns green and nearly a minute passes without any movement, Ove gets out of his car and wonders if it was a woman driver or an Audi holding up traffic. When Ove ends up behind the Mercedes at the next light, he chooses to pull off on a side road to skip traffic.

When Ove approaches the shopping center, he notes the two available parking spaces and wonders why everyone is shopping early on a weekday. The narrator says that at times like these, Ove's wife (Sonja) starts sighing about Ove's desire to find the best parking spot. Ove insists that it's a question of principles, something his wife simply doesn't understand.

Ove is frugal and begins to demonstrate that his frugality comes from a belief that those who wish to take his money (like the power company) are undeserving. This suggests a distrust of organizations and corporations like power companies. Ove's frugality, however, comes at a cost: if Sonja is sneakily turning up radiators, it's easy to believe that the diesel generator isn't enough to keep her warm. Ove prioritizes besting the power company over his wife's comfort. Note again that Ove's wife doesn't actually appear—he just thinks about her as being in the house with him.



Ove's description of his morning shows again that he very much values doing things for himself rather than relying on technology or other people. He continues to distance himself from his neighbors by refusing to wave, and still seems stuck in the past as he remembers what his neighborhood was like long ago.



For Ove, who's Swedish, people who drive foreign cars (here, Mercedes and Audi) are inherently bad people, and this particular Mercedes driver reinforces that idea. He seems to embody what Ove has said he hates about the current generation: he wants only to get where he's going as fast as possible and is willing to do whatever it takes to get there.



Sonja seems to not care much for Ove's "principles" and his insistence on saving gas and getting good parking spots. Notably, Ove actively creates distance between himself and Sonja by saying that she simply doesn't understand. He doesn't allow room for her to understand, or for himself to compromise.



Ove sees the **Mercedes** enter the shopping center parking lot, and the two cars begin racing for the two open parking spots. Ove blocks the Mercedes' path and allows a little Toyota to take one of the spots while taking the other one for himself. Ove is pleased that he thwarted the Mercedes until he sees the Lanky One, the Foreign Pregnant Woman, and their three-year-old get out of the Toyota. The three-year-old excitedly introduces herself to Ove as Nasanin but when her parents try to introduce themselves, Ove is already heading for the entrance to the florist's.

Ove enters the florist's with a coupon and spends 15 minutes arguing with the manager that logically, he should be able to get one plant for 25 kroner since the coupon is for two plants at 50 kroner. The manager finally agrees and when Ove hands him his debit card, the manager points at a sign indicating that there's a 3 kroner surcharge for card purchases less than 50 kroner.

Because of this, Ove now stands in front of Sonja with two plants and explains to her that he wasn't going to pay the surcharge. He tells his wife that the street is turning into a madhouse and explains why he couldn't put the hook up yesterday. He offers her the plants and tells her that they're **pink**, and then describes the new neighbors. Finally, Ove leans down, digs up the plant from last week, and carefully plants the two new plants. He gently caresses his wife's headstone and tells her that he misses her. The narrator says that she's been gone for six months now, but Ove still inspects the radiators to make sure she hasn't been turning them up.

5. A MAN CALLED OVE

None of Sonja's friends understood why she married Ove. They called him antisocial and bitter and complained that he didn't see the point in small talk. Ove thinks that now, people are proud of the fact that they don't know how to build or fix things, because everything can be bought. Ove wonders what the value in something is if you can just buy it.

The narrator says that Ove is a man in black and white, while Sonja was **color**. Before meeting her, the only thing Ove loved was math and numbers. When he was seven years old, his mother died, though he remembers little about her except for her hoarse singing at the kitchen window. Ove's father worked for the railways and was exceptionally strong. He told Ove once that size and strength are entirely different things, and Ove never forgot that lesson. His father was never violent and was well liked at work, though some people thought he was too kind.

Ove's principles do leave room for him to help others, but at this point, only if he's also adhering to his "principles" (and ruining someone else's day in the process). Ove continues to insist on remaining entirely disconnected from his new neighbors and shows no desire to get to know them at all. The three-year-old, on the other hand, very much wants to draw Ove into her family and her community.



Ove's principles don't always serve him, which again raises the question of why he clings so tightly to them. Notice that Ove is using a debit card despite his negative feelings about technology and modernity. He's not entirely unwilling to adapt when it serves him (or, as we later learn, when Sonja is involved).



Finally we learn that Ove has spent the last six months grieving the death of his wife. This provides some explanation for why he clings so tightly to his routines, as the routines provide some sense of safety and sameness even though her death turned his life entirely upside down. This also shows how stuck he is in his ways and his grief, however, if he's checking for changes in the radiators that only she would've made.



Ove doesn't understand how anyone can value themselves if they can't make or do things for themselves, which begins to explain why he feels so strongly about only driving cars with manual transmissions and using a physical key.



Ove and Sonja are described as being almost polar opposites. This implies that Sonja didn't follow Ove's strict rules and principles to the letter, but also implies that Ove was generally okay with that. Ove's early experiences of loss likely contribute to his desire for structure and principles, as it allows him control over a world that's often unpredictable and cruel.



After Ove's mother died, Ove and his father didn't speak much except for about engines. Ove's father said that a respected engine will give someone freedom, while an abused engine will take freedom away. In the 1940s and '50s, the directors at the railway learned that Ove's father had a knack for working on engines. He was called on once to fix the car of the director's daughter, which had broken down on the way to her wedding. The director sent Ove's father home with food in thanks.

Several months later, the director sent for Ove's father and showed him an old **Saab** that had been in an accident. Ove's father deemed it fixable, and the director handed him the keys and gifted him the car. That evening Ove's father explained to an awestruck Ove as much as he could about cars. At that point, Ove decided he'd never drive anything but Saabs.

On Saturdays, Ove's father would teach Ove how to work on the **Saab**, and on Sundays they went to church as a way of missing Ove's mother. Soon, Ove began working on the railway with his father after school. When Ove was nine, his father sent him with Tom, the only person that Ove didn't like, to clean out a broken-down train car. Tom found an abandoned briefcase and began snatching up the contents. Ove turned to leave the car and noticed a wallet. When he picked it up, there was a huge sum of money inside. Tom saw and tried to take the wallet from Ove. He made to punch Ove, but Ove's father appeared and Tom backed off. Ove's father said that Ove needed to decide what to do with the wallet. Tom looked murderous.

Ove quietly said that they should take the wallet to the lost property office. Ove's father took Ove's hand and they walked together to the office, listening to Tom shouting angrily behind them. At the office, Ove's father refused to tell the receptionist if there was a bag with the wallet. When Ove asked him about it later, Ove's father said that they don't tell tales about other people. Ove whispers that he thought about keeping the money and that he decided to turn it in because he knew his father would hand it in. The narrator says that Ove learned that day that right had to be right, and decided to be as much like his father as possible.

When Ove was 16, his father died and Ove stopped being happy. Ove made it clear to the church that he wouldn't accept charity from them and certainly wouldn't be returning to church for services. The next day, he went to the wage office at the railway and tried to return his father's wages, which were paid in advance. When the director realized that Ove wasn't going to agree to keep the money, he suggested that Ove work to earn the money. Ove never returned to school and worked for the railway for the next five years. He met Sonja on a train, and she was all the **color** he had.

Engines are for Ove's father what (we'll learn later) houses are for Ove: predictable and fair. This shows how both men formulate their beliefs about the world in terms of the things they work on. Engines and houses then become metaphors for the way they'd like the world to be, though both are given ample evidence that the real world is neither predictable nor fair.



The director is a key figure because he stands out from all other authority figures Ove encounters. He seems genuinely kind and to truly appreciate what Ove's father does for him. He provides early evidence for Ove that powerful men can also be kind.



Even as a child, Ove and his father follow a very prescribed routine for their week, which presumably instills in Ove an early love of routines. Even though Tom is angry about it, he agrees to follow along with Ove's father's sense of right, wrong, and the rules governing how found items are dealt with. This shows both the power and respect that people give to Ove's father, as well as the power of generally accepted rules themselves. Ove is faced with a dilemma, as he has to decide whether to act like Tom or act like his father.



Ove's principles came directly from his father. Notice, though, that Ove's father taught these principles to Ove as they strengthened their familial relationship, yet in the present, Ove is using his principles to distance himself from anyone who might fill a familial role in Sonja's absence. Ove has essentially taken his belief in principles to the extreme in the 50 years between this incident and the present.



Again, the railway director is willing to work with this obstinate young man and offer him a future. When Ove tries to return his father's wages, he operates under the belief that it's better to be right and honorable than it is to accept something kind and "unearned." Though at this point it has no negative effects on Ove, Ove later uses this principle to create distance between himself and his neighbors.



6. A MAN CALLED OVE AND A BICYCLE THAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN LEFT WHERE BICYCLES ARE LEFT

The narrator says that Ove just wants to die in peace. He didn't kill himself right after Sonja died because he still had to go to work, but now that he's been forcibly retired, he's prepared to die. He has an envelope filled with all his important documents, his utility accounts are paid, and the newspaper subscription is canceled. Ove sits in his **Saab** and thinks he can probably die today if he can avoid his neighbors. He sees the overweight young man from next door wave to him cheerfully. Ove nods back curtly and thinks that his wife liked the young man. His wife took food to him every week after his mother died, and told Ove to stop when he made mean jokes about not getting their containers back.

Ove gets out of his **Saab**, locks the garage door, and heads back to his **house**. As he passes the bike shed he sees a woman's bicycle improperly parked outside. Ove puts the bike away and notices that it has a puncture in the tire. As Ove locks the door to the bike shed, a teenage boy asks Ove loudly what he's doing. Ove explains that the bike was improperly parked, and the youth (whose name is later revealed to be Adrian) incredulously replies that he was repairing the bike. Ove points out that it's a woman's bike and therefore cannot possibly belong to this male teenager.

Ove and the youth glare at each other and Ove notices another teenager with "black stuff" around his eyes behind the bike-parking teen. The youth mutters that the bike belongs to his girlfriend and points to her house down the street. Ove says that she can pick up her bike in the shed, and walks away. The youth calls Ove a bastard while the other young man (whose name is later revealed to be Mirsad) steers the youth away from causing trouble.

As Ove stomps back to his **house** he thinks about all his horrible neighbors. He remembers that the heavy young man's name is Jimmy and wonders what Jimmy does for a living. He decides it's either something criminal or testing bacon. On the other side of Jimmy lives Rune, Ove's enemy. Rune and his wife, Anita, moved in on the same day that Ove and Sonja did. Rune drove a **Volvo** then, but has since upgraded to a BMW. Ove thinks you can't reason with people who buy BMWs. The narrator says that it's Rune's fault that Ove is no longer the chairman of the Residents' Association, and Ove hasn't shown his face in meetings since then.

Ove's principles and sense of duty kept him from committing suicide earlier. This suggests that Ove views his principles as being more important than his sense of family—he seems to believe that he'll be able to maintain his familial relationship with Sonja by dying and joining her in the afterlife, but he's unwilling to compromise his self-imposed principles to do so. We see that Sonja was kind, caring, and involved in her community. We also see that the community is standing in Ove's way of dying, even if he's not actively participating in it.



Notice here that Ove doesn't consider the possibility that the youth might be repairing the bike for someone else. Again, this shows how distrustful Ove is of people in his community and how he very much expects them to not look out for or help each other. Ove expects that everyone is operating the same way he is and thinks of themselves as being very much alone in the neighborhood.



Ove continues to deny others the opportunity to create community by clinging tightly to his rigid principles. Ove's scathing remark that the bike is a woman's bike suggests early on that Ove has definite ideas about what roles men and women play, and isn't at all interested in muddying or perceiving nuance in those roles.



Like the Mercedes Ove tormented on the way to the shopping center, Rune's BMW is a foreign car, and a luxury car at that, and is therefore seen by Ove as a rejection of Swedish culture and sensibilities. In Ove's mind, Rune is also responsible for the fact that Ove is no longer powerful in the Residents' Association. Notice too that Ove doesn't go if he doesn't have power; he doesn't see himself as useful or the organization as worthwhile if he's not the one steering it.



When Ove gets close to his **house**, he notices that “Blond Weed” is yelling violently and throwing stones at the cat, which is backed into a corner, bleeding, and hissing at her dog. Ove comes up behind Weed and tells her to stop. When she insists that the cat scratched Prince, Ove notes that the cat is bleeding and therefore the fight looks even. Weed insists that the cat is rabid, and Ove says that Weed is probably also rabid but they don't throw stones at her. Ove tells Weed that the dog needs to be on a leash in the residential area and to leave the cat alone. He adds that the next time the dog urinates on his paving, he'll electrify the stone. Weed leaves angrily.

Ove is finally engaging in and picking sides in the neighborhood squabbles. He dislikes both “Blond Weed” and the cat, but we see here that he does have a sense of right and wrong when it comes to how people treat animals. It's undeniable that Blond Weed is being cruel, which Ove sees as a direct rejection of his principles of fairness. Here, then, Ove uses his principles to do some good in the world.



On his way to his shed Ove notices a puddle of urine from the dog. Ove gets out his drill and drill bits. The cat stares at him when he comes out of the shed, and Ove yells at it to leave. The cat seems unconcerned and saunters away. Ove slams his door on the way into his **house** and decides he's had enough and he's going to die now.

Just because he saved the cat from Blond Weed's torment doesn't mean Ove actually likes the cat; he just believes in doing what he thinks is right. Notice too that this little bit of involvement in the community is enough to push Ove immediately to suicide. Any kind of engagement is too painful for him at this point.



7. A MAN CALLED OVE DRILLS A HOLE FOR A HOOK

Ove puts on his best pants and shirt and covers his floor with a sheet of plastic. Ove isn't worried about making a mess hanging himself—rather, he knows that his **house** will be crawling with real estate agents as soon as he's dead. Ove puts his painting stool in the middle of the floor and thinks about how he used to paint a room in the house every six months when Sonja threatened to pay someone else to do it. Ove carefully selects a drill bit and measures to find the exact center of the ceiling. He unlocks his door so the ambulance crew won't have to break it down and installs the hook in the ceiling. As he drills, he notices that his doorbell is ringing.

Ove believes very strongly in preparing his house to weather what happens after his death. The care and concern he shows his house indicates how important houses, and his house in particular, are to him. His comments about the real estate agents also indicate that he has a possibly inflated sense of his house's worth, which is also a reflection of how Ove views his house. The house also acts as a receptacle for his memories of Sonja as he remembers painting the house for her.



Ove flings the door open to find the Lanky One and the Pregnant Foreign Woman on his doorstep. She hands him cookies and comments on how dressed up he is. The Lanky One explains that his wife is Iranian and Iranians always travel with food. He's an exceptionally awkward man and Ove looks very uninterested. The Pregnant One tries to introduce herself and thank Ove for backing up their trailer, but Ove tries to close the door on her. She sticks her arm in the door to stop it, and Ove insults the Lanky One's trailer-backing skills. The Pregnant Woman introduces herself as Parvaneh and the Lanky One as Patrick. Ove doesn't answer.

Ove is so intent on leaving his community through death that he can't even appropriately accept cookies from his neighbors. The cookies from the Pregnant Foreign woman point loosely back to Sonja taking food to Jimmy, and situates sharing food as a peace offering and a way to build community (should Ove accept it, of course). Patrick continues to show that he's the exact opposite of Ove.



Parvaneh asks Ove if he's always this unfriendly, to which Ove replies that he's not unfriendly. He asks about her Arabian cookies, and Parvaneh corrects him that they're Persian, because she's from Iran and speaks Farsi. Ove misunderstands "Farsi" and Parvaneh laughs. Ove steps back, gets his foot stuck on some tape and plastic, and struggles to free himself. When he finally does he asks Patrick what he is, and Patrick replies that he's an IT consultant. Both Ove and Parvaneh shake their heads, and Ove thinks he dislikes Parvaneh slightly less.

Ove learns that though Parvaneh is everything he isn't (Iranian, female, friendly), they also share similar feelings about Patrick's profession. They're developing a bond based on mutual distaste for jobs like Patrick's that don't do anything tangible, which fits in with Ove's grumpy nature and stubborn principles. It makes sense that he builds community with people based on shared annoyances or dislikes.



Patrick asks Ove what he's doing, and Ove scathingly replies that he's drilling. Parvaneh rolls her eyes and Ove thinks he'd find her sympathetic if her pregnancy weren't evidence that she likes Patrick. Patrick comments that with all the plastic, Ove's house looks like an episode of *Dexter*. Ove continues to look scathing and uninterested and Patrick trails off. As Ove tries to close his door again, Parvaneh says they actually came to see if they could borrow some things.

