

# CHAPTER 11

## Summary

This chapter opens in Fremont, California, in the 1980's. Amir and his father have come to America and Baba loves the *idea* of America, but *living* in America has given him an ulcer. Baba insists there are only three real men in the world: America the brash savior, Britain, and Israel, the last of which insults the Afghans living in Fremont. He insists, however, that it has nothing to do with religion, but rather with the courage Israel possesses to live in the middle of Arabs. Baba also loathes Jimmy Carter and loves Ronald Reagan, but he is alone in this belief where he lives as well. Furthermore, he feels hemmed in by American smog, traffic, and pollen.

In the spring of 1983, Baba has an ugly confrontation with a Vietnamese fruit stand owner who demands ID before he will accept his check. Baba is outraged that no one in America trusts anyone else. Amir is forced to promise the Vietnamese that they will pay for any damages that Baba has caused, because he is having a hard time adjusting to life in the United States. Life has become so hard for him, because it is not his home, he must work as a mechanic rather than a successful businessman, and no one trusts him. America has become a place for Amir to bury his memories, but it has become for Baba a place to mourn his.

Amir suggests that they go back to Peshawar in Pakistan where Baba was more content. But Baba insists that he came to America, because it was good for Amir. So, it is one last gift from his father: he will work in a gas station for Amir and he will refuse food stamps for Amir. In the end, he can stand to live in America, if it is for Amir.

Amir graduates from high school in the summer of 1983 and Baba tells him, "I am *moftakhir* (proud), Amir." At the celebration of his graduation that night, Baba tells the restaurant owner that Amir will be going to college that fall. Amir argues that he should get a job and save some money to go the following year. Baba just looks at him with one of his smoldering looks and Amir acquiesces. Baba then takes him to a sports bar where at first they stand out because of their formal dress. But soon, Baba is buying pitchers for everyone and has started a party just like he used to do back home in Kabul. On the way home, Baba has Amir drive to the end of their block where he gives him the keys to a car of his own - a Ford Grand Torino. The feeling between them is close and Amir is feeling that once again he has Baba to himself. Then, his father says the words that make his windpipe constrict, "I wish Hassan had been with us today."

Later, Amir tells his father that he will enroll in Junior College in the fall and that he wants to major in English and be a writer. Baba is appalled that he would choose a career that was dependent upon being discovered. How will Amir pay the bills? But Amir decides he's through sacrificing for Baba. The last time he had done that, he had damned himself.

Amir takes to driving the Ford everywhere where he contemplates the vastness that is America. It allows him to realize that America is a river unmindful of the past and it can carry him far, some place where there are "no ghosts, no memories, and no sins." For that, he embraces America.

In the summer of 1984, Baba buys an old Volkswagon bus and he and Amir use it to scan garage sales. There, they buy many different kinds of goods and then resell them at the San Jose Flea Market to make money. Afghans who have come to America soon take up an

entire section of the market and it becomes like a home away from home. One day, Baba introduces him to General Sahib, Mr. Iqbal Taheri, who was a decorated general in Kabul. Baba brags to him that Amir is going to be a great writer, a comment that makes Amir do a double-take. This is followed by the general's observation that Baba is truly one of the great men of Afghanistan. Their conversation is finally interrupted by the voice of a young woman whose appearance makes Amir's heart quicken. She is the general's daughter, Soraya.

On the way home that day, Amir remembers that there was some gossip about the daughter of Taheri. Baba confirms that there had been a man once in her life and that things did not go well. She is a decent, hardworking girl, but no suitors have knocked on her door since the situation with the young man had occurred. Baba observes, "It may be unfair, but what happens in a single day, can change the course of a whole lifetime." That night, Amir finds it hard to sleep, not because of his guilt over Hassan, but this time because of his thoughts about his "Swap Meet Princess."

## Notes

This chapter covers four years in the 1980's after Amir and his father came to America. It is a difficult adjustment for Baba, but he is ready to sacrifice for his son. This is in direct contrast to Amir's belief that his father holds him responsible for his mother's death and that he sometimes thinks Amir is not his son at all. Amir's love for America is significant, because it offers him a place to avoid his memories and his sins. He continues to hide from his past, but if the old saying is true, his past will eventually catch up to him, and he will have to face it then. The introduction of a love interest for Amir is interesting, because the young lady in question is "damaged goods," which in some ways, is just like Amir. They have that in common already and so the match appears to have some potential.

Baba's statement that what happens in a single day can change the course of a whole lifetime is ironic, because that is exactly true for Amir. It will also be true for Baba as we will see later in the story when his past is revealed.