

Chapter 11: Gone

Chapter 11: Gone was a moment that forever changed Dodo's life. The faint flicker of the bulb in the Heaven & Earth Grocery Store marked the entrance of someone unexpected. Though the store typically had few visitors in the afternoon, this time was different. As Dodo stood on the trapdoor ladder leading to the basement, hidden behind the butcher's case, he witnessed an unsettling scene. The moment Miss Chona moved to greet the visitor, her face betrayed fear, unlike anything Dodo had ever seen before. His instinctual reaction was to lower himself further into the basement, unsure of who was entering but sensing the change in the air.

Miss Chona had always been a pillar of strength for Dodo. Despite her occasional tremors and seizures, she moved about the store, independent and strong-willed. Dodo had come to admire her resilience and had learned to respect her autonomy, often helping only when asked. Her love of reading, which she encouraged in him, had been one of the few consistent joys in his life. Although he didn't share her passion for books, he still indulged her by pretending to read, knowing that it made her happy. But today, something was different. He could feel the weight of the moment in the way Miss Chona moved, and the flickering light, the unease in her actions, set the stage for what was about to unfold.

When Dodo heard the sound of the strange visitor's footsteps, he recognized the uneven pattern immediately. The vibrations underfoot told him something was wrong, but it wasn't until he saw the man's face that he understood. It was Doc Roberts, a man whose reputation had long been steeped in fear for the people of the Hill. To the white community, Doc Roberts was a benevolent figure, the trusted country doctor. But to the black families in the neighborhood, he represented something far more sinister—a figure of nightmares, a symbol of mistrust and fear. The man who had brought dread into the lives of many now stood in the store, and Dodo's heart raced as

the tension between Miss Chona and Doc Roberts grew palpable.

The argument between the two escalated quickly, and Dodo, still hidden behind the butcher's counter, could sense the change in the atmosphere. Miss Chona's usual calm demeanor had shifted to something darker. Her trembling hand, her flushed face, and the rapid-fire words exchanged with Doc Roberts were all signs that something was terribly wrong. As Dodo watched, helpless, Miss Chona's body began to shake uncontrollably. The seizure was familiar to him, but this time, the urgency in the room was unlike anything he had experienced before. His own body stiffened in response, a mix of fear and helplessness overcoming him as he realized that the situation was far more serious than he had anticipated.

Miss Chona's fall to the ground, her body jerking violently, sent a shock through Dodo's system. He had witnessed her seizures before, but this one felt different. The intensity of her convulsions, the way her body hit the floor with a force that seemed to echo through the store, left Dodo frozen in place. For a brief moment, he felt as though he had been transported back to the night of the explosion at his mother's stove. The same sense of fear and panic overwhelmed him, as though time had stood still, and the pain of loss and helplessness had returned. But now, there was no time to dwell on those past memories. The present moment demanded his full attention.

In a burst of adrenaline, Dodo sprang into action. His instinct to protect Miss Chona, to do something—anything—kicked in. He rushed to her side, but Doc Roberts was already there, doing something unspeakable. The moment felt surreal, and Dodo's emotions swirled in a mix of anger, fear, and confusion. He didn't fully understand what was happening, but the sight of Doc's hands on Miss Chona in such a way made him act without thinking. In a moment of raw emotion, Dodo shoved Doc Roberts away, knocking him off Miss Chona and into the shelves behind him. The impact was jarring, and Dodo was surprised by how easily Doc had been sent flying.

The scene that unfolded before him would stay with Dodo for the rest of his life. The chaos in the store, the way Miss Chona's body spasmed, and the confrontation with

Doc Roberts were all moments that shattered the life he had known. But Dodo was not the same boy who had entered the store that afternoon. The courage he found in that moment, the strength to stand up for Miss Chona, marked the beginning of his transformation. As the situation escalated, Dodo found himself in a battle for survival—physically, emotionally, and psychologically. The simple rules he had been taught—stay close, stay quiet—were now irrelevant. The store, the Hill, the people he had trusted—everything had changed. The world outside was no longer the same.

In the end, the truth of what happened in the grocery store that day would follow Dodo for years to come. The struggle for his survival, his escape from the grasp of authority, and his desire to protect Miss Chona from harm became the defining moments of his life. The fear of the man from the state, the one who had been mentioned time and time again by Miss Chona and Aunt Addie, was no longer a distant threat. It was real, and it was coming for him. But Dodo was ready, prepared to face whatever came his way.