*Patrick alienates Ove even further by mentioning a TV show that Ove certainly hasn't seen: it seems highly unlikely that Ove would be willing to pay extra for the channel that airs *Dexter*. Parvaneh continues to try to get Ove to participate in the community by asking to borrow things. It seems that she suspects just how depressed and lonely he really is, though he'd never admit it.*



Ove raises his eyebrows and Patrick says they need a ladder and an "Eileen key." Ove corrects him that it's an Allen key, and Parvaneh and Patrick begin arguing about whether it's an Allen key or an Eileen key. As the dispute escalates, Ove takes off his jacket and goes to his shed. As Patrick runs to help Ove with the ladder, Ove notices that Anita is also in his yard. He decides to ignore her and hands Patrick a case of Allen keys. Ove is incredulous when Patrick doesn't know what size he needs and when he explains that he needs the ladder to open a jammed window from the outside.

Patrick betrays how deep his ignorance of practical tasks goes when he can't give the appropriate name for an Allen key (wrench) and legitimately expects to be able to open a window from the outside. This reinforces that in Ove's eyes, Patrick is in direct opposition to Ove's beliefs regarding how life should be lived. Anita's sudden and uninvited appearance indicates that the community is indeed tight-knit, except for Ove.



Ove turns his attention to Anita, who he thinks has gotten exceptionally old since he last saw her. She explains that she needs help with her radiators and Ove remarks that nobody on the street has jobs to go to anymore. Anita explains that she's retired, Parvaneh says she's on maternity leave, and Patrick again states that he's an IT consultant. Ove asks Anita if she has bled her radiators recently, and rolls his eyes at her reply. Parvaneh roars at Ove to stop being rude and tells Anita that Ove will certainly help. Ove asks why Rune can't do it, and Anita explains sadly that Rune is sick with Alzheimer's. Parvaneh insists that Ove help.

Ove's worldview leaves little room for aging and the things that come with aging, such as illnesses that could make someone non-functional. This again speaks to how much stock Ove puts in being "useful," as it's entirely beyond him that people who aren't traditionally functional can have value. Parvaneh continues to show that she's not afraid of Ove and is willing to match him in belligerence. At the same time, she's clearly trying to make him engage in the community. It should be noted that helping people perform these tasks does fall in with Ove's sense of principles and loyalty, despite his unwillingness to do them.



Ove suggests that Anita should've thought about needing help like this when she staged the coup d'état in the Residents' Association. Anita explains quickly to Parvaneh and Patrick that there was a "wrangle" between Ove and Rune when Rune was elected head of the Association. Ove continues to be belligerent, but Anita says it doesn't matter now that Rune is so sick. She straightens and says that the authorities are going to put Rune in a home. Ove decides he's had enough and backs towards his door.

Patrick steals a glance through Ove's open front door and notices marks on Ove's floor. He asks if Ove cycles inside. Anita begins to explain something about Sonja, but Ove furiously cuts her off and tells the crowd in his yard to shut up. He goes inside and slams his door. Anita, Parvaneh, and Patrick leave Ove's yard.

Ove sits down on his stool. His heart is thumping too hard and he struggles to breathe. He thinks about his so-called early retirement and studies a photograph of himself and Sonja from 40 years ago, when they were on a bus tour in Spain. Ove remembers how Sonja folded her fingers into Ove's big hands and thinks that's the thing he misses most about her. He gets up, installs his hook, puts his suit jacket back on, and turns out his lights. He ties a noose in a rope and hangs it from his hook. Ove stands on the stool, puts his head through the noose, and kicks the stool away.

8. A MAN CALLED OVE AND A PAIR OF HIS FATHER'S OLD FOOTPRINTS

The narrator says that Sonja believed in destiny. Ove never outright agreed with her, but he never disagreed with her either. For him, destiny was "someone" rather than "something."

Ove became an orphan at the age of sixteen. After his first two weeks working on the railways, Ove sadly left the changing rooms. A man from the director's office stopped Ove and asked him if he'd be interested in staying on, and Ove agreed. Ove's coworkers thought him eccentric, but when he proved himself to be as kind as his father and just as good with engines, they accepted him. He continued his routine of eating potatoes and sausages for dinner and talked less and less as time went on. Ove had no friends and no enemy except for Tom, who, after being promoted to foreman, set out to make Ove's life miserable.

Ove's use of language to describe Rune's win suggests that he sees that the world is out to get him. Further, he insists on hanging onto these injustices as evidence for why he shouldn't help people now. This contrasts with Anita's suggestion that it doesn't matter anymore. She's prioritizing love and quality of life over principles and stubbornness, something that Ove is still unwilling to do.



There's more to Sonja than meets the eye, and Ove is evidently very sensitive about that. Notably, he wants to keep Sonja to himself and not share her memory with people who might be able to help him move on. He's clinging to the community he had with Sonja rather than moving on to a newer and larger community.



The photographs of Sonja throughout Ove's house are tangible memories of Ove and Sonja's marriage. They function to encourage Ove to take action, whether the action be trying to kill himself, as he does here, or more positive actions later in the novel. We see that Ove is truly overcome with grief as he remembers how Sonja held his hand. Ove obviously has the capacity to love deeply, but only seems to have exercised that love with one person.



This conception of destiny shows that the Ove of the present is capable of love and kindness to others, as evidenced by Sonja and the love they shared being destiny.



Ove's goal of being as much like his father as possible seems to be coming true: he's equally as good with engines and at this point, he's kind. This is a testament to the power of family and love: Ove's love for his father has the power to make him into the person we see here. He's also still clinging to routine, as evidenced by his dinner, and doing rather than talking, which plays into his beliefs about how a man should act.



Two years after Ove's father died, Ove and Tom were the only ones present when money disappeared out of a train carriage. Nobody believed that Ove stole the money, but when Ove was called to the director's office to testify that he saw Tom took the money, he only stared at the floor. When pressed, Ove told the director that he doesn't tell tales about other people. The director reminded Ove that if witnesses come forward accusing him, then they'll have to conclude that Ove committed the crime. Ove nodded and left the office.

Throughout the afternoon, two young men who worked with Tom accused Ove. The next morning, the foreman fired Ove. Tom hissed "thief" at Ove as he walked out. Ove was ashamed that he'd been fired from his father's job. In the director's office a little later, the director told Ove that Tom stole the money and then proceeded to ignore Ove. Ove told him that men are what they are because of what they do, not what they say. The director asked Ove to sign some paperwork and sent him on his way without calling the police.

Ove left the director's office. As he reached the front door, a woman from the office caught up to him and told him that the director was hiring him as a night cleaner starting the next morning. The woman passed on another message from the director: that he knows Ove didn't steal the money and he doesn't want to be responsible for firing a decent man's son for having principles. This change in job title is how Ove met Sonja as he finished his shift one morning.

9. A MAN CALLED OVE BLEEDS A RADIATOR

The narrator notes that the brain functions faster while it's falling. Because of this, after Ove kicked his stool, he had a lot of time to think about radiators. The narrator says that the feud between Ove and Rune had been about a new heating system for the **houses** in the neighborhood, though it was really about many things and spanned 37 years. Ove can't even remember how it started, but it also had to do with **cars**. In the beginning, Ove and Rune had been friends for the sake of their wives, who became best friends immediately.

Ove and Rune had developed the Residents' Association. Ove was the chairman and Rune was the assistant chairman, and the first major thing they did together was shut down the city council's plan to cut down the nearby forest and build more houses. The war with the council went on for a year and a half, but Ove and Rune won. They didn't seem particularly happy about winning, but that's because that year and a half of fighting made them exceptionally happy and they were sorry it was over.

Again, Ove is willing to allow others to accuse him of theft in order to be as much like his father as possible. This brings the usefulness of Ove's principles into question. Though it's certainly true that Ove's principles here bring him closer to meeting Sonja, it's also possible that had Ove accused Tom, he would've been able to avoid their later conflicts and still remain as principled as he is now.



The director is an honorable man. He's fully aware that Ove is simply too principled to accuse Tom, but the director is bound by the rules that dictate that Ove must be fired since he "stole" the money. The young men who work with Tom seem to embody all the qualities that Ove finds distasteful in the present. They want to curry favor and get ahead, rather than do the right thing.



We get proof now that Ove's principles brought him closer to Sonja. This begins to suggest that in the present, Ove's desire to stick to his principles will work out similarly well for him and bring him closer to the community. The director again shows that he's a decent and honorable man by hiring Ove back.



Ove and Rune's friendship came about because of their loyalty to and desire to please Sonja and Anita. In many ways, this speaks to the strength of their relationships with their wives, as both Ove and Rune seem similarly principled and solitary. The fights about heating systems and cars suggests that their firmly held beliefs didn't line up with each other.



Initially, both Ove and Rune fought for the good of the small community and neighborhood by fighting to keep the forest. Notice that their adversary in this fight is the nameless, faceless council. This suggests early on that it is possible to win these fights against the council and the white shirts. It then provides Ove hope for the future that he can win again.



Rune bought his **BMW** long after that and Ove thought he was an idiot for doing so. Sonja only rolled her eyes at Ove and called him hopeless, but Ove thought that Rune's switch to BMW was an indicator of a lack of loyalty. He thinks all this as he's falling and also thinks that nobody can change tires or file their own taxes. Today, Ove doesn't know if Rune even has the BMW because he's ill and doesn't leave the house. He thinks that he misses Rune all the same.

Ove falls and hits the ground. He swears when he realizes that his rope broke, which he thinks is an indicator that nobody can manufacture anything of quality anymore. Angrily, Ove cleans up his plastic sheeting and puts his drill away. He grabs his watering can out of the shed and knocks on Anita and Rune's door. When Anita happily opens it for Ove, he grumpily asks where the radiators are and says his day is already ruined.

Ove's principles certainly don't allow for anyone to switch car brands, especially when they switch to a foreign brand. Notice too that in Ove's "final moments," he's also ruminating on the fact that people can't do things for themselves anymore. This is extremely offensive to him and makes those people less valuable in his eyes.



When Ove's attempts to die are thwarted, he turns to the community (though he only does so grumpily). Performing these acts for the community allows Ove to feel superior, as he's the only one capable of performing them as far as he's concerned. It also has the side effect of giving him the opportunity to see that he's needed in his community.



10. A MAN WHO WAS OVE AND A HOUSE THAT OVE BUILT

After Ove turned 18, he passed his driving test, sold his father's **Saab**, and bought a marginally newer blue Saab. At this time in Sweden people began talking about a middle class, which Ove realized he wasn't a part of. Ove began receiving letters from the council about his **house** being on the edge of a municipal boundary. He noticed that the middle class were moving into newly built housing developments and understood that his house was in the way. He refused the council's offer to buy his house and decided instead to repair it.

Ove got a job at a construction site. He worked construction during the day and as a train cleaner at night. One day, the foreman at the construction site told Ove that if he needed scrap material, he'd look the other way. Other coworkers at the construction site told Ove he was an idiot but taught him building skills. One afternoon, Ove found a toolbox full of used tools with a note saying "to the puppy."

Ove avoided his neighbors, all of whom disliked him greatly. Ove met the elderly old man next door one day when he forgot to feed the birds on his usual schedule. When he went out to feed them on the next day, which was an off day, Ove found the old man feeding the birds. Several weeks later, Ove painted the old man's fence. The man's wife left Ove an apple pie on his doorstep the next day. Ove began throwing away the letters from the council and finished repairing his **house**. He'd learned that he liked houses because they were fair and understandable, unlike people.

Here, Ove situates himself as being very much opposed to the middle class. He separates himself from it and refuses to acknowledge that he might one day join it. Notice that he sees that the middle class is purchasing new things, rather than making things themselves. This begins to suggest that the middle class is something that Ove despises because they don't follow his system of rules and principles.



Ove finds community at the construction site and gets to learn skills that support his belief that men should make things themselves rather than buy them. His boss at the construction site is kind like the director at the train station, and similarly supports Ove's principles.



Here, when Ove neglects his routine, he begins to form a friendship and a community with his neighbor. This is an early indicator that though Ove's love of routine isn't necessarily bad, changing his routine can have positive outcomes. We see too that Ove is becoming increasingly distrustful of people and leaning more and more on physical things, like houses, to provide him the security and comfort he craves.



One Sunday, a man in a suit appeared at Ove's gate and asked Ove for water. Ove gave him some and they ended up sitting in Ove's kitchen talking about remodeling **houses** for an hour. When Ove admitted to the man that he didn't have house insurance, the man admitted he was an insurance agent, made a phone call, and set Ove up with a policy. Ove paid his premium and was happy when the man said he'd come by again to talk about renovating houses. The man never returned, and Ove was disappointed.

Ove tried to avoid his neighbors, but several weeks after finishing his **house** one of the neighbors was robbed. The neighbors figured that Ove stole money to renovate his house and began leaving threatening notes and throwing stones at Ove's window. Ove did nothing but replace his window. Days later, Ove woke to the smell of smoke. He ran downstairs in his underwear and grabbed a hammer, figuring that someone had set fire to his house.

When Ove reached his porch, he realized it was his elderly neighbor's **house** burning, not his own. The man and his wife were out of the house. Ove knew that his own house was going to catch fire if he didn't get out his water hose immediately. When the wife started screaming a name, Ove realized their grandson was still in the burning house. Ove thought of what his father would do and ran into the burning building with his neighbor. They emerged a few minutes later with the boy.

By that time, the fire department had arrived and the fire had reached Ove's **house**. When Ove ran to put out the fire, a man in a **white shirt** explained to Ove that he wasn't allowed to fight the fire on his house, and they weren't either due to the funky municipal boundary. The man told Ove that rules are rules. By the time the fire department got permission, the house was gone. Later, when Ove called his insurance company, he learned that his insurance "agent" wasn't an agent at all and his policy was phony.

11. A MAN CALLED OVE AND A LANKY ONE WHO CAN'T OPEN A WINDOW WITHOUT FALLING OFF A LADDER

When Ove leaves his **house** for his inspection the next morning, the ground is covered in snow. Ove notices the cat sitting by his door and tries to scare it away. The cat is unconcerned with Ove's yelling and stomping. Ove kicks one of his clogs towards the cat and thinks that Sonja would've been furious. The cat continues to not care, and strolls away. After Ove's inspection, he digs his snow shovel out of the shed.

Despite Ove's wary nature, he decides to trust this man when he's made to understand that his beloved house is at risk. This shows that physical objects like houses and cars can be tools for bringing Ove closer to others if he chooses to let them. Ove's sadness that the man never returns indicates that he does crave some kind of community, even if it's only one based around useful matters.



This event provides an explanation for why Ove in the present feels so strongly about patrolling for burglars—burglars were his downfall in this neighborhood. Ove also jumps to conclusions that his neighbors are out to get him, which is indicative of his great distrust of people he views as unprincipled.



Ove's father continues to be a force in Ove's life that reminds him of the proper way to act. Here, Ove's father insists that Ove value human life over saving his house, which shows that Ove at least believes in theory that people are more important than objects. Ove does value love and community to some extent.



Ove learns from this man in the white shirt that rules for rules' sake are more important than doing things that actually help people. This, combined with Ove's realization that his insurance agent wasn't an agent at all, explains Ove's deep distrust of government entities and people trying to sell him things. They took away the one thing he loved at this point when they couldn't save, and then couldn't rebuild, his house.



Like Parvaneh, the cat is entirely unconcerned with Ove's grumpiness. Here, the thought of what Sonja would think works similarly to how Ove considered what his father would do in the flashbacks. Ove uses his community from the past to think about his actions in the present.



The cat is back when Ove comes out of his shed. Ove notices that it has more bald patches than fur and throws some snow at it. The cat looks offended and leaves. Ove shovels his walkway carefully and thinks that people don't shovel carefully anymore, they just want to get ahead. He watches the sunrise and thinks of how to die. His current plan is a bad one, but necessary to get the job done. Ove goes inside, puts on his good suit, and prepares his **house** for his death.

Ove fetches a plastic tube out of his shed and heads towards his garage. A white **Škoda** races into the residential area and takes Ove entirely by surprise. Ove roars at the driver to read the sign indicating that motor vehicles are prohibited and approaches the car. The man in the white shirt in the car has his window down to smoke, but rolls it up as Ove approaches. The man rolls towards the main road.

Ove angrily walks to where the **Škoda** was parked in front of Rune and Anita's **house**. He picks up cigarette butts that the driver threw on the ground. Anita appears, greets Ove, and explains that the man is from the council and has special permission to drive in the residential area. Ove tries to argue, but Anita looks ready to cry and says that the council wants to take Rune away from her. Ove says nothing but walks back towards his own house.

Blond Weed stands in the street while her dog barks. Ove doesn't like the satisfied grin on her face. Patrick calls out a greeting to Ove. Ove notices that Patrick is holding a butter knife and likely intends to use it to open his jammed window. The ladder is improperly shoved into a snowdrift outside. Ove mutters an answer and keeps walking. He looks again at Weed and her dog and feels disturbed, though he's reluctant to admit that he's worried about the cat.

