

CHAPTER 10

Summary

It is now March, 1981 and Amir and his father are riding in a truck which is helping them flee from the Russians into Pakistan. Amir is once again sick from the motion of the vehicle, but it will not stop for him. He is embarrassed when Baba apologizes for him. When the truck finally does stop, they are sitting above Mahipar Falls. It allows Amir some time to get control of his stomach and think about what they have just left. Most of their things had to remain behind, but they do bring a few photos and Amir brings his precious leather notebook of stories. They are fleeing what the Russian communists have done to their country. Everybody seems to divide into two groups: those who eavesdrop and those who don't and it is tricky to figure out who is in each group. Once they arrive at the border, Karim, the driver, assures Baba that they will be met by his brother who will help them cross through checkpoints and drive them to Peshawar. Amir wonders what has happened to Hassan and with that thought, he finally throws up.

At the border, they very nearly are held there by a drunken Russian soldier. The soldier wants them to give him the young woman who sits in the middle of the truck with a baby on her lap as the price for him looking the other way. Baba stands up and protests and Amir is afraid that this is where Baba dies. The Russian raises his rifle and is about to shoot Baba. Amir hears a shot and thinks now he is truly an orphan. However, he sees that a Russian officer has shot his pistol into the air. He apologizes for his comrade's behavior, saying it's because he is drugged and then, he lets them go. They ride on for about fifteen minutes when suddenly the husband of the woman who had been so close to being raped by the Russian soldier stands and kisses Baba's hand in gratitude.

They arrive in Jalalabad where Karim tells them that his brother's truck engine had blown up and that they must wait there for a while. Baba reacts to this news by slamming Karim up against the wall of the house where he has taken them and Baba tells the others that Karim doesn't care about anything but the money he gets paid for his leg of the trip. He very nearly kills the man, but eventually lets him go. The worst realization, however, is that there are people in the basement of the house who have been waiting even longer. They end up staying there for another week.

Once his eyes become accustomed to the light, Amir realizes that two of the people in the basement are Kamal, Assef's friend who had helped rape Hassan, and his father. He listens while Kamal's father tells Baba that his wife had been killed by a stray bullet and Kamal had been, ironically, raped himself. He has not spoken since it happened. At the end of the week, Karim tells them that the truck is unable to be repaired, but that his cousin owns a fuel truck that will hold all of them if they squeeze inside. They leave that night and just before they climb into the fuel tank, Amir sees his father pick up a handful of dirt and place it in his snuffbox. He stows it in the pocket of his shirt next to his heart.

The ride in the fuel tank is horrible, because the fumes make it very hard to breathe. Amir is only able to stand it by remembering good times flying kites with Hassan. They arrive early the next morning and plan to take a bus to Peshawar. Amir looks at their suitcases and feels very sorry for his father. Everything he has spent working his entire life to achieve is gone and all that is left is two small suitcases. Fortunately, they still have their lives, which is more than Kamal can say. He has died from the fumes and his father reacts by grabbing Karim's gun as if to kill the man who had put them in the fuel tank. Instead, he shoves the gun into his own mouth and pulls

the trigger. He can no longer live now that he has lost both his wife and his son.

Notes

The Russian invasion of Afghanistan has forced Baba to uproot himself and his son and flee a country where no one is safe from being turned in to the communists. Amir still thinks of Hassan, however, and the thought that the friend he betrayed is still in the Russian controlled country makes him physically ill.

The scene between Baba and the Russian soldier is a direct contrast to Amir and Hassan. Baba is willing to stand up and defend a woman he doesn't even know while Amir couldn't defend the friend with whom he had grown up.

It is ironic that Amir and his father meet up with Kamal and his father in the basement just before the border. Kamal who participated in Hassan's rape, has gone silent, because he, too, was raped. It is touching when Baba speaks words of comfort to his old friend for what has happened to his son and it reinforces Amir's guilt that he is alive and well while two boys he knew have been so painfully violated. It is also touching when Baba gathers up the dirt of his homeland to hold next to his heart. It foreshadows that Baba will never come back.

It is ironic that the only way Amir can survive the long ride in the fume-filled tank is by remembering flying kites with Hassan. This very activity is what led to the guilt he must relive daily.

Kamal's father's suicide is symbolic in that it represents the dying of the old life they all must leave behind.