

9. The Robin and the Sparrow

You are being provided with a book chapter by chapter. I will request you to read the book for me after each chapter. After reading the chapter, 1. shorten the chapter to no less than 300 words and no more than 400 words. 2. Do not change the name, address, or any important nouns in the chapter. 3. Do not translate the original language. 4. Keep the same style as the original chapter, keep it consistent throughout the chapter. Your reply must comply with all four requirements, or it's invalid. I will provide the chapter now.

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The Robin and the Sparrow

The home next door to Chona's Heaven & Earth Grocery Store was occupied by the lovely Bernice Davis, sister of Fatty Davis. Like Fatty, Bernice was related to just about every black person on the Hill. She was second cousin to Earl "Shug" Davis, driver for the vice president of Pottstown Bank; second cousin to Bobby Davis, who once worked as an all-around handyman for Buck Weaver, the great Pottstown baseball player who played for the Chicago White Sox; and also, by dint of a twisted, convoluted intermarriage between her grandfather and his son's stepdaughter, was great-aunt to Mrs. Traffina Davis, the wife of Reverend Sturgess, meaning Bernice was actually twelve years younger than her great-niece. She also served as stepsister to Rusty Davis, the handyman who fixed everything; fourth cousin to Hollis Davis, the Hill's only locksmith; and polished it off by being niece to Chulo Davis, the legendary jazz drummer who left Chicken Hill to play with the famous Harlem Hamfats in Chicago before he was shot dead over a bowl of butter beans.

Bernice was also the proud mother of, at last count, eight children, all of whom looked more or less like Bernice in varying degrees of skin color from light-skinned to dark.

That was not a bad thing. Nor was it a good thing. Everybody knew Bernice had the kind of face that would make a man wire home for money. The question was, who was the man and where was the money?

Chona, supporting herself with a cane, moved to the kitchen sink that afforded a view of the small clapboard house where Bernice lived. She stared out her window for a long time. The two homes had identical plots, shared a fence, and were twenty feet apart. Yet she hadn't seen Bernice face-to-face in years. She got her information about Bernice from Addie, one of the few on the Hill who talked to Bernice, whom Addie described as the "most disagreeable, mean-spirited, face-beating, strangle-mad soul" on the Hill next to Irv and Marv Skrupskelis—for whom Bernice, ironically, worked as a cook, which Chona thought seemed a right pairing, since if one had to choose the most evil, dispiriting, quarrelsome Jews on Chicken Hill, those two were the champions. She'd heard rumors that Bernice had been "tipping" with Irv for decades, then the rumor flipped that it was Bernice and Marv, then back to Irv until Irv got married and ended the rumors, or half of them anyway. No one, not even Nate, ever dared raise the subject of the father of Bernice's children with Bernice. Even Fatty, who loved to talk to anyone, when asked about his sister, said, "I don't ask her no questions. I like breathing."

Chona stared at the house and sighed. In the last fourteen years they had lived as neighbors, she and Bernice had not spoken more than five words to each other.

It hadn't always been that way. When Chona was a little girl, her father and Bernice's father, Shad, had been good friends. Chona's father, Yakov, arrived from Bulgaria in 1917, one of the first Jews in Pottstown. He came as a peddler like many Jews did, with a rucksack full of kitchen utensils, used tools, and homemade devices he'd managed to procure from the Lower East Side, where he landed after being released from Ellis Island with six cents, a tiny mezuzah his mother gave him, and a grapefruit that was handed to him by a kind Negro fruit vendor who saw him crying on Delancey Street and felt sorry for him. Yakov had never seen a grapefruit before. The Negro had to show him how to peel it, and when he bit into it, it was so sour and tangy his eyes filled with even more tears and he realized he must give his life to spreading the Jewish Word lest he end up like this odd American, consigned to doling out fruit that caused weeping. He was a kind and generous chap, a hard worker; and after some months of working in a pants factory for \$1.50 a week and studying the Torah at night, he had amassed a pile of junk, a bit of savings, and a desire to spread the Word. He headed west.