Ove enters his garage and studies his **Saab**. He looks over his shoulder and hopes that nothing happened to the cat, because he knows Sonja will be very upset if something happened. Ove hears an ambulance siren but pays no attention. He starts his car and threads his plastic tube onto his exhaust pipe and then into a back window of the Saab. Ove gets in the Saab and thinks that "until death do us part" was talking about his death, not Sonja's. Ove ignores the banging on his garage door and wonders if Sonja will be ashamed to see him turn up unemployed and wearing a dirty suit.

Ove's musings on people's snow shoveling habits illustrate again how he conceptualizes the younger generation. In his eyes, they do things carelessly and don't really value a job well done. Ove obviously wants to die very badly if he's going with a self-described subpar plan. He's valuing the end result rather than the job well done in this case.



Škodas are foreign cars, which makes this particular man in a white shirt a horrible person in Ove's opinion, even knowing nothing else about him. This man also doesn't abide by the clearly stated neighborhood rules, which makes him even worse to Ove.



When Ove picks up the cigarette butts, it calls into question the narrator's earlier assertion that Ove didn't care about garbage. He cares about garbage when it's litter and affecting the people in the neighborhood. The man in the white shirt is following rules that go above Ove's rules, which understandably doesn't sit well with Ove.



Ove is entirely overwhelmed by the teeming community surrounding him, though his concern about the cat suggests that Ove isn't as disconnected as he'd like everyone to think. Patrick again shows that he's hopeless when it comes to practical skills, but in Ove's overwhelmed state, he's unable to tell Patrick he's doing it wrong.



These concerns about what Sonja will think about Ove show how loyal Ove still is to Sonja, even when she's gone. He uses her memory to try to behave to a certain standard that would make her proud. This shows that memory isn't just something that's oppressing Ove; Ove's concerns about the cat in particular show that Sonja's memory also has the potential to drive him to do good things.



The banging persists, and finally Ove yells, gets out of his car, and opens the door hard into Parvaneh's face. She's shocked at the exhaust billowing out of the garage and asks Ove what he's doing. Her nose begins to bleed and she tells Ove she needs a ride to the hospital. Ove informs her that her nosebleed isn't that bad, and Parvaneh curses and explains that Patrick fell off the ladder. She couldn't accompany him in the ambulance, doesn't have a driver's license, all the taxis are in use, and the buses are running slow. Ove darkens and says quietly that bus drivers are always drunk and not trustworthy.

Parvaneh jumps on Ove's discomfort and insists that he drive her and the children to the hospital. She walks away as though the matter is settled as Ove roars indignantly about having to drive children. He thinks of what Sonja would've said if she'd been there, and then pulls the tube off his exhaust pipe and pulls out into the parking area.

12. A MAN WHO WAS OVE AND ONE DAY HE HAD ENOUGH

Ove never understood why Sonja chose him. She liked abstract things, while Ove liked things he could hold. She always told him that she knew he was dancing on the inside, which he resented because he thought dancing was haphazard. Ove wanted things to be right or wrong, not muddy.

The night after the house fire, Ove slept in his car. Two days later, two men in **white shirts** showed up. They told him that they'd been sending him letters and explained that Ove had no choice but to sell them the land where his **house** stood. Ove studied the forms and realized he hated the men in white shirts. He signed the document and rented a room from an old lady in town.

The next morning, Ove passed Tom in the hallway at work. Tom loudly called Ove a thief. Ove ignored him, went into the changing room, took off his clothes and his father's watch, and took a long shower. When Ove came out of the shower, his watch was gone. The narrator says that it was like someone removed a fuse in Ove's mind. Naked, Ove walked into the foremen's changing room, grabbed Tom, and yelled for him to return his watch. When Tom insisted he didn't have it, Ove dug in Tom's coat pocket, found it, and punched Tom. Later in the hospital, Tom insisted he'd slipped, and the other men in the changing room claimed to not remember what happened. Ove decided that was the last time he was going to let someone trick him.

Once again, Ove expects that Parvaneh is thinking only about herself and not about someone else in the community. Ove's comment about bus drivers suggests that there are specific types of people that Ove believes to be particularly untrustworthy, though at this point it's unclear why bus drivers fit in this category. However, this creates a situation in which Ove must choose to follow his principles by not allowing Parvaneh to take the bus.



The thought of Sonja now makes Ove engage with his community and do good deeds for them. By agreeing to drive Parvaneh and the children, Ove insures that Sonja will approve and that bus drivers won't get the satisfaction of more passengers.



Sonja is an interesting figure as Ove's love interest because he does feel so strongly that people who don't do things are less-than. This suggests that Ove's love for Sonja was stronger than his principles and beliefs, and helped shake up the rules he usually adhered to.



Again, the white shirts are doing things that don't help people, and Ove has no power to resist them. This marks the true beginning of Ove's hatred for men in white shirts, and he hates them primarily because their rules don't have goals that do anyone any good (at least that Ove can see).



When Ove snaps, he stops acting generously and thinking charitable thoughts about people. He decides that getting his way and making sure that the right thing is done is more important than being kind and generous, particularly where people like Tom are concerned. Ove insists that his belief in fairness needs to also include himself and how people interact with him. This shift in demeanor explains why in the present, Ove always thinks that people are looking out for themselves. Everyone he's met thus far is doing just that.



Ove quit his job at the construction site. His coworkers gifted him a toolbox with new tools to "build something that lasts." Later in the year, Ove enlisted in the military and scored well on all the tests. The military appealed to Ove because of the uniforms and order. Ove's happiness was shattered quickly when he failed his medical examination. Something was wrong with his heart. The **white-shirted** army man told Ove that rules are rules.

When Ove returned to his night cleaning job on the railway, he got quieter and quieter. Ove's landlady found him a garage in which he could work on his **Saab**, and Ove took the car apart and reassembled it. When he was done, he sold it and bought a newer Saab, which he promptly took apart and reassembled. His days passed slowly and peacefully until he met Sonja.

Not everyone is bad: the construction workers give Ove the ability to build things and remember the community he had at the construction site. The military also appeals to Ove's love of rules, regulations, and principles, but the military follows rules that prioritize the organization over the wishes of people who'd like to serve it.



As Ove gets quieter, he does more things like messing with his car, which very much connects him to his father. The landlady is kind to Ove and seems to care about his happiness, which complicates Ove's belief that all people are out to get him.



13. A MAN CALLED OVE AND A CLOWN CALLED BEPPO

Nasanin is delighted by Ove. The seven-year-old is less delighted as she leads her sister up the hospital steps. Parvaneh looks ready to hit Ove, but decides not to. Ove follows them into the hospital, thinking about the parking debacle that just took place. He'd yelled at the parking attendant that he was a fake policeman and thinks that it's a rip-off to pay for parking when you go to the hospital to die. Parvaneh had offered to pay, and Ove had declared that women don't understand principles.

Ove studies the signs in the hospital entrance explaining the out-of-service elevators and that Beppo the clown is visiting the hospital today. Ove grouses that the hospital makes you pay to use the restroom, and Parvaneh offers him some change. Ove insists he doesn't need to use the bathroom and seems offended that Parvaneh offered. When she asks Ove how much time he put on the parking meter and finds he only put ten minutes on it, Ove says he'll feed the meter in ten minutes rather than pay for more time that they might not even use.

Parvaneh tells her daughters to sit with Ove while she goes to see Patrick. She disappears before Ove can argue. Nasanin happily screams and runs towards the kids' toys in the waiting room. Ove turns to the seven-year-old and asks her if she needs to use the restroom or needs food. She's very offended and insists that she's almost eight and can use the bathroom alone. Nasanin returns with a book and says "read!" to Ove. Ove looks at the book as though it's evil, but follows her to the bench. Nasanin threads herself between Ove's legs and excitedly looks at the pictures.

Parvaneh understands that principles aren't the most important thing; sometimes, it's more important to live in the real world and stay flexible. Ove then genders Parvaneh's outlook as feminine. Notably, her belief here prioritizes people and the wellbeing of others over being right, something that Ove isn't yet willing to cave on.



Just like the injustice of having to pay for parking at a hospital, Ove sees having to pay for a bathroom as a complete rip off and worth commenting on for the sake of pointing out that it's an unjust system. Again, Parvaneh is less concerned with hanging onto change and more concerned with making sure her companions are comfortable.



By their very nature, children challenge Ove's love of structure and rules. Nasanin in particular wants nothing more than to spend time with Ove (prioritizing people) and doesn't care for Ove's insistence that they follow rules and his principles. Ove's willingness to read the book suggests he's not as cold as he'd like people to think, however. He wants to make the girls happy enough to get through this ordeal at the hospital.



Ove begins to unenthusiastically read a story about a train. The seven-year-old explains that he has to "do the voices" and Ove attempts unsuccessfully to not curse as he argues with her about the quality of the book. Nasanin is thrilled that Ove swore and cries "clown!" When Ove insists he's not a clown, the seven-year-old points to the approaching clown. Nasanin is beside herself with excitement as the clown approaches and offers to perform a magic trick. He asks Ove for a coin and Ove says he doesn't have one. The clown asks Ove again for a coin and insists he'll give it back. Nasanin keeps screaming and finally, Ove gives the clown a coin.

Several minutes later, Parvaneh returns and a nurse directs her to Ove and the girls. Ove sits angrily on a bench with a child on each side and a security guard standing on either side of them. When Parvaneh asks incredulously what happened, Nasanin happily shrieks that Ove hit the clown. The seven-year-old tries to explain that the clown was going to make Ove's coin disappear as her sister continues excitedly to say that Ove hit the clown. Parvaneh stares at her daughters and Ove for a minute before telling the security guards that she's taking her daughters to see Patrick.

When Ove, Parvaneh, Nasanin, and the seven-year-old make it back to Ove's garage, Parvaneh offers to pay Ove's parking ticket. The seven-year-old heads back to her house as Ove insists that he'll pay his own ticket, and Nasanin happily tells Ove he's funny. He tells her that she should turn out okay. Parvaneh notices the tube on the floor and looks worried. She asks Ove to help her move the ladder and fix a radiator in her house. She says that Patrick doesn't know how to fix things and suggests that Ove can't let the girls freeze.

Ove decides that Sonja would be very upset if he let the girls freeze. He closes up his garage, fetches his tools from the shed, and decides that he will kill himself the next day.

14. A MAN WHO WAS OVE AND A WOMAN ON A TRAIN

When Ove first saw Sonja, he'd just finished his cleaning shift and was supposed to take the train home in the opposite direction. When he saw her on the platform, however, he got back on the train, convinced a conductor to lend him spare clothes, and sat by her. She greeted him warmly and showed him the books in her lap. Even though Ove said he didn't like reading much, she proceeded to tell him about each book. Ove thought he wanted to hear her talk about things she loved for the rest of his life. Years later she told him that she was confused when he sat down with her, but he was kind, listened, and she liked making him laugh.

The book doesn't follow Ove's principles, and he's not above arguing with children about that. Ove's principles dictate that the clown is surely lying and will obviously steal a coin. Though this moment is particularly humorous, it's also sad to see the extent of Ove's principles. Here, they don't help him at all as he both denies the girls a magic trick and doesn't feel that he can trust even a hospital clown, someone whose job is to bring joy.



Nasanin is entirely unconcerned with the fact that Ove hit a clown. At three years old, she doesn't yet understand the rules and conventions that society expects people to follow. Her obvious joy at Ove's actions suggests that there's some happiness to be gained by simply not acknowledging that there are codes of conduct in place. Her youth keeps her from adhering to the rules, and that in turn makes this a fantastic experience for her and only her.



Parvaneh manipulates Ove's desire to both have things be right and make fun of Patrick as she convinces him to fix her radiators. By insisting that Ove help his community, she keeps him from spending the rest of the day going back to his task of committing suicide. Ove insists on sticking to his own principles by not allowing Parvaneh to pay his parking ticket, though his decision to help shows that he's coming around to the idea that community isn't entirely bad.



Again, the thought of what Sonja would say keeps Ove making decisions that turn him towards the community again and again.



Ove's decision to do something uncharacteristically spontaneous speaks to the power that Sonja held (and still holds) in his life. Even at this early stage when the two don't know each other, Sonja enjoys making Ove laugh and come outside of his shell. This shows that she's going to be a force in his life that encourages him to step outside of his rigid principles, do spontaneous things, and take himself less seriously sometimes.



Sonja was studying to be a teacher and made an hour and a half journey each way to school. Ove made the journey with her that day, which was in the wrong direction for him. When they got off the train and she asked where he was headed, he said something vague about doing his military service. She said she was going home at five and boarded her bus. Ove walked around the town and found a tailor's shop that agreed to press his shirt and pants, then slept in the train station. At four he went back to the tailor's, met Sonja at the train station, and rode the train home with her. He did that for three months. Finally, she got tired of Ove not asking her to dinner, so she invited herself.

On Saturday, Ove put on his father's suit. This attracted the attention of his landlady. As Ove was at the door she called after him that he should get his date flowers. He waited for Sonja at the train station for more than 15 minutes. He felt anxious that she'd never come, but he stayed anyway. The narrator tells the reader that Ove didn't know it, but he was destined to spend so many 15-minute increments waiting for Sonja, Ove's father would have gone cross eyed. Finally Sonja arrived and was thrilled to receive the **pink** flowers.

Ove had eaten before the date so that Sonja could order whatever she wanted and he would still be able to pay the bill. He felt that the waiter knew that Sonja was too good for him. He listened to her tell him about books and films and her studies and finally told her that he'd lied about doing his military service. He apologized for lying to her and Sonja just smiled and asked Ove to sit back down. She wasn't angry and had already figured out he wasn't in the military.

Sonja asked Ove what he wanted to do with his life, and he answered that he wanted to build **houses**. She angrily asked him why he wasn't doing that. On Monday, she showed up at Ove's house with brochures for a certification course for an engineering qualification. They decided that they were an item, and Ove enrolled in the course.

Ove got a job at a housing office and worked there for more than 30 years. He and Sonja married and agreed to have children, so they moved into the row **house** near the forest. And now, less than 40 years after their first date, the forest that once surrounded the row house is gone. Six months ago, she comforted Ove as she lay in the hospital, and then died. Ove buried Sonja on Sunday and went to work the next day. The narrator says that if anyone asked, Ove would say he didn't live before he met Sonja or after her death.

It's important to note that teaching is a profession that by its very nature includes giving back to the community and helping others. This shows that Sonja is very concerned with being a part of a community and serving it, which explains some of the actions that Ove described earlier, like providing Jimmy lunch weekly. Ove shows that he's very loyal already to Sonja by riding the train with her. This sets up the knowledge that Ove is willing to step outside of his principles for her, and only her.



This experience of waiting for Sonja provides Ove an experience in which he is rewarded for violating his principles of timeliness. This lesson apparently sticks, if he goes on to put up with her lateness for the next 40 years. This experience also shows him that some people, Sonja in particular, can be trusted. She doesn't stand him up and she follows through with her promises, even if she's late.



Again, Ove's decision to not follow his rigid principles of honor and truthfulness doesn't have a bad result here. Sonja already knew he was lying and further, she doesn't care. These experiences plant the idea for Ove that occasionally breaking or bending one's principles doesn't always have disastrous consequences. Indeed, sometimes the consequences are truly positive.



Despite Sonja's habit of encouraging Ove to not follow his principles so strictly, here she encourages him to follow them—in terms of the big picture, rather than just the details he usually gets caught up in—when she insists that he actually do what he wants to do, not just talk about doing it.



Time has passed and things have changed, and for Ove, that change hasn't been for the better. These flashbacks show that Ove had exceptionally happy times in the past, and the changes that are taking place in the present and the very recent past are in direct opposition to those memories, making him feel all the worse.



15. A MAN CALLED OVE AND A DELAYED TRAIN

Ove is at the train station, arguing with a man covered in tattoos about whether or not the ticket machine is working. Ove insists it isn't, but the man insists Ove just has dirt on his card's magnetic strip. The man asks for Ove's card, rubs it against his pants, and gives it back. The machine works and Ove feels betrayed by his card. The narrator explains that Ove thinks cash is just fine, but Sonja had insisted on a prepaid debit card. After her death, the bank sent Ove a card connected to her account, which he has used to buy her flowers for the last six months.

Ove had prepared his **house** for his death and not noticed the cat-shaped hole in the snow outside his shed. He'd walked to the train station so that there was less chance of someone or something ruining his plan. He thinks that Sonja had always been terrible at sticking to plans. While Ove made schedules and detailed maps, she insisted that they weren't in a hurry (which wasn't the point) and regularly forgot the coffee thermos.

As Ove stands on the train platform, he studies the other people. There are youths with backpacks that Ove thinks must contain drugs, a middle-aged man, women from the council, and three municipal employees studying a hole in the pavement. As he looks at the workers eating and doing nothing about the hole, Ove thinks it's no wonder that the world is suffering a financial crisis.

