

17. The Bullfrog

Chapter 17 of the narrative titled "The Bullfrog" revolves around the issues faced by the Ahavat Achim congregation in Pottstown, particularly following Chona's hospitalization. The temple, built by Chona's father, is thrown into disarray due to the recent influx of new Hungarian members, one of whom, Mr. Hudson, discovers a giant bullfrog in the mikvah. Outraged, he promises a hefty donation for a new mikvah, demanding it be double the size and made of Carrara marble, despite the temple's financial struggles indicated by their meager funds.

The meeting to address these issues reveals Rabbi Karl Feldman struggling to maintain order amidst the chaos. As discussions unfold, it becomes clear that there are significant water issues affecting the proposed mikvah. Feldman awkwardly explains complications related to obtaining running water, revealing the temple had to clandestinely use water from a well because the town had never run water to the site. This revelation adds layers to the congregational dynamics, as it connects back to Chona's previous disputes with a local farmer, Mr. Plitzka, and complicates relationships with the town's authorities.

The dialogue raises tensions as congregants, especially Mr. Hudson and Irv Skrupskelis, clash over the mismanagement of the temple's resources and health concerns about Chona. The chapter explores themes of community, practicality, and the intersection of Jewish and local culture as the characters grapple with both mundane issues concerning water access and deeper personal ties to the sick congregant. Hudson's frustration crescendos into a call for modernization and a reevaluation of the temple's place in the community, reflecting a broader desire for progress amid entrenched challenges.

Ultimately, the chapter speaks to the resilience and interconnectedness of the characters as they navigate these communal struggles, revealing not just the impact of an unexpected bullfrog but also the broader implications on their faith, community ties, and identity in a changing world.