

Chapter 8: Paper

Chapter 8: Paper was no stranger to the news of Chicken Hill. When Paper—known for her lively chatter, sharp wit, and seemingly endless supply of gossip—gathered her audience at Chona’s Heaven & Earth Grocery Store, the atmosphere was always filled with excitement and curiosity. She was the unofficial news source for the area, wielding the power of the spoken word in a way that few could rival. Unlike the local newspapers, which often skipped over the stories that truly mattered to the people of Chicken Hill, Paper’s updates were the pulse of the community. The local housekeepers, janitors, and factory workers gathered around her each Saturday morning, eager to hear what new scandal or juicy tidbit would be revealed. Despite rumors suggesting that Paper couldn’t read, it didn’t matter—her stories, filled with humor, charm, and drama, were enough to captivate anyone who would listen.

Her beauty and magnetic personality made her the center of attention, and her influence on the Hill was undeniable. Men, young and old, couldn’t help but be drawn to her. Her presence could soften even the hardest hearts. From the rough, knife-wielding thugs to the mild-mannered deacons, everyone seemed to have a soft spot for Paper. She was able to weave her charm effortlessly, and her laughter—loud and infectious—could bring joy to anyone within earshot. This natural allure made Paper not only a highly sought-after confidante but also a figure who had the ear of almost every man in town. It was said that no man, no matter how hardened, could resist confessing his secrets to her. Her beauty, intelligence, and wit combined to make her a central figure in the daily life of Chicken Hill.

One Saturday morning, as the sun poured into the grocery store, Paper dropped the news that would capture everyone’s attention—Big Soap, a large Italian man known for his kindness, had knocked out Fatty Davis’s gold tooth. The crowd in the store quickly gathered around, eager to hear the details. This wasn’t just a fight; it was an event.

The story unraveled like a carefully constructed narrative, with Paper playing her part to perfection. Her vivid description painted the scene of Fatty's taunts and Big Soap's reluctance, followed by the climactic moment when Big Soap's massive fist landed on Fatty's face. Laughter erupted as Paper recounted how Fatty, after being knocked out, had to search the dirt for his lost tooth. It was a story filled with humor and the familiar dynamic of men testing each other's limits, all told through Paper's eyes.

As Paper continued to entertain the crowd with her detailed recollections, she effortlessly shifted the focus of her story to a more pressing matter—Dodo, a deaf boy whom Chona had been hiding from the state. The tension between the local community and the outside world had been building, and Paper knew that the arrival of a state official looking for Dodo could change everything. The mysterious man, who seemed out of place among the familiar faces of Chicken Hill, was a figure of concern. His presence made Chona uneasy, and the possibility of Dodo being sent to a facility like Pennhurst, known for its inhumane conditions, weighed heavily on her mind. But Paper, ever the source of gossip and information, was quick to shift the conversation. She didn't want to focus on the painful reality of Dodo's situation, knowing that for many, it was simply another injustice to accept in a world full of them.

The community's collective response to Dodo's plight reflected the complexities of life in Chicken Hill. While some were deeply concerned, others, like Paper, saw it as another inevitable consequence of the system they lived under. The group knew the state was a powerful, unyielding force, but they also knew that the bonds they shared in their tight-knit community were just as powerful. For Chona, the decision to protect Dodo was a personal one, but for others, it was just another story among many—another tragedy in a world where survival meant accepting hardship. Yet, the conversations about Dodo, like the stories shared in the grocery store, were part of a larger narrative of resilience. Despite the difficulties they faced, the people of Chicken Hill continued to find ways to support one another, even as the system threatened to tear them apart.

Through all the chaos and drama, it was Paper who held the community together with her stories. Her ability to make the mundane feel important, and her knack for turning even the smallest incident into a captivating tale, made her a beloved figure in Chicken Hill. Whether it was a fight between two men, the latest gossip, or the quiet struggles of those around her, Paper's stories were a thread that connected everyone in the community. She wasn't just a laundress; she was the lifeblood of Chicken Hill's social scene, always there to share the news and offer her unique perspective on the world around her. Even in a place as tough as Chicken Hill, where hardship was common and survival often meant accepting the worst, Paper's presence reminded everyone of the power of laughter, of connection, and of the simple joy that could still be found in life's everyday moments.