And the Mountains Echoed

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF KHALED HOSSEINI

Khaled Hosseini was born in Kabul, Afghanistan. His father was a successful diplomat, and his mother was a high school teacher at an all-girls school. As a child, Hosseini loved to read and write, and was encouraged by both of his parents, particularly his mother. In 1978, Hosseini's father moved the family to Paris. Following the start of the Soviet-Afghan War in early 1979, Hosseini's family realized that returning to Afghanistan would be nearly impossible. As a result, they spent the next two years in Paris. At the age of fifteen, Hosseini and his family moved to the United States. He spoke no English, and found his time in the U.S. extremely uncomfortable. Nevertheless, he succeeded in learning English, attended medical school at UC San Diego, and completed his residence at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles. For the next ten years, Hosseini practiced medicine while working on his first novel, *The Kite Runner*, which was loosely based on his childhood. When *The Kite Runner* was published in 2003, it made Hosseini an international literary star. In 2007 Hosseini published his second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, which was even more successful than *The Kite Runner*, and then published *And the Mountains Echoed* in 2013. Hosseini resides in New York and California, and is working on a fourth novel.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

And the Mountains Echoed alludes to many events in recent Afghan history, though its allusions are less overt than those of Hosseini's previous two novels, *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Nila Wahdati mentions that her family traveled to Afghanistan to aid in the political and social reforms of King Amanullah Khan, who ruled from 1919 to 1929. Amanullah instituted sweeping changes in Afghan society, banning the institution of slavery, modernizing and Westernizing the school system, and reducing state censorship of scientific and religious texts. Amanullah was banished from Afghanistan by his own cousin, who promptly reversed the majority of Amanullah's reforms, and Amanullah spent the remainder of his life in Switzerland. Hosseini also references the Soviet-Afghan War, which lasted from 1979 to 1989. During this long, bloody conflict, Soviet forces invaded Afghanistan, killing huge numbers of civilians and doing enormous damage to the country's infrastructure (including that of the city of Kabul, where much of *And the Mountains Echoed* takes place). The United States, which was locked in a Cold War with the Soviet Union at the time, took measures to arm and train Afghan resistance armies, prolonging the war by many years. (One of these armies was headed by Osama Bin Laden, at the time an ally of the U.S.). The Soviet-Afghan War paved the way for the rise of the Taliban—a terrorist group that used violence to oppose "Westernization" of the kind that Amanullah had installed decades previously. In the late 90s and early 2000s, the United States waged war on the Taliban in Afghanistan. In the novel, Dr. Markos Varvaris travels to Kabul in the early 2000s to help the sick and dying—the casualties of their country's numerous wars and violent conflicts since the late 70s.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

And the Mountains Echoed alludes to many literary works—indeed, its title is an allusion to the William Blake poem, "The Nurse's Song": "and the hills echoed." In this poem, a friendly nurse watches a group of children play outside, seemingly unaware of the dangers the children could encounter. This reflects the novel's themes of childhood, and the innocence that quickly gives way to cynical experience. It's also useful to situate Hosseini's novel in the recent trend of "everything is connected" fictions. Especially in the past twenty years, many novels have widened their scope to describe a greater number of characters in a larger number of settings, many of which lie outside the Western world. The characters in these novels don't always "mingle" with each other: instead, their paths cross occasionally, reflecting the increased complexity of the world in an era of globalization. Recent examples of this genre include *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010) by Jennifer Egan, *Let the Great World Spin* (2009) by Colum McCann, and *The Hours* (1998) by Michael Cunningham. Arguably the best examples of the genre can be found in cinema (where the techniques of montage and "cutting" fit perfectly with the genre's scope and pace). The films of Alejandro González Iñárritu—such as *Amores Perros* (1999), *21 Grams* (2003), and *Babel* (2005)—and Fernando Meirelles—such as *Blindness* (2008) and *360* (2011)—exemplify the ensemble casts and large-scale ambitions of the "everything is connected" genre.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *And the Mountains Echoed*
- **Where Written:** Kabul, Afghanistan and New York City, USA
- **When Published:** May 21, 2013
- **Literary Period:** Globalization fictions of the early 21st century
- **Genre:** Generational drama, historical novel
- **Setting:** There are many: Shadbagh, New Shadbagh, and

Kabul (all in Afghanistan); Paris, France; Tinos, Greece; California, USA.

- **Climax:** While *And the Mountains Echoed* is, in many ways, a collection of short vignettes, each of which can be said to have a climax, the climax of the entire novel arguably comes in Chapter Nine, when Pari reunites with her brother, Abdullah.
- **Antagonist:** None—in the vast, interconnected world of the novel, it's hard to separate "good" and "bad" characters.
- **Point of View:** The novel consists of nine chapters, each narrated from a different point of view. One chapter is epistolary (written in the form of a letter), another is written in the first person, and several others are narrated in the third person limited point of view. The majority of the chapters are also written in the present tense, rather than the more common past tense.

EXTRA CREDIT

Art and life: There's a good reason why all of Khaled Hosseini's novels concern the years following the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. Hosseini has admitted to suffering from a sense of survivor's guilt: he wishes his family hadn't left the country before the Soviet-Afghan War began. By writing about Afghanistan's history since that time, Hosseini controls and, he says, combats his acute sense of guilt.

Going for triple digits: You know you're a big-time author when your *least* successful book spends 33 weeks on the bestseller list. This was the case with *And the Mountains Echoed*, which was on the *New York Times* Best Seller list until January 2014, often in the number one slot. Any other novelist would have viewed this as a major achievement, but compared with *The Kite Runner* (101 weeks) and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (103 weeks), it was only a modest success for Hosseini.

PLOT SUMMARY

The novel is broken into nine chapters, each told from the perspective of a different character. In the first chapter, told from the perspective of the Afghan laborer Saboor, Saboor tells his two children, Abdullah and Pari, a fairy tale before they go to sleep. In the fairy tale, a farmer named Baba Ayub is forced to sacrifice his favorite son, Qais, to an evil spirit called **the div**. Ayub, furious with himself for giving up his own child, decides to hunt down the *div*. Eventually, he traces the *div* to a beautiful palace, in which he finds Qais playing happily with his friends. The *div* explains to Baba Ayub that it has provided Qais with a wonderful home and a good education. It gives Ayub two options: take Qais home, or allow him to stay. Reluctantly, Baba Ayub decides to let Qais stay. Before Ayub leaves, the *div*, sympathetic to Ayub's guilt, gives him a **bottle** of liquid that makes him forget that he ever had a son named Qais. Now an old man, Ayub returns to his home. Although he's forgotten about Qais almost entirely, he sometimes hears the sounds of his son—sounds that he has no way of understanding anymore.