The train will arrive in one minute. Ove stands at the edge of the platform and thinks that he doesn't like the symbolism of dying by train. He hears a scream and looks up to see the middle-aged man sway, twitch, and fall onto the tracks. Fuming, Ove jumps down onto the track and yells at the youths to help him get the unconscious man onto the platform. Ove stays on the tracks. He walks to the middle and stares down the approaching train. Ove's eyes meet the eyes of the train conductor, a young man of maybe 20. Ove swears and jumps back onto the platform.

Ove meets the driver's eyes again as the train stops. The driver looks horrified. Ove thinks that he couldn't ruin the man's day by committing suicide after meeting his eyes. The municipal workers tell Ove that he's a hero, and Ove corrects their grammar. As passengers and IT consultants get off the train, Ove turns and walks home.

The debit card again represents modernity that Ove doesn't find wonderful or useful. Here it means that Ove is wrong, which is understandably offensive and uncomfortable for him. Sonja's desire for a debit card, however, suggests that she was willing and able to adapt to the changing times. She didn't allow memories of the past to keep her from moving forward.



We see again how Sonja didn't allow rules and structure to take away from her enjoyment of life. She insisted on enjoying their journeys rather than making the journeys about sticking fully to Ove's schedule. Ove's principles, on the other hand, dictate that there's nothing more important than the schedule, as it provides the structure he craves.



Ove doesn't think highly of anyone: the youths must be criminals, and the municipal employees are wholly useless. They represent the changing times and the fact that the world isn't as it once was, and that in turn explains why the world is in such a state (hence the reference to the financial crisis).



Besides being messy, dying by train means that Ove's life will be taken by the exact thing that gave him a life as a youth. When Ove saves the man in the suit, he places doing the right thing and helping people above adhering to his plan and his rules. Notice too that as Ove saves the man, he mobilizes others on the platform to work together to do so. Ove is a natural leader when there's a task to be done.



Here, Ove's principles actually prioritize the feelings of others, which hints at the possibility that Ove is beginning to think more about the people around him. He still thinks less of them, however, as evidenced by his cynical mention of IT consultants.



As Ove walks by the bicycle shed, he sees the white Škoda. In addition to the man in the white shirt, there's a woman in a **white shirt** in the car. The man nearly runs Ove over as he passes him. Ove yells obscenities after the car. Blond Weed appears behind Ove and hisses that soon it'll be his turn. She says the car is from Social Services and soon both Ove and Rune will be placed in homes. Weed gets into Anders' Audi and Ove wants to destroy the car, but he suddenly feels out of breath. When he recovers, he heads back to his house and notices the cat-shaped hole in the snow and the cat at the bottom of it.

Blond Weed seems to have no motivation other than the personal satisfaction she gets from being cruel to Ove, Rune, and the cat. This puts her on a level with Tom. Both of them despise community and wish to actively destroy it by taking down individuals within the community. Ove's breathlessness suggests that the congenital heart defect that the army found still plagues him.



16. A MAN WHO WAS OVE AND A TRUCK IN THE FOREST

Before meeting Ove, Sonja had only ever truly loved three things: her father, books, and cats. She'd had suitors, but none of them looked at her like Ove did. Her friends told her that Ove was Ove and would always be grumpy, but she loved his belief in justice and hard work. She understood that men like him didn't exist much anymore, and she loved making him smile. Sonja taught hundreds of troubled students how to read Shakespeare over her nearly 40 years of marriage to Ove, but Ove refused to read any Shakespeare. He did make her beautiful bookcases for all her books, however.

Sonja recognizes that even when he's young, Ove exists in a time period that's a mere memory. This explains Ove's unwillingness to modernize in the present: modernizing would entail even more work, as Ove would have even more time to bridge. The narrator describes exactly how Sonja gave back to her community through teaching: she taught troubled students and gave them purpose and success. Ove busied himself making things for Sonja, not joining her in her more intellectual interests.



Ove only met Sonja's father a handful of times. Her mother died in childbirth and he never remarried. He lived in the far north all alone except for Ernest, a massive farm cat. Sonja named him after Ernest Hemingway, who was one of her favorite authors. Ernest regularly went fishing with Sonja's father.

Sonja's father is a loner similar to the version of Ove we see in the present. His community consists only of his daughter and the cat—echoing Ove's growing (if reluctant) attachment to the neighborhood cat and Parvaneh's family in the present.



When Sonja brought Ove to meet her father for the first time, they sat silently for an hour while Sonja tried to make conversation. Sonja's father didn't like Ove because Ove was from the town and didn't like cats, while Ove felt he was at a job interview. Finally, Sonja angrily kicked Ove under the table, and he asked Sonja's father about his Scania truck. Ove mentioned that **Saab** is making Scania trucks now, and Sonja's father angrily said that Saab making the vehicles doesn't make them Saabs.

Despite Ove and Sonja's father's perceptions that they are two very different (and opposed) men, they share a deep loyalty to their car brand of choice. Both brands are also Swedish, which seems to make Ove view Sonja's father more favorably. Their mutual grumpiness and stubbornness can then even unite them.



The narrator explains that Sonja's father always drove Scania trucks and felt quite betrayed when Scania merged with **Saab**, while Ove had suddenly become very interested in Scania vehicles after the merger. Ove asked if the truck ran well and when Sonja's father said it didn't, Ove asked to look at it. The two men got up and went out to the truck. Sonja's father came back in and Sonja thanked him for accepting Ove. He asked Sonja if Ove fished and when she said no, he said that Ove would have to learn.

Cars allow Ove and Sonja's father to bond. Ove channels his father here as he works on the Scania's engine and in return, he gets a reasonable relationship with his partner's father. Sonja's father shows that he accepts Ove as a fixture when he asks if Ove fishes. It's implied that fishing is something that the two of them will share, regardless of Ove's thoughts at the time.



17. A MAN CALLED OVE AND A CAT ANNOYANCE IN A SNOWDRIFT

As Ove regards the cat in the snowdrift, Parvaneh rushes towards him, asking in a terrified voice if the cat is dead. Ove tells her he's not a vet and certainly doesn't have to save the cat. He continues that the cat will come out when the snow melts, and Parvaneh throws a glove at Ove and digs the cat out of the snow. She yells at Ove to open the door to his **house**. Ove feels out of breath and thinks of Ernest as Parvaneh yells again to open the door.

Parvaneh strides into Ove's **house** with the dripping cat and orders Ove to find her blankets. She tells him to turn up the radiators. Ove refuses but goes upstairs to get blankets. He hears another voice downstairs and when he descends the stairs, finds Jimmy with Parvaneh and the cat in his living room. Jimmy greets Ove cheerfully and tells Parvaneh that wrapping the cat in the blanket won't work to warm it up.

Ove argues with Parvaneh about the cat's outlook as Jimmy takes off his shirt and cuddles the cat close to his chest. He introduces himself to Parvaneh and Ove insists that Jimmy is going to strangle the cat. Jimmy just smiles and tells Ove that a fat person such as himself is exceptionally good at warming things up with body heat. Parvaneh checks the cat's nose and finds it warmer. Ove is relieved, though he won't admit it.

Parvaneh goes into the kitchen to heat water. Ove follows after her and finds her standing still and looking overwhelmed at the sight of Ove's kitchen. Sonja's things are everywhere collecting dust, the floor is covered in wheel marks, and the counters are very low. Ove is used to the way people look at the kitchen. The narrator says he rebuilt it himself after the accident. Ove takes the kettle from Parvaneh and fills it with water while she apologizes for coming into the kitchen without asking first. Ove lets her hand rest on his shoulder.

Jimmy calls to Ove and asks for some food. Ove brings Jimmy a sandwich and they remark that the cat looks much better. Jimmy offers Ove condolences for Sonja's death. Ove doesn't feel angry. He tells Parvaneh that she has to take the cat, but she says her daughters are allergic. Ove turns to Jimmy, but Jimmy says he's also allergic. Ove and Parvaneh notice that Jimmy is sweating and blotchy. Parvaneh takes the cat and shrieks that they have to take Jimmy to the hospital. Ove says he's barred from the hospital but when he sees the look on Parvaneh's face, he leads the way to his car. He lets Parvaneh pay for parking at the hospital.

It's unclear here if Ove is behaving this way because Parvaneh is around to care about the cat, or if he truly doesn't care what happens to the cat. The latter seems unlikely, given that Ove has felt concern for the cat before, which suggests that Ove is very concerned with keeping up his appearances as a curmudgeonly old man with strict principles.



As Parvaneh manipulates Ove into allowing her to care for the cat in his home, she seems very reminiscent of what we've heard thus far about Sonja. She's forcing Ove to accept the community and he reluctantly does as she tells him to.



Jimmy shows that he's exceptionally good-natured and helpful. He knows that Ove thinks less of him because he's overweight, but he seems to be unbothered by this knowledge. The fact that Ove is relieved that the cat is getting better shows that he does care for members of the community, even if he's uncomfortable saying so.



We finally learn that Sonja was in a wheelchair. With the kitchen, Ove took his belief in doing things rather than saying things to the extreme by rebuilding it himself to show Sonja he loved and cared about her. Parvaneh's surprise speaks to how well Ove has been able to keep Sonja's condition a secret up until now, though his reasons for not sharing Sonja with anyone are still unclear.



In this moment when Ove is entirely overwhelmed with kindness from his community, he brings himself to accept their kindness, their care, and even to put aside his principles to let Parvaneh do something nice for him and pay for parking. Jimmy's kindness also takes on a sacrificial light here. While Ove takes his grumpiness to an extreme that hurts him, Jimmy does the same thing with his kindness.



18. A MAN WHO WAS OVE AND A CAT CALLED ERNEST

Ove didn't like cats in general because he felt them untrustworthy, but he and Ernest had learned to get along because Ove knew that Sonja loved Ernest unconditionally. Ove learned to fish with Sonja's father and fixed her father's roof and truck. Three years later, Sonja's father died. Sonja stayed in bed for three days and then began madly cleaning the house. Ove wandered around the farm fixing it up and three days later, they got a call from the grocery store that Ernest had been hit by a car.

Nobody believed it was an accident: everyone who had met Ernest knew that was impossible. Ove and Sonja drove Ernest to the vet, where he died. Sonja leaned against Ove in the waiting room and told him that he had to love her twice as much now that Ernest and her father were gone. Ove told her he would, which was the last lie he'd ever tell her: he knew he couldn't love her any more than he already did.

Ove and Sonja buried Ernest by the lake and then drove back to the town. Sonja had arranged to meet someone there and Ove never asked who it was or why. When Sonja returned from her meeting and got in the **Saab**, she told Ove that they needed to buy a **house**. When Ove asked why, she put his hand on her belly and told him that their child needed to grow up in a house. Ove was quiet for a while and then said that they needed to get a Saab station wagon as well.

Sonja's birth family disappears in a matter of days, leaving her with only Ove. Notice that after her father's death, she takes her time to grieve and then moves right on to frantic cleaning—exactly the opposite of what Ove did in the present after Sonja's death.



Once again we see that Ove has a lot in common with these figures he doesn't really like. His suicide attempts in the present mirror Ernest's in the past. Ove also shows that he's willing to compromise his principles and lie to Sonja to make her feel better and cared for.



Ove's suggestion to get a station wagon shows that he is very interested in following what they "should" do now that they're expecting a baby. Ove's principles likely keep him from asking questions about whoever Sonja is meeting. At this point, Ove is actively working on building community and family as they prepare to be parents and to move.



19. A MAN CALLED OVE AND A CAT THAT WAS BROKEN WHEN HE CAME

The narrator says that despite Ove spending most of the previous day yelling at Parvaneh that he wouldn't keep the cat, the cat is in his **house** today and Ove isn't dead. Parvaneh had called a vet, who had left Ove a long list of care instructions for the cat, which needs exercise more than anything. At a quarter to six Ove prepares his coffee. He picks up four tiny socks that the vet left for the cat and wrestles the cat into them. On his morning inspection, Ove picks up a cigarette butt left by the man in the white shirt.

After Ove feeds the cat, he tells it that it will have to accompany him on his errands. Ove and the cat disagree on whether the cat should sit on newspaper in the **Saab**. When the cat scratches through the paper, Ove slams on the brakes and the cat hits its nose on the dashboard. While Ove is in the florist's, the cat licks the steering wheel and Ove's seatbelt. When Ove waves his finger at the cat, it bites him.

When Parvaneh forces community on Ove, she successfully thwarts his suicide attempts. Now that Ove has something to care for, just as he cared for Sonja, Ove is going to have a much harder time dying. Because of this, Ove is also taking care of things in his greater community as he picks up the cigarette butts.



The cat has absolutely no regard for Ove's principles. Like Parvaneh, the cat seems to meet Ove on his level and fight back when Ove does things the cat finds questionable. This works to bring Ove outside of his own head and his stubborn ideas to see the greater community and world around him.



At the cemetery, Ove kicks the cat out of the car, gets his flowers, and they walk to Sonja's grave. Ove offers her the **pink** flowers and introduces the "cat annoyance." He clarifies to Sonja that the cat looked mangy before it arrived, and then gets down on his knees and tells Sonja he misses her. The cat lays its head in Ove's palm.

Despite Ove's tiff with the cat, the cat acts like it genuinely cares for Ove. This tender moment shows that when Ove allows people (or cats) into his life, they'll often offer care and comfort in return.



20. A MAN CALLED OVE AND AN INTRUDER

Ove stays in the parked **Saab** for nearly twenty minutes. The cat gets agitated and then falls asleep. Ove looks over the parking area and thinks about his friendship with Rune. Rune and Anita had moved in the same day that Ove and Sonja did, and Sonja and Anita became best friends immediately. Anita was also pregnant, and the women felt their husbands should be friends. Ove resisted because Rune drove a Volvo, but soon they lent each other tools and talked about lawnmowers. When more people started moving to the area, Ove and Rune established the Residents' Association and the rules for the neighborhood.

Remember the narrator stating that Ove wasn't one for thinking about feelings—the fact that Ove is spending more time in reveries like this is indicative of how he's beginning to change and become more introspective. Ove is wary of anyone who doesn't drive a Saab, but Volvos are also Swedish cars, which makes Rune a reasonable ally. They share similar principles and a love of rules, and appear to work well together when they put their minds to a task.



Ove and Rune talked about their wives' raging pregnancy hormones. Anita kept putting the coffee pot in the fridge, while Sonja developed a short temper and was alternately sweating and freezing. Rune told Ove one day that he found Anita crying because she heard a nice song on the radio.

Their wives' hormonal roller coasters are even more foreign to these principled and structured men than women are in general. All sense of principles and rules go out the window during this time when Sonja and Anita are pregnant.



Sonja played music for her belly to make the child move, and Ove worried that he wasn't going to be a good father. Sonja suggested Ove talk to Rune about it and laughed when Ove asked for an instruction manual. Ove and Rune ended up standing around in Ove's shed while their wives talked in the kitchen. After three nights of this, they began building blue cribs and then put them in their nurseries. Sonja cried when she saw hers and told Ove she wanted to get married. They got married at the town hall with Rune and Anita and went out for dinner after. Ove and Rune argued with the waiter about the bill for an hour while their wives took a taxi home.

Here, both Ove and Rune follow Ove's principle of doing things rather than just talking about things. They deal with their confused emotions about becoming fathers by making something useful, by hand, that will help them in their role as parents. The fact that they painted the cribs blue suggests that both Ove and Rune hoped for boys to share their principles with, rather than girls who would, they presume, be emotional and beyond their understanding.



Back in the present day, Ove finally wakes the cat up and gets out of the **Saab**. He hears an unfamiliar female voice calling his name in a friendly way. The woman stumbles into the garage and Ove tells her he doesn't want anything. She introduces herself as Lena from the local newspaper, and explains that she's a journalist, as Ove continues to insist he doesn't want a subscription. She tells him that she wants to interview him since he saved a man at the train station yesterday.

Ove is faced with the unpleasant (for him) fact that doing a good deed like saving a man has consequences of fame. He resists the interview so he doesn't have to be known in the much greater community. The paper certainly reaches a wider audience than those who were at the train station or the six houses on Ove's street, and Ove still very much wants to avoid any community outside of his memories of Sonja.



Lena loses Ove's attention as he races past her towards the **Škoda** that's driving in the residential area. Ove bangs on the window and startles the woman in the passenger seat, but the man in the white shirt rolls down his window and seems unconcerned. The man tells Ove that he has permission to drive in the residential area, and lights a cigarette. As Ove curses and keeps pressing the issue, the man in the **white shirt** explains that they're there to take Rune into care. When Ove reminds the man that Anita doesn't want that, the man tells Ove that Anita doesn't get to decide.

Ove tells the man in the white shirt again that he can't drive in the residential area. The man asks Ove what he's going to do about it, and Ove is shocked to hear the man address him by name. The man drives away and Lena comes up behind Ove. Ove asks her how she knows his name and asks Lena how the **white-shirt** man knows his name. Lena admits that she found Ove's receipt for his train ticket at the station, but doesn't know how the man knows Ove's name.

