

18. The Hot Dog

In the chapter "The Hot Dog," Chona awakens in her hospital bed a week after an assault, feeling the comforting echoes of the prayer Barukh She'amar. The sacred words create a sense of light and hope, and she reflects on a cherished childhood memory with her father, feeling grateful for his love. However, a deep realization strikes her – she senses she is dying and must communicate this to Moshe, her husband.

As nostalgia mingles with a strange, forbidden aroma, she distinctly smells a hot dog, recalling a past adventure with her friend Bernice. This memory, however, is shattered by pain, bringing her back to the present moment. Looking around the room, she finds Moshe asleep in a chair beside her. His pale, exhausted face fills her with guilt; she reflects on their years together, expressing regret over her criticisms of him and her detachment from life's joys. The pain in her stomach intensifies, forcing her to wish away the hot dog smell, prompting a moment of interaction with Moshe.

The room fills with familiar faces, but the absence of Dodo weighs heavily on her heart. A flash of guilt overwhelms Chona for the toll her struggles have taken on Moshe. She struggles to speak but manages a joking remark about Bernice eating the hot dog, only to realize the pain this brings her. Despite her turmoil, she feels a sense of connection with her friends and family, sharing a moment of laughter with Bernice before the agony draws her away into unconsciousness.

Rabbi Feldman's voice begins the Mi Shebeirach prayer for healing in the background as Moshe eventually requests everyone to leave, allowing a brief moment of intimacy between them. Outside, a diverse group of well-wishers gathers, experiencing discomfort and tension as they await news of Chona. Conversations reveal community history and relationships, particularly about the synagogue built by Chona's father. Amidst the somber mood, the tension escalates when the group hears Moshe's grief-stricken cry echo down the hall, resulting in a collective, heavy movement toward Chona's room. The chapter closes with a bleak sense of history and forgotten struggles as they confront an uncertain future, reflecting on the trials faced by their ancestors.