

CHAPTER 5

Summary

Afghanistan has just been overthrown by a coup d'état and Ali races to Amir's and Hassan's side, trying to calm them by telling them it is just a duck hunt. When Hassan begins to cry, Ali embraces him tenderly and Amir tries to tell himself that he is not envious. He tells us that this overthrow of the monarchy would be followed about eighteen months later with the Russian invasion. They stay huddled together for the rest of the night until dawn when Baba returns, frantic to know they are alright. He embraces both boys and for a moment Amir is glad for what had happened that night.

Amir explains that it was a bloodless coup ordered by the king's cousin, Daoud Khan, who intends to establish a republic. Amir and Hassan briefly discuss whether Hassan and his father will be sent away, something he very much hopes never happens. Amir assures him that such an event will never happen and then they decide to go climb their tree.

On the way, Hassan is struck in the back with a rock. When the two whirl around, they discover Assef and two of his friends, Wali and Kamal, approaching them. Amir explains that Assef has a reputation for savagery in the streets and so is someone to avoid. However, he has found them. First, he calls them *kunis*, or fags. Then, he brags that their new leader, Daoud Khan, dined at his house the night before and that Assef has plans to tell the man how much he admires Hitler. He wants, like Hitler did in Germany, to rid Afghanistan of unwanted minorities like the Hazara and save it for the Pashtuns. He uses this as a threat to Hassan and pulls out his brass knuckles. He asks Amir how he can call such a one as Hassan a friend and Amir almost blurts out that Hassan is not a friend, but a servant. It would have done him no good, because Assef intends to hurt Amir as well since he and his father have "taken these people in."

Suddenly, Hassan bends down, picks up some stones, and pulls out his slingshot. Hassan orders Assef to leave them be, although he is still so socially ingrained that he refers to him, as he does to Amir and Baba, as agha, or master. His sense of his place in the social hierarchy doesn't mean he is not deadly serious about protecting Amir and himself and warns Assef that he will take out his eye. Assef lowers his fists and backs off, because Hassan's agility with a slingshot is known throughout the neighborhood. However, he warns them both that he is a patient person and that what has happened that day is not the end between them. Despite the fact that Assef and his friends walk away, neither of the two boys feels comforted. They know Assef is capable of anything.

For the next few years, the family sees Afghanistan declared a republic and life goes on as before. One day in the winter of 1974, while Amir and Hassan are building a snow fort, Ali calls Hassan in, because Baba wants to speak to him. It is Hassan's birthday and Baba has never forgotten to get him a present. This year, it is plastic surgery to repair Hassan's harelip. Amir is once again jealous and thinks that Hassan's present isn't fair. He even wishes he had his own scar. The surgery goes well and by the following winter, Hassan is finally able to smile normally. Amir thinks this is ironic, because that is the winter that Hassan stops smiling.

Notes

In this chapter, we see some significant events taking place: Amir once again shows his need for love and acceptance from his father, because he is envious of Ali's tenderness toward Hassan and he is almost glad for the long night of wondering what happened in Afghanistan, because he was embraced by Baba when he came home; we are introduced to the neighborhood bully, Assef, who has strange, anti-social ideas that mimic Hitler; Assef's decision to attack Amir and Hassan once again shows us the discrimination against the Hazara and foreshadows later events in which Assef will make good on his "patience;" and we see that Amir is a coward, because he wants to tell Assef that Hassan is not his friend, but his servant.

He is in contrast to Hassan who plans to use his slingshot against a Pashtun to save his Amir agha. So far, Hassan continues to be the better of the two boys in the strength of his character. Also, Hassan warns Assef that he will take out his eye if he doesn't leave them alone. This foreshadows what his son Sohrab actually does to Assef many years later under.

Hassan's surgery is an unexpected gift for a Pashtun to give a Hazara, even if he had lived in their house his whole life. It leaves the reader wondering if there is something more in this relationship and foreshadows the impact of the truth about Baba's love and generosity toward Hassan and Ali. Also, Amir himself presents both foreshadowing and irony when he tells us that the following winter something will happen that makes Hassan stop smiling.