Ove walks towards his **house** with the cat, goes inside, and sits on his stool. He's shaking with humiliation and he remembers that you can't fight men in **white shirts**. The white shirts haven't been in the neighborhood since he and Sonja returned from Spain after the accident.

The man in the white shirt knows he has a great deal of power. He's playing by rules that nobody on Ove's street can control or change, and Ove's anger stems in part from the unfairness of this. The man's cigarettes are also a slap in the face to Ove and his love of rules. Smoking is likely not illegal, but the way the man goes about it is certainly not following general codes of conduct that dictate how a person should dispose of their trash appropriately.



All of Ove's secrets are coming out, from his name to the fact that Sonja was in a wheelchair. This violates Ove's love of privacy and ruins his attempts to distance himself from people in his neighborhood, and especially to steer clear of men in white shirts.



Ove is obviously haunted by the accident that took place in Spain, and what's happening with Rune now sends Ove right back into those unpleasant memories. This suggests too that Ove might not be fully recovered emotionally from the accident.



21. A MAN WHO WAS OVE AND COUNTRIES WHERE THEY PLAY FOREIGN MUSIC IN RESTAURANTS

The bus tour through Spain was Sonja's idea. Ove tried to dislike the whole trip, but Sonja was so happy he couldn't help but enjoy it. They stayed in a little hotel run by a man named José. Sonja regularly gave money to beggars in the street despite Ove's insistence that they'd only buy alcohol with it. She went to bed in the middle of the day and Ove walked around the village to amuse himself while she slept. Coming back to the hotel one day, he saw José next to a smoking car with two children and an old, sick-looking woman inside.

José called Ove over and shouted "hospital." Ove decided the car model must be "hospital." He pointed to himself and said "**Saab**," and José pointed at himself and said "José." Finally, Ove looked at the old woman's face, realized what was going on, and fixed the car in ten minutes. Sonja was never able to figure out why José didn't charge them for any of their food the rest of the week.

Once again, Sonja is exceptionally kind and giving to anyone who exists within her community, while Ove thinks the worst of people and feels that he and Sonja are being taken advantage of by the beggars. Ove doesn't find the change in his daily structure (the midday naps) charming because of his inflexibility, while Sonja finds the change exciting.



In the flashbacks, we see that Ove seldom hesitates significantly before he goes on to do the right thing and help people. This reminds the reader that Ove is truly a good, kind, and caring person at heart. His grief and stubborn habits in the present are just more powerful than his true nature.



For the next several days while Sonja slept during the day, Ove walked and helped people fix fences and build walls after telling them that they were doing it all wrong. On the bus home, Sonja put Ove's hand on her belly and he felt the baby kicking. The narrator says that week was the happiest week of Ove's life, but would be followed by the unhappiest.

These memories of the trip to Spain are undeniably happy: Sonja is happy, Ove gets to berate people, build things, and help do things right, and their family is soon to expand. It's apparent already, though, that for Ove these good memories are clouded by grief and he can no longer truly enjoy them.



22. A MAN CALLED OVE AND SOMEONE IN A GARAGE

Ove and the cat sit in the **Saab** outside the hospital. This is Ove's third trip to the hospital in a week and the cat looks disappointed. Earlier that morning, during the morning inspection, Ove found that the sign saying that vehicles are prohibited had been run over. Ove fetched his snow shovel and looked at Rune and Anita's house. The cat looked at Ove accusingly, and Ove yelled at the cat that the council won't come to a real conclusion about Rune for years because it has to go through the bureaucratic process first.

It's unclear why the cat is disappointed in Ove; past events show that Ove usually goes to the hospital unwillingly, but for honorable reasons that benefit his community, and the cat acts as a voice of reason and morality in Ove's head. Notice how Ove is prepared to fully trust that bureaucracy takes time and doesn't actually mean anything now. Even if Ove hates white shirts, the fact that their goals take so long to accomplish is comforting in this case.



A bit later, as Ove shoveled snow, Lena reappeared and tried to talk to Ove. Ove locked himself in his **house**, but Lena continued to bang on his door and called him a hero. When she wouldn't stop, Ove opened the door and shushed her. She tried to walk inside, and Ove pushed her back out. Lena waved a camera at Ove as Ove and the cat walked to the parking area.

Like the cat or Parvaneh, Lena is forcing community and an interview-length period of companionship on Ove, though with significantly less success. Notice also that she's breaking all codes of polite conduct by trying to enter Ove's house without being invited.



Fifteen minutes later, Parvaneh and Nasanin knocked on Ove's door. When Parvaneh heard voices from the parking area, she followed them and found Ove standing outside his garage door with the cat. She heard knocking from inside the garage and Ove looked away. Lena spoke from inside the garage and Parvaneh yelled at Ove about it not being okay to lock people in the garage. Ove grumpily explains that the woman is a journalist and won't leave him alone. Nasanin tells Ove he's naughty.

Ove is more than willing to break codes of polite conduct right back when he locks Lena in the garage. Ove's distress at Lena's insistence shows that maintaining his privacy by not doing the interview is exceptionally important to him. An interview about Ove's heroics would compromise Ove's hard-won image that he's a curmudgeon and loner.



Parvaneh asks through the door why Lena wants to talk to Ove. Lena says that Ove is a hero and saved a man from a train yesterday. Parvaneh is awestruck and Nasanin starts to chase the cat around Ove's ankles. Ove mumbles a brief explanation of what happened at the train station and tells Parvaneh he can't get rid of Lena. Ove reaches down and grabs Nasanin, who bursts into laughter. He asks Parvaneh why they've come, and she explains that they're taking the bus to the hospital to pick up Patrick and Jimmy. Lena yells for them to talk louder, and Parvaneh tells Ove that if he gives her a ride to the hospital, she'll get rid of Lena. Ove agrees.

Here, Parvaneh again manipulates Ove's love of rules and fairness to save him (for the time being) and force him to do the right thing by taking her to the hospital. As we learn that Sonja's accident had to do with a bus, Ove's desire to keep Parvaneh from taking the bus takes on more weight now, as it can be read as an attempt to protect Parvaneh from whatever happened to Sonja. Even as Ove behaves rudely and acts as though he doesn't care about people, this shows that he actually does care.



The narrator explains that all this is why Ove is at the hospital for the third time in a week. The cat looks disappointed that it had to ride with Nasanin in the back seat. Parvaneh had given Lena a business card and instructed her to call her to talk about Ove. Ove feels that was a poor move and feels blackmailed.

Ove believes that Parvaneh barely saved him, but his sense of fairness and principles keeps him from going back on his promise to drive them to the hospital.



The cat keeps looking at Ove with a look that reminds Ove of Sonja. Ove tells the cat again that the council won't take Rune away for years and reminds the cat that it has Ove to thank for the fact that it doesn't currently live with Nasanin. The cat goes to sleep and Ove thinks he knows that Nasanin certainly isn't allergic to cats—but that Parvaneh lied so Ove would take the cat.

Ove's assertion that the cat reminds him of Sonja reinforces the idea that the cat acts as a way for Ove to more productively think about the lessons that Sonja taught him. Again, Ove is very intent on reminding the cat that the bureaucracy takes time and there's nothing to worry about, which raises the question of whether Ove is just trying to convince himself so he can avoid a confrontation with Rune.



23. A MAN WHO WAS OVE AND A BUS THAT NEVER GOT THERE

When their stay in Spain was over, Ove carried Sonja's huge bags to the bus. He noticed that the bus driver smelled of wine, but didn't think much of it. Ove felt the baby move as they drove and then got up to use the bathroom. When he was halfway to the back of the bus, the bus lurched and glass exploded. People screamed and Ove was thrown around. He couldn't find Sonja, and would forever be haunted by the feeling of helplessness he felt in that moment.

During the accident, Ove is unable to do anything. For him, this is the absolute worst situation for a variety of reasons, not least because his principles value doing over talking. Further, in this situation where Ove has no option to follow his principles, his family is harmed.



For the first week after the accident, Ove sat by Sonja's bed and didn't leave until the nurses insisted he shower and change. A doctor told Ove to prepare himself for the worst, and Ove threw the doctor through a closed door. Sonja briefly woke on the tenth day, found Ove's hand, and fell back asleep. When she woke up the following day, Ove insisted on telling her himself that the baby was gone. Sonja cried and grieved and Ove knew he'd never forgive himself for not being able to protect Sonja and the baby.

Ove is exceptionally loyal while Sonja is in the hospital, and he demands that Sonja's healthcare providers act the same way. Notice that both Ove and Sonja take the time to mourn and grieve for the family that, it's implied, they're not going to have now. Ove knows that he's going to carry this grief around with him forever, which explains some of his depression in the present.



Days later, Sonja told Ove she wanted to start physiotherapy. Ove looked at her as though she was crazy, and she told him that they needed to move on. Back in Sweden, Ove met more **white shirts**, one of whom wanted to place Sonja in assisted living and spoke as though Sonja wasn't in the room. Ove threw that woman out and threw one of Sonja's shoes after her. When he went later to ask the nurses where the shoe went, Sonja laughed and Ove's chest felt looser than it had in weeks.

Unlike Ove, Sonja insists that they move forward and put their grief behind them. There's never an indication that she regrets the trip or even what happened, which suggests that Ove's habit of regretting his inability to help and refusal to forgive himself is one of the most destructive elements of memory and grief. It doesn't allow Ove to truly move on from the trauma.



Ove rebuilt the **house** and made it accessible for Sonja's wheelchair. She returned to teacher training the day after she left the hospital, finished in the spring, and applied for a job teaching troubled students. She got them all to read Shakespeare.

Sonja uses what happened to move forward and continue doing good in the world. Ove can finally do something productive when he rebuilds the house for Sonja.



Ove remained angry. He wanted to destroy everyone involved in the accident and began writing letters to anyone who might be able to do something. Nobody would accept responsibility. He tried to sue the council for refusing to install an access ramp at Sonja's school. Men in **white shirts** kept stopping Ove, and Ove never forgave them. Finally, one spring day, Sonja stopped Ove in the middle of writing a letter and told him it was enough. Ove built the ramp at Sonja's school himself, and she came home every day and told him about her students. Sonja said that everyone needs to know what they're fighting for. The narrator says that Sonja fought for her students, and Ove fought for Sonja.

The implication that Ove had nobody to fight for but Sonja, or simply didn't want to fight for anything or anyone else, is shown in the present to have disastrous consequences. While in the flashbacks where Sonja is still alive it gives Ove purpose and an outlet, in the present it leaves Ove completely lost. The bureaucracy, represented by the men in white shirts, means that Ove is never able to translate his own principles and sense of fairness into reparations for Sonja.



24. A MAN CALLED OVE AND A BRAT WHO DRAWS IN COLOR

When Ove leaves the hospital, the **Saab** is filled with people. Parvaneh gives Nasanin crayons, which makes Ove angry. Patrick is wedged into the middle of the backseat and tries not to disturb the newspaper Ove put down to keep his seats clean. Nasanin drops a crayon and Jimmy picks it up from his front seat. Jimmy's phone pings and Patrick asks who owns the cat. Parvaneh insists that it's Ove's, but Ove insists that the cat's a vagrant. However, Ove gets very angry when Patrick suggests they hand the cat in to a shelter.

Ove's reaction to Patrick's suggestion shows that whatever Ove might say, he does believe one hundred percent in people (and cats) remaining in their communities and with their families. This suggests that if Ove turns out to be wrong about the white shirts and Rune, he'll still fight to keep Rune in his home on principle.



Jimmy asks if they can stop to get something to eat. Ove thinks about swerving off the road but realizes that all these people might then join him in the afterlife. He slows down and Parvaneh says that she and Nasanin need the restroom. Jimmy suggests they stop at McDonald's, and when Parvaneh glares at Ove, he agrees to stop. Ove doesn't go into the restaurant.

Again, Ove uses what Sonja might think were he to turn up in the afterlife in his current state as a way to steer himself towards doing the right thing. Her memory, along with Parvaneh's insistence that he not be rude, guide his behavior and steer it towards better behavior.



Ten minutes later, Parvaneh comes out of McDonald's and gets in the passenger seat. She asks Ove for help passing her driving test. Ove thinks it's a joke, but Parvaneh explains that Patrick won't be able to drive for months because of the casts. Ove is confused, and Parvaneh patiently explains that she doesn't have a driver's license. She asks Ove if he really wants someone else to teach her to drive and gets out of the car.

Parvaneh uses Ove's love of rules, and his belief that his rules are the only rules worth following, to convince him to teach her to drive. Ove's confusion stems from his belief that "real" people do things, like drive. This suggests that he views Parvaneh as a competent and valuable person, despite their squabbles.



Jimmy appears at the passenger window and asks Ove if he can eat in the car. Ove puts down more newspaper and tells Jimmy to make his phone stop making noise. Jimmy says that work keeps emailing him and explains that he programs iPhone apps. Ove stops by the bicycle shed and his passengers get out of the **Saab**. When Parvaneh lifts out Nasanin, Nasanin waves paper and yells. Parvaneh gives Ove the piece of paper and explains that Nasanin drew a picture of Ove. Ove is unimpressed, but Parvaneh points out that the figures are all drawn in black except for Ove, who is drawn in bright **colors**. She tells Ove that Nasanin always draws Ove in color because she thinks he's funny.

Jimmy effectively meets Ove halfway in regards to rules when he asks permission to eat in the car. Ove's community is beginning to listen to each other and truly respect each other. Nasanin's color drawing of Ove points back to the narrator's assertion that Sonja was Ove's color. This drawing suggests that Ove is finally finding some color in his life after Sonja's death, and that it's coming from his immersion in a new community.



Ove puts the **Saab** in the garage and considers trying to kill himself with the exhaust again. He thinks he misses Sonja, but he looks at the cat asleep on the passenger seat and turns the car off. After Ove gets up the next morning and makes his inspection, he shovels his walkway and then his neighbors' walkways.

Ove's ruminations on suicide are getting less intense and less action-based. The cat continues to act as a reason to stay and as a vehicle for Sonja's morality and kindness. When Ove starts giving back to the community, we see that he's truly choosing to become a part of it.



25. A MAN CALLED OVE AND A PIECE OF CORRUGATED IRON

After breakfast, Ove lets the cat out and finds a plastic bottle of pills in the bathroom. The narrator explains that doctors prescribed a number of painkillers for Sonja near the end and Ove still has a lot of them. It has occurred to him that they're a convenient way to kill oneself. He hears the cat yelling outside and wonders how death by painkillers will feel. The cat's cries intensify and Ove thinks of Sonja and how he doesn't know how to live without her. He arranges the pills along the edge of the sink and notices that the cat is crying even louder now. Ove hears a dog bark, the cat cry in pain, and Blond Weed yell.

Ove is brought back from his suicide attempt by a cry for help in the real world. His desire to save the cat from Blond Weed is indicative of Ove's kindness and his growing desire to protect individuals in the community, while ridding the community of intruders (like Blond Weed and the man in the white shirt). Ove is learning that this is how he'll have to live without Sonja. It's already proven impossible to live without her alone.



Ove tries to ignore the sounds outside, fails, and puts the pills back in the bottle. As he passes a window, he sees Blond Weed rush towards the cat. Ove opens his front door just as she's about to kick the cat. The cat runs and Weed stammers that the cat needs to die because it scratched Prince. Ove says nothing and looks dangerously angry. Blond Weed calls Prince and walks away, and Ove calls the cat to come inside.

After saving the cat, Ove truly invites the cat inside as though it belongs and Ove wants it to be there. This is a major shift, and illustrates Ove's growing sense that he (and the cat) are valuable and useful parts of the community. Ove is also finding purpose as he defends the cat from Blond Weed.



Ove notices that he's positioned all the photographs of Sonja so that she seems to follow him through the **house**. When Ove picks up the pill bottle, the cat looks at him with a horrified expression. Ove puts the bottle away and drinks his coffee while the cat drinks water. They head back outside and Ove thinks that maybe he can wait an hour to die.

Without thinking, Ove surrounds himself with tangible memories of Sonja by arranging her photographs this way. This means that he never has a moment to disengage from her. It's a way of keeping her memory alive and remaining faithful to her.



Ove and the cat knock on Rune's door. Rune finally answers. Ove asks Rune for corrugated iron, but Rune only stares for a minute. Rune asks, "Ove?" and smiles. Ove tells Rune he looks old, and Anita appears next to Rune, sounding terrified. She looks small, gray, and as though she's been crying. She leads Rune back to his wheelchair and then asks Ove what he needs. She's confused by his request for corrugated iron and finally tells Ove that he can look through Rune's shed for some.

A few minutes later, Ove reappears in the doorway with a surprisingly huge piece of corrugated iron. Rune smiles and waves at Ove from the window, and Anita tells Ove again that Social Services wants to take Rune away from her. She tells Ove that Rune will die if that happens. Ove suggests that Anita's son can come and help, but Anita explains that their son lives in America and is very busy. She turns to go back inside and Ove mutters to her that if she needs help with the radiators, she can ask him for help. Anita smiles and Ove disappears around the corner.

