

## Chapter 18: The Hot Dog

Chapter 18: The Hot Dog begins with Chona waking up in her hospital bed after a week of recovery from a brutal assault. The room is filled with an unsettling silence, but in her mind, the comforting words of the prayer Barukh She'amar begin to play, creating a sense of peace. These sacred words, familiar from her childhood, bring with them a feeling of light and hope, and they evoke memories of her father's love for her. The memories flood her, giving her a moment of solace as she recalls the deep bond they once shared. However, as this peaceful reverie continues, a harsh realization begins to settle within her: Chona knows that she is nearing the end of her life. The understanding is profound and undeniable, and she knows that she must communicate this to Moshe, her husband. This realization creates an overwhelming weight in her chest, and she feels the urgent need to share her truth with him before it is too late.

As she lies there in a haze of memories, a sudden and strange aroma fills the air. She distinctly smells a hot dog, a scent that immediately transports her to a happier time, reminding her of an adventure with her friend Bernice. The memory of that simpler time, full of carefree laughter and shared joy, floods her senses. But as the pleasant recollection starts to settle, it is cruelly interrupted by a sharp, searing pain that pulls her back to the present. She is no longer able to escape the reality of her illness, and the moment of nostalgia quickly dissipates. Looking around the sterile hospital room, her gaze lands on Moshe, who is asleep in a chair beside her bed. His face is pale, his exhaustion apparent. Seeing him like this fills her with guilt, and she begins to reflect on their years together. Chona regrets the times when she had criticized Moshe and distanced herself from the simple joys of life, consumed by her own struggles. The overwhelming pain in her stomach intensifies, and she wishes she could push away the lingering smell of the hot dog, hoping it might give her a brief reprieve from her emotional and physical torment. This moment of reflection, coupled with the harsh

reality of her situation, prompts her to reach out to Moshe.

The room fills with the presence of familiar faces, but Chona feels a heavy absence—the absence of Dodo, who has been on her mind since the assault. She is overwhelmed by guilt, not only for the toll her condition has taken on Moshe but also for the distance between her and the people she loves. Her struggles have strained those relationships, and it weighs on her that she may have failed them. She attempts to speak but struggles, only managing to utter a light-hearted remark about Bernice enjoying the hot dog. Yet, in the next instant, she realizes how painful this comment is, both for herself and for the people around her. Despite her body wracked with pain, Chona finds herself sharing a moment of laughter with Bernice, but it is fleeting. The laughter, which represents a brief escape from her suffering, is soon overshadowed by the intense agony that pulls her back into unconsciousness. Her longing for peace grows stronger, and she wonders if she will ever be free from the pain that now defines her existence.

Meanwhile, Rabbi Feldman's voice rises in the background, softly reciting the Mi Shebeirach prayer for healing. The words bring a sense of reverence to the air, even as Moshe, emotionally exhausted, requests that the visitors leave the room to allow him some privacy with Chona. Outside, a small group of well-wishers has gathered, each of them weighed down by their own fears and anxieties. Their conversations, though muted, offer insights into the tight-knit nature of the community, particularly when they discuss the synagogue that Chona's father had once built. The synagogue, a symbol of faith and perseverance, is a constant in the lives of those who have been part of this community for so long. However, the mood outside the room is one of palpable discomfort as the group waits for news, unsure of what the next moments will bring. The tension in the air heightens when a sudden, grief-stricken cry from Moshe echoes down the hall, piercing the silence. The sound of his pain prompts a collective movement toward Chona's room, as the weight of the moment draws them all together in shared sorrow.

The chapter closes with an overwhelming sense of finality as the group moves toward Chona's room, their footsteps heavy with the knowledge that the future is uncertain. The rich history of their community, built through years of shared struggles and triumphs, now hangs in the balance. As they confront the potential loss of Chona, the characters are reminded of the painful history of their ancestors and the trials they faced. The weight of these collective memories adds another layer to the emotional complexity of the moment, as the community is forced to grapple with the realities of life and death. The tension between the future and the past, between personal loss and communal history, makes for a somber conclusion to the chapter, leaving the reader to reflect on the impact of Chona's legacy and the uncertain road ahead.