He arrived in Pottstown with a pile of good junk and limited English skills. He sold his junk cheaply but was quickly driven out of business by the town's hardware-store owner, who fetched the local police to run him off Main Street and up into Chicken Hill, where Reb, as he was called, got a job in a tannery with colored workers and then a second job working with livestock with more Negroes. Reb was a cheerful soul, a man of boundless enthusiasm, who believed the Talmud empowered him with the gift of making everyone around him happy and comfortable, including Negroes, whom he saw as fellow immigrants who, like him, were forced by poverty and lack of resources to learn many skills and continually adjust. After saving enough money to send to Europe for his wife, Reb bought an old sewing machine, and at night, the two sewed ready-made coats, pants, and jackets, which he sold to his Negro coworkers at the tannery who wanted nice, cheap clothing for Sunday church. On Sundays he delivered milk in the early morning hours, sold fresh fruit and vegetables in the afternoon, and at night manned the ticket booth of the local ice-skating rink, for while the Pottstown fathers prohibited Jews from skating in their wonderful ice-skating park, they had no issues with the race that murdered their beloved Jesus Christ roasting wonderful, tasty, excellent, marvelous chestnuts that were so popular they ended up on the table of nearly every Protestant household in town during the Christmas holidays, cooked by none other than Reb himself, as he was an excellent cook. "That Jew," one city councilman remarked, "is skilled."

Reb parlayed his skills into six hundred dollars, half of which he used to buy an old icehouse on Chicken Hill where he planned to build a grocery store with an apartment above it to house his family, and the other half to buy an old distillery atop a knob two blocks away for a shul he planned to call Ahavat Achim to service the town's Jewish population, which he prayed would come. In four years, they did. The Jewish population grew from two to ten to seventeen families, stopping at that number when the town's fathers decided through intimidation, clever laws, and outright thievery that seventeen Jewish families were enough. Even though Congress was beginning to pass immigration quotas into law, the seventeen

Jewish families, German, Polish, and one Lithuanian, decided to stay. The groups did not get along. The Germans and Poles despised one another, and all feared the head of the sole Lithuanian family, Norman Skrupskelis, a thick, barrel-chested man of dangerous silences who rarely ventured outside his home, a modest brick house that sat between a pig pen on one side and a ramshackle house on the other. The rumor was that Norman's wife kept him in a cage and let him out only for Yom Kippur, the day of atonement, at which time he would emerge, walk to Reb's icehouse-turned-temporary-shul, pray for a few minutes, then disappear back into his basement, where he expertly crafted wonderful stylish shoes that his wife sold to a local shoe merchant for a fat fee. Norman Skrupskelis's shoes were extraordinary works of art, as comfortable as they were stylish. In later years, his sons Irv and Marv inherited his expert shoemaking ability and opened a store, though both had inherited his personality. Only Irv was temperate enough to manage sales in the store itself—so long as you didn't bring the merchandise back. Skrup Shoes, as they were called, were nonreturnable.

REB FLOHR'S FIRST job was to build his house. He liked to joke that the birth of the shul had as much to do with the birth of his house as it had to do with G-d's will, but the truth was, the actual construction of Reb's house required skills that he did not possess at the time. Muscle. Measurements. Bricks. Wood. And men. Men who could lift and haul things up the steep slopes of the Hill, muddy and unmanageable after every summer rain, cold and unforgiving after every snowstorm. He had no one to help him after he saved his six hundred dollars with plans to build his house and a shul, so Reb hired four Negroes and a fellow coworker from the tannery named Shad Davis, who owned a fat thousand-pound mule named Thunder. Shad lived in an old shack next door to the icehouse where Reb planned to build his store, and Reb noticed that the colored man had done a nice job transforming his old shack. Shad was a mild, neatly attired Negro who, unlike other Negroes on the Hill, avoided coveralls and farmers' clothing, preferring a gentleman's jacket, a tattered homburg, and leather shoes no matter what the job. How he managed to keep his battered coat and hat clean was, Reb thought, a tiny miracle, but then again, the soft-spoken Shad turned out to be the greatest stonemason Reb had ever seen. Shad could look at a plot of land and smell the cracks in the earth beneath it. He could hold a small boulder in his hand, balance it, measure its weight as he held it, and decide where the stone would sit, how much mortar it would need, and in what position it must lie in order to support hundreds of pounds of brick and mortar above it. He and his crew of Negroes built Reb's three-story house, complete with the Heaven & Earth Grocery Store on the first floor, in five weeks.

