

CHAPTER 6

Summary

Winter in Afghanistan is the yearly vacation from school, because it is so icy. It is also the season of kite flying. This is one activity that brings success to Amir and brings him closer to his father. Every winter, there is a kite-fighting tournament in Kabul. Amir and Hassan at first would make their own kites, including the *tar*, or glass-coated string. This would be used to cut the strings of kites flown by competitors. Every boy would have gashes in their fingers all winter because of making the tar. Eventually, however, Amir and Hassan decide they are better flyers than kite makers and they go to Saifo, the nearly blind kite maker. Baba always bought equally priced kites for the two boys and again Amir is jealous that he cannot be Baba's favorite.

The kite competition always begins early in the morning and continues until only one kite flies in the sky. It is Amir's job to actually fly the kite while Hassan holds the spool and feeds the line. Social hierarchy occurred even in kite flying. The Afghans are an independent people and showed this in how they fought the Russians. But they also show it in how they fly kites: there are no rules! When a kite is cut and begins to fall, then the kite runners will go into action. Every kite is a prize to them, but the most coveted prize is the last fallen kite. It is a trophy of honor and would be displayed on the mantle of the winner's home for guests to admire.

Amir says that Hassan is the best kite runner he had ever seen. He seems to have a sixth sense about where the kite will land and often doesn't follow it with his eyes, but with his ears and his feel for the wind. One time, Hassan just stopped and told Amir to sit down and wait, that the kite would come. Amir thinks he is lying, but Hassan tells him he would sooner eat dirt than ever lie to him. Amir challenges Hassan's loyalty by asking him if would indeed eat dirt if Amir asked. He almost finds a sick satisfaction in teasing the Hazara boy. However, Hassan throws the challenge back into Amir's lap by asking, "Would you ever ask me to do such a thing, Amir agha?" Then, before his eyes and before he can answer Hassan, the Hazara boy stands up and the kite that they had been waiting for literally drops into his open arms.

In the winter of 1975, Amir sees Hassan run for a kite for the last time. Several districts of the city are banding together for the first time to hold the biggest tournament ever. Baba tells Amir that this year he'll win the tournament. Amir has come close in past years, but has never won. Now his baba has planted the idea in his head that he *can* win. He wants to do this so badly, because this might end his "life as a ghost in his own home" forever. And maybe Baba will call him *Amir jan*, a term of affection that Rahim Khan uses, but his father never does. And maybe finally he will be forgiven for killing his mother.

The night before the tournament, Amir and Hassan warm themselves under a blanket and play *panjpar*, a card game. They discuss the fact that Daoud Khan, the new leader, has promised that soon Afghanistan will have television and Hassan notes that they already have TV in Iran. Amir sighs

when he mentions Iran, because he knows that the country is a sanctuary of sorts for the Hazara. Most of the Iranians are Shi'as rather than Sunnis and so, many Hazara live there. However, his teacher had once told his class that the Iranians were "smooth talkers who patted you on the back with one hand and picked your pocket with the other." Baba had told him that the comment was just jealousy, because Iran was a rising power.

Amir promises to buy Hassan a television and Hassan says he will put it on the table with his drawings. Amir is amazed that Hassan is content with the knowledge that he will probably spend the rest of his life in the mud hut behind Baba's house. Hassan tells Amir that he is going to make Baba very proud the next day. Amir is pleased he thinks so, but he is somewhat uncomfortable when Hassan says he likes where he lives, because it's his home. Once again, it is almost like Hassan can read Amir's mind, because he is so close to him.

Notes

This chapter introduces us to the event that gives the novel its title: the kite flying tournament. In learning about the event, we see Amir's jealousy of Hassan who is treated equally by Baba and we continue to understand that Amir just wants his father to make him the favorite. This undeveloped relationship with his father haunts the boy who feels great loneliness because of his father's inability to accept him for who he is.

Hassan is the best kite runner and this position once again allows him to show his loyalty to Amir. He says he would never lie to him and his fierce acceptance of his position in Amir's life reflects the great inner beauty of his soul. Hassan also continues to know Amir better than Amir knows himself: he knows that Amir is surprised that he would be content to stay in the same mud hut the rest of his life. But Hassan wants to be there, because it is his home. This foreshadows the terrible day that Hassan and Ali are forced to leave the only home either of them have ever known.

The commentary on the Iranians is interesting, because Americans have had the same type of experience with that country and know that what the teacher says is true.