

CHAPTER 13

Summary

The next evening, Amir and his father travel to the home of the Taheris for *lafz*, or the ceremony of “giving word.” Amir is very content when Baba tells him that this is the happiest day of his, Baba’s, life. The ceremony follows very strict traditions: first Amir must kiss the hand of his future mother-in-law, Jamila, who is very happy to have him in her family; he must kiss the general three times on the cheek; Soraya cannot be present; Baba must show great humility toward and praise for the Taheri family as he presents his son and asks for him to be admitted into their family; then, the general accepts the honor of having Amir as his daughter’s husband; finally, Soraya enters and kisses Baba’s hand and sits beside Amir for the first time. This is all followed by the *awroussi*, or the real ceremony between Amir and Soraya. They give their vows during the *nika* and there are poems read by Soraya’s uncle. They walk through the hall with a mullah holding the Koran over their heads and followed by all the relatives. While they march, the wedding song is played. Once they have reached the stage, a veil is thrown over their heads and a mirror placed in their hands so they can gaze upon each other. Amir holds Soraya’s henna-painted hands and tells her for the first time that he loves her. Afterwards, there are traditional foods and the traditional wedding dance called the *attan*. Amir has trouble remembering everything that happened that night, but he does remember the moment that he realized that he had spent his entire life in the company of men and now he finally discovers the tenderness of a woman.

Soraya decides they will move in with Baba so she can dedicate herself to his care in the final days of his life. One day, Amir comes home and discovers Soraya quickly sliding something under Baba’s blanket. It turns out Baba had suggested that Soraya read Amir’s stories which he still keeps in the leather notebook given to him by Rahim Khan on his thirteenth birthday. Amir is moved to tears for two reasons: Soraya tells him how wonderful his writing is and he now knows that Baba is proud of it.

A month after the wedding, Soraya’s family comes to Amir’s house for dinner and he sees his father laying on the couch and watching contentedly Amir’s love for her. Later, the couple helps him into bed and he has each of them lean forward so he can give them a kiss. When Amir tells Baba he will get him his morphine, his father says, “Not tonight. There is no pain tonight.” They pull up his blanket, wish him goodnight, and close the door. That night Baba goes to sleep and never wakes up.

People have to park their cars three or four blocks away from the mosque on the day of Baba’s funeral. As the words from the Koran begin to reverberate throughout the mosque, Amir is reminded of the legend that his father had wrestled a black bear. He thinks that Baba had wrestled bears all of his life as well: losing his wife, raising a son alone, leaving his beloved homeland, and facing poverty and indignity. “In the end, a bear had come that he couldn’t best. But even then, he had lost on his own terms.” Then, when the mourners file by and offer Amir their sympathies, he realizes that much of who he is has been defined by Baba and the marks he made on people’s lives. All his life Baba has shown him the way and now that he must find it on his own, he is terrified. He eventually finds Soraya and he takes her for a walk away from the mosque. He tells her how much he will miss his father and when he realizes that, for the first time ever, Baba would be all alone, the tears he had been holding back all day finally begin to flow.

Because there had been no engagement period for Amir and Soraya in consideration for his father’s illness, much of what Amir comes to know about the Taheris he learns after the wedding. For

example, he learns that the general is the victim of blinding migraines at least once a month. He also learns that the general believes that, sooner or later, Afghanistan will be freed and he will once again be needed at home in service to his country. Furthermore, Amir discovers that Jamila has a beautiful singing voice and that she is very devoted to him as her daughter’s husband. He has relieved her of the greatest fear of an Afghan mother - that no honorable *khastegar*, or suitor, would seek her Soraya’s hand in marriage.

Soraya eventually tells Amir all the details of running away with another man. She breaks down when she reveals her bitterness at the double standard between Afghan men and women. Her father had shown up that night with a rifle and then when he got her home, not only was her mother sick from having suffered a stroke, but her father made her cut off all her hair to show her shame. She stayed in the house for weeks and the whispers have never stopped. She tells Amir that she is so lucky to have him, because he is different from any Afghan man she has ever met. He wonders why he is so different and finally muses that he has no problem with Soraya’s past, because he has one of his own.

Amir is accepted at San Jose State University where studies English. He also works as a security cop in a furniture warehouse. He finds he can study there after everyone leaves for the day and this is where he begins his first novel. Meanwhile, Soraya continues her studies to become a teacher, a decision that her father constantly criticizes. She is very angry at him for this, because he collects welfare checks while waiting for the call to return home to Afghanistan.

By the summer of 1988, Amir is ready to send off his novel to a representative named Martin Greenwalt. A month later, he learns that the book is going to be published. Soraya and Amir are both ecstatic and Amir wishes that Baba could have seen what he has accomplished. He is also reminded of how Hassan firmly believed that someday Amir would be a great writer. Amir reflects that there is so much goodness in his life and he wonders whether he deserves it. As a result of the publishing, Amir goes on a five city tour to promote his book and he becomes at least a minor celebrity in the Afghan community.

By 1989, the Russians have completely withdrawn from Afghanistan, but there is no joy in the country, because a civil war breaks out between the Mujahedin, or Afghans, and the puppet government the Soviets have installed. It is also the year that Amir and Soraya begin trying to have a child.

Amir realizes that the thought of fatherhood unleashes a swirl of emotions. He wants to be just like Baba and yet he wants to be nothing like him. However, the emotions have to be put on hold, because Soraya fails to become pregnant. As a result, they begin to seek out medical help. Amir is not the problem, according to all the tests, but Soraya is also healthy and able to become pregnant. The doctors just can’t explain why it isn’t happening. The next word that enters their vocabulary is adoption. The general voices his opinion that adoption is not so good for Afghans, because blood is such a powerful thing in the Afghan culture. Amir has his own reservations and even Soraya finally decides it is not the best solution for them. Instead, they move to a pretty two bedroom Victorian house in San Francisco. Unfortunately, the emptiness of not having children seeps into their marriage, their laughter, and even their lovemaking.

Notes

Amir faces two emotional ceremonies in as little as two months of his life: his wedding to Soraya and Baba's funeral. It is significant that just as Baba is leaving him, he has Soraya to support him. He is a very lucky man for all that has happened to him, even though they are unable to have children. However, his ever-present guilt makes him ask himself if he really deserves it. Also, Hassan is never far from his mind, which foreshadows that he will someday atone for what he has done to his old friend.