

CHAPTER 22

Summary

Farid tells Amir that he will wait for him in the car and Amir understands why he would make that choice. Amir doesn't want to go in that house either. He is frisked by guards standing outside the house and they take him to a room upstairs. As he waits for his audience with the Taliban official, he wonders what insanity he has gotten himself into, wanting to talk to a man he had seen murder two people that day. He pops some grapes in his mouth as the wait continues and tells us that at the time he was unaware that those grapes would be the last bit of solid food he would eat for a long time. He even notices how the table in front of him is supported by legs decorated with brass balls and they remind him of a table he had seen somewhere before.

Finally, the official arrives, with spots of blood on his left sleeve, something that Amir finds morbidly fascinating. He also notices that he has needle marks on his arms, just like the drug addicts Amir had seen living in the grimy alleys of San Francisco. They exchange greetings and then, suddenly the Talib motions to one of the guards, who rips the beard from Amir's face. They realize that his beard is a fake, which means that he is indeed in trouble. However, the Talib first discusses the massacre of the Hazara at Mazar in 1998 and how they left the bodies of those they killed out in the streets for the dogs to eat. He insists that what they have done is virtuous and good and for that reason, very liberating. Then he tells Amir that since he has gone to live in America that he is a traitor and could be executed.

Amir holds his breath and then asks for the boy. The Talib agrees and Sohrab enters the room. He is the spitting image of Hassan, but how he is dressed and how he is made up - like a harem girl - is disconcerting painful for Amir to see. Then, they make him dance while they laugh and cheer and when the dance is finished, he is called to stand between the legs of the Talib who caresses him obscenely. At this point, the Talib makes his guards leave the room and asks Amir whatever happened to old Babalu, the mean name Assef the neighborhood bully had given Ali. The color drains from Amir's face as he realizes that this terrible man with the sunglasses is Assef himself. Amir begs him to sell Sohrab to him, but Assef laughs and says he has plenty of money. Furthermore, he tells Amir that when he was rounded up and put in prison because he was rich, he had an epiphany that God had saved his life for a reason. Amir asks him if that reason is to stone adulterers or rape children and Assef is briefly surprised at his spirit. Amir continues to hammer him with the words that he wants Sohrab while the boy peers out at him with slaughter sheep's eyes.

Assef finally tells him that he can have Sohrab, but as they go to the door, trying to leave, he says that he cannot take him for free. According to Assef, they have unfinished business. He had already settled the score with Hassan by murdering him. Now it is Amir's turn. He tells the guards that he is going to close the doors and that they are not to come in under any circumstances. If Amir makes it out alive, they are to let him pass no matter what. He keeps Sohrab in the room as well and then he pulls out his brass knuckles.

The fight begins and as Amir remembers, he doesn't think he fought very well. At one point, he begins laughing and laughing which makes Assef angrier and angrier. But Amir laughs, because for the first time since that summer of 1975, he feels at peace and healed. But it is what happened at the end that is the clearest and the memory he will take to his grave. Assef has total control of Amir and is ready to strike perhaps a mortal blow when a voice rings out, "Bas," or no more. Sohrab has his slingshot cocked and

ready to fly with brass balls from the ring in the base of the table where Amir had been sitting. Assef will not let Amir go and orders the boy to put it down. However, Sohrab lets it fly and it hits Assef in the eye. Amir manages to walk out of the house in spite of his injuries and when Farid sees him, he picks him in his arms and with Sohrab at his side, gets Amir in the Land Rover. Because Assef had warned his guards to let them go if they were able to leave the room on their own, Amir and Sohrab are finally free of the Taliban.

Notes

Amir has wondered all along if he deserved all the goodness he had received in his life and now God has answered yes. He first, however, has to suffer just as Hassan had by being beaten almost senseless by Assef. It is ironic that Assef in his arrogance has made it possible for them to leave unmolested by the guards. He is so sure that he will be the victor of both Sohran and Amir that he orders his guards to allow them to pass even before he is hit by the brass ball in Sohrab's slingshot. It is also ironic that Sohrab uses the brass balls from the very table in Assef's office. It is almost as if he has used Assef's own weapon against him. Furthermore, Amir remembers seeing a table just like it at the crowded teashop in Peshawar. Seeing that table was a kind of foreshadowing in that somehow young Sohrab figures out that they would make the perfect weapon. Finally, it is ironic that Sohrab bests Assef with a slingshot just as his father had done years before in protecting Amir from a younger Assef. This time, unlike the first, Assef feels the shattering blow that Hassan never had to use.

It is significant that even as he is being beaten by Assef, Amir feels peace and healing. He has needed this punishment his whole life as part of his atonement for the sins he committed against Hassan.

Finally, the fact that Sohrab hits Assef in his eye and blinds him is symbolic. Assef has been blind emotionally to basic human compassion and now he is blind in reality. It reinforces the Old Testament adage of "an eye for eye." It balances what is unbalanced in their universe.