

## 13. Cowboy

In chapter 13, titled "Cowboy," Moshe finds himself at the Ringing Rocks skating rink, reflecting on the joys and sorrows of his life. As he leans against the pavilion railing, he observes the teenage skaters below, feeling detached from their laughter and warmth. His mind drifts to the rocks nearby, a curious tourist attraction that resonates with him, providing a momentary escape from the turmoil surrounding his family. With his wife, Chona, in a coma and their adopted child in state custody, Moshe grapples with feelings of despair and confusion—wondering how everything spiraled out of control.

Chona's insistence on visiting the skating rink in the past contrasts with her current absence. He recalls how she never allowed their boy to skate, insisting instead that he enjoy the vibrations of the ancient rocks. Moshe's bitterness grows as he reflects on her notion of "helpfulness" amidst their dire circumstances. As winter snow begins to fall, he pulls out a pen and paper to write a letter to his old friend, Malachi. He expresses his struggles in the theater business and laments the shift away from Yiddish culture, noting that audiences now yearn for American cowboy ideals.

That night at the theater, chaos erupts when Lionel Hampton's band and Machito's Afro-Cubans clash over their performance order. Moshe, who is late due to his wife's hospitalization, finds himself trapped in a confrontation he desperately wishes to avoid. As tensions escalate between the bands, Moshe struggles to mediate, recalling how Chona used to guide him through such situations.

The chapter culminates with Moshe realizing the shifting cultural landscape around him—the diverse sounds emerging in America demand new interpretations of music, challenging his understanding of identity and art. Despite his struggles, he receives a humorous package from Malachi—infant-sized cowboy pants—prompting reflection on his life and the changes that lie ahead.

As the chapter closes, Moshe reconciles the complexities of his identity and ponders whether he should embrace a new path, symbolized by the cowboy, while also contemplating the need for change amid his family's crisis.