

Chapter 5: The Stranger

Chapter 5: The Stranger opens in the quiet, early hours of the morning, when Moshe is roused from his sleep by a persistent and mysterious visitor at his door. The time is late, and the world outside is still wrapped in darkness, yet this unexpected knock interrupts the tranquility of the household. Inside, Moshe and Addie, the housemaid, are consumed with the task of caring for Moshe's sick wife, Chona. She has been bedridden for days, and her condition weighs heavily on both of them. The urgency of the situation and the demands of looking after Chona make Moshe reluctant to attend to any outside disturbances, but the visitor's persistence makes it impossible to ignore. Addie, clearly irritated by the intrusion, informs Moshe of the visitor's presence, knowing that the matter is important enough to warrant his attention despite the late hour.

When Moshe finally opens the door, he finds himself face-to-face with a small, stout Jewish man who, to Moshe's surprise, claims that he has come to ask for kosher flour. He wants to make challah bread, something Moshe finds odd at this hour, considering the circumstances. At first, Moshe rebuffs him, unsure why the visitor has arrived at such an inconvenient time with such a trivial request. However, as the conversation begins to unfold, the stranger's story becomes more intriguing. The man introduces himself as Malachi, and through his words, it becomes clear that he's not merely seeking flour for baking. He reveals that his visit is motivated by a much deeper connection to Moshe and his past. Malachi tells Moshe that it was during a memorable event at Moshe's theater—a dance that Moshe had organized for the Jewish community—that his life was forever changed. This dance, which symbolized unity and joy among the Jewish people, had inspired Malachi to find a wife. He now seeks Moshe's help, not only for the flour but also to rekindle a connection that was sparked years ago in that moment of celebration.

As Moshe listens to the stranger's tale, emotions begin to stir within him, reminding him of a time in his life that he had long since put behind him. The dance, an event filled with joy and communal spirit, had been a symbol of hope, connection, and prosperity in their tight-knit Jewish community. In the present, Moshe's life has changed dramatically. He is now burdened by the care of his ailing wife and the responsibilities that come with running his businesses, including a theater and a grocery store. As the stranger, Malachi, stands before him, Moshe feels the weight of the past pressing upon him. His memories of the dance, and the lively celebration that had once filled his heart with a sense of purpose, feel distant now. His life has since become a balancing act between his obligations to Chona and the fading memories of the joy he once shared with his community. The stranger's arrival serves as a powerful reminder that the past is never truly gone, but it has a way of resurfacing at the most unexpected times.

The conversation shifts as Malachi continues to speak about the impact that the dance had on him and how it led him to meet his wife. He speaks with passion and clarity about the transformative power of community, love, and shared experiences. For Malachi, this event had been a turning point—a moment that had given him direction and purpose. To him, it had been more than just a dance; it had been a catalyst for a new chapter in his life. Moshe, however, is less certain of the significance of that long-ago evening. Although he had been the one to organize the event, the joy it had once brought now seems distant and almost irrelevant to the struggles he faces in the present. The chapters of his life are filled with hardship and the pressing responsibility of caring for his wife. Yet, Malachi's presence forces Moshe to confront these buried memories and the deeper connections he has to his past. As he listens to Malachi, Moshe realizes that the man's insistence is more than just a request for flour; it is a call to reconnect with a time and a place Moshe has long forgotten.

As the stranger stands before him, resolute and unwavering, Moshe's internal conflict grows. He is pulled between the weight of his present responsibilities and the memories that Malachi's words have stirred within him. The past, with its joy and

community, contrasts sharply with the present, which is filled with illness, isolation, and uncertainty. Moshe finds himself caught in a moment of introspection, forced to reflect on the choices he has made and the life he has built in America. His desire to remain focused on the well-being of his wife is at odds with the reminder of what he once had—a sense of community and belonging that seems out of reach in his current life. Malachi's insistence, along with his connection to Moshe's past, forces Moshe to confront the difficult questions about who he has become and whether he can ever return to the joyful unity of the past.



Summary

In this chapter, themes of memory, identity, and community are explored in depth. As Moshe reflects on his past, he is confronted with the question of how to reconcile who he once was with who he is now. Malachi's visit acts as a catalyst for Moshe's emotional reckoning, pushing him to question the life he has built and the relationships that once defined him. The stranger's insistence on rekindling a connection to the past brings Moshe face to face with the reality that the past is never truly gone; it lingers, quietly waiting to resurface. Through Malachi's words, Moshe is reminded of the importance of community, unity, and the transformative power of love—a love that transcends time and place, even as the burdens of the present threaten to overwhelm him. The chapter concludes with Moshe standing at the crossroads of his past and present, unsure of which path to follow but aware that the choice will shape the future in ways he cannot yet understand.