The second chapter is set in the late 1940s and told from the perspective of Saboor's young son, Abdullah. Abdullah and his sister, Pari, travel with Saboor to the city of Kabul. Saboor has told his children that he's been summoned to do construction work on a mansion in the city, where his brother-in-law, Nabi, has been working as a servant. It takes Saboor, Pari, and Abdullah almost an entire day to travel to Kabul from their tiny village, Shadbagh. When they arrive, Nabi leads them to the mansion where he lives and works. Nabi introduces his family to Mr. Suleiman Wahdati and Mrs. Nila Wahdati, the owners of the mansion. During their visit, Mrs. Wahdati separates Abdullah and Pari, and then tells Abdullah that "it's for the best." It becomes clear that the Wahdatis have adopted Pari as their own child—and it seems that Abdullah, now returned to Shadbagh along with his father, will never see his beloved sister again. Nevertheless, Abdullah continues to love Pari more than anyone else. One day, he finds a small **yellow feather**, of the kind that Pari was once fond of collecting. Instead of throwing the feather away, he keeps it for himself, vowing to give it to Pari himself one day.

The third chapter is told from the perspective of Parwana, Saboor's second wife, and Abdullah and Pari's stepmother. Parwana—as the chapter begins, a single woman, not yet married to Saboor—takes care of her beautiful twin sister, Masooma, who has recently had a horrible accident, and can no longer walk. While they were growing up, Parwana and Masooma were competitive with one another, and Parwana in particular resented Masooma for being prettier and more popular than she. Parwana developed a crush on Saboor, then a young, handsome man. Because Parwana was shy and cautious, Masooma was able to "swoop in" and claim Saboor for herself. Masooma and Saboor became a serious couple, and a few years later, they announced their engagement. Parwana was so jealous that she caused Masooma to fall from a tall tree, causing the injury that left her a paraplegic. For the next few years, Parwana, overcome with guilt, took care of Masooma at all times. Meanwhile, Saboor married another woman, who died while giving birth to Pari. As the chapter comes "full circle," Parwana learns that Saboor is interested in remarrying, and wants to court her. Masooma, who senses that Parwana and Saboor may become a couple, tells Parwana to leave her. At first, Parwana is reluctant to abandon her sister. Eventually, however, she decides to marry Saboor. She leaves Masooma, and never sees her again.

The fourth chapter consists of a letter, written by Nabi, the brother of Masooma and Parwana. Nabi, an old man as the chapter begins, describes his career working for the Wahdati family. As a young man, Nabi works as a cook and chauffeur for Mr. Suleiman Wahdati, a quiet, shy man. Shortly after he begins

his job, Mr. Wahdati marries Mrs. Nila Wahdati, a beautiful, mysterious woman with whom Nabi is fascinated. As the years go on, Nabi becomes increasingly close with Nila, and is ultimately the one to suggest that Nila and Suleiman adopt Pari as their own child. While Saboor agrees, he comes to hate Nabi for his role in breaking up Saboor's family.

As Pari grows up in the 60s and 70s, she loses all memory of Saboor and Abdullah, and comes to think of Nabi as her servant, rather than her uncle. Nila, meanwhile, becomes more alienated from her husband. While Pari is still young, Nila leaves her husband and takes Pari to live in Paris, never to return. Mr. Wahdati suffers a stroke that leaves him incapable of walking, and as a result, Nabi spends more and more time taking care of his employer, eventually becoming his only companion. Nabi and Wahdati grow old together. One day, when they're both elderly, Wahdati reveals that he's always been in love with Nabi. Nabi isn't sure how to respond, but he continues to work as Wahdati's loyal servant. In the early 2000s, Wahdati dies, leaving all his property to Nabi. Around this time, the Taliban invade Kabul, throwing the city into chaos. Nabi invites a group of European doctors and surgeons to stay in his home for free. One of these, Dr. Markos Varvaris, is the recipient of Nabi's letter from the fourth chapter. In closing, Nabi tells Markos that he must track down Pari and tell her that she has a brother named Abdullah.

In Chapter Five, two cousins, Timur Bashiri and Idris Bashiri, arrive in Afghanistan from the United States in the mid-2000s. Timur is a loud, arrogant used car dealer, while Idris is a shy, reserved doctor who resents Timur greatly. They've come to investigate what became of their family's property in Kabul. During their stay in the city, they make the acquaintance of a Bosnian doctor, Dr. Amra Ademovic. Amra befriends Idris, and introduces him to a beautiful young girl named Roshana, who was nearly murdered by the Taliban. Idris is so moved by Roshana that he promises to find a way to pay for the surgeries she needs to make a full recovery. Back in the United States, Idris immediately finds himself engulfed with responsibilities at his hospital and home, and can't find the time to research Roshana's operation. Eventually he forgets about the entire situation.

Years later, Roshana has made a full recovery, thanks to the generosity of Idris's cousin, Timur. Roshana, now a young woman, has written a book about her life. The book is dedicated to Timur and Amra. Idris—terrified that Roshana has written about his negligence and callousness—goes to a book signing event for Roshana's book. When it's his turn to have his book signed, Roshana barely acknowledges him. In his copy, she writes, "Don't worry. You're not in it."

Chapter Six concerns Pari's relationship with Nila Wahdati, the woman she's come to think of as her mother. At the chapter begins, Nila—now a middle-aged woman—has a poor relationship with her adopted daughter. She's been a neglectful parent, despite building up a successful career as a poet. When Pari was a young teenager, Nila began seeing a man named Julien, for whom Pari had feelings, too. Julien and Nila's relationship lasted only a few months. Several years later, while Pari was studying mathematics at the Sorbonne, she encountered Julien once again, and they began an affair of their own. When Pari worked up the courage to tell Nila about the affair, Nila laughed and told Pari that they were no longer mother and daughter.