After the seventeen families arrived and decided to build the shul, Reb suggested that Shad be put in charge of directing the building of their first-ever temple. But the congregation, led by the Germans who always clambered for respectability among the town's white Christian natives, howled their disapproval. They insisted that a young, newly arrived architect be engaged for the design and build, since he was educated at one of America's great universities. Reb reluctantly agreed. After collecting \$1,700, which represented the entirety of the congregation's building fund, the architect, a serious young man with a handlebar mustache, clad in fancy knee-high rubber boots, a handsome bowler, and a sheepskin coat, marched to the top of the muddy slopes of Chicken Hill and stood atop the appointed

knob of land. He cast an arrogant gaze about the muddy slopes below, the churning yards filled with chickens, pigs, and goats, the open sewage ditches, the Negroes wandering about, then tromped back down the hill to town, whereupon he disappeared into his office, drew a few sketches, passed them on to a local construction crew along with three hundred dollars, pocketed the remaining balance of his fee, and departed Pottstown for points unknown. He was never seen again.

The construction crew started the project. and when the money ran out a month later, they quit. Three months later, the half-built structure collapsed. Now, with their beloved shul a pile of rubble—some of which was marble, having come from a stone quarry in Carrara, Italy, and bought at a ridiculous price by Norman Skrupskelis, since it was to be used for the women's mikvah to be named in honor of his late mother, Yvette Hurlbutt Nezefky Skrupskelis, whom no one had ever seen since she died in Europe in a town whose name was so complex that the Germans called it Thumb-in-Your-Nose—the congregation faced its first real crisis. Their building fund was depleted. To raise another \$1,700 among the seventeen families, who were shopkeepers, railroad workers, and laborers, was impossible. Even worse, Norman Skrupskelis had contributed nearly a third of the initial building fund in addition to contributing the wonderful Torah scroll, which he'd taken great pains to bring from Europe.

The thought of an angry Norman Skrupskelis having six hundred of his precious dollars wasted in a bungled construction project was more frightening than the idea of G-d raining his fury down on Moses and not allowing him to enter the land of Israel. "If I had a choice between being Moses or myself right now," the head of the chevry confessed to Reb Flohr, "I'd choose Moses." The congregation scrambled, calling friends and relatives in Reading, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and even Vermont, reminding their lundsmen of the wonderful part of the kaddish prayer that reads "Let His great name be blessed for ever and ever and to all eternity," and also pointing out that a crazy Lithuanian among them had sunk six hundred smackers into a deal that had melted away and was a cyclops who would clobber all within range if he should find out. With their help, the shul hastily plucked another \$350 from its ass and offered it to Reb, saying, "You're the boss. Get moving."

It was then that Reb summoned Shad. The slim colored man climbed to the top of the knoll, leading Thunder and a wagon full of stone. He stood amid the splintered wood, shattered walls, and crushed stone, and peered silently about, removing his bowler hat to block the blaring sunlight and raising his hand over his face. Finally, he pointed to a corner of the splintered ruin. "The north is this way here. Your stone has got to come to the edge. All the way to the end. Run that stone along the edge, shorten it by ten feet on the south side this way, bring it farther along west by about six feet, and you'll have your wall and it'll hold. Then your windows will still face the east where the sun comes up, and you'll have your building."

