

Chapter 4: Dodo

Chapter 4: Dodo introduces us to Addie Timblin, an elderly Black woman waiting anxiously for her husband Nate outside their home in Chicken Hill, Pottstown. Inside their home, a meeting of the Pottstown Association of Negro Men takes place, where the group of men is engaged in card games and gossip, avoiding discussions on serious issues facing the community. The conversation at the meeting reveals the ongoing struggles within the Black community, particularly regarding job opportunities and infrastructure improvements. While the men seem preoccupied with trivial matters, the community's urgent need for progress is sidelined, further emphasizing the disconnect between the discussions of the association and the real challenges faced by its members.

As the conversation turns to the dying Miss Chona, Addie becomes frustrated with the men's talk of traditional death customs proposed by Snooks, a self-proclaimed reverend. While the men joke and engage in lighthearted banter about religious practices and superstitions, Addie is unmoved by their frivolity, finding their lack of genuine concern hypocritical. The men owe Miss Chona money but pretend to care for her, and Addie can't ignore the contradiction between their actions and words. This hypocrisy weighs heavily on Addie, as she considers the lack of true empathy in the community. She watches the men, increasingly irritated by their idle behavior and absence of real action.

When Nate arrives home, the mood shifts. Addie informs him that Dodo, a twelve-year-old deaf boy, has gone missing, heightening the anxiety of the situation. The community is increasingly worried, especially when it becomes apparent that Dodo may have ridden a freight train to Philadelphia. Addie's revelation that the boys who found Dodo had no way to call for help adds to the tension, and Nate's frustration rises as the urgency of the situation becomes more clear. The men's continued focus on

inconsequential topics only deepens Addie's frustration, and she steps outside to reflect on the situation, realizing the lack of action could have serious consequences for Dodo's safety.

Addie's worry about Dodo's safety grows, as she quietly expresses how the inaction of the men could lead to dire outcomes. She believes that the lack of urgency from the community might cause Dodo harm, fueling her desire for action. Nate, determined to find Dodo and unwilling to let the situation escalate further, decides to search for him himself. The narrative then shifts to Nate's search, portraying his deep-rooted connection to the land and the community of Chicken Hill. As Nate searches, he finds Dodo by the creek, where the boy is attempting to build something with rocks, seemingly lost in his own world.

The interaction between Nate and Dodo highlights the boy's innocence and emotional struggles. Dodo presents Nate with a note about his deceased mother, a symbol of his grief and the loss he has endured. Despite Dodo's emotional burden, Nate reassures him, offering comfort and affirming his worth. Nate's gentle approach dismisses the note's significance, focusing instead on the boy's resilience and the value of his spirit. Through this moment, the chapter underscores the challenges faced by both the Black community and individuals like Dodo, who carry heavy emotional burdens but also demonstrate immense strength. The narrative weaves together humor, community dynamics, and personal struggles, reflecting the complex relationships within the community and the heavy toll these challenges take on its members.

This chapter highlights the resilience of the Black community in Chicken Hill, as well as the internal conflicts that often prevent meaningful progress. Moshe's character is contrasted with that of Nate, who is more proactive and involved in addressing issues, such as Dodo's disappearance. The community's reluctance to face uncomfortable truths—like the hypocrisy of its members and the real struggles they face—is evident, yet there remains a powerful undercurrent of care and solidarity. Through Nate's search for Dodo and the complex dynamics at play in the community, the chapter portrays the nuanced and often contradictory nature of human relationships. The

narrative captures both the heavy realities of life in Chicken Hill and the moments of connection and support that define the community's strength.