The chapter is intercut with portions of an interview that Nila gives for a poetry magazine. In the interview, Nila explains that she never had a romantic relationship with Mr. Wahdati, since he was "in love with the chauffeur." She also talks about her father, a cruel man who often beat her. Shortly after giving the interview, Nila kills herself by slitting her wrists.

Pari is devastated by her mother's suicide, and feels guilty for not spending more time with her. Nevertheless, she proceeds with her studies of mathematics, and eventually earns a Ph.D. As a young woman, she marries a man named Eric Lacombe, with whom she has three children. As she grows older, Pari comes to feel a stronger connection with Nila than she ever did when Nila was alive: she recognizes how difficult it can be to be a parent. Years later, when Pari is an elderly woman and barely able to walk, she receives a call from Marko Varvaris, who tells her that she has a brother named Abdullah. As she processes this news, she feels a strange sense of connection with her sibling—a sense that she's forgotten about for decades.

The seventh chapter concerns a boy named Adel who lives in Shadbagh in 2009. His father, Commander Sahib, is a powerful military leader, whom Adel loves and worships. One day, while his father is out of the city, Adel meets a boy named Gholam. Gholam develops a friendship with Adel, and they spend the afternoons playing soccer together. One day, Gholam reveals that he's the son of Iqbal—Saboor and Parwana's child. Gholam and Iqbal had been forced to live on a refugee camp in Pakistan following the invasion of the Taliban in the early 2000s. Now Gholam and Iqbal have returned to Afghanistan, only to find that their land has been stolen by Adel's father. At first, Adel refuses to believe that Gholam is telling the truth. Several days later, however, he's sitting with his father in their house when an old man—Iqbal—throws a rock through a window. Commander Sahib orders Adel to go upstairs while he "deals with" the man. Adel wonders what will become of the man, and imagines that he might even be shot. The next day, Adel sees a story in the newspaper about how Commander Sahib survived an "assassination attempt." As he reads the story—which never says what became of the old man—Adel senses that he'll never again be able to love or trust his father.

In Chapter Eight, narrated by Markos Varvaris, we see Markos at many points in his life, beginning with his childhood on the Greek island of Tinos. Markos has a conflicted relationship with his stern mother, Odelia, who takes good care of him but

doesn't show him any affection. One day, Odelia announces that she'll be hosting a visit from her old friend, Madaline, and Madaline's daughter, Thalia. When Markos meets Thalia, he notices that she has a hideous wound on her face—a wound which came from a dog bite, and which has taken away most of her lower jaw. As time goes on, Markos strikes up a friendship with Thalia. He learns that she's intelligent and quick-witted. She also encourages him to take up photography as a hobby. Eventually, Madaline abandons Thalia, leaving her to live with Odelia and Markos—Madaline has selfishly accepted work as an actress in a film, and no longer has any interest in her daughter.

The chapter cuts ahead to Markos's early adulthood. He travels the world, using money that Thalia has inherited from her father, who's recently passed away. Markos photographs buildings and natural landmarks across the world, keeping up his close friendship with Thalia the entire time. He decides to become a doctor after nearly dying in an Indian hospital and being unable to save a young boy. Although he goes on to become a plastic surgeon, and often offers Thalia the chance to repair her face, Thalia always refuses.

One day, when Markos is a middle-aged man and Odelia is old and suffering from Lou Gehrig's disease, he goes to visit her in Tinos. She tells him that she's proud of him. Markos is overjoyed to hear these words—he's been waiting for decades to hear his mother say them to him. Nevertheless, he's saddened that he and his mother have always felt alienated from one another, and he wishes they could have been closer.

In the final chapter of the book, Abdullah's daughter, Pari II, explains how her father reunited with Pari, her aunt and namesake. Pari II is a good, devoted daughter who's given up art school to take care of her mother, who dies of cancer, and later her ailing father, who's beginning to suffer from dementia. Pari II receives a call from Pari, and arranges for Pari to come to California, where Abdullah has settled. When Pari and Abdullah reunite, Abdullah is at first skeptical that Pari is who she claims to be. He realizes the truth when Pari sings him the song Abdullah used to sing her when they were both children. This happy reunion doesn't last long, however, as Abdullah begins to lose his memory. One day he screams at Pari, accusing her of being a thief and a liar.

Pari II and Pari decide to take a trip to Paris together. While Pari II is packing, she comes across a small box that belongs to her father. Inside, she finds the yellow feather he kept decades ago. Next to the feather, she finds a note, dated shortly after Abdullah learned he was losing his memory, explaining that he's spent his entire life waiting to see Pari again. In Paris, Pari II has a vivid dream in which Abdullah and Pari reunite as children, and embrace tenderly.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Baba Ayub – A character in the story Saboor tells his children, Baba Ayub is a simple farmer forced to make an impossible choice: he must sacrifice one of his own children to appease an evil creature, **the div**. Baba Ayub's capacity to make agonizing decisions—and then live with these decisions—establishes memory, interconnectedness, and time as some of the most important themes of the novel.

Abdullah – Abdullah, the son of Saboor, first appears in the novel as a young child, while at the end of the book, he's an old man, succumbing to dementia. The only constant in his life (symbolized by the **yellow feather** he keeps) is his devotion to his sister, Pari, from whom he's separated for the better part of his life. While *And the Mountains Echoed* doesn't exactly have a protagonist, Abdullah is arguably the novel's central character: not the most complex or richly drawn character, but the one who best embodies the novel's themes of love, time, memory, and forgetting. Although Abdullah provides the most compelling evidence in the novel for the persistence of love in the face of age, money, and distance, his example ultimately proves that even this kind of love can fall victim to the deterioration of time.

Pari Wahdati – The daughter of Saboor and the brother of Abdullah, Pari plays a major role in more chapters of *And the Mountains Echoed* than any other character, and so is another contestant for the novel's main protagonist. At a young age, she's adopted by Mrs. Nila Wahdati, who eventually takes Pari to Paris with her. In Paris, Pari grows up to study mathematics—a field she enjoys, it's suggested, because it clashes with her mother's interests in poetry. More than almost anyone else in the novel, Pari's adult behavior seemed dictated by the absences in her childhood: for instance, it's implied that she's attracted to the older, calmer Julien because he represents a father figure, of the kind Pari never had growing up. Pari has a similarly conflicted relationship with her adopted mother, Nila, and as a result makes great efforts to be a loving, attentive parent for her own children. In the end, Pari reunites with her brother, Abdullah. While this event may seem like the dramatic climax of the novel, Hosseini makes it clear that Pari's odyssey from childhood to old age is only one small part of the story he's telling. Pari may be the protagonist of her own story, but she's an ensemble player in the "stories" of the other characters, and a supporting player in the stories of still others.

