

15. The Worm

In Chapter 15, titled "The Worm," Mrs. Fioria Carissimi learns about a tumultuous event involving a Jewish storekeeper and a deaf Negro boy, Dodo, from Vivana Agnello, president of the Volunteer Women's Association. Vivana spread a startling rumor that the Jewish family had hidden the boy to extort money from the locals but still called the police on him. Fioria's indifference towards Vivana's gossip highlights her pragmatic nature; she is less concerned with the scandal than with maintaining her relationships and stability within her community. Her conflict with Vivana stems from the latter's condemnation of a fellow Italian, Eugenio Fabicelli, whom she accused of making a poor business decision.

During a visit with Pia, her friend and fellow Sicilian, Fioria discusses the incident involving the boy. Pia expresses frustration about hiding children in their impoverished community, while Fioria provides some details she has gathered. The conversation hints at Pia's troubled relationship with her husband, Matteo, and a growing tension regarding Doc Roberts, implying potentially troubling ties.

Fioria's maternal instincts are highlighted as she worries about the possibility of her son, Enzo, getting involved in the chaotic events unfolding in their neighborhood. Enzo's closeness with Fatty, the town's notorious Negro, raises alarms for Fioria, prompting her to intervene after learning that the police were involved in a disturbance at the store linked to Dodo. As she marches to confront Enzo, she adopts authoritative Italian tones, demanding he refrain from meddling with the police—an admonition reflecting her desire to protect him from future troubles.

The narrative shifts as Fioria confronts the group gathered at Fatty's jook joint, where the mood transforms as she questions her son about the scandal. The scene blends humor with tension, while Fioria chastises Enzo, translating her fears and frustrations across cultural divides. Fatty, witnessing the interaction, becomes increasingly concerned about the precarious balance of their precarious community, especially as gossip and rumors swirl around the incident at the Heaven & Earth Grocery Store.

Ultimately, the chapter encapsulates the intersections of community, motherhood, and the complexities of societal disputes, focusing on Fioria's protective nature amidst the chaos surrounding Dodo and the possible repercussions it could have for her son.