Ove finds his spare car battery and some metal clips. He lays out the iron on the paving stones, covers it with snow, and hooks it to the battery. Ove admires his handiwork and thinks of the shock that Blond Weed's dog will get when it tries to pee on his paving stones. The cat gives Ove a look and Ove dismantles his trap. The narrator explains that it had been a while since Ove was reminded of the difference between being mean for sport or because you have to be.

26. A MAN CALLED OVE AND A SOCIETY WHERE NO ONE CAN REPAIR A BICYCLE ANYMORE

When he hears the mail arrive, Ove says "I won" to the cat. The narrator explains that Ove and Rune used to bet on when the mail would arrive and had a complex system since the mail arrived at noon. Now, the mail comes at any point during the day. Ove tried to make bets with Sonja after he stopped talking to Rune, but soon gave up.

Ove throws the door open and nearly hits the youth, who is wearing a postman's uniform and standing outside. Ove asks the youth what he wants and notices that it's the same youth who was trying to fix the lady's bike the other day. The youth hands Ove his mail and explains that he's bringing him the mail, since the mailbox is smashed. Ove examines his mail. He has one letter that is hand-addressed, but Ove knows that's just an advertising trick. The youth doesn't leave and finally asks Ove if his wife's name is Sonja. He continues, saying that he noticed Ove's last name and had a teacher with the same name. The youth starts a question, but then turns to leave. Ove asks the youth to finish, and the youth said he liked Sonja a lot and she's the only teacher who didn't think he was dumb.

Though Rune's memory is faulty, he remembers Ove's name and smiles: a testament to the quiet friendship the men once shared. Now, Ove is calling on others in the community for help, which continues to show how he's becoming integrated into the neighborhood on his own terms, not because Sonja forced him to be nice.



Anita's distress about Social Services suggests that Ove might not be as correct in assuming that there's time to spare as he'd like to think. Notice that he encourages Anita to turn to biological family for help. This shows that Ove believes that one's nuclear family is the first line of defense and assistance, though Anita's response makes it clear that Ove's belief is idealistic at best.



Even though Blond Weed's dog has made the cat bleed, the cat's look shows that the cat is truly the bigger "person" here. It's able to pass this onto Ove as well and encourage him to stick to his principles and not act out of spite. Here, the act of not doing something shows growth for Ove.



The complex system to time the mail reflects Ove and Rune's shared love of rules and specifics. Notice that Ove was very happy when he got to share that love with someone; it's not nearly as much fun when he's alone or with someone who doesn't get it.



Whatever Ove thinks about "kids these days," this teenager has a job (and, notably, a job in which he actually does something) and is kind enough to bring the mail to the door. When the youth speaks about Sonja, the reader is given concrete evidence that Sonja was successful in giving back to her community and doing good things for the world. Ove's suspicion about the hand-addressed letter shows that he's not fully come around to trusting people yet, though his willingness to talk to the youth indicates that he's certainly getting better.



Ove and the youth stand for a minute and remember Sonja, and finally Ove asks the youth what he was doing with the bike. The youth repeats his story again that he's fixing the bike for his girlfriend, but adds that she's not his girlfriend yet. Ove asks if he has any tools. The youth doesn't, and Ove asks why he promised to fix the bike. The youth responds that he loves the girl, and then turns to leave. Ove tells him to come over after work to pick up the bike.

The youth looks suddenly excited, but asks to come tomorrow since he has another job. Ove asks what the other job is, and the youth says he works in a cafe. He explains that he's saving money to buy a car and says he's looking at a **Renault**. Ove loses his composure and yells that the youth can't buy a French car, and then asks how the youth plans on getting the bike to the cafe without a car. Ove shakes his head and asks which cafe he works at.

Twenty minutes later, Ove knocks on Parvaneh's door and asks her if she has the signs to put on the car to indicate she's a student driver. She says yes, and he tells her that he'll be back to pick her up for her first lesson in two hours.

27. A MAN CALLED OVE AND A DRIVING LESSON

At various points during the past forty years, a neighbor would ask Sonja why Rune and Ove hated each other. Sonja usually offered an account of their vehicular upgrades over the years, with Rune purchasing **Volvos** and Ove purchasing Saabs, until one day Rune purchased a BMW. Ove insisted you can't reason with people who purchase BMWs. Sonja told the neighbors that you either understood it or you didn't. Ove said that people had no sense of loyalty anymore and just viewed cars as a means of transportation.

Back in the present, Parvaneh tries to get into Ove's car with a bottle of fizzy juice and then tries to change the radio station, both of which are bad ideas according to the narrator. Ove instructs her to press the clutch pedal. Parvaneh looks around and asks where it is, and Ove holds his forehead. Parvaneh looks sour and says she wanted to get her license for an automatic, but Ove yells that she's getting a "proper license." They shout at each other for a minute and then Ove tells her where the clutch, brake, and gas pedals are. He explains how to get the car to move. Parvaneh does as she's told and the car lurches forward. Ove pulls the hand brake as the car comes within inches of another car. Parvaneh panics, but Ove calmly says that the car she almost hit is a **Volvo** and therefore doesn't matter.

Ove is coming around. He doesn't berate the youth for talking and being unable to do anything he's talking about, and further, he offers to help the youth perform the task. The youth here shares similar qualities to young Ove on the construction site, suggesting that some memories repeat in later generations.



It's one thing for the youth to be lovestruck and unable to perform tasks, but wholly another for him to want to buy a foreign car. Now the youth is truly becoming a project for Ove, as it's obvious that Ove will attempt to steer him towards an appropriate car brand. In doing so, Ove learns that he can feel superior and become a part of the community.



Parvaneh's bet that Ove wouldn't let anyone else teach her to drive proves correct. Ove will share his principles now with Parvaneh and the youth, while making sure neither of them are "ruined" by someone less principled.



At this point in the explanation of the Ove/Rune conflict, it appears as though it's simply a matter of Rune's faltering loyalty to a Swedish car brand. To be fair to Ove, this has already been developed as a major offense in his eyes. He also views cars as almost living things and certainly as a connection to his father, hence his lament that people don't view them in that way anymore.



Parvaneh's comment about her license type refers to the fact that in much of Europe, a candidate for a driver's license can choose to get a restricted license that allows them to only drive cars with automatic transmissions (a regular license allows you to drive manuals and automatics). As Ove tries to teach, he definitely doesn't remember that driving is something that people aren't born knowing how to do. He does agree to actually teach Parvaneh rather than just act superior, which allows him to continue to build a relationship with her.



They make it out of the parking area and onto the main road. When they reach a red light, a big SUV with two young men inside pulls up close behind Parvaneh. They rev their engine. When the light turns green, Parvaneh promptly stalls the car and the men behind lay on their horn and gesture rudely at Parvaneh. The **Saab** rolls backwards into the SUV as Parvaneh tries to move off again.

Parvaneh takes her hands off the wheel and starts crying. Ove stares at her in amazement as she sobs that everything is so stressful. The SUV keeps honking. Ove gets out of the **Saab**, walks around to the driver's door of the SUV, and rips the door open. He yells at the man and pulls him out of the car by his collar. Ove tells the man that if he honks again, it'll be the last thing he does. None of the other cars on the road come to the man's defense, and the man nods. Ove puts him down and gets back in the Saab.

Parvaneh looks at Ove with her mouth open. Ove calmly tells her that he hasn't seen her afraid of anything until now, and driving isn't brain surgery. He continues that plenty of "twits" know how to drive, and she's not a twit. Parvaneh takes this as the best compliment and learns to drive that afternoon.

The SUV is symbolic of its driver's rudeness. A car that large can be very intimidating to a Saab, especially one in the control of a new driver. The SUV itself, like its driver's behavior, is then in violation of Ove's principles and belief in fairness, as well as his new regard for kindness and understanding.



When push comes to shove, Ove shows that he'll stand up for his newfound community members in their times of need. We learn that just like Ove, Parvaneh is putting on a show that makes it seem as though she's collected, in control, and doing just fine—when in reality, that's just not the case. This moment of vulnerability allows the two to strengthen their relationship.



Ove and Parvaneh learn how to appropriately communicate with each other, which enables them to form a closer relationship and allows Parvaneh to learn how to drive.



28. A MAN WHO WAS OVE AND A MAN WHO WAS RUNE

The narrator says that Sonja always said that Ove was unforgiving. Ove knew that Sonja was disappointed that he and Rune couldn't remain friends, but Ove couldn't figure out how to fix what happened or even how the conflict started. It ended when Rune bought the **BMW**. The narrator insists that the connection between cars and emotions is the only thing that explains why Rune and Ove became enemies.

Not long after Ove and Sonja returned from Spain after the accident, Ove laid new paving stones, Rune built a fence, Ove put up a higher fence, and Rune built a swimming pool. Ove angrily insisted it was just a splash pool for their toddler and threatened to report it, but Sonja shut that suggestion down. Soon, Ove saw a rat and demanded all residents put out poison, but everyone refused. Someone sprinkled birdseed behind Rune's house, which attracted massive rats, and Rune put out poison. There was then the "Snow Clearance Skirmish," an argument over lawnmowers, and "the battle of the water pump" when the **houses** needed new heating systems.

The narrator has already left clues indicating that cars are tied to emotions in the book. Ove's affinity for Saabs is an emotional connection both to his father and to his country, while the man in the white shirt's Škoda is an indicator that he's a powerful jerk.



The fences and the splash pool in particular suggest that Ove is jealous that Rune and Anita have a child, even if Ove isn't willing or able to admit that. Rather than actually talk to each other about Ove's jealousy and their emotions, the men instead use their respective outdoor areas as weapons and as signals to fight each other. They also fight through official channels (it's implied that the heating system question is a question with a single answer for all the houses).



There were good moments in and amongst the conflict where Sonja and Anita were able to get together with Rune and Ove for dinner. When Anita and Rune's son was a teenager they had a dinner and whiskey after, but had a fight over how to light the grill weeks later. Rune's son moved away in the early 1990s at the age of twenty. Anita tried not to cry, and Rune seemed to shrink over the next few years.

A few years later, Ove and Rune fought over the heating system for the last time, and then over Rune's new robotic lawnmower. The lawnmower mysteriously drove itself into Rune's pool and weeks later, Rune went into the hospital and never bought another lawnmower.

The narrator explains again the men's string of **cars**: cars to accommodate strollers and wheelchairs and more children that never arrived. The narrator wonders if Ove never forgave Rune for having a son he didn't get along with, or if neither man was able to forgive themselves for being unable to give their wives more children. After Rune's son moved out, Rune bought a sporty BMW with two seats since it was only him and Anita. Ove realized that Rune had given up on having a family.

These good times show that the men did indeed like each other, but the gulf created by the fight was just too much to get over long-term. When Rune and Anita's son moves away and they struggle, it stands as an equalizer between Ove and Rune: neither has their child.



The breakdown of Rune's family brings about his poor health and the end of his feud with Ove. Everything unravels after Rune's son's departure, as the stable family unit is necessary for keeping its members healthy and happy.



Here, we realize that the men aren't just loyal to the cars themselves. Rather, they use the particular car to show that they're loyal to their families and what their families look like at any given time. The two-seater BMW is thus a rejection of family, and as a sports car, it's very much just a vehicle to get from point A to point B in a fun and zippy way. It's not functional—it's fun, which is something Ove can't approve of.



29. A MAN CALLED OVE AND A BENDER

Parvaneh, the cat, and Ove reach the cafe after arguing over where to park. Ove recognizes the young man with black stuff around his eyes. The young man smiles at Ove and Ove nods back, noting that the young man is giving a homeless person sandwiches. Ove and Parvaneh enter the cafe and the youth greets them, introducing himself as Adrian and offering them something to drink. Parvaneh asks for a latte and Ove asks for black coffee. Adrian admits he doesn't know how to make filter coffee. Ove curses and walks around behind the counter to make it himself.

Parvaneh asks why they're at the cafe and Ove explains that Adrian's bike needs to be repaired. Adrian thanks Ove for bringing the bike and explains to Parvaneh that the bike is his sort-of-girlfriend's. Parvaneh smiles and suggests that Ove has a heart. Adrian fetches his tools as the young man with dark stuff around his eyes comes into the cafe. Adrian introduces the young man as his boss and Ove asks where the coffee filters are. He explains to the perplexed young man that Adrian is going to fix a bike.

The young man already bears a great deal of similarity to Sonja: he cares for the homeless and earlier encouraged his companion to not argue, just as Sonja encouraged Ove to let things be. However much Ove might initially be okay with these young men, however, he can't escape his "kids these days" mentality when Adrian admits he can't make drip coffee.



Though Ove is certainly showing more of his heart, helping Adrian fix the bike is also an opportunity for him to encourage the despised younger generation to actually do something rather than purchase or talk about it. This is a way for Ove to give back to the younger generation, just like Sonja did, which he never got to do before (or never had the desire to do prior to the present).



Ove asks the young man if he's wearing makeup. Parvaneh hushes Ove. The boy smiles nervously, confirms that it's makeup, and accepts a wet wipe from Parvaneh as he explains that he went dancing last night. Ove offhandedly wonders if the young man has love and girl problems, and the young man chuckles that he doesn't have problems with girls. Ove asks the young man if he's "bent" and Parvaneh promptly slaps him. Ove doesn't understand why he can't say "bent" or "queer," though the young man doesn't seem concerned. Ove pours himself coffee and takes his cup outside.

Adrian is standing behind the **Saab** looking lost. Ove gives Adrian his cup and unhooks the bike for him. He asks Adrian if his dad didn't teach him to repair a bike, and Adrian mumbles that his dad's in prison. Ove is silent for a minute and then talks Adrian through repairing the puncture. When they're done, Ove says that he hopes the girl is worth it.

When Ove and Adrian re-enter the cafe, a short, wide man is on a ladder messing with the fan heater. The young man is holding a box of tools, and Parvaneh introduces the wide man as Amel, the owner of the cafe. Amel is cursing in a language Ove doesn't understand. Adrian asks what Amel is saying, and the young man uncomfortably and quietly says that Amel is saying the fan is "worthless like a homo." Parvaneh is delighted by the foreign-language profanity.

Amel asks Ove if the cat belongs to him. Ove insists it doesn't, and Amel insists the cat has to go. Ove says that if he fixes the fan heater, the cat stays. Amel gets off the ladder and Ove fixes the fan in minutes. Amel excitedly offers Ove whiskey, which Ove uncomfortably refuses. As Ove leaves the cafe, Adrian runs after him and asks Ove to not say anything to Amel about the young man, whose name is Mirsad, being gay. Ove insists that Adrian has more pressing worries, since he wants to buy a French **car**, but promises not to say anything.

30. A MAN CALLED OVE AND A SOCIETY WITHOUT HIM

Ove replaces the **pink** flowers at Sonja's gravestone and then tells her that life has been mayhem as an apology for being late. The narrator says that Ove doesn't know what happened to him after Sonja's funeral. His routine was entirely upended. He and Sonja stayed up late watching TV on Fridays and got ice cream on Saturdays. On Sundays they went to a cafe and then one Monday, Sonja wasn't there anymore. Ove doesn't know when he got so quiet and wonders if he's going insane. He runs his fingers over Sonja's gravestone and realizes that he misses having things the same as usual.

Remember that Ove has very distinct ideas of what constitutes appropriate male and female behavior, one that's rooted in his memories of the past and how things used to be. However, though the young man's sexual orientation seems certainly outside Ove's understanding, he seems entirely unconcerned that the young man is gay. This suggests that even if Ove does believe in traditional gender roles, he also believes in minding one's business when it comes to personal matters.



The actual absence of Adrian's father allows Ove to step in and fill that role for the time being. As Ove builds his network of friends, he gets to be the parent figure he never got to be in the past. This begins to develop the idea that Ove is building a "chosen family" of sorts.



The young man's proficiency in Amel's language suggests the two are related, while Amel's particular word choice to describe the fan suggests that he not only doesn't know that his son is gay, but certainly wouldn't be pleased to find out. This implies a tenuous family situation, one that once again challenges Ove's prioritization of family over all else.



Adrian and Mirsad seem close personally in addition to their professional relationship. Adrian's distrust of Ove mirrors Ove's own distrust of people, but here Ove has the opportunity to teach Adrian a lesson that Ove himself is still learning: he has nothing to gain from and no reason to out Mirsad, so why would he?



Ove is very conscious of the fact that his engagement with the community has kept him from dwelling on Sonja (though he might choose different or more positive terminology, like remembering). It's telling that he misses his routine and misses Sonja. It suggests that if Ove can find a new routine that includes his community, he might find happiness and comfort again.



Ove bought his **Saab** thirteen years ago. Not long after he bought it, GM acquired Saab. Ove spent the day cursing, and Ove never bought another car.

Saab's sellout to an American company is understandably offensive to Ove; he'd rather drive his Saab forever than drive something that isn't really a Saab.



