

Chapter XXXVI

In Chapter XXXVI, the family gathers around Poppa's hospital bed, a somber scene filled with anxiety and love. Poppa appears unrecognizable, with his bald head wrapped in bandages and numerous medical devices connected to him. Each family member holds onto someone else's hand as they inch closer to him. The atmosphere is heavy; the protagonist struggles to breathe and fears her emotions might spill over as tears.

Grandpa Bomba tries unsuccessfully to open a jar, and Rocket helps him, letting out the familiar love song of Momma and Poppa. The protagonist tenderly touches Poppa's face and reflects on the contrast between Poppa's situation and that of a homeless man she once saw, who had no one to care for him. As she recalls Poppa's faded tattoo of a mermaid – Miss Mermaid – she feels a desperate longing to connect with him and hear his thoughts.

Despite her attempts to listen for the mermaid's voice or any sign from Poppa, there is silence, amplifying the sense of hopelessness. Fish and Samson rely on her to glean any insight, yet she's unable to hear anything encouraging. Fish eventually walks out, followed by Momma, leaving the protagonist listening to the relentless beeping of machines.

In a moment of whispered encouragement, she reassures Poppa that he has a "savvy," emphasizing his fighting spirit. As she expresses her love and wishes for his recovery, faint signs of response begin to emerge from Poppa. The room erupts in commotion as alarms sound and machines go haywire, signaling a crisis. Despite the chaos, she persists in speaking to him, urging him to wake up and come home to fulfill promises like building a porch swing.

As Poppa's fingers twitch and his eyes flutter open in response to her voice, a wave of hope floods the room, signaling that all might be well again. The chapter concludes on a hopeful note, connecting love, family, and the magic of belief in moments of despair.