

Chapter 10: The Skrup Shoe

Chapter 10: The Skrup Shoe centers around Earl Roberts, commonly known as Doc, a man from Pottstown who becomes caught up in rumors about a Jewish woman named Chona allegedly hiding a Black child from the state. Doc hears about this from his distant cousin, Carl Boydkins, who works for the state welfare office. The families, despite their strained relationship, both trace their lineage back to the Mayflower, a claim that is more of a fabricated myth than a truth, rooted in the story of Ed Bole, an English sailor from the late 18th century. Bole's tumultuous life would ultimately lead to the Roberts and Boydkins families prospering on neighboring farms along the Manatawny Creek. This shared myth, tied to the colonial past, serves as a backdrop to the strained social dynamics of Pottstown.

The chapter then delves into the significant social and economic changes before and after the Great Crash of 1929. While the Roberts family manages to sell their property just before the crash, the Boydkins family is hit hard as the factories that once fueled their prosperity now pollute their land, decimating their way of life. Doc reflects on his childhood during these turbulent times, grappling with his insecurities, especially about his left foot, which was affected by polio. His disability makes him self-conscious, particularly when interacting with girls, leading him to avoid social situations. This sense of alienation from his peers shapes much of Doc's character and contributes to his later feelings of bitterness and resentment. The social changes around him only exacerbate these feelings, as his discomfort with the evolving world around him grows.

As Doc matures, his feelings toward Chona resurface, rooted in memories from his high school days when he unsuccessfully tried to court her. The rejection he faced then left a lasting impact, fueling his insecurities. Later, Doc visits Norman Skrupskelis, the town's renowned shoemaker, to have a custom shoe made for his cleft foot. Norman's harsh and abrupt manner during the fitting leaves a bitter impression on Doc, leading

to years of resentment that continues even after Norman's death. This bitterness is compounded by the transition of Norman's business to his sons, further fueling Doc's ongoing frustration with the changes around him. These unresolved feelings toward Norman and Chona linger, influencing Doc's worldview and interactions with those in his community.

Doc's struggles with Pottstown's demographic shifts reflect his deepening bigotry as immigrants from various cultural backgrounds settle in the area. He begins to view these changes as a threat to the way of life he once knew and becomes increasingly alienated from his hometown. His sense of disconnection grows, and his resentment towards the "outsiders" intensifies, culminating in his involvement with the Knights of Pottstown. This group aligns itself with the ideologies of the Ku Klux Klan, which only deepens Doc's prejudices and sense of exclusion. His affiliation with such a group highlights his unwillingness to adapt to the changing social fabric of Pottstown, further isolating him from the evolving community around him.

The chapter concludes with Doc reluctantly agreeing to visit Chona, stirred by the complex emotions regarding their shared past and the cultural differences that continue to define their interactions. This visit, charged with the weight of history and personal grievances, sets the stage for deeper exploration of themes like identity, social change, and the intricacies of human relationships in the context of entrenched prejudice. The chapter not only illuminates the personal struggles of Doc but also paints a larger picture of the societal challenges faced by communities as they undergo significant transformations. Through Doc's internal conflict and his journey towards confronting these changes, the story addresses broader issues of race, class, and identity, marking a crucial moment in the narrative.