

CHAPTER 8

Summary

For entire week after the kite tournament, Amir barely sees Hassan. He still makes Amir's breakfast and lays out his clothes, but he doesn't stay around to talk to him and Amir can no longer hear him sing. Ali tells Amir that, lately, all Hassan wants to do is sleep. Ali wonders if Amir knows why Hassan came home a little bloodied that day, but Amir cannot tell him the truth. Later, Amir asks his father if they can go to Jalalabad on Friday and when Baba says yes and offers to bring Hassan, too, Amir lies and says that Hassan is mareez, or not feeling well. Baba is also quite worried about Hassan, like Ali, because he hasn't seen much of him and now Amir says he is sick.

Amir wants the trip to Jalalabad to be between him and his father, but Baba ends up inviting all kinds of friends and relatives and they fill three vans. As usual, Amir is carsick all the way and it's made worse when the friends and relatives all praise him for winning the tournament. Only Rahim Khan looks thoughtfully at him instead of offering congratulations. Even though he must share Baba this day, Amir has his praise from him, something he's wanted for so long. Unfortunately, he just feels very empty. In the middle of the night, after Baba has continued with stories of the kite tournament, Amir awakens and hears everyone around him snoring and stirring in their sleep. He says aloud, but to no one in particular, "I watched Hassan get raped," but no one hears him. He then realizes his new curse: he's going to get away with it and now he's the monster of Hassan's dream. This begins his life as an insomniac. The guilt ridden cannot sleep.

The following week, Hassan and Amir go outside together and Hassan asks him to read from the *Shahnamah*, but when Amir sees the carving in the tree - Amir and Hassan: The Sultans of Kabul - he tells Hassan he doesn't feel like it. For the first time in his life, in spite of the fact that school will begin at that time, he cannot wait for spring.

The rest of that winter is hazy in Amir's memory - he only recalls how happy he was when Baba was at home. His father even reads some of his stories and so Amir believes their new found closeness will last. When Baba is gone, Amir closes himself in his room and reads, writes stories and draws. To his dismay, Hassan keeps trying to re-ignite their friendship and that only brings on a headache for Amir. When Hassan begs him to tell what he has done wrong, Amir just tells him to stop bothering him. He wishes Hassan would tell him off for that, but Hassan merely follows his bidding. It makes Amir hold his head under his pillow and sob. Also, it seems like everywhere Amir turns, he sees signs of Hassan's unwavering loyalty.

One day, Amir follows Baba into the garden and asks him if he ever thought of getting new servants. Baba just tells him that he's noticed that there is something going on between the two boys, but that he doesn't want to be forced into the middle of it. He lectures his son about how long he has known Ali and how Amir and Hassan were raised together from the breast. He warns him that if he ever says such a thing again, he will strike him. Hassan is not going anywhere as far as he is concerned. He emphasizes to Amir that this is Hassan's home and that they are his family.

Fortunately, for Amir, school starts soon after this conversation and gives him an excuse to remain in his room and complete his homework. One afternoon that summer (school was in session in the summer in Afghanistan), Amir asks Hassan to go with him to their spot at the top of the hill, because he says he wants to read

him one of his stories. They pick pomegranates and Amir asks Hassan what he would do if he hit him with one of them. Hassan refuses to answer and so Amir throws the pomegranate as hard as he can into Hassan's chest. It soon becomes obvious that Amir wants Hassan to hit him back. He taunts him to do so and even calls the Hazara boy a coward. When Hassan continues to remain silent, Amir hits him with another one and another one until Hassan is smeared in red like he'd been shot by a firing squad.

Finally, Hassan picks up a pomegranate and Amir thinks he's finally going to hit him. But Hassan instead smashes the fruit against his own forehead and asks Amir, "Are you satisfied? Do you feel better?" He turns away and walks down the hill while Amir once again breaks into tears and asks himself, "What am I going to do with you, Hassan?" The answer occurs to him only as he, too, is walking back toward home.

That summer, Amir turns thirteen and things are beginning to cool once more between him and Baba. He thinks it's because of his remark about getting new servants. However, Baba is planning a huge birthday party for Amir in spite of his belief that Baba is angry with him. The party turns out to be a huge success. Amir greets every guest personally and he receives a large pile of presents. Even Assef and his family are invited and when Amir observes how his parents behave around their son, it occurs to Amir that maybe they are a little afraid of him as well. Amir won't give Assef much attention and even refuses to go with him to a volleyball game the next day, much to Baba's embarrassment. But for Amir, this seemingly perfect boy, who is handsome, intelligent and popular, should be a different person, but his eyes reveal the madness behind the perfection. This feeling is reinforced when Amir opens Assef's present and it's a biography of Adolf Hitler, given to taunt Amir. Amir just throws it into the weeds.

After this experience, Amir stays outside for a while until he is found by Rahim Khan. Rahim Khan tells Amir about the fact that he was once married to a Hazara girl named Homaira. His family was so appalled at what he had done that they sent her away and he never saw her again. This is Rahim's way of trying to get Amir to tell him why he seems so unhappy and Amir almost tells him everything. He stops himself, however, because he fears that Rahim would hate him. Rahim Khan then gives Amir his present: a leather-bound notebook to hold his stories. This is followed by a scream, "Fireworks!" and they hurry into the house. During one of the bursts of light from the fireworks, Amir sees something he will never forget - Hassan is serving drinks to Assef and Wali and after taking a glass, Assef knees the Hazara boy in the chest.

Notes

This entire chapter is devoted to Amir's attempts to forget what he has done to Hassan. He treats him like a servant instead of his friend; he lies about him being ill; he hits him with ripe pomegranates; he even asks his father to get new servants. Nothing works, however, because Amir cannot discard his guilt as easily as he can discard Hassan himself. The birthday party reinforces this even more: he must deal with the emptiness inside him every time he is congratulated for winning the kite tournament and he must stand speechless while Hassan is forced to serve the very boys who raped him. The true coward that he called Hassan is really himself, because at least Hassan faced his attackers bravely while Amir just ran.