Father / Saboor – A Stoic, hard-working Afghan farmer and laborer, Saboor is arguably the most ambiguous major character in the novel. He's responsible for making the choice to sell his daughter, Pari, to a wealthy couple, Mr. and Mrs. Wahdati—a choice which has consequences that echo throughout the rest of the book. And yet we know little to

nothing about Saboor's personality, his "inner life," etc. After selling Pari, Saboor becomes alienated from his other child, Abdullah, and dies in his early forties, unaware of the effects Pari's absence will have on the other characters in the book.

Parwana – The second wife of Saboor, the sister of Masooma, and the mother of Iqbal, Parwana is the main character of the third chapter of *And the Mountains Echoed*. As a young woman, Parwana develops a rivalry with her sister, Masooma, whom Parwana considers to be prettier and more likeable than she. After Parwana learns that Masooma is preparing to marry Saboor—a man Parwana has liked for many years—Parwana spitefully causes her sister to fall out of a tree, injuring her and causing her to spend the rest of her life an invalid. Parwana spends many years caring for her sister, guilty but unwilling to admit what she's done. In the end, Saboor begins to court Parwana, and—partly with Masooma's encouragement—Parwana marries Saboor, leaving her sister to fend for herself.

Uncle Nabi – The brother of Parwana and Masooma, Uncle Nabi is the main character in Chapter Four of *And the Mountains Echoed*. Because he works for the Wahdatis, he is instrumental in arranging the "sale" of Pari, which has huge ramifications for almost every character in the book. Beginning in the 1960s, Nabi becomes Mr. Wahdati's servant, caretaker, and best friend. When Wahdati dies, Nabi inherits his employer's property, which he then gives away to Dr. Markos Varvaris almost immediately. At the end of his life, Nabi makes another crucial decision: he reveals to Markos that Pari and Abdullah are brother and sister—a piece of information that sets in motion the events of the final chapter.

Masooma – The sister of Parwana, Masooma is described (from Parwana's perspective) as a beautiful young woman, desired by every man in her community. Although Masooma has planned to marry Saboor, Parwana's connivances cause Masooma to become an invalid for the rest of her life (though she doesn't know her sister is responsible for her injury). At the end of her life, Masooma tells Parwana to marry Saboor and leave her to fend for herself.

Mr. Suleiman Wahdati – The wealthy head of the Wahdati's household, Mr. Suleiman Wahdati is a mysterious character throughout most of Chapter Four of *And the Mountains Echoed*. After his wife, Nila Wahdati, and adopted daughter, Pari, leave him for Paris, Mr. Wahdati develops an extremely close friendship with Nabi, his servant. As time goes on, it's revealed that Wahdati is in love with Nabi—a fact that, in retrospect, explains why he spends long hours drawing Nabi.

Mrs. Nila Wahdati – The beautiful, troubled wife of Mr. Suleiman Wahdati, Mrs. Nila Wahdati is an unpredictable, romantic, and undeniably talented woman. When she first appears in the early chapters of the novel, she's desperate to have a child—and knows she'll never succeed with her husband, a closeted homosexual. When Nabi arranges for Mrs. Wahdati to adopt Pari as her own child, Mrs. Wahdati moves to Paris with Pari, where she begins her a career as a poet, and begins to resent her new daughter. In the end, Mrs. Wahdati seems to regret her decision to adopt Pari, and views her life as a failure in almost every way. She commits suicide when Pari is a young woman.

Dr. Markos Varvaris ("Mr. Markos") – The narrator of Chapter Eight of *And the Mountains Echoed*, Dr. Markos Varvaris is a troubled plastic surgeon, who's spent many years of his life trying to find a profession that will both bring him happiness and make his mother, Odelia, proud. As a young man, Markos develops a close friendship with Thalia—a friendship that ultimately inspires him to become a plastic surgeon and travel to Afghanistan, where he uses his training to care for the injured. Markos is also instrumental in reuniting Pari and Abdullah: after Nabi dies, Markos is the one to inform Pari that she has a brother.

Dr. Amra Ademovic – A Bosnian nurse who works in the hospitals in Kabul, Afghanistan following the rise of the Taliban, Dr. Amra Ademovic is a capable and selfless woman who uses her training to care for the injured in her hospital. She seems to have a special fondness for children, such as Roshana, and goes out of her way to ensure that they receive the best medical care.

Dr. Idris Bashiri – An Afghan immigrant who works as a doctor in the United States, Dr. Idris Bashiri is a quiet, shy, and somewhat self-righteous young man. He resents his cousin, Timur Bashiri, for being more successful and confident than he is. When Idris visits Afghanistan in the mid-2000s, he develops a close friendship with Roshana, a young girl whom he meets in a hospital. While he plans to use his power and medical influence to save Roshana's life, Idris's ease of lifestyle in his adopted country ultimately distracts him from helping Roshana, and causes him tremendous guilt and self-hatred.

Timur Bashiri – The loud, charismatic, and somewhat obnoxious cousin of Dr. Idris Bashiri, Timur Bashiri is an ambiguous character, since he's seen entirely through the eyes of his cousin. Idris deeply dislikes Timur, so it's not clear if Timur is, as Idris insists, actually a showy, insincere braggart or not. What *is* clear, however, is that Timur spends large amounts of his time and money caring for other people: beggars, friends in need, and, at the end of Chapter Five, Roshana, the young girl Idris has forgotten about.

Roshana – A young girl confined to a hospital in Kabul after she's attacked by the Taliban, Roshana is the embodiment of innocence and kindness. (She may be partly modeled on Malala Yousafzai, the real-life girl who was shot by the Taliban and went on to write a book about her experience.) Although Idris assures Roshana that he'll use his medical influence to care for her, it is Timur who ultimately provides her with the help she

needs. When Roshana grows older, she writes a book about her experience, and dedicates it to Timur and Amra Ademovic, the nurse who cared for her.

