

Chapter 10: The Skrup Shoe

Chapter 10: The Skrup Shoe begins with Doc, whose knowledge of the Jewess hiding a Negro child had been passed on through family gossip. This particular rumor came from his cousin, Carl Boydkins, who worked for the state welfare office. The two families, the Robertses and Boydkins, had long-standing ties to the local community, with roots that, as they claimed, stretched back to the Mayflower. However, this lineage was nothing more than a fabricated story. In reality, their ancestors hailed from an Irishman named Ed Bole, who had been involved in the Chinese imperial court before making a fortune in England. He later sent his wife and children to America, where they settled near Pottstown, giving rise to the Roberts and Boydkins families.

Doc had grown up in the comforts of rural America, far removed from the struggles of the immigrants and minorities who began arriving in the town as it expanded. He never questioned his family's history, nor did he ever think about the broader racial tensions emerging in Pottstown. But things were changing rapidly. The factories and industries that were growing in the area began to replace farms and dairies, bringing with them a mix of ethnicities that altered the town's social fabric. While Doc's family had prospered, the Boydkins family found themselves trapped by industrial expansion, with their once-beautiful land now polluted by the new factories. Despite their protests, the Boydkins were forced to sell their land for far less than it was worth, a decision they would regret as the town became increasingly industrialized.

Doc's own story was equally complex, marked by a childhood filled with insecurities about his deformed foot, which he tried to hide from others. His struggles in school and awkward interactions with girls shaped his view of the world. He had been embarrassed by his foot after a painful incident in first grade, where his classmates mocked him, calling him "Hoof." This experience left him ashamed, and despite his academic successes, he continued to harbor resentment toward his physical

difference. Yet, his mother had always encouraged him to keep his disability hidden, teaching him that appearances mattered more than anything. Despite this, Doc still managed to gain some respect from his peers, especially as he excelled in subjects like biology, eventually becoming the president of the school debate team.

One key event in Doc's life came when he was forced to seek out the town's infamous shoemaker, Norman Skrupskelis, to craft a special shoe for his deformed foot. Norman was a gruff, silent figure, whose shoe-making skills were unmatched but whose personality was infamous in town. Doc's visit to Norman's dark, cluttered workshop was uncomfortable, but the result was a pair of shoes that fit perfectly and alleviated his discomfort. Despite his gratitude, Doc harbored resentment toward Norman, feeling humiliated by the shoemaker's aloof attitude. After Norman's death, his sons took over the business, and though they were highly skilled, Doc refused to patronize their shop, choosing to pay three times more for shoes made in Philadelphia out of spite.

As Doc's life continued, his views became increasingly shaped by his hometown's social dynamics. While he initially struggled with his foot and the way people perceived him, he later found himself drawn to the idea of preserving the values of his community. His childhood had been one of comfort and privilege, but as the town grew and changed, he felt a growing sense of unease. He began to see the immigrants and minorities in town as threats to the way of life he had known. This belief led him to join the White Knights, a local group that shared his views on preserving a "pure" America. His cousin Carl, ever the opportunist, presented Doc with a new problem to solve—one that involved a Negro child being hidden by the Jewess of Chicken Hill. Carl's proposal to have Doc examine the child for the state stirred a complex mix of curiosity, resentment, and duty in Doc.

The child in question was deaf, possibly mute, and had been kept hidden from the authorities by Miss Chona, a woman who had once been part of Doc's past. He remembered her from high school, where she had limped along, much like him. But now, years later, he found himself intrigued by her and the life she led. The

conversation with Carl about the child, however, was not one that Doc took lightly. He questioned Carl's motives and wondered if this was more about politics than medical necessity. Despite his discomfort, Doc agreed to see the child, not out of kindness, but out of a sense of duty to the state.

In the weeks that followed, Doc's thoughts became consumed by Miss Chona and her mysterious relationship with the child. He recalled his awkward teenage years when he had tried to approach Miss Chona, only to be rejected in a way that stung deeply. The girl he had once seen as an object of curiosity had now become a symbol of something more complex. She was an outsider, much like him, yet she seemed to live a life full of contradictions. The Skrup Shoe, which he had once despised, became a symbol of their shared history, and Doc found himself reflecting on the ways in which his own life had been shaped by those small, seemingly insignificant details.

Doc's visit to Miss Chona's store would change everything. It marked the beginning of a complicated journey, where his professional role as a doctor collided with his personal insecurities and long-held prejudices. What started as a simple medical examination turned into something much deeper, forcing Doc to confront not only his own biases but also the shifting dynamics of his town. The town that had once been so familiar, with its tidy churches and clear boundaries, was now unrecognizable. The influx of outsiders had brought with it not only diversity but also a sense of unease that had never been there before. And as Doc faced Miss Chona and the child, he began to realize that the world he had once known was slipping away.