

Chapter 4: Dodo

Chapter 4: Dodo begins in the cold darkness of Chicken Hill, where Addie Timblin waits anxiously for her husband, Nate, to return home. As she waits, the Pottstown Association of Negro Men is gathered around her kitchen table, engaged in animated discussions filled with card games and gossip. The focus of their conversation shifts to Miss Chona, a crucial yet ailing figure in the community, and her longstanding impact on the Hill. The men, though half-hearted, acknowledge their debt to Miss Chona, but their attention often drifts, reflecting the distractions of their lives. Amid this, Addie finds herself distracted, reflecting on the lingering echoes of the South, the traditions, and the disputes that shape the dynamics of their community. The discussion at the table seems to resonate with the complex history of the area, mirroring the struggles and hopes that each person carries with them.

Nate, known for his quiet demeanor and mysterious past, stands in stark contrast to the lively, sometimes frivolous conversations that fill the room. His presence shifts the atmosphere immediately, as the men regard him not only with respect but with the unspoken acknowledgment of his quiet strength and unwavering support for the community. Addie shares a concern that weighs heavily on her mind: Dodo, a young deaf boy with a deep connection to Nate, has vanished, most likely on his way to Philadelphia. This revelation stirs the previously passive gathering, sparking concern among the men and a sense of urgency that wasn't there before. Nate, driven by a deep sense of responsibility, prepares to act, embodying the role of a protector, someone the community can rely on in times of uncertainty.

As Nate sets off in search of Dodo, the boy is found by a creek, absorbed in his own thoughts and disconnected from the world around him. Their meeting by the water is filled with unspoken emotions, a moment of quiet understanding between the two. Dodo, despite his recent adventure, reveals his simple, yet profound mission: to create

a garden of sunflowers. This quiet, innocent gesture symbolizes hope and beauty amid the complex and often harsh world he navigates. Nate, ever patient and compassionate, does not react harshly to Dodo's wanderings. Instead, he seeks to understand the deeper meaning behind the boy's actions, offering gentle guidance rather than punishment, demonstrating his depth of care and insight into the complexities of Dodo's life.

The chapter closes with a moment of tenderness, highlighting the deep bond between Nate and Dodo. The discovery of a crumpled piece of paper, bearing the news of Dodo's mother's death, symbolizes the fragility of life on Chicken Hill. This simple yet powerful symbol reminds the reader of the challenges that shadow their lives. Despite the heavy weight of grief and loss, Nate reassures Dodo with a message of hope, resilience, and belonging. The fear of being lost or displaced, prevalent in both their lives, is alleviated through Nate's words, offering Dodo a sense of internal security and love that transcends external turmoil. This final moment serves as a poignant reminder that even in the face of overwhelming loss, the connection they share remains a source of strength and comfort, an unwavering bond that shields them from the harshness of their world.

This chapter explores themes of community, belonging, and resilience, as the characters navigate the complexities of their lives in Chicken Hill. Nate's role as a protector and guide, not just for Dodo but for the entire community, is emphasized throughout the story. His gentle approach to the challenges that arise, whether it be the worries over Dodo's disappearance or the fragile realities of life on the Hill, reveals the deep emotional strength he carries. Meanwhile, Dodo's simple yet profound mission to create a garden of sunflowers offers a beautiful contrast to the often difficult lives they lead, symbolizing the power of innocence and hope. Through their interactions, we are reminded that love and understanding can provide a sanctuary in the most tumultuous of times, a lesson that Nate imparts to Dodo in their shared moment by the creek.