Reb, with the congregation's relief money in his pocket, agreed, cut a quiet deal with Shad for the entire \$350, and when the cornerstone of Ahavat Achim was laid again a month later, it was laid by Shad Davis. It was an odd friendship, for Shad, as far as Reb could determine, was neither deeply religious nor overly friendly to anyone, including his own people. And while he built wonderful homes of solid brick and stone for others, he barely maintained his ramshackle house that stood next to Reb's Heaven & Earth Grocery Store. The home was built of neither brick nor

stone. It was mostly wood and metal. It housed Shad, a wife named Lulu, who rarely spoke to anyone, and two silent, respectful children. Their two yards adjoined, the parcels matching exactly, stretching for nearly an acre all the way back to Manatawny Creek, but the similarities ended there. Reb's yard bore supplies, barrels, a cow, and several chickens for kosher purposes. Shad's yard remained bare, save for his mule, Thunder, and a few vegetables his wife grew. The men rarely talked outside of work, for Reb had learned that in America, what a man does to live often has nothing to do with how he lives. Besides, Shad's genius for building the shul attracted plenty of business from the town's Jewish residents, who applied Shad to the job of fixing up the ramshackle houses they purchased closer to town with brick, stone, and mortar as soon as they could afford to move off the Hill.

Reb believed the genius builder was likely a drinker or gambler until he learned from his wife, who chatted with Shad's wife, that Shad Davis had no long-term plans to stay on Chicken Hill. He was saving every penny to move to Philadelphia, to educate his young children there, then send them to Lincoln University, a Negro college in Oxford, Pa., or perhaps even to Oberlin College in Ohio, the first white university in America to open its doors to the Negro. Reb respected those aspirations. They lined up with Reb's belief that in America, anything was possible, and that Shad, a man of fullness, purpose, and talent, whose word was his bond, deserved the best of what the nation had to offer.

Alas, none of his dreams would come to pass.

SOON AFTER HE built the shul, Shad fell ill and died, devastating Shad's family. Reb assumed that Shad's savings would cover his family, at least for a little while, since Shad rarely spent money to fix his ramshackle home. But according to his wife, Shad was suspicious of banks and had placed his faith in a financial advisor who turned out to be as shady and fleet-footed as the shul's first architect. The man vanished right after Shad died, leaving the careful builder's family broke.

It was only because of the two men's friendship that Shad's family survived, for Reb grew accustomed to looking the other way as his wife slipped bread, milk, and butter from his store over to Shad's widow. And when the strangely odd Marv Skrupskelis, son of Norman Skrupskelis, appeared over at the Davis residence to do odd jobs for Shad's widow, and occasionally trailing Shad's daughter, Bernice, about the yard, Reb chose not to speculate, for children were children.

As it was, the families would have likely drifted apart altogether were it not for Chona, who, despite having contracted polio at age four, was an active child and a handful. Getting her to school was a challenge from the first, because Chona at age six refused to ride in any vehicle, wagon, or wheelchair, or in the bed of the ancient truck Reb had purchased for his grocery business. She preferred to walk to school like the other children of Chicken Hill, and since Pottstown's schools were integrated with whites and a scattering of Negroes, Shad's two children, Bernice and Fatty, would find themselves appended by the cute six-year-old Jewish girl in a dark skirt with curly hair that framed her oval face, limping along behind them as they descended the Hill toward the town's brick schoolhouse.

At age nine, Fatty couldn't be bothered with another girl pattering along behind him. He couldn't stand his sister as it was. But Bernice was dying for a little sister. The two girls started first grade together despite the fact

that Bernice was a year older. On their first walk to school, Chona announced that Bernice was too tall to be in first grade. Bernice took the insult in silence, but the two cemented their friendship that afternoon when the teacher sat behind the piano and played "Polly Parrot Ate the Carrot," a popular children's ditty. She called each student to the front of the class and played the song, demanding that each child sing. If the child sang, she labeled them a robin. If they didn't, they were a sparrow.

Chona became a robin easily, hopping to the front of the class and singing in a clear, strong voice. But Bernice, the only black face in the class, when summoned, refused to sing.

"You're a sparrow," the teacher announced. "Sit."

