

Chapter 5: The Stranger

Chapter 5: The Stranger opens with Moshe sitting anxiously beside his wife Chona, who is resting in bed, gravely ill. Early in the morning, a knock at the door disturbs the stillness of the room, exacerbating his worries. His mind is clouded with concern over her deteriorating health, but the disturbance is compounded when Addie informs him of a visitor—a man who recently purchased Mr. Fabicelli's bakery. She mentions that the man wants to talk about "hollers," a term Moshe mishears and finds puzzling. His frustration with the interruption grows as he tries to manage his emotions and prioritize his wife's condition. Still, Addie insists that the man is persistent, having visited several times, which only deepens Moshe's irritation.

Moshe, overwhelmed by the situation, directs Addie to send the visitor away, but she refuses, urging him to at least meet the man. This interaction causes Moshe to reflect on his role in the household. Throughout their marriage, Chona and Addie have always been the caretakers, while he has been more of a passive participant, relying on their support. With his wife's illness taking center stage, Moshe finds himself unprepared to step up and make decisions. His hesitation increases as he contemplates how he might handle the situation if Chona were to wake up while he was downstairs. The weight of the responsibility settles heavily on him, causing an internal conflict between his duty as a husband and his discomfort with confrontation.

Finally, Moshe decides to face the visitor. When he opens the door, he encounters a small, stout man with a thin mustache and mischievous eyes, who immediately asserts that he needs flour for making challah bread. The man insists that Moshe had previously suggested he come for the flour, a statement that adds to Moshe's growing frustration. The tension escalates when Moshe attempts to close the door, but the stranger holds it open, refusing to leave. At this point, Moshe feels the burden of exhaustion and helplessness, wishing for the strength to deal with this man or for the

support of family or friends. However, the stranger is persistent, creating a conflict that pushes Moshe further into discomfort. As the encounter becomes more physical, the atmosphere in the room shifts, with Moshe overwhelmed by a sense of powerlessness in dealing with the stranger's boldness.

As the conversation unfolds, the man introduces himself as a dancer, boldly claiming that Moshe had once encouraged him to attend a dance. He explains his need for the floor but seems more focused on establishing a connection with Moshe. Moshe, distracted by the pressing concern for his wife's health, tries to steer the conversation to a subject closer to his heart, talking about his wife's condition in the hopes of redirecting the interaction. Yet the man persists, extending an offer of friendship and sharing that he has recently found a wife. Moshe, unmoved by this revelation, responds with indifference, still consumed by his own worries. He cannot find the energy to care about the stranger's personal life in the midst of his own family's crisis. The conversation reflects a disconnect between the two men, with Moshe's priorities firmly anchored in the health and well-being of his wife.

As Moshe continues to engage with the stranger, a memory is triggered. He recalls their first encounter at the theater, which helps him piece together who this persistent visitor is. The man's true identity is revealed as Malachi, a dancer whom Moshe once knew. This recognition brings back a wave of warmth and nostalgia, evoking memories of their shared history and past camaraderie. The presence of Malachi, though initially irritating, becomes a potential opportunity for reconnecting with an old acquaintance. The chapter subtly hints at the possibility of rebuilding a relationship rooted in mutual understanding and shared cultural heritage. Moshe's reaction to Malachi sets the stage for a deeper exploration of identity, connections, and the role of history in shaping one's present relationships.

Through this encounter, the chapter highlights the tension between personal struggles and the broader context of community ties. Moshe's internal conflict between his role as a caregiver for his wife and his dealings with the stranger illustrates the emotional complexity of navigating responsibilities. The themes of memory, identity, and human

connection are woven throughout, showing how even the most unlikely interactions can spark moments of introspection and change. The unexpected visitor, Malachi, serves as a catalyst for Moshe to reflect on his past, reminding him of the bonds that once defined him. Ultimately, the chapter builds on the idea that relationships, whether strained or long-standing, carry the potential for reconciliation and renewal. Through Malachi, Moshe is confronted not only with his past but also with the possibility of moving forward amidst the challenges he faces.

