

9. The Robin and the Sparrow

In chapter 9, titled "The Robin and the Sparrow" from **The Heaven & Earth Grocery Store**, the narrative unfolds around Chona, who runs a grocery store beside Bernice Davis's house. Bernice is a complex character, tied to numerous families in their predominantly black community on Chicken Hill. Chona, who is married to Moshe, reflects on her relationship with Bernice, which has grown distant over the years despite their shared history. Chona recalls Bernice's familial ties, beauty, and the fact that she is a mother of eight children, while also noting the rumors of Bernice's connections with the men she worked for, Irv and Marv Skrupskelis.

Chona's past memories reveal a close friendship with Bernice from childhood marked by moments of joy, such as singing and sewing clothes together. However, the friendship dwindled when Bernice, impacted by societal prejudices, began to retreat into herself, leading to an eventual rift between them. As they grew older, stressors from their opposing environments often left Chona pensive about the nature of their relationship. Chona observes the world around her, absorbing the struggles of the Jewish community, her own family's dynamics, and especially Bernice's difficulties.

Amid her contemplations, Chona finds herself caring for Dodo, a deaf boy who has become a significant part of her life—a source of joy and reflection on her desire for children. As Chona faces the possibility of Dodo being taken away by the state, she reaches out to Bernice for help, despite their long silence. Bernice immediately offers her support, suggesting Chona hide Dodo in her yard, highlighting the unspoken bond that still exists between the two women.

The chapter eloquently captures themes of friendship, community ties, and the struggle against systemic issues, as underlying tensions from the past resonate deeply with both women as Chona seeks Bernice's assistance in her moment of desperation. Bernice's cold exterior belies an inner wisdom that is called upon again, reflecting the complexities of their intertwined lives.