Chona watched, stunned, as Bernice moved back to her seat. They were neighbors. They overheard each other's lives: the arguments, the chairs scraping across the kitchen floor, the creaking porch steps, the slamming doors. The one constant Chona loved was the sound of Bernice's voice. At home, Bernice sang like a bird. She had a gorgeous, soaring, beautiful soprano, a sorrowful sound full of sadness and longing. Bernice sang everywhere, in the yard as she weeded her mother's garden, on the porch as she swept, during the afternoons as she picked through the vegetables at the Heaven & Earth Grocery Store for her mother, her voice so clear and angelic that when Chona walked by the Second Baptist church on Sundays with her mother, they would pause just to hear Bernice's voice soaring out above the rest, stronger and more beautiful than ever.

When Bernice sat down, Chona piped up, "Bernie's not a sparrow. She's a robin."

The comment drew chortles from the class and a trip to the principal's office for both of them for speaking out of turn. That afternoon, as the two slowly made their walk home, Chona tried to raise the matter again.

"You're not a sparrow, Bernice. You're a robin." But Bernice was sullen and silent.

Chona realized, for the first time, that Bernice was like the twins at shul, Irv and Marvin. Their father, Mr. Norman, who had made her special boot so carefully, was the same way. They were bottled up inside. There was something that was closed. She realized, looking at Bernice, that something inside her had turned off in some kind of way, like a water fixture closed tightly or a lamp that refused to light. But at age six, Chona couldn't express what it was. Instead, she grasped Bernice's hand and said, "I like flowers better than birds." She received a small smile in return.

Over time, the space between them lessened. Chona showed Bernice how to play pinochle, which she learned from watching her father play with the other Jewish men in the back of the store, how to crochet with her left hand or her right, and how to negotiate a flight of stairs quickly by sliding down the banister, her feet not touching the steps. Bernice taught Chona how to make thick wool quilts that kept the cold out and how to grow parsley and greens and all manner of vegetables in her backyard. The two girls grew close.

Their relationship lasted all the way through high school as they shadowed each other, for neither joined any club or sport. They had to work at home. When both were assigned to make a dress for home economics, Chona dusted off her father's old sewing machine in the basement, a leftover from his days when he first arrived in Pottstown, and taught Bernice how to do French stitching, doing the first stitch on one side, turning it over, and doing the stitching again on the other. They worked on

Chona's dress first, then Bernice's. "I'll do the first row on the machine," Chona announced, "you do the second."

They worked on each other's dresses and were delighted by the results.

On the day of the exam, they brought them to school and proudly placed them on a table piled with dresses made by the other students. Chona had made a purple dress with azaleas; Bernice, a black dress with yellow daisies.

Their teacher, a gray-haired, pinch-faced soul who always wore black, held up each dress, examining each one and remarking about the handiwork.

When she reached Chona's dress, she was satisfied. But when she picked up Bernice's dress, which was clearly the most beautiful dress of the bunch, she summoned Bernice to the front of the class.

Bernice complied, her eyes blinking in embarrassment. The tall, lean girl glided to the front of the classroom and stood before the teacher at her desk. The teacher held up Bernice's dress and said, "This is not the stitch I told you to use," and ripped at the back stitching, tearing it apart.

As they walked home after school, Chona said, "I'll teach you another stitch. I have a better one." But Bernice said nothing. She glared at Chona in a way that Chona had never seen before.

"You made me do the wrong stitch," she said.

Before Chona could remind her that she had also used French stitching and that she didn't know why the teacher did not point that out, since both dresses were stitched identically, Bernice did something that she had never done in all the years they had known each other.

She picked up her pace and simply walked faster, leaving Chona behind.

The next day, when Chona emerged from her house to join the brood of black schoolkids trooping down the Hill to school, Bernice wasn't there. Bernice did not return to school that day. Or the next. Or ever. She stayed inside, rarely appearing.