Pari II (daughter) – The narrator of the final chapter of *And the Mountains Echoed*, Pari II (called Pari in the novel), is the devoted daughter of Abdullah and Sultana, and a resident of the state of California. Although Pari II excels as an artist, she makes the difficult decision to remain in California and care for her elderly parents instead of pursuing her career elsewhere. When Pari—Abdullah's sister, and Pari II's aunt and namesake—learns that Abdullah is still alive, Pari II plays an important role in reuniting her father and aunt. In the final pages of the novel, Pari II has the painful role of witnessing her father succumb to dementia before he can truly appreciate seeing his sister again.

Adel – The son of Baba Jan, and a resident of the city of Shadbagh, Adel is a young, innocent child, and the main character in Chapter Seven of *And the Mountains Echoed*. For most of the chapter, Adel regards his father as a hero who selflessly gives his money to build schools and hospitals for the people of Shadbagh. As the chapter proceeds, however, Adel learns from Gholam that his father is a cruel, criminal man, who's used his military force to do great damage to the people of Afghanistan. Ultimately, Adel comes to view his father with a mixture of fear and awe—a far cry from the unconditional love he felt for Baba Jan prior to meeting Gholam.

Baba Jan / The Commander / Commander Sahib – An unnamed character, and one of the antagonists of Chapter Seven of *And the Mountains Echoed*, The Commander is a powerful, intimidating leader, about whom we know very little, since he's seen entirely from the perspective of his young, adoring son, Adel. As the chapter unfolds, it becomes clear that The Commander is a dangerous military leader, as well as a criminal. He steals land from Iqbal and Gholam, and then manipulates the justice system to keep his property. While it's not clear exactly what The Commander's crimes are, we can deduce from the constant presence of guns in his followers' hands that he's a very dangerous person.

Gholam – The son of Iqbal (Abdullah's half-brother), Gholam is a clever, savvy teenager who befriends Adel during Chapter Seven of the novel. Gholam knows from his father that The Commander, Adel's father, is a thief and criminal. He doesn't hesitate to share this information with Adel, despite the fact that Adel idolizes his father.

Thalia – A calm, intelligent woman who appears during Chapter Eight. Ever since being bitten by a dog as a child, Thalia has borne a brutal facial injury, one that makes the people in her life uncomfortable around her, at least initially. When her mother, Madaline, brings her to live with Markos and Odelia, Thalia develops a close friendship with Markos that stays strong for the rest of her life. Thalia is instrumental in encouraging Markos to become a photographer, and later a plastic surgeon. While Markos frequently offers Thalia free plastic surgery, which could remove her injury for good, Thalia always refuses any such procedure: she's proud of her body and her life.

Madaline – The arrogant, narcissistic mother of Thalia, Madaline figures in Chapter Eight of *And the Mountains Echoed*. While she's lifelong friends with Odelia, Odelia begins to resent her constant talk about husbands and boyfriends. Eventually Madaline abandons Thalia, leaving her behind to live with Odelia and Markos. Madaline spends the rest of her life as a successful theater producer.

Odelia Varvaris – The mother of Markos Varvaris, Odelia Varvaris is a strong, tough, and often seemingly emotionless woman. Although she takes good care of Markos, and later of Thalia, Odelia has a difficult time expressing her love and pride in other people. Her Stoicism causes Markos to experience identity crises for many years. Ultimately, shortly after being diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease, she tells her son that she's extremely proud of him—words which fill Markos with pride, but also remind him of the loving relationship he and his mother have been missing for years.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Qais – The favorite child of Baba Ayub in the story Saboor tells his children in the first chapter of the novel.

Baitullah – A man who lives in the same village as Saboor, Masooma, and Parwana.

Zahib – An irritable and lazy gardener who works for Mr. Suleiman Wahdati for many years.

Mr. Bashiri – An employee of Afghanistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the 1970s, the father of Idris, and the uncle of Timur.

Nahil – The wife of Dr. Idris Bashiri, a young woman planning on attending law school.

Farooq – An Afghan lawyer hired by Timur and Idris Bashiri to manage the sale of their property in the city of Kabul.

Zabi – One of Dr. Idris Bashiri's two children.

Lemar – One of Dr. Idris Bashiri's two children.

Sultana – The wife of Abdullah and the mother of Pari II, Sultana appears briefly in the final chapter of *And the Mountains Echoed* before dying of cancer.

Joan Schaeffer – The chief doctor at Dr. Idris Bashiri's hospital.

Julien – A mature, intelligent Frenchman, Julien works first as a professor at the Sorbonne, and later as an employee of the International Monetary Fund. He appears in *And the Mountains Echoed* in Chapter Six, where he's the lover of both Nila Wahdati and (later) Pari Wahdati.

Christian – A college friend of Julien.

Aurelie – A college friend of Julien.

Dr. Delaunay – The doctor who calls Pari after Nila Wahdati has an "accident."

King Amanullah – The ruler of Afghanistan in the years following World War II, King Amanullah is a young, "Westernized" politician, who tries and fails to introduce secularism and democracy to his country, and is ultimately banished for his efforts.

Collette – A friend of Pari Wahdati, who ultimately marries Didier and runs a profitable travel company.

Zahia – A young nursing student, with whom Pari Wahdati lives briefly, following the end of her romance with Julien.

Eric Lacombe – The husband of Pari Wahdati (after her relationship with Julien).

Isabelle – The eldest daughter of Pari Wahdati and Eric Lacombe, who ultimately marries Albert and works as a musician.

Alain – The middle child of Pari Wahdati and Eric Lacombe, who ultimately marries Ana and has four children.

Didier – A psychiatrist who marries Collette.

Malalai – A teacher at a school in New Shadbagh.

Kabir – One of The Commander's bodyguards.

Andrea Gianakos – One of several husbands of Madaline.

Manaar – A young Indian boy whom Dr. Markos Varvaris meets while he's in the hospital with hepatitis. Manaar plays a crucial role in convincing Markos to become a doctor, as Markos develops a close bond with Manaar, but can't save his life.

Dorian – Madaline's first husband.

Apollo – The dog that attacked Thalia and gave her a lifelong facial injury.

Hector Juarez – A soldier and friend of Pari II, who becomes a paraplegic after fighting in Afghanistan.

Iqbal – The half-brother of Abdullah, who lives as a refugee in Afghanistan and Pakistan. His son is Gholam, and his land is stolen by the The Commander.

Ana – The wife of Alain.

Albert – The husband of Isabelle.

