

20. The Antes House

In the chapter "The Antes House," we follow Gus Plitzka, the chairman of the Pottstown city council, who dreads Memorial Day due to its association with the John Antes Historical Society's Cornet Marching Band. The yearly events include the council meeting followed by the band performance, breakfast with German sausages, and a parade featuring council members dressed as Revolutionary soldiers. This gathering honors John Antes, Pottstown's little-known composer whose controversial life was a mix of achievements and misconduct.

The celebration culminates at the Antes House, a dilapidated historical site that serves as a haven for the town's more unsavory characters. For the rest of the year, it hosts a diverse crowd—from runaways to revelers, all who vanish a week before Memorial Day for preparations that include cleaning and refurbishing the house.

Plitzka reflects on his new role as the owner of Clover Dairy but is secretly burdened by a debt to a mobster named Nig Rosen. Despite participating as a parade marshal, he is preoccupied with financial woes related to his loan, which has become a crippling, anxiety-filled obligation instead of a step up in life.

As the chapter unfolds, Plitzka seeks assistance from Doc Roberts, a fellow council member and member of the marching band, to address his physical ailments, specifically a painful toe. Their tense interactions reveal mutual disdain, as both men have past grievances against each other, stemming from class and political differences.

They discuss the community, including the growing presence of Black residents in Pottstown, bringing uncomfortable tensions and underlying racial discrimination to the forefront. Plitzka makes disparaging remarks about the Black community, while Doc expresses discontent with the conditions they endure.

Amidst their exchanges, which reveal both their characters and societal issues, they explore the implications of their roles within the council and community, highlighting divisions, political maneuvering, and ethical questions surrounding their lives and histories, further complicating their already strained relationship. The chapter captures the essence of small-town politics interwoven with personal struggles and societal attitudes, ultimately setting the stage for larger themes to unfold.