For Chona, the day Bernice Davis closed off the world was the beginning of her own adulthood, for the realization that lay before her had begun to clamp down on her and she could see Chicken Hill and the town for what they really were. She began to have opinions about what lay ahead, and to see the limitations of her own life, too. Her mother wanted her to marry a young Orthodox Jew from Reading she'd found. He was nice enough, a short, dour Pole who was in line to inherit his father's shoe store and was gentle in manner and seemed open to new ideas. But he had a habit of sucking his teeth that she found off-putting, and after having dinner with him once, decided he was horrible and avoided meeting him again. She saw the broken marriages of the town's Jewish community—the miserable housewives, the frustrated husbands; she noted the ragged disputes among the tiny Jewish populace dominated by the German-born Jews who strained their necks to peek over the shoulders of their Christian counterparts, holding their noses in their social service agencies and snobby organizations, looking down their noses at their Yiddish-speaking lundsmen from the European provinces, sending money, secondhand clothes, secondhand advice—in English, no Yiddish allowed. Sending everything but love. She had dreamed of leaving Chicken Hill after graduating from high school and even had a few tentative plans in that direction, but when Moshe wandered into her father's basement and walked love into her life, he changed everything. Here was a man who wanted her to be full, who never blocked the entrance to the doors of knowledge and growth and

passion and life's reckoning, who brought her books and records and music. When she married him, she forgot about Bernice and the Davises who lived next door, for life took over. Her mother died two years after she married; her father departed for Reading and a bigger shul; and the challenges of propping up her mild husband so that he might not follow the rest of the Jews in town into obscurity took over, followed by her own illness, which swallowed the whole world. She had her own life and no children to show for it. Other than a hasty nod to Bernice, whose increasing brood of lovely children passed through her store and were quiet, beautiful shadows like their mother, and an occasional laugh with Bernice's brother, Fatty, who never changed, Chona had no room to see to Bernice's life. How Bernice procured her children, with whom, why she had so many, or the manner in which she led her life, Chona never inquired. Her own life was full, yet she felt incomplete. She had no children. Bernice, on the other hand, had plenty. Bernice was rich with children, yet she had blamed Chona for her French-stitched dress anyway, which was not true. The whole business was too complicated and too old, like the overgrown roots of an ancient tree. But now she had a problem.

Chona had her own child now. He wasn't hers, but he was the closest thing to one. For the past four months, the deaf boy, Dodo, had been a dream. It didn't matter what the other congregants in the shul called him when she wasn't around. He'd come as a matter of conscience but now was a matter of love. He was smart. Sensitive. He saw things other people didn't. Even without his hearing, he understood everything. He was sharp. Bright. And necessary. For years she'd prayed for children, and when none came, she had accepted it as part of life. She'd spend hours reading about politics and socialism and change in places like New York, the wild world of Emma Goldman and progressive Jews, anarchists, troublemakers, union builders, and pacifists who shoved aside the constraints placed upon them to demand the same fullness of American life that others received—Jews who tried, in their own way, to bring light to the world. Isn't that what Judaism should do, bring light and reflection between cultures? All that high-handed talk of Judaism had seemed increasingly useless and distant as she grew older until it folded neatly into the sunshine reality that had arrived in the form of Dodo. The boy brought his own kind of light. She set him up in the back room of the store where she had frequently lain during her illnesses, and he brought light into the dark room in a way that vanquished pain from her memory. The silent, morose child who'd first arrived brought life anew. He was a spark, a whiz. He was there in the morning when she awoke. He wandered into her bedroom to say good night. He was twelve and learning his all-boy things out of sight of others; he drew pictures, played with balloons, and read comic books in his room. He fished in the creek at night. He cleaned the store after-hours. He was remarkably aware for someone who had no hearing. He read lips expertly. He collected bottle caps and marbles, loved jelly apples and roasted chestnuts, and found Chona's father's accordion and played it terribly in the basement. He littered her kitchen with peach pits. On Sabbaths, he was there in the morning when she awoke, having doused the lights the evening before and lit the stove the next morning. He couldn't sit still. As she and Moshe read quietly upstairs, the noise of banging and clattering emerged from the room behind the store where he slept that was equipped with a sink and wood stove. On other nights, Chona would wander down, turn on the light, and find the room a junkyard of joy, complete with mops used as

broomsticks, old comic books, chalk, rocks, arrowheads, and wires. From the overhead fan, he hung flying contraptions that dangled on wires and spun in circles. In four months, he had become a living embodiment of l'chaim, a toast to life. A boy. A boy living a life. Something she'd wanted and prayed for ever since she was a girl. Who cared that he was Negro. He was hers!

