

22. Without a Song

In the chapter titled "Without a Song" from *The Heaven & Earth Grocery Store*, Moshe confronts the painful task of closing the grocery store he shared with his late wife, Chona. As he sorts through their belongings in the basement, he is overwhelmed by memories, particularly a small barrel that holds emotional significance. He recalls how Chona used to create joy from simple things, filling that barrel with gifts for local children. The presence of his friends, Nate and Addie, provides a bittersweet comfort, as they quietly support him in their own way, all while grappling with their own guilt and sorrow surrounding Chona's death.

Moshe reflects on the troubling events leading to Chona's passing, particularly the conflicting narratives that complicate the truth of that day. As he navigates these feelings, he grapples with the loss of his wife—her spirit, courage, and vibrant view of life—a stark contrast to his own feelings of inadequacy and sorrow. He views himself as merely a business owner, while Chona was a force of nature, driven by the desire to improve the world.

Their conversation touches on sensitive issues, including the fate of Dodo, the boy they had taken in, and the lingering implications of their community's prejudices. Despite his grief, Moshe insists on assisting Nate and Addie in their efforts to visit Dodo, recognizing their shared bond.

The narrative shifts with the arrival of Moshe's cousin, Isaac, and the friend Malachi, who brings unexpected joy. Their reunion leads to discussions about community support and the importance of standing by one another in difficult times.

As they converse, the heavy weight of social injustices surfaces, particularly regarding the injustices faced by Nate and other Black community members in their town. Isaac's intentions to thank Nate and Addie for their support bring tension, as they refuse to accept money for their kindness. This resistance underscores the moral complexities they face, grappling with societal expectations and personal experiences of love, loss, and brotherhood.

In this somber yet impactful chapter, Moshe's emotional journey encapsulates themes of grief, community, and the interplay of personal and societal struggles within the backdrop of a racially charged environment.