

## CHAPTER 4

### Summary

This chapter begins with the background of Ali, Hassan's father. He is the orphan son of a Hazara couple who had been killed on the road by two brothers who were high on hashish and *mast*, or drunk, on wine. Amir's grandfather had been the judge who had ordered the two boys to serve in the army for one year as punishment and who had then taken the orphan son of the dead couple, Ali, into his own home. He had raised Ali with Amir's Baba and they had grown up together just as Amir and Hassan have done a generation later. Amir says that never in all the stories his father told about him and Ali did he ever refer to Ali as his friend. It also occurs to him that he never thought of Hassan as his friend either. He is Pashtun and Sunni and Hassan is Hazara and Shi'a and nothing will ever change that. Of course, they had fed from the same breast and had learned to crawl together and nothing would change that either.

Amir goes on to describe all the different activities that he and Hassan would share: chasing the nomads, hurling pebbles from Hassan's slingshot, watching American western movies, all while Hassan fulfills the role of Amir's servant at the same time. Amir goes to school, but Hassan does not and so, Amir reads to Hassan. He even carved into the pomegranate tree these words: "Amir and Hassan, the Sultans of Kabul." One of Hassan's favorite stories was from the *Shahnamah*, the tenth century epic of ancient Persian heroes. It was about Rostam and Sohrab, a very tragic tale in which the two warriors battle each other and one kills the other, only to learn that he has killed his own son. One day, instead of reading the words of the epic as written, Amir substitutes his own stories, made up in his own imagination. Hassan loves them and begs him to read them again the next day. Amir is so amazed at Hassan's reaction that he sits down that night and writes his first short story. He takes it to his father and receives the usual lukewarm reaction - his father doesn't show any interest in even reading it. Fortunately for Amir, Rahim Khan is there and asks to read the story. His father is relieved that his friend is willing to read the story and leaves the room. At that moment, Amir wishes he could "open his veins and drain his cursed blood from his body."

Rahim Khan leaves Amir a note and speaks one word after reading the story: "Bravo!" The note is filled with praise for Amir, exactly what he would have wished his father had said instead. Nonetheless, he rushes downstairs and wakes Hassan to listen to the new story. Hassan is immediately excited to hear it. He is rapt with attention until Amir finishes it and then he says the same thing as Rahim Khan, "Bravo!" He tells Amir that *Inshallah*, or God willing, someday he will be a great writer and people all over the world will read his stories. Unfortunately, Hassan recognizes in Amir's plot something called a Plot Hole or an illogical aspect of the story. Amir is angry for a moment that an illiterate Hazara had taught him about a weakness in his writing. He starts to explain to Hassan why he had written it that way. Then, Afghanistan changes forever.

### Notes

Amir emphasizes the differences between his father and Ali and Hassan and him: they are differences of class and wealth and the two classes can never really cross into each other. It is the Afghanistan version of racism and classism and he and Hassan will become its victims in more ways than one. The story Hassan loves about Rostam and Sohrab is significant in that he will eventually name his own son Sohrab. Also, he is often seen as more intelligent than Amir and even though he can neither read nor write, he finds the plot hole in Amir's story. Nonetheless, Hassan never believes he is better than his young master and actually idolizes him. He is forever loyal.

The story Amir writes is rejected by his father, because it is not what he would have wished for his son to do with his life. Rahim Khan tries valiantly to substitute his own praise for that missing from Baba, but for Amir, it is not enough. He just feels he can never live up to what his father wants and that his father hates him. The ending of the chapter is an ominous one in that the life Amir and Hassan and their families have always known is about to come to an end.