

# 15. The Worm

Mrs. Fioria Carissimi, mother of Enzo Carissimi, known as "Big Soap," learns about a commotion involving a Jewish storekeeper and a deaf Negro boy from two sources, mainly through gossip in her church group. The story suggests that Jews tried to hide the boy to protect him but ended up calling the police themselves. Discrepancies in the story raise doubts among the community members about its truth.

Fioria, while not too involved in group gossip or city news, finds herself amidst discussions about this incident. She visits her friend Pia, who shares critical views on the situation, including distrust towards a local doctor, hinting at personal grievances.

The narrative then shifts to a deeper community connection surrounding the event, revealing the complexities of living on "the Hill," where rumors, racial tensions, and social politics intertwine. Fioria's interest is partly personal and partly due to her community's involvement, including her son's relationship with the Negro community, especially his friendship with "Fatty," a notable figure within the community.

Fioria confronts her son and Fatty about the incident at the grocery store involving the boy, identified as Dodo, and a Jewish woman named Chona. The discourse reveals that Dodo's mother died after an accident with a stove, leaving him in the care of his aunt and uncle who sought help to avoid state intervention. Amidst the confusion of what happened to Chona, there's an underlying tension involving racial dynamics, police involvement, and community distrust toward certain individuals, particularly the mentioned doctor.

The chapter portrays a microcosm of racism, mistrust, and the blending of truth and rumor within a small-town setting. Fioria's determination to uncover the truth amidst the chaos, coupled with her protective nature over her son and the community's youth, showcases the tangled webs of personal relationships and community dynamics in the face of adversity. As Fioria questions those involved, she uncovers layers of misinformation and concern over the wellbeing of the vulnerable, illustrating the challenges of navigating societal problems within tightly-knit communities.