Sonja always said there was a time for everything. The narrator says she got her cancer diagnosis four years ago. Sonja forgave the world, while Ove fought the men in **white shirts** for insurance and assistance. Sonja gradually reduced her workload and finally quit in her last year, telling her students to visit. Most of them did, and Sonja told Ove that God took a child from her but gave her thousands in return. She died not long after. Ove takes a deep breath and tells Sonja's gravestone that he'll see her tomorrow.

Again, Sonja chooses to see the good in what happened to her. She's able to conceptualize the thousands of children as a reasonable tradeoff for not getting a child of her own, and it seems as though her students truly loved her. Ove again turned to fighting bureaucracy, since fighting the cancer was a lost cause. His promise to see her tomorrow foreshadows yet another suicide attempt; he still hasn't fully decided to remain alive.



Parvaneh is waiting in the car for Ove and asks if she could help Ove put Sonja's things away. Ove cuts her off and angrily tells her no.

Ove isn't ready to relegate Sonja to memory. He takes comfort in his grief, as it allows him to think he doesn't have to change.



31. A MAN CALLED OVE BACKS UP A TRAILER. AGAIN.

Earlier that morning, Ove had gotten out Sonja's father's rifle to shoot himself. He was interrupted, however, by something that made him extremely angry, and now he is standing in the road with the man in the white shirt, telling the man that there was nothing good on TV. Unlike all the other men in **white shirts** that Ove has dealt with, this one seems actually angry and that makes Ove feel very good inside.

The white shirts' lack of feeling makes them all the more frustrating for Ove, who feels so much anger and negative emotion about them. This white shirt is then marked as being different than all the others, which means that Ove will have to use new or different ways of fighting him than he's used in the past.



Ove had planned to shoot himself when the cat went outside, but Parvaneh had knocked on Ove's door and asked to use the bathroom. On her way in, she hands Ove her phone and says it's the journalist. Ove accepts the phone and Lena asks Ove if he read the letter or the newspaper she sent. He hadn't read either but as he goes to find them, he notices the man in the white shirt driving his **Škoda** through the residential area. Ove drops the phone and runs out to yell at him.

Parvaneh is still knocking before coming in, but she's also definitely forcing Ove to accept her as a fixture in the neighborhood and in his house. The man in the white shirt continues to violate Ove's rules for the neighborhood and is also threatening Ove's community, which makes his presence even more infuriating.



The man in the white shirt gets out of his car by Rune and Anita's **house** as Ove yells at him. The man asks Ove what he's going to do about his rule breaking and tells Ove that he knows all about Ove's fight with the council after Sonja's accident. When Ove approaches the man, the man puts his hand on Ove's chest and tells him to go inside and watch TV. Ove stands, angry, and watches the man and his female companion go into Rune's house.

Ove is a known entity for the man in the white shirt, while the man in the white shirt is still a mystery to Ove. This creates a major power imbalance, particularly since Ove has a history of failure and the white shirt has the council and bureaucracy on his side.



Ove walks to Parvaneh's **house** and asks if Patrick is home. Parvaneh nods and Patrick opens the door. He greets Ove cheerfully, which Ove ignores. Ove asks if Patrick can procure the trailer he had when he and Parvaneh moved in.

Ove's transformation is evident: he's calling on previously despised members of his community for help, something that was entirely unthinkable a week ago.



When the man in the white shirt comes out of Rune's **house**, he finds his car blocked by a trailer. Ove stands there and insists he didn't do it, and then refuses to move the trailer. He only points to the sign forbidding vehicles in the residential area. When the man asks if Ove has anything better to do, Ove insists that there's nothing good on TV. The man tells Ove that this was silly, and he and his companion stalk away.

Ove's love of rules and regulations allows him to achieve this victory. The fact that Ove most certainly drove in the residential area to park the trailer suggests that the fight to keep Rune in his home is more important to Ove than even his most important principles. He's willing to break his own rules to protect his community.



Rather than looking thrilled, Ove just looks sad. Parvaneh comes up behind him and tells him that they're going to take Rune away from Anita. Anita appears suddenly and tells Ove that they're coming to get Rune later that week. Parvaneh tries to call Ove to action, but Ove only insists that it'll take years to get through all the bureaucracy. Parvaneh and Ove argue that neither knows what they're talking about, and Ove suddenly feels drained. He realizes that the **white shirts** always come back and win, and that life will go on without Sonja. Ove goes into his **house**, ignores Parvaneh banging on the door, and cries.

Here, Ove becomes trapped by his memories. He's never truly won anything from the white shirts, and this parking victory is small compared to the larger goal. His experiences fighting for Sonja were largely unsuccessful and certainly draining, hence his loss of hope here. Notice, though, that this is the first time we hear of Ove crying. This suggests that it's possible he's beginning to actually grieve and recover, rather than just pretending as though Sonja is still around.



32. A MAN CALLED OVE ISN'T RUNNING A DAMNED HOTEL

The narrator says that Sonja said that men like Ove and Rune were men caught in the wrong time. Dignity to them meant never being reliant on someone else and being able to do things themselves. After Sonja's accident and when she received her diagnosis, Ove couldn't deal with his anger, and he fought the council for everything as a way of managing his frustration. He finally blamed the **white shirts** for everything that happened to Sonja, including the miscarriage.

For proudly self-sufficient individuals like Ove and Rune, the socialized healthcare system presents its own problems, as it by nature requires them to accept help from the government (though the white shirts have shown that the "help" isn't always what they want or need). The white shirts become an easy target for Ove's anger, because socialized healthcare requires that a person be reliant on the government for help.



Late that night, Ove and the cat go to bed. Ove waits for the cat to fall asleep on Sonja's pillow before he gets up, goes downstairs, and gets out the rifle. He tarps the floor and the walls of his hall. Ove decides that wearing his nice clothes might not be the best idea, so he strips to his underwear and writes "bury me in my suit" on his envelope of after-death arrangements for Parvaneh. He decides to turn on the radio so it's not so quiet for the cat after he's gone. Ove listens to the local news and curses when he hears that there have been a number of burglaries over the weekend.

It's important to take note of how Ove is preparing for his death here. The envelope is now addressed to Parvaneh, not just whoever finds his body, and he turns on the radio because he's thinking of how the cat will feel. Suicide is no longer just about Ove and Sonja. It's beginning to encompass Ove's entire neighborhood, and he's considering how they'll feel after he's no longer a part of it.



A few seconds later, Adrian and Mirsad come to Ove's door. Ove naturally thinks they're thieving hooligans and kicks the door open. Adrian screams and runs straight into the side of Ove's toolshed, while Mirsad attempts to explain who he is to Ove. Ove waves the rifle around and yells at Adrian to be quiet. Mirsad drops his bag and says that this was Adrian's idea, and Adrian blurts that Mirsad came out as gay to his father.

Mirsad explains that he told his father, Amel, that he is gay, and Amel had kicked him out. Mirsad says that this was a stupid idea. Ove presses for more information, and Mirsad and Adrian explain that they were hoping Mirsad could stay with Ove. Ove tells them he's not running a hotel and points the rifle at Adrian. Mirsad pushes the rifle away and apologizes. Ove calms down and steps back into his hall. He notices a photo of Sonja from the trip to Spain, which she refused to take down. In the morning, Ove wakes to a **house** occupied by himself, the cat, and a gay person. He thinks that Sonja would've liked it.

Ove's belief system and love of structure dictates that young men like Adrian and Mirsad can't possibly be up to any good this late at night. Mirsad has just been ousted from his family and now finds himself without community, which puts him in a similar position to Ove. But Mirsad, unlike Ove, has people to call on from the start.



Again, Ove makes decisions (and is deterred from committing suicide) by thinking about what Sonja would want. The fact that Sonja would've liked having a houseguest makes the idea of opening his home up to community far more palatable for Ove. Notice too that houses symbolize fairness and offer to their residents what the residents put into them. Ove is beginning to put people and community into his house, and he'll get the same in return.



33. A MAN CALLED OVE AND AN INSPECTION TOUR THAT IS NOT THE USUAL

The narrator suggests that Ove knew all along what he had to do, but says that all people are "time optimists" and operate under the incorrect assumption that they will have enough time to do and say things to people.

When Ove comes down the stairs, he notices that the house smells like toast, which it hasn't smelled like since Sonja died. He accuses Mirsad of making toast and notices that Mirsad made coffee and fed the cat as well. Ove tells Mirsad that he's going to take a walk with the cat. Mirsad asks if he can come, and Ove agrees, after looking at Mirsad like he's crazy.

When they get outside, Jimmy runs up to them and greets them. He's in a tracksuit and is panting. He tells Ove that he's starting to exercise and wants to join Ove on his walk. Mirsad briefly explains to Jimmy that he's not getting along with Amel and is staying with Ove. Ove stops Jimmy from asking Mirsad uncomfortable questions.

Jimmy asks Ove if he has heard that the council is picking Rune up today. He explains that Anita has been trying for two years to get more help for Rune and now the investigation is closed. Ove refuses to accept this and says that Sonja would've heard about it if it were true. Jimmy says that Anita asked him to not say anything to Sonja, since she and Ove had so many troubles of their own.

This idea of "time optimism" is in direct opposition to memory and grief: when people find their time optimism is faulty and they don't actually have time, it ends in grief.



Mirsad makes himself at home in Ove's house, which also forces Ove to change or abandon his morning rituals. It's all very strange for Ove, but it also reminds him of Sonja, which suggests this will turn out okay.



Jimmy is changing up his own routine by beginning to exercise, as well as interrupting Ove's routine. Ove's protection of Mirsad suggests that he understands the value in taking some time to grieve privately for one's lost family.



Finally it comes out that Anita wasn't honest with her best friend, in an attempt to protect Sonja from more grief. We see that the council does take time to make decisions, but the time has simply already passed. This shows that Ove was himself a "time optimist," as he's already been doing things to stop the council.



Ove is silent and continues his inspection, but grows noticeably angrier. Mirsad asks Ove if he's okay, and Ove turns and asks Jimmy to confirm Anita's reasons for not wanting to tell Sonja. Ove thinks that Sonja would've been heartbroken to find out. He mumbles that he thought he had more time to help, and then strides off to Anita and Rune's **house**. He bangs on the door and Anita opens it. Ove steps in without being invited and asks for the paperwork. The narrator says that Anita hadn't seen Ove so angry since a possible **Saab-Volvo** merger in 1977.

Ove knows that Sonja valued her community above all else, and knowing that her community hadn't allowed her to help would've been heartbreaking. This finally spurs Ove to action. Remember that though Ove finds fights with white shirts exhausting, fighting is exhilarating for him, and this particular fight has the added suspense of a time limit.



34. A MAN CALLED OVE AND A BOY IN THE HOUSE NEXT DOOR

Ove brings a deck chair to Sonja's grave so he can take his time telling her "something she doesn't like." The narrator explains that over the last forty years, many different people lived in the **house** between Ove and Rune. Ove and Rune could always agree that the current residents of the house were imbeciles. One summer in the early '90s, three young men rented the house and held loud parties that went on for hours. The last straw was when they threw a bottle through Rune and Anita's window. Ove saw Rune with a small bag one night and the next day, the three men were arrested for drug possession. Rune mentioned to Ove the next day that you can buy drugs on the street behind the train station.

As the house between Ove and Rune has been inhabited by a variety of individuals over the years, it's suggested that none of them had the long-term housing goals that Ove and Rune had. They more likely fell into Ove's despised category of people who change things whenever they feel like it. Rune wasn't above breaking the rules to make things right and safe in the neighborhood, which suggests his principles were somewhat more easily compromised than Ove's.



In the mid-'90s, a woman moved in with a chubby nine-year-old boy and her new boyfriend, a man with bad breath and a bull neck. Anita and Sonja tried to ignore the shouting they heard coming from the **house**, but began to notice bruises on the woman. When Ove heard the boy pleading one night for the man to stop yelling, he went outside and found Rune waiting. Ove and Rune hadn't spoken for a year, but rang the doorbell together and punched the bullnecked man. The man left the next day and never returned. A few weeks later, Ove and Rune bought the house for the woman. The woman stayed in the house with her son, Jimmy.

Anita and Sonja tried to respect the privacy of the woman in the house until they realized that the man with her was a direct threat to the safety and happiness of the community. Against such a threat, Ove and Rune were able to put aside their differences, which shows that the two men did (and do) care very much for the wellbeing of the community. Their gift of the house is extremely generous, but it also represents their desires for sameness in the neighborhood; it ensures no new neighbors.



Back in the present at Sonja's grave, Ove tells Sonja he thought he'd have more time, and that she has to understand the situation. Earlier that morning, Ove called Social Services from Parvaneh's house and spoke with the man in the white shirt about Rune. The conversation went poorly from the start: Ove insulted the man's ability to read signs, told the man that he couldn't take Rune out of his home, and then the man told Ove that there was nothing he could do and hung up.

Inserting the flashback of Jimmy, his mother, and the abusive boyfriend at this point in the story begins to align the present man in the white shirt with terrible people like the boyfriend. Their goals are to break apart the community and strike fear in the residents, something that Ove is simply not willing to stand for.



Ove, angry, yelled that they needed a new plan. Patrick hobbled out the door and came back again a few minutes later with Anders and Jimmy. Anders hesitantly explained that he owns a towing company and also that he broke up with Blond Weed. Later that afternoon, when the man in the white shirt returned with police to get his Škoda unblocked, the trailer and the Škoda were both gone. The man lost his composure and cursed at Ove, and Ove never mentioned that the Škoda had been dumped in a gravel pit. Ove only said that his memory was faulty and that there's still nothing on TV. An hour later, Anita opened her door to a courier with a letter confirming the date and time of Rune's "transfer into care."

Now, Ove tells Sonja's grave that she's going to have to wait for him because he doesn't have time to die right now. He replaces her pink flowers and heads back to the parking lot, muttering that there's a war on.

35. A MAN CALLED OVE AND SOCIAL INCOMPETENCE

A few mornings later, Parvaneh lets herself into Ove's house and runs for his bathroom. Ove remembers Sonja saying, "hell has no fury like a pregnant woman in need" and says nothing. The neighbors have been talking about how engaged Ove has been the last few days, but Ove insists he's just never "engaged" in their business before. He's spent the last few nights in Patrick and Parvaneh's kitchen with Jimmy, Mirsad, Adrian, and Anders, formulating a plan to help Rune. After a few nights, Ove made a phone call.

Parvaneh comes out of the bathroom and the two head out Ove's door. As she passes Ove's living room, Parvaneh stops and stares at the blue crib. Ove explains that if Parvaneh has a girl, he can repaint it pink, though he adds that boys can have pink too. He tells Parvaneh she can't have it if she cries but when she starts crying, he just sighs and walks out.

Half an hour later, the man in the white shirt knocks on Rune and Anita's door. Anita opens it and he tells her it's time to take Rune. She tells him no. They argue and he asks who's going to take care of him, and Ove, Parvaneh, Patrick, Jimmy, Anders, and Adrian appear behind her and say that they will. The man looks suspicious. Lena walks up to the house with a recorder, introduces herself as a journalist, and pulls out a stack of papers. The man meets Ove's eyes.

Ove now has to reevaluate his thoughts about Anders: he may drive an Audi, but he has a useful job and finally seems to have some sense about choosing good partners. The fact that Patrick is able to know who in the neighborhood to call on after living in it for only a week shows again how different he is from Ove. He made the effort and has a greater sense of community in one week than Ove has after living here for almost forty years.



This fight gives Ove purpose and a reason to live, something that would surely please Sonja to know. He's finally moving past his grief and is no longer allowing Sonja's memory to control him.



Ove's thought here confirms that he and Parvaneh get along because Parvaneh also shares similarities with Sonja, which provides him with a real person to begin taking the place of her memory. Ove finally chooses to engage with his community, which allows him to change for the better and also follow his principles of doing rather than just speaking.



Ove's strict ideas about gender have been challenged since meeting Mirsad, which makes this moment even more touching. He's not only releasing the memory of his unborn child by passing on the crib, he's also already accepting Parvaneh's child regardless of sexuality.



All assembled, the community is a force to be reckoned with: Ove has his principles, Parvaneh her forceful personality, Anders can take care of those who drive in the residential area, and Patrick can rally the neighborhood to action. The reaction of the man in the white shirt suggests that this is not something he expected to deal with; he was betting on a fractured or unengaged community.



Lena explains that the papers are records of the man in the white shirt's patients over the last few years who have been improperly placed in assisted living. The man keeps staring at Ove as Patrick explains that they also have his bank statements, email records, and web history. The man turns white and stays silent for minutes. He angrily asks where they got all this information, and Ove angrily yells "the internet." Lena points out that there's nothing technically illegal in what they found, but the documents could lead to a years-long legal investigation. The man leaves, much to Ove's surprise.

Lena reminds Ove of what he promised her—an interview—and asks if he's read the letter yet. He hasn't. Ove spends an hour sitting with Rune before he goes home.