Aunt Nargis – Adel's aunt.

Gianna – A beautiful woman who sleeps with Dr. Markos Varvaris, and later burns his photograph of Thalia because she thinks Thalia is his girlfriend.

Omar – The child of Saboor and Parwana, who dies, possibly because of Saboor's carelessness.

Shuja – Saboor, Pari, and Abdullah's beloved dog.

Thierry – The youngest child of Pari Wahdati and Eric Lacombe. He has a poor relationship with his parents and lives in Chad, where he works with Darfur refugees.

The div – In Saboor's story, **the div** is a magical creature—not entirely good or evil—who forces Baba Ayub to make a difficult choice: either sacrifice a member of his family, or watch as the *div* kills all of them. (See Symbols for more on the *div*.)

Andreas – Another of Madaline's husbands.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

INTERCONNECTEDNESS

Perhaps the most obvious theme of *And the Mountains Echoed* is interconnectedness. The novel consists of nine chapters, each written from the perspective of a different character. Instead of unfolding like a conventional novel—with a small number of characters interacting with each other for the entire book—Hosseini's book cuts back and forth between many different characters, many of whom don't know each other, or are only dimly aware of each other's existence—and all this takes place over the course of many decades. It's worth thinking about why Hosseini structures his novel in this way.

One way to define interconnectedness is to talk about how small actions have huge consequences. The characters in *And the Mountains Echoed* make decisions that they only see as affecting themselves or the people around them, yet their decisions have huge effects on other people, and even affect future generations to come. There's a famous "thought experiment" that suggests that the flapping of a butterfly's wing could trigger a chain of events that causes a hurricane on the other side of the world. Hosseini's novel, one could say, is about some of these "hurricanes." For example, Saboor, an impoverished father working in Afghanistan, makes the difficult decision to sell his daughter, Pari, to the Wahdatis, a wealthy family living in Kabul. At first, the decision seems to affect only a small number of people: Saboor, his son Abdullah, Pari herself, and the couple who adopt her. But in fact, Hosseini shows how the decision ends up changing the lives of many dozens of people: Abdullah's own child (whom he also gives them name Pari), Mrs. Wahdati's future boyfriends and lovers, the European doctors who take over the Wahdati's house years later, etc.

The theme of interconnectedness has enormous moral implications in the novel. One could almost say it's a *good* thing that the characters in *And the Mountains Echoed* aren't aware of the effects of their decisions on the world—if there were aware, they might collapse under the crushing weight of their choices.

There seems to be no winning option: if the characters in the novel knew exactly what effects their actions were causing, they would be paralyzed, but because the characters *don't* know what they're doing, they cause all kinds of pain and discomfort to others, naively assuming that their decisions influence only a few people.

And yet *And the Mountains Echoed* doesn't simply paint a picture of a chaotic world where there's no strictly "right" or "wrong" thing to do. Even if we can't be sure exactly what the consequences of our actions will be, we can still try to ensure that these consequences will be positive, not negative, by following simple rules of kindness, respect, and love. The novel is full of examples of how small, kind actions get "multiplied" into enormous, positive effects. The lifelong friendship between Nabi (Saboor's brother-in-law) and his employer, Mr. Wahdati, a crippled invalid, ends up benefitting hundreds of people throughout the city of Kabul: because Nabi helps Wahdati take care of his house and keep it safe from vandals, the house is still in excellent condition in the early 2000s, when doctors arrive in Afghanistan, looking for places where they can treat the sick and dying. Nabi, who has inherited the house from Wahdati, offers it to the doctors, and as a result hundreds of young children are given the best medical care possible. In the end, Hosseini suggests that interconnectedness is a "neutral multiplier"—small good actions end up having large good effects, and the inverse is true as well. Even if we can't be sure what effects our actions have, the novel suggests, we should try to behave well and treat others with respect, as our actions are always more consequential than we think.

TIME, MEMORY, FORGETTING, AND ART

In the first chapter of *And the Mountains Echoed*, an impoverished Afghan worker, Saboor, tells his two children, Abdullah and Pari, a story about a farmer, Baba Ayub, who's forced to sacrifice his beloved child, Qais, to a monster called **the div**. Baba Ayub does so, and then is horrified by his own callous choice to murder his own son. Yet the *div* gives him a way of fighting his own guilt and pain: a small **bottle** that allows him to forget Qais altogether. Even after Baba Ayub drinks from the bottle, however, he has brief, fleeting memories of his son.

As the opening chapter suggests, *And the Mountains Echoed* is a book about the relationship between time, memory, and forgetting. To be human is to make decisions—some of which are extremely difficult. The power to forget is thus one of humanity's most powerful survival mechanisms. If we didn't have the power to slowly forget our actions over time, we would spend our entire lives full of grief and self-hatred. And yet, as the story of Baba Ayub indicates, forgetting isn't always totally effective: we will always remember bits and pieces of the past, particularly about the people we love most. The novel asks then asks if it's ever *really* possible to forget the people we love most. When is it better to remember, and when is it useful to forget? Is forgetting ever a choice?

In a sense, *And the Mountains Echoed* is a novel about the conflict between love and forgetfulness. Although there are many different characters and stories in the book, arguably the "central" story (the story Hosseini begins with, and to which he returns at the end) is that of Pari and her brother Abdullah, who are separated at a young age. Abdullah spends most of his life remembering his beloved younger sister—he even names his child after her. While Pari's memories of Abdullah are less clear (she was only four years old when they were separated), she remembers him decades later. The siblings' love for one another is so powerful that time and forgetfulness can't destroy it.

It's tempting to think of forgetfulness as the "villain" of the novel: the force that threatens and sometimes destroys love. Yet it's important to keep in mind that, sometimes, forgetting can be a force for good. The characters in the novel endure enormous pain and tragedy, and if they didn't have the power to forget, they'd have no way of healing and moving on with their lives. Thalia, a young woman who's attacked by a dog as a young girl and sustains a horrible facial injury for most of her life, experiences bullying and cruelty for most of her adolescence. And yet as she grows up, she manages to move beyond this cruelty, even befriending some of the people who once bullied her. Although time doesn't permit Thalia to forget her past entirely, it does allow her to forget some of the intensity of her pain, and gives her an opportunity to grow into a mature, happy adult.

