

CHAPTER 3

Summary

Amir opens this chapter by telling us how lore has it that his father once wrestled a black bear with his bare hands. Of course, he informs us at the same time that exaggeration or *laaf* is a national affliction. Rahim Khan referred to Amir's father as *Toophan agha*, or "Mr. Hurricane," because his father was almost a force of nature. He was also a very good and generous man, having built an orphanage in the late 1960's. On the day before the orphanage opened, Baba took Amir to Ghargha Lake for a picnic. He had wanted to bring Hassan as well, but Amir had lied and said Hassan was sick so he could have his father all to himself. He aches for his father's praise and resents it when Hassan receives it instead. This happened once when they were skipping stones across the lake and he could only make it skip five times to Hassan's eight. His father had patted Hassan on the back and even put his arms around his shoulders. Amir never had his father do the same to him.

While they are at the lake for the picnic, Baba spends the time eating and working on his speech for the orphanage while Amir tries to get his attention by telling him that he thinks he has *saratan* or cancer. Baba just grunts and tells him to get the soda from the car.

At the opening ceremony of the orphanage, Amir gets to hold his father's hat while he gives his speech, a great honor for the young boy. The speech gets a long standing ovation and it allows Amir to further reflect on the man his father is: even though he was told that business was not in his blood, he established a very successful carpet exporting business, two pharmacies, and a restaurant with Rahim Khan as his partner; and when people said that he would never marry well, he met and married Sofia Akrami, a widely regarded and respected young woman of Kabul. To Amir, he is the only glaring exception to his father's success. His father was a man who saw everything in black and white and as Amir says, he gets to decide what is black and what is white. This makes him a man to be both loved and feared and even hated a little.

When Amir went into the fifth grade, he had a mullah (*religious teacher*) who taught his class about Islam, including the five daily *namaz*, or prayers and memorized verses from the Koran. He told his father one day what the mullah had taught them about the sins of drinking alcohol, while his father was pouring himself a whiskey. Baba sat down and pulled Amir onto his lap and told him that he would never "learn anything of value from those bearded idiots." He proclaims that God will have to help them all if Afghanistan ever falls into the hands of the mullahs.

Then, he tells Amir that despite what the mullahs teach, there is only one real sin and that is the sin of theft. Every other sin is a variation of theft and he cautions Amir to never forget that. In fact, he says that any man who takes what is not his to take is a man Baba will spit upon. Amir is very impressed with what his father says, but he is more impressed that he had talked to Amir man to man. He wonders how long it will be before his father talks that way to him again. Amir feels like his father hates him a little, because he had killed his

mother when she bled to death giving birth to him. He believes that he should have had the decency to have turned out more like his father for having taken his beloved wife from him. Unfortunately, Amir is nothing like his father.

In school, Amir and his classmates play a game called *Sherjangi*, or "Battle of the Poems." One student recites a verse from a poem and the opponent has sixty seconds to reply with a verse that begins with the same letter with which the first verse ends. Amir is so good at this game that everyone wants him on their team. Unfortunately, Baba is never impressed by this success of his son. He wants him to achieve at sports and tries to get him to play soccer. Amir is a dismal failure. He also takes Amir to the yearly *Buzkashi* tournament. This is Afghanistan's national passion: the object of the sport is for a *chapandaz*, or highly skilled horseman, to snatch a goat or cattle carcass from the midst of a melee, carry the carcass with him around the stadium at full gallop, and drop it in a scoring circle while the opposing team's *chapandaz* does everything in his power to snatch the carcass from him.

While they are at the tournament, his father points out Henry Kissinger, the American Secretary of State, sitting in the stands. However, Amir is riveted by a terrible accident - one of the *chapandaz* fell off his saddle and is trampled to death in front of the entire crowd. Amir begins to cry and his tears force Baba to take him home, trying valiantly not to show his disgust with a son who would cry at this famous, manly sport. Later that night, Amir overhears his father tell Rahim Khan that "there is something missing in that boy." His father is upset that Amir never takes a stand or fights back against the other boys in the neighborhood and he fears that he will become a man who can't stand up to anything. He insists that if he hadn't seen the doctor pull Amir out of his mother with his own eyes, he would never believe he is his son.

Notes

This chapter is a reliving for Amir of how very much he desired his father's acceptance and approval and how very seldom he received it. He presents his Baba as a man who is larger than life and one whom Amir wishes he were exactly alike, but is not. His father presents Amir with some wisdom that is also foreshadowing: he tells Amir that the mullahs would ruin Afghanistan and that the only sin is theft of any kind. We will eventually see that his fear of the mullahs will come true when the Taliban eventually takes over the rule of Afghanistan and when Amir will learn that his father, in spite of his contempt for thieves, had already stolen something very important from him.

The most poignant aspect of this chapter is the end when Amir overhears the worst words any child can hear from a parent: that he is a disappointment to his father and that his father wonders if he might not be his son at all.