Finally, Ove calls the one person in his greater community that he truly doesn't want anything to do with in order to help Rune. What she finds shows that Ove is right: rules are extremely powerful, and breaking them has major consequences when others find out rules have been broken. Ove's development is also obvious when he asserts that they used the Internet, something he's distrustful of (and something that, at its core, is based on community).



In order to save one member of the community, Ove voluntarily gives up his love of privacy and agrees to share his story with the greater community of newspaper readers.



36. A MAN CALLED OVE AND A WHISKEY

Ove has been explaining how to properly own a **car** to Parvaneh as they drive. It's apparent to Ove that Parvaneh isn't listening, as she's asking silly questions. She stops and says she'll wait for Ove and says that it was nice that he came over the night before. The narrator says that last night after dinner at Parvaneh's **house**, Nasanin had asked Ove to read her a story. After Nasanin and the cat had fallen asleep, Ove crept back down the hallway past the seven-year-old's room. She'd been sitting at her computer playing a game and Ove looked at the drawings on her walls. Most of them were of houses, which Ove found intriguing.

Ove entered the seven-year-old's room. She looked displeased but pointed to a crate for Ove to sit on next to her. She explained the game she was playing to Ove, in which she builds **houses** and then cities. Ove sat with her and they played the game for two and a half hours, until Parvaneh threatened to unplug the computer. As Ove left her room, the seven-year-old pointed to a drawing of a house and whispered that it was Ove's house.

Back in the present, Ove enters Amel's cafe. Amel looks sad and angry, and he and Ove look at each for a minute. Ove sits on a bar stool and asks Amel if he still has whiskey. Amel slowly gets the whiskey out. The narrator says that it's difficult to admit that you're wrong when you've been wrong for a very long time.

Ove hasn't done a complete 180; he still has definite ideas about certain things (like how to properly own a car) and isn't willing to budge on some of those things, regardless of the other changes he's made. Ove is forming community with Parvaneh's children as well as the adults in the neighborhood. The house drawings that the seven-year-old makes suggest that the two have more in common than Ove might've thought, which again encourages Ove to think more critically about how he judges people.



The game allows Ove and the seven-year-old to bridge the generation gap by giving them each something they love (houses, computers) in one game. The game sounds very much like what Ove might've done in his job at the housing office, which turns the game then into a way to remember the past without negatively dwelling on it.



Amel is showing the signs of community loss; he very much resembles the Ove we met at the beginning of the novel. The narrator's aside suggests there is hope that Amel will come around and decide that loving his son is something he can do.



37. A MAN CALLED OVE AND A LOT OF BASTARDS STICKING THEIR NOSES IN

Ove sits at Sonja's grave and apologizes, saying that people have no sense of boundaries. He replaces her flowers. Earlier that morning, Lena had dropped off a copy of the newspaper. Ove was on the front page looking grumpy, and looked just as grumpy when he saw the paper. Lena giggled that she and Anders were going skating, and Ove closed the door on her. He cleaned up junk mail in his kitchen and found the letter from Lena. The letter was from the man Ove saved at the train station. The man included a photograph of himself with his three children. Ove threw the letter away and put the photograph on his fridge next to Nasanin's **color** drawing of Ove.

At the graveyard, Parvaneh, Patrick, Nasanin, the seven-year-old, Jimmy, Adrian, and Mirsad come up behind Ove and greet Sonja. Parvaneh lowers herself down and gives Sonja flowers from herself and more from Anita and Rune. Everyone but Parvaneh heads back to the car. When she joins the group and Ove asks why she stayed, she tells him "girl talk." The group squeezes into Ove's car and into Adrian's new **Toyota**. Ove had helped Adrian purchase it and saved him from purchasing a Hyundai.

When the group gets back to their street, Amel is standing outside Ove's **house**. Mirsad mumbles a greeting and Ove has dinner at Parvaneh and Patrick's house while Mirsad and Amel talk in Ove's kitchen. Ove thinks that Sonja would've liked it.

Before the seven-year-old goes to bed, she gives Ove a handwritten invitation to her birthday party. Ove reads it and confirms that she wants presents. The seven-year-old says she only wants one thing and Mum said it was too expensive. Ove nods, looks around the hall for Parvaneh and Patrick, and leans down. The seven-year-old whispers in Ove's ear that she wants an iPad so she can use special drawing programs.

38. A MAN CALLED OVE AND THE END OF A STORY

The narrator says that there are two kinds of people: those who like things with white cables and fruit on the back, and those who don't. Jimmy is the first kind of person and Ove wishes he hadn't asked for his help in his current endeavor. When they get to the Apple store, Jimmy shuffles away to look at something and Ove verbally abuses a sales associate. When Ove's verbal assaults get very loud, Jimmy finally reappears and tells the sales associate that he's with Ove.

Ove is now using photographs (and Nasanin's drawing) to remind himself that community is a positive thing. By saving the man at the train station, Ove allowed the man to remain present for his family and his community, something that Ove has spent the entire novel learning about. Lena is also inserting herself into Ove's community by dating Anders. No matter what Ove has learned, though, he's still grumpy about having to compromise his principles for the newspaper, hence his grumpy photo.



Finally Ove allows his new community to connect with his old one by bringing them all to Sonja's grave. Parvaneh feels a connection to Sonja now that she knows about her and how she affected Ove's life. Ove's principles and beliefs about cars remain strong as ever, as evidenced by his "saving" Adrian from a Hyundai.



Sonja certainly would've loved being able to facilitate a father and a son making up with each other, and Ove seems to as well. It's what he always hoped Rune and Rune's son would be able to do.



Now Ove is working on creating a bond with the seven-year-old that has nothing to do with her parents. Indeed, he's willing to at least consider bypassing Parvaneh and Patrick entirely if he's checking to make sure they can't hear. It's implied that these drawing programs will help her draw houses.



The story finally meets back up with the beginning at the Apple store. Finding Ove in an Apple store is indicative of his complete transformation over the course of the novel: he's willing to go way outside of his comfort zone to do something nice for someone else. Note too that an iPad would compromise Ove's principles, given his distrust of the Internet.



Ove waves a white cable at the sales associate and Jimmy insists that Ove means no harm. The sales associate tells Jimmy that Ove is interrogating him about the **car** he drives. He says he doesn't drive one. Ove turns to Jimmy and insists you can't reason with a person who doesn't own a car. Jimmy asks the associate to show Ove an iPad and the associate explains that he'd already tried to ask Ove which model he wanted. Jimmy translates the associate's computer speak for Ove and Ove finally yells that he wants the seven-year-old to have the best one. Jimmy rattles off a list of features and Ove purchases the iPad while cursing about not even getting a keyboard.

The seven-year-old gets an iPad for her eighth birthday and awkwardly thanks Ove and Jimmy. Jimmy heads for the cake and the seven-year-old strokes the iPad box. Ove leans down and says that he always felt this way when he got a new **car**. She hugs him, thanks him, and calls him "Granddad" before running to her room. Patrick limps towards her room to try to convince her to stay at the party, and Ove stands in the hallway for nearly 10 minutes.

Parvaneh interrupts Ove's reverie and offers him cake. Ove refuses and says he's going for a walk with the cat, who saunters into the hall with cake on its whiskers. Parvaneh confirms their driving lesson for the following day and Ove goes outside. He thinks that Sonja would've loved the party. He makes his regular round of the neighborhood and notices someone moving between Parvaneh's **house** and the house next door, whose residents are in Thailand. Ove hears the someone tapping the window with a hammer to break the glass.

Ove yells at the figures and runs towards them. He hits one of them and feels a stab in his chest. He thinks they managed to hit him until he realizes the pain is coming from inside his body. He falls to the ground and the pain squeezes his chest. The burglars run away and finally, Ove hears Parvaneh. Ove manages to make her promise to not let the ambulance drive in the residential area before he loses consciousness.

39. A MAN CALLED OVE

The narrator says that death is strange. It's often the greatest motivator to keep living, and most people fear it. People said that Ove was bitter, but the narrator insists that Ove wasn't: he just didn't smile all the time. The narrator says that time is funny too, and one of the most painful moments of life is when someone realizes they have more life to look back on than forward to. Some people live for other things, like grandchildren. When Sonja died, Ove stopped living.

Ove is trying to use cars to gauge the character of the poor sales associate. The fact that the associate has no car then represents a lack of character in Ove's eyes. Ove's own age and the fact that he's mentally living in a time that no longer exists is obvious when he continues to gripe about the keyboard. His understanding of computers and technology definitely isn't caught up to modern times.



Ove and the seven-year-old now have bonded over both houses and cars. Ove recognizes that the spark of joy and inspiration is the same in both him and the seven-year-old, regardless of what creates the spark. Ove's reverie suggests that he's still grieving somewhat, as it recalls his other times sitting in his house and losing track of time thinking about Sonja.



Ove finally gets the opportunity to save his community from the burglars he's been watching for over the last 40 years. In this moment, Ove's love of community combines with both his desire to enforce rules and his principles to lead him to take on these burglars singlehanded.



Ove's principles are still comically important to him if he's asking Parvaneh to enforce driving rules on what might be his own deathbed. This adds a humorous note to a tragic scene, and drives home the fact that not everything about Ove is going to change just because he's now accepted a community.



The narrator finally provides language for the way that Ove has used memory. Rather than living for others in his old age, he simply stopped living in the present and instead remained stuck in his memories. Sonja's death made this even more pronounced by robbing him of the only thing he ever truly lived for.



The hospital staff refuse to let Parvaneh follow Ove's stretcher into the operating room and it takes Patrick, Jimmy, Mirsad, Anders, Adrian, and four nurses to keep her from following. She overturns benches and screams at doctors. At 3:30am, they finally let Parvaneh into Ove's room. She nearly crumbles when she sees Ove, but steadies herself and approaches him. She starts crying, hits his arm, and tells him he can't die. Ove hoarsely tells her to calm down. Parvaneh takes his hand and sits down. He strokes her hair and confirms that she didn't let the ambulance into the residential area.

After 40 minutes a young doctor finally goes into Ove's room. He mispronounces Parvaneh's name and seems confused that an Iranian woman is listed as next of kin for the very Swedish-looking Ove. Ove and Parvaneh snicker at each other and the doctor begins to explain that Ove has a heart problem in complicated medical jargon. Parvaneh looks at him blankly and the doctor says that Ove's heart is too big. Parvaneh stares at the doctor and at Ove for a minute and then starts laughing uncontrollably. Ove rolls his eyes and the doctor looks confused. Finally, the doctor says that if Ove takes medication they can control it for months or years. Parvaneh waves her hand and states that Ove is lousy at dying.

Ove returns home four days later, supported by Parvaneh and Patrick. The cat is waiting outside the door. Inside, Parvaneh explains the drawings all over Ove's table that Nasanin and the seven-year-old drew. She looks embarrassed at the writing on the drawings and explains that her father died in Iran and the girls have never had a grandfather, but Ove tells her the girls can call him what they want to. He puts the drawing that says "to Granddad" in the top spot on the fridge.

Ove fetches boxes from the attic, and that evening Parvaneh, Nasanin, and the seven-year-old help put Sonja's things away. After 9:00pm, as the girls sleep on Ove's couch, Parvaneh grips Ove's arm and they go back to the hospital. Parvaneh gives birth to a boy.

Parvaneh comes to take the place of an adult daughter that Ove never got to have, while Ove takes the place of Parvaneh's own father. She takes responsibility for Ove in the hospital, which brings the idea and the power of one's chosen family back around. The family that Ove and Parvaneh have chosen to create over the last week is strong, caring, and willing to rally for the community.



Ove and Parvaneh's deadpan reaction to the doctor's confusion seeks to normalize the idea of a chosen family. The fact that Ove has an enlarged heart gives new meaning to his good deeds throughout his life. It's a tangible reminder that Ove does indeed have a big heart in a symbolic sense, though it's certainly not a positive thing in a medical sense. It shows that Ove has learned that love is extremely important and can do great things—it's easy enough to infer that Ove's symbolic big heart is his reason for still being alive.



As Ove returns home, his entire community is there to help him and support him. The girls have also claimed Ove as a real family member by considering him a grandfather. Ove's fridge art continues to function as a reminder of his family and their love, just as the photographs of Sonja function to remind him of her and what she'd think of things.



The blue crib will finally get some use, and Ove gets to participate in the baby's birth like he never got to with Sonja. Finally, too, Ove agrees to put Sonja's memories away and live in the present.



A MAN CALLED OVE AND AN EPILOGUE

As spring arrives, Parvaneh passes her driving test, Ove teaches Adrian to change tires, and Ove shows photos of Parvaneh's little boy to everyone he meets. Ove resists getting a cell phone with a camera, preferring physical photos instead. By fall, Lena moves in with Anders and Ove backs their **moving van** in for them. The next spring, Ove shows Sonja the invitation for Mirsad and Jimmy's wedding. Ove is the best man and Amel holds the party at his cafe. Mirsad moves into Jimmy's **house** and they adopt a little girl the next year. They visit Rune every day, and although he doesn't get better, he smiles every time Jimmy and Mirsad's daughter runs to him.

Within a few years, Ove's neighborhood turns into a city district as they build more **houses**. One day Patrick shows up on Ove's doorstep with two men who need help restoring their houses. Ove helps the two men and then most of the other neighbors with house repairs. Ove takes Nasanin to her first day of school, and she teaches Ove how to insert emojis into his text messages. He makes her swear to not tell Patrick that he got a cell phone. Ove builds a splash pond for Nasanin's little brother in his backyard.

Nearly four years after Parvaneh and Patrick moved in, Parvaneh wakes up at 8:15 one morning and sees that the snow hasn't been shoveled outside Ove's **house**. She runs across the street and into Ove's bedroom, where the cat is lying with its head in Ove's hand. Parvaneh sits on the bed with the cat until the ambulance comes to take Ove's body away. She tells Ove to give her love to Sonja and takes the big envelope labeled "to Parvaneh" from Ove's bedside.

The envelope contains Ove's bank information, instruction manuals, insurance documents, and a letter for Parvaneh. The letter says that Adrian gets the **Saab** and explains who to contact for Ove's money, which came from Sonja's father. Ove tells Parvaneh to give each of her children and Jimmy's daughter each a million kroner when they turn eighteen and to do what she wants with the rest. He ends by telling her to not let the new neighbors drive in the residential area and tells her she's not a complete idiot, adding a smiley face.

Ove also leaves instructions for a simple funeral with "no people." More than 300 people attend. They all hold candles with "Sonja's Fund" engraved on them. Parvaneh used the rest of Ove's money to start a charity for orphaned children. Patrick elbows Parvaneh and says that Ove would've hated the funeral. Parvaneh laughs.

Over the next year, Ove's neighborhood community grows and thrives with more marriages and children. Ove still doesn't compromise his principles, however: he still insists he's the only one who can properly drive moving vans, and he passes on his car knowledge to Adrian. We see that Amel did indeed come around to accepting Mirsad's sexual orientation and now gets the opportunity to demonstrate his love by offering his space for the reception.



The neighborhood, and Ove, continue to change and grow: Ove decides to truly live in the present by adapting to the technology of the times and getting a cell phone. This passage also notably doesn't mention Sonja at all, which suggests that regardless of Ove's cell phone usage, he's finally allowing her to exist as a memory.



The cat remains faithful to Ove to the very end. Parvaneh's request shows how much Sonja has become a part of everyone's lives since developing a true sense of community with Ove. Ove finally gets what he spent so much of the novel wanting, but he also gets the satisfaction of having lived four years surrounded by loving friends before joining his beloved wife.



In his final words, Ove pays his own familial relationships forward by giving money to the children and to Parvaneh. In doing so, he encourages Parvaneh to use his memory to do good things in the present and the future, rather than dwelling on his memory as he dwelled on Sonja's. He insists that his principles and his rules be upheld, and pays her another glowing compliment (by Ove's standards).



Again, what Parvaneh does with Ove's money suggests that memories are best used for good and to make the world a better place. Funeral attendance would indicate that Ove most certainly succeeded in building a community for himself after Sonja's death.



Later that evening, Parvaneh shows Ove's **house** to a young couple. The woman is pregnant and seems to love the house, but the man is less sure. He asks to see the garage, and Parvaneh asks what car he drives. The man looks her in the eye and says he drives a **Saab**.

The man's car indicates that he's a lot like Ove, which makes him automatically a good guy. As this couple very much resembles young Ove and Sonja, it suggests that they will have the future in this house that Ove and Sonja dreamed of.





HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Brock, Zoë. "A Man Called Ove." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 29 Nov 2017. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Brock, Zoë. "A Man Called Ove." LitCharts LLC, November 29, 2017. Retrieved April 21, 2020. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/a-man-called-ove>.

To cite any of the quotes from *A Man Called Ove* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Backman, Fredrik. *A Man Called Ove*. Washington Square Press. 2015.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Backman, Fredrik. *A Man Called Ove*. New York: Washington Square Press. 2015.