

Chapter 6: Challah

Chapter 6: Challah opens with Chona's slow but steady recovery from a fever that had kept her bedridden for over a week. Her condition gradually improved, and with Addie's assistance, she began to regain strength. Eventually, Chona expressed her eagerness to return to the grocery store, a sign of her growing resilience. Moshe, thrilled by her recovery, attributed much of her healing to Malachi, a baker from the theater who had been delivering fresh challah daily. Although Moshe wasn't particularly fond of challah, preferring traditional white bread and sandwiches, he felt a deep sense of gratitude towards Malachi, believing that the bread played a key role in Chona's improvement.

Malachi's usual appearance was disheveled, and his worn clothes were a stark contrast to the pristine bakery image Moshe had envisioned. Nevertheless, Malachi delivered his challah with pride, and Moshe, despite his distaste for the bread, accepted it out of respect. His first attempt to taste it ended in disgust, but he knew he had to maintain politeness, so he complimented Malachi on the bread. Wanting to avoid offending him, Moshe discreetly gave the bread to a dog that had been a nuisance to him in the past. To Moshe's surprise, the dog stopped bothering him after that day, and he couldn't help but find a strange satisfaction in the outcome of his quiet action.

Despite Malachi's lack of baking skills and his chaotic lifestyle, Moshe found himself drawn to the baker's charm and infectious enthusiasm. The more time they spent together, the more Moshe realized that they shared a common bond, having both experienced the challenges of being immigrants in America. Malachi's simple and unrefined approach to life contrasted sharply with Moshe's more structured and cautious nature, but this only added to the appeal of their unlikely friendship. Moshe found that he appreciated the uniqueness of Malachi's perspective, even though it often differed from his own. Their relationship grew into a source of comfort for Moshe,

particularly as his social circle in Chicken Hill had dwindled over time.

The friendship Moshe had with Malachi felt different from his relationship with Nate, a Black man in Chicken Hill. While Nate's friendship was important to Moshe, the societal barriers between them were always present, and Moshe couldn't shake the feeling that their bond was limited by race. In contrast, his bond with Malachi felt more open and unrestricted, even though their differing backgrounds sometimes caused friction in their conversations. Moshe took pride in being an American, but this identity was also complicated by the challenges minorities faced in finding full acceptance in their new country. His decision to gift Malachi a mezuzah pendant—a symbol of welcome and Jewish identity—was a gesture of goodwill. However, Malachi insisted the pendant be given to Chona, emphasizing his own connection to Jewish traditions while showing an unexpected reverence for Moshe's cultural practices.

Their conversations often centered around the differences in their views on tradition and modern American life. Malachi, while proud of his past, often expressed frustration with the American way of life, criticizing it for its lack of authenticity. He emphasized that the intention behind one's actions was far more important than the formalities and rituals that often dominated societal expectations. Yet, despite his open criticism, Malachi failed to reveal much about his personal life, keeping certain aspects of his journey in America hidden from Moshe. This caused some tension in their friendship, as Moshe was intrigued by Malachi's reluctance to share but also frustrated by the lack of clarity in their discussions. These conversations allowed Moshe to further explore the complexities of identity and the immigrant experience, even as the two men struggled to understand each other fully.

Meanwhile, Malachi's bakery, despite his best efforts, was faltering. His self-taught approach to baking did not yield the desired results, and the quality of his products was subpar. This reality led Moshe to confront the failure of Malachi's business, an outcome that weighed heavily on both of them. Their discussions about the bakery's struggles brought into focus the broader difficulties faced by many immigrants trying to make a living in a foreign land. As Malachi came to the decision to close his bakery,

he acknowledged that change was necessary, both for his own future and for the evolving dynamics of his life in America. This decision, while difficult, marked the end of a chapter in Malachi's journey, leaving Moshe with lingering thoughts about the complexities of his friend's path. The interactions between Moshe and Malachi highlighted the universal challenges of immigration, cultural adaptation, and the ongoing search for identity in a rapidly changing world.

Through their friendship, Moshe was reminded of the ties that bind individuals together, even across cultural divides. The shared experiences of being outsiders in America allowed them to connect in a way that transcended their differences. Malachi's struggles with his bakery mirrored Moshe's own inner conflicts about his place in the world, further deepening their bond. In the end, this chapter serves as a reflection on the challenges and resilience of immigrants, illustrating the emotional complexity of their journey as they navigate their new lives.