

5. The Stranger

In "The Stranger," Moshe is roused from his sleep by a persistent visitor seeking to see him at his home above their grocery store. It's in the early hours before dawn, and both Moshe and the housemaid, Addie, who woke to answer the door, are deeply involved in caring for Moshe's ailing wife, Chona. Addie, seemingly exasperated by the visitor's insistence, informs Moshe of his presence. Despite Moshe's reluctance, the urgency and mystery surrounding the visitor's message compel him to confront him.

Opening the door, Moshe finds himself face to face with a small, stout Jewish man claiming to need kosher flour for challah bread, a plea Moshe initially rebuffs. However, as their confrontation escalates, the stranger reveals his true purpose: he claims to have found a wife because Moshe had invited him years before during a memorable dance at Moshe's theater—an event symbolizing prosperity, unity, and joy among the Jewish community. The stranger identifies himself as Malachi and reminisces about the transformative power of dance and love, invoking memories of a vibrant, communal celebration that Moshe had long forgotten.

The chapter paints a vivid scene of Moshe's complex emotions and the weight of his responsibilities, caught between the care for his sick wife and the unexpected reminder of joyful times past brought on by Malachi's visit. The themes of memory, identity, and community intertwined through Malachi's insistence and Moshe's reluctant recollection highlight a deeper connection between past joys and present burdens. As Malachi stands resolute, demanding attention and respect for his quest influenced by a fleeting moment of shared history, Moshe is forced to confront not just the stranger at his door but the echoes of his past and the uncertain future of his wife's health.