And he responded. She had no idea how easy it would be. She never had to tell him to do anything twice. Brush teeth. Comb hair. Wash face. Hang laundry. Stack shelves. He loved chocolate. She had to force herself not to give him too much. Each day he would sweep and clean and work with such force and focus that she'd have to slow him down, and then, at the end of the week, he'd appear at the back of the store after closing and hold forth his hand containing a marble, indicating that he'd like to use that to pay for his piece of chocolate. It was a game she played with several neighborhood children. They would come into the store hungry, eyeing a can of pea soup, and ask, "How much does that cost?" at which point Chona would say,

"How much do you have?"

"I only have a red marble."

"Do you have any green marbles?"

"I might have one at home."

"Okay. Take the soup and go home and bring me the green marble tomorrow, and I'll decide if that's the one I want."

The next day the child would bring in a red marble. And she would say, "No, that's not the one. I don't like the color. I want a blue marble." So the child would disappear and return the next day with a blue marble. Then a green one. Until the week passed and the marble was forgotten and the kid would come in the next week asking for a certain vegetable or a box of crackers and pay with the wrong color marble, and the game would begin again.

Back and forth it went, sometimes for weeks. There were several marble kids, and Dodo became one of them, joining her Marble Choir. She never gave in, never gave him too much chocolate. But she gave him enough. A red marble for a piece of chocolate here. A blue marble for a piece of chocolate there. The marbles she accumulated from the neighborhood kids she kept in a jar. The pile of marbles in the jar would diminish mysteriously, and a week later, the same marble would appear in a child's hand. She never minded. She understood. She loved Dodo's generosity. He was a simple child of love, easy to satisfy, easy to give.

She knew, even from the beginning, that the dream was not meant to last. She had not meant to love him so much. It was only shelter they were providing, a respite for the ever-loyal Nate and Addie and Addie's late sister, Thelma, who at times had helped nurse Chona during her many sick periods. But now, four months into keeping Dodo safe, the man from the state had discovered the boy's whereabouts. She knew the man faintly—Carl Boydkins. They were close in age. They'd attended the local high school at the same time. She recalled he'd been an athlete of some kind—football maybe. And that he, like most of her classmates, was not particularly fond of Jews. He was from one of the farming families that lost out by not selling when the big steel companies bought several thousand acres near the Manatawny. It had not worked out for those families that stayed.

So when Carl Boydkins came into the store asking questions, she'd tried to be pleasant. But he was in no mood for it. He made a few remarks about

breaking the law and harboring fugitives. She was thankful that Moshe had not been there when the man appeared, because Moshe would've turned Dodo over instantly. Moshe was afraid of the authorities. But Moshe didn't know. Not yet. He would, though. The news about the two men that the state, first Carl Boydkins and now the Negro man, had sent to the store to find Dodo would pass quickly from Addie to Nate, and from Nate, it would pass to Moshe.

That's why she needed Bernice. Bernice had all those children—eight at last count. They looked like the colors of the rainbow, from light to dark, tall to short. How she got them, and who their fathers were, was not Chona's business. But none of Bernice's kids looked alike—they were all Negro-looking, and that was good enough.

Chona turned away from the window, cane in hand, and walked slowly to the front door of the store. Addie was behind the counter. Dodo was standing on a milk crate, stacking boxes of crackers onto shelves. She raised her walking stick in the air at him to get his attention. When he looked over, she said, "Come with me."