In the end, *And the Mountains Echoed* offers a nuanced theory of time, memory, and forgetting. Sometimes it's important to remember things—indeed, memory is often what gives life meaning, as in Abdullah's case—but sometimes it's also necessary to forget. In the end, for better or worse, forgetting often wins out. Even Abdullah, who faithfully remembers his little sister for decades, eventually succumbs to Alzheimer's disease, and forgets who Pari is.

Because memory is both flawed and extremely important, the novel concludes that art is especially vital to humanity. Many of the characters in the novel turn to some kind of art as a way of remembering the past: Mr. Markos with his photography, Abdullah with the **yellow feather** he keeps in memory of his sister, and perhaps even Hosseini with the novel itself. Humans don't have perfect memories, but they do have the ability to preserve their memories in other ways: through conversation, art, and, above all, writing.

COMPASSION AND SELFISHNESS

In *And the Mountains Echoed*—a novel about the interconnectedness of all human beings—it's no surprise that compassion is among the most

important themes. At times, the characters makes choices aiming to benefit only themselves, but at many other points they choose to help other people. Hosseini poses some complicated questions related to this theme: for which people do we feel the most compassion? for how long are we obligated to help these people? and at what point does compassion become a kind of selfishness—a way to fight one's own sense of guilt?

Because *And the Mountains Echoed* is a novel with dozens of main characters, it's difficult to take away any single "big point" about compassion. In each of the novel's nine chapters, the characters are confronted with different kinds of moral dilemmas, some of which have different solutions, and some of which don't really have "solutions" at all. At the same time, the novel suggests many important points about compassion, selfishness, and human nature.

One of the most important conclusions the novel reaches is that compassion is, fundamentally, a free choice. The characters who feel the greatest compassion for others aren't "obligated" to feel this way in any sense. Hosseini emphasizes this point by showing how characters often feel more compassion for strangers than they do for their own families. Dr. Markos, for example, struggles to show his compassion for his own mother, Odelia—a person whom, one might say, he's obligated by society and blood ties to love—but he has few reservations about devoting his adult life to helping the victims of war in Kabul, Afghanistan. Although one often hears about one's "duty to your family/fellow man" in politics and literature, *And the Mountains Echoed* never suggests that caring about other people is a duty—either you choose to do so, or you don't.

One strange side effect of the fact that compassion is a choice is that compassionate acts are also, at times, selfishly motivated. Characters choose to devote their time and money to helping other people, but they do so in large part because they themselves want to feel happier. Indeed, the characters in *And the Mountains Echoed* who are most compassionate toward others are often the characters who are most selfish in other respects, suggesting that their compassion is itself a kind of selfishness. Dr. Markos, to continue the earlier example, helps war victims in Kabul, but Hosseini makes it clear that he's doing so in large part because he's unsure about his place in the world and because he's always felt unloved. For Markos, compassion is a kind of therapeutic transaction—by showing love and respect for others, he gains the love and respect that he's been searching for. In another chapter, Hosseini studies the fine line between compassion and selfishness by showing the rivalry between Idris and his cousin, Timur. Although Timur appears to be a selfish and arrogant person, he also devotes large amounts of his own time and money to helping the poor and unfortunate, and at the end of the chapter, he saves the life of a young Afghan girl, Roshana.

As befits a novel about many characters and settings, *And the Mountains Echoed* never portrays a single or "correct" form of compassion—people express their love for each other in all kinds of ways, and for all kinds of reasons. And yet all these forms of compassion are united in the sense that they're impactful: their effects echo and amplify over time. In the end, the novel suggests that compassion is most powerful when it takes the form of action, not thought: Markos and Timur's "selfish selflessness" in Kabul, Nabi's care for Mr. Wahdati, etc. It's because compassion must be expressed through action that it has so many far-reaching consequences, and takes so many different shapes.

FAMILY

In each of the nine chapters of *And the Mountains Echoed*, we're presented with a subtly different kind of family. In the loosest terms, this means a small group of people between whom there exists an intimate, personal bond. Sometimes the family bond is purely biological: a father, a mother, some children, some grandchildren, etc. Other families in the novel are less literal, however. Often a character *chooses* to belong to a "family" of strangers, with varying degrees of success. Hosseini explores these different kinds of families, and the ways that people attempt to navigate between them.

It's clear from the opening pages of *And the Mountains Echoed* that sharing DNA, by itself, is no guarantee of a family bond. The first characters we meet, Saboor and his two children, Abdullah and Pari, are "linked" by blood, but they're not bound together by it. Abdullah never expresses any feelings of closeness or intimacy with his father, and as he grows up, he seems to forget about his father altogether. By contrast, Abdullah remembers Pari all his life, even after he's separated from her as an eight-year-old child. Many of the characters in the novel, including Nabi, Abdullah's step-uncle, point out how remarkably strong the bond between Pari and Abdullah is. The bond is so strong, in fact, that it can't simply be explained by biological connection alone—in a sense, Abdullah and Pari have chosen to form a family with each other. Likewise, later in the novel we see intimate, familial connections between characters who aren't related by blood at all. Evidently, people have much more of a choice in their family than it seems.

And yet *And the Mountains Echoed* makes it clear that family cannot *only* be a choice. The characters who "choose" their families too quickly, such as Idris and Nila, end up lonely and unhappy. Nila believes that she can create a family for herself by "borrowing" someone else's family—thus, she buys Pari from Saboor, and treats her as her own daughter. But Nila's attempts to build her own family collapse as time goes on. She neglects Pari, and Pari responds in kind. In short, Nila has chosen to be a mother too hastily. Conversely, the characters who try the hardest to escape their biological families, such as Dr. Markos, end up feeling more connected to their biological families than

ever before. Although *And the Mountains Echoed* suggests that all human beings are interconnected, and thus all part of the same "family," the characters in the novel who try to live according to such a belief often end up overextending themselves, hurting others, and becoming deeply disillusioned with their lives.

The novel instead points toward a more balanced view of family, biology, and choice. The strongest and most stable families it depicts aren't necessarily biological families (in fact, most of the biological families in the novel are heavily fractured), but the most conspicuously "artificial" families (such as the family built by Nila), are usually failures too. Rather, family bonds arise over the course of many years of close connection. For this reason, many of the strongest families in *And the Mountains Echoed* are both biological *and* chosen. It's not until Pari II is a young woman, for instance, that she decides to spend her life taking care of her father, Abdullah. She does so both because Abdullah is her biological father and because she's come to recognize that he's a good, loving person. In the end, the novel suggests that a good family—no matter what form it takes—doesn't emerge overnight: it needs love, attention, and above all, time, to appear.

