

## CHAPTER 17

### Summary

Amir asks Rahim Khan whether Hassan is still at the house. At this question, Rahim hands Amir a sealed envelope in which he finds a Polaroid photograph and a folded letter. The photograph is of Hassan and Sohrab and Rahim is right: Amir would have recognized him anywhere. In the letter, Hassan wishes Amir all good health and tells him that he relates stories about their childhood to his wife and son who laugh at how mischievous they were. Then, he tells him how horrible life in Afghanistan is under the Taliban: one day when his wife spoke too loudly to a potato vender, a Talib hit her on the thigh with a wooden stick, because women are not allowed to speak that way in the new Afghanistan. He also tells Amir how wonderful little Sohrab is and how he is teaching him to read and write and he especially loves the stories from the *Shahnamah* just like his father did.

In the next section of the letter, Hassan tells Amir that Rahim Khan is very ill and that he is leaving for Pakistan in a few days to consult with doctors there. He also relates that he is having nightmares about hanged corpses rotting in soccer fields with blood red grass around them and yet he can still think of good things like Rahim Khan getting well and his son growing up to be a good, free person. He ends the letter by saying that if Amir ever returns to Kabul, he will find Hassan, his good and faithful friend, waiting for him.

Once he finishes the letter, Amir asks Rahim Khan how Hassan is now. Rahim tells him that the letter is six months old and soon after Rahim Khan left for Pakistan, a rumor started that a Hazara family was living alone in the house. The Taliban investigated and even though the neighbors supported the story that Hassan and his family were living there with Rahim, the Talibs called him a liar and ordered him out of the house by sundown. They were looking at the big house like “wolves looking at a flock of sheep.” When Hassan protested, they took him into the streets and shot him in the back of the head. When his wife came to his rescue, they shot her, too.

Amir has visions of Hassan the day he first looked at his face after the harelip surgery and how everyone who sat around his bed that day is either dead or dying. He also imagines the death of his friend at the hands of a man dressed in a herringbone vest - the clothing of the Taliban. At this point in the story, Rahim Khan is very weak, but he answers when Amir asks what the Taliban did with Sohrab: he is in an orphanage somewhere in Karteh-Seh. That answer brings Rahim to the real reason why he summoned Amir to Pakistan. He wanted to see him before he dies, but he also wants him to go to Afghanistan and bring Sohrab to Pakistan. He tells Amir that an American couple named Betty and Thomas Caldwell has an orphanage they run in Peshawar that takes in children orphaned by the Taliban. He has already spoken to them and they are willing to take Sohrab.

However, Amir protests that he can't go back to Afghanistan and why doesn't Rahim Khan pay someone to find Sohrab. Rahim roars out with his last bit of strength that Amir knows why it has to be him to do this. Amir continues to make excuses, so Rahim interrupts him by telling him something that Baba once said about the son he feared had no strength of character, “A boy who won't stand up for himself becomes a man who can't stand up to anything.” Rahim emphasizes even more his need for Amir to do this by telling him it's his dying wish. Amir murmurs that perhaps his father was right about him, so Rahim must tell him a truth that he has never known: Hassan was his father's son, too. Amir is furious and curses Rahim for not telling the truth before this.

Rahim insists that it was impossible at that time to admit to such a shameful situation. But Amir spits out these words after Rahim begs him not to leave, “Why? What can you possibly say to me . . . I've just found out my whole life is one big lie . . . ” and he storms out of the apartment.

### Notes

This is a very tragic chapter for two major reasons: Hassan's death and Rahim's revelation that Hassan is also Baba's son. Amir is, at least for the moment, unable to absorb all this news and can react only in anger. He is still so guilt ridden from all those years before and now to know that he can never make it up to Hassan personally is a greater burden for him to bear. But to know that he not only betrayed his friend in the alley when he was twelve years old, but that he betrayed his half-brother is nearly overwhelming. He has much thinking to do if he is going to be able to finally do good.