

4. Dodo

In the cold darkness of Chicken Hill, Addie Timblin anxiously awaits her husband, Nate, while the Pottstown Association of Negro Men fervently discusses the community's needs amidst card games and gossip at her kitchen table. The conversation shifts to Miss Chona, a pivotal but ailing figure in the community, as the men half-heartedly acknowledge the debt they owe her. Addie, distracted, reflects on the echoes of the South in the bonds and disputes of the Hill, symbolized through the spirited back-and-forth about traditions and beliefs.

Nate, known for his silent strength and mysterious past, is a quiet force in Chicken Hill, contrasting with the lively, often frivolous, discussions of the men. His arrival shifts the atmosphere, spotlighting his role as an unwavering pillar of the community, respected beyond the confines of the meeting. Addie reveals that Dodo, a deaf and endearing boy central to Nate's life, has vanished, presumably headed towards Philadelphia, sparking concern and a mobilizing force in Nate that contrasts with the previously passive meeting dynamics.

As Nate contemplates action, Dodo is discovered by the creek, engaged in his own world, detached from the community's worries. This encounter between Nate and Dodo by the creek unfolds with a poignancy that underlines their profound connection. Nate's confrontation reveals Dodo's simple yet poignant mission to create a garden of sunflowers, emblematic of innocence and hope amidst the challenges around him. Despite the boy's recent risky adventure, Nate's response is gentle, aiming to teach rather than punish, illustrating the depth of his understanding and compassion.

The chapter closes with a tender moment between Nate and Dodo, revealing the harsh realities that shadow their lives on Chicken Hill. The crumpled paper, signifying Dodo's mother's death and potential upheaval in his life, symbolizes the fragility and complexities of their existence. Nate's assurance to Dodo encapsulates a vital message of resilience and belonging, dismissing the fear of loss and displacement with the affirmation of an internal haven of love and acceptance within the heart, undiminished by external turmoil.