

CHAPTER 23

Summary

Everything for awhile is fuzzy to Amir as he slips in and out of consciousness. For some reasons he can't think of, however, he wants to thank the child. He also dreams that he is in Baluchistan where Baba is wrestling the bear. When the man wrestling the bear looks up, he is not Baba. He is Amir.

When Amir finally awakens, the doctor tells him that he has suffered very significant injuries, including a broken jaw. The impact from one of Assef's blows had also cut his lip in two, clean down the middle. Amir thinks ironically, that now he has a harelip. He speaks to Sohrab and thanks him for saving his life. Farid tells him that Rahim Khan had left, without telling anyone where he is going, but had given a note and his key to his landlord for Amir. Later, a strange man wrapped in a blanket enters his room and just stares at him until the nurse asks him to leave. Meanwhile, Sohrab sits beside his bed on a three-legged stool and keeps watch over Amir.

That night, Amir begins to read Rahim Khan's note. The older man tells him that he was right all those years, that he did know what had happened the day of the kite tournament. He advises him to remember that "a man, who has no conscience, no goodness, does not suffer." He hopes Amir's suffering comes to end in Afghanistan. He explains as well that Amir's father was hard on him as a child, because he was so sad that he could not openly love Hassan as a son and that Baba was a tortured soul, also. He insists that out of Baba's remorse was born real goodness, like the orphanage he built. Rahim believes that is what true redemption is: when guilt leads to goodness. He ends his note by telling Amir that he has left him all the money he has left and how to find it. He also asks him not to try to find him, because he wants to face his death alone. He leaves Amir in the hands of God and bids him goodbye. Amir, even after reading the note, still questions what he has ever done to right things. He is still unsure of his own redemption.

When Farid visits Amir the next time, he cautions him that he is not safe there, because the Taliban have friends in Peshawar. They need to leave as soon as Amir can walk out of the hospital. Amir remembers the strange man who had been in his room and knows that the Taliban is already on the lookout for him. Farid then reduces Amir to tears by responding to Amir's request for a favor with the words, "For you, a thousand times over." When he is able to speak once more, he tells Farid about John and Betty Caldwell and the orphanage they run in Peshawar. Farid agrees to look for them, but Sohrab just wanders to the window where the pigeons strut looking for bread crumbs. His silence is significant.

Later, Amir finds a deck of cards in a bedside stand and he plays panjar with Sohrab. They talk about Hassan and how he and Amir were nursed by the same woman. Sohrab tells Amir that Hassan has said that Amir was the best friend he had ever had. Later that night, Amir dreams that Assef is standing in the doorway with a brass ball still in his eye socket. He tells Amir that they are twins, that they are the same.

The next day, Amir decides he must leave, but there is a hitch in their plans: John and Betty Caldwell are not in Peshawar; in fact, there never was a John and Betty Caldwell there according to the US consulate. In his ride to Islamabad, Amir dreams snippets of dreams reflecting memories from the past and he hears the words over and over, "A way to be good again . . ."

Notes

The dream Amir has of wrestling the bear like his father is symbolic of his mortal battle with Assef. He has become the man his father was. This will be further emphasized in Rahim's final note when he tells Amir that his father was a tortured soul, too. So, Amir is more like his father than he ever believed. It is also symbolic that Assef cut Amir's lip in half so it looked like he had a harelip. He is also Hassan at this point, suffering at the hands of the man who had tormented them both all through their boyhood.

Rahim's final words to Amir are very poignant, but also significant. He explains why they had lied to him and Hassan for all those years and how that tormented Baba. But he notes that bad men have no conscience and feel no guilt, a lesson for Amir that he is basically a good man. He also indicates that true redemption comes only when guilt leads to goodness, something Amir has done. His leaving his apartment key and all his money as well as the news that John and Betty Caldwell never existed indicate that this was all part of Rahim Khan's plan. He must have had a tremendous belief in Amir's goodness to have set into motion the trip to Afghanistan and the return of Amir with Sohrab. His lied about the Caldwells to encourage Amir to find Sohrab. Now they foreshadow Rahim's real plan: to have Amir bring Sohrab with him to the United States.