POWER AND WEALTH

Because *And the Mountains Echoed* takes place in multiple countries at multiple points in time, its characters differ from one another in nearly every way. Perhaps the most obvious kind of difference between the characters is monetary: some are wealthy, while others struggle just to survive. Even in the earliest pages of the novel, we're forced to notice the differences between the "have-nots"—such as Saboor, who's traveling through the desert to do construction work on a mansion—and the "haves"—like Mr. Wahdati, who owns the mansion. It's worth understanding how power and wealth influence people's relationships with each other in the novel, and specifically whether they serve to bring people closer together or further isolate them.

From the beginning, Hosseini makes it clear that wealth can be a barrier between different kinds of people. Indeed, as the novel begins, Mr. Wahdati is paying Saboor to build a literal wall between his own family and the rest of the city. Understood in a slightly different sense, wealth is a distraction as well as a barrier. Idris, an Afghan immigrant to the United States, often notes that his children seem uninterested in the rest of the world—they've grown so accustomed to their luxurious lifestyle in the United States that they've lost all interest in the lives of others. Idris himself is no better. While he expresses an interest in helping Roshana, a young girl who was wounded during war in Afghanistan, the elements of his life in America (a nice house, a home theater, etc.) "drown out" his innate concern for other people.

And yet wealth is also used for good in *And the Mountains Echoed*. Idris's cousin, Timur, arranges for Roshana to have an operation, using the money he's earned as a used car dealer in the United States. There are many other instances of powerful, elite characters using their power to help others, rather than ignore them: Nabi, who donates his house to the foreign doctors who've come to Kabul to treat the sick and dying; Dr. Markos, who uses his first-rate medical training to care for people who are too poor to pay, etc. Wealth gives people a way to reach across the world, passing on their gifts to those who need them most.

Power and wealth, much like interconnectedness, are portrayed as "neutral multipliers." (Indeed, the interconnectedness that we see in *And the Mountains Echoed* couldn't exist without money and influence enabling it.) On its own, money is neither a curse nor a blessing. Rather, it's an invitation for the money-holder to use his or her power with great responsibility—an invitation that's all the more important, considering that Hosseini is writing during an era that has seen tremendous inequality between the very rich and the very poor.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE YELLOW FEATHER

At the beginning of *And the Mountains Echoed*, Abdullah finds a small **yellow feather**. Although his sister Pari (who collects feathers) has recently been adopted by another family, the Wahdatis, Abdullah still decides to keep the feather. In one sense, he does this because he loves his sister, and wants to give her the feather later. But in a more profound sense, Abdullah keeps the feather because he wants to *remember* his sister. Decades later, after Abdullah has succumbed to Alzheimer's disease and can barely remember his own name, much less his sister's identity, we learn that he has kept the feather for all these years—a reminder of his love for Pari that proves even stronger than his memory. Human memory is a powerful thing, but it's ultimately weak and fallible. Abdullah's yellow feather can be said to symbolize the "tools" we turn to in order to strengthen our imperfect memories: objects which are originally intended to strengthen our memories, but which ultimately become the only parts of the memory to survive.

THE DIV

In the fairy tale Saboor tells his children, an evil demon—**a div**—orders a farmer, Baba Ayub, to

sacrifice one of his children. Baba Ayub is then forced to make the agonizing choice to give away his favorite son, Qais. In a sense, the *div* symbolizes the cruel, uncaring universe—the thing that forces human beings to make difficult choices, some of which are impossible to live with. If the "universe" in *And the Mountains Echoed* is a character, it is a volatile, cruel, unpredictable, and ultimately indifferent character—and the presence of the *div* is the first sign that this is the case.

THE DIV'S BOTTLE

After **the div** forces Baba Ayub to choose between his own happiness and that of his favorite child, Qais, it gives Baba Ayub a small **bottle** of liquid, and tells Baba Ayub to drink it. The contents of the bottle eventually make Baba Ayub forget that he ever had a son named Qais, or had to make the choice of whether or not to sacrifice him to the *div*. The *div*'s bottle thus symbolizes one of the key themes of *And the Mountains Echoed*: the human ability to forget. That Baba Ayub needs to drink from a bottle is ironic—as we see in the later chapters of the novel, humans *don't* need magic to forget their unsavory pasts: without any help, they are capable of forgetting almost anything. And yet the *div*'s bottle isn't entirely successful at making Baba Ayub forget his son. Like the other characters in the novel, Ayub occasionally feels a brief "flash" of his past, which he's powerless to understand or interpret. If the bottle at first seems to symbolize one's ability to forget, it ultimately becomes a symbol of one's remarkable power to remember.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Riverhead Books edition of *And the Mountains Echoed* published in 2014.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ Your son does not remember you, the div continued. This is his life now, and you saw for yourself his happiness. He is provided here with the finest food and clothes, with friendship and affection. He receives tutoring in the arts and languages and in the sciences, and in the ways of wisdom and charity. He wants for nothing. Someday, when he is a man, he may choose to leave, and he shall be free to do so. I suspect he will touch many lives with his kindness and bring happiness to those trapped in sorrow.

Related Characters: Baba Ayub, The div (speaker), Qais

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 11-12

Explanation and Analysis

In the first chapter of the novel, an unnamed man (later revealed as Saboor, the father of Abdullah and Pari) tells a fairy tale about a loving father whose favorite child, Qais, is stolen away by a demon called a div. The father, Baba Ayub, goes to find Qais, only to see that Qais has magically forgotten his old life and now lives with luxuries and education that Baba Ayub never could have provided for him. Baba Ayub then faces an impossible choice: he can either be selfish and reclaim his child (in which case Qais will live a poor, threadbare life), or he can allow Qais to continue living with the div (in which case Qais will be well-fed, well-educated, and have a wonderful life). In short, Baba Ayub must choose between his own happiness and the happiness of his child.

Right away, the novel draws a contrast between one's own happiness and that of other people. The essence of being a thinking human being, it's implied, is having to make such a choice. In each of the successive stories in the book, the characters will face a moral dilemma comparable with the one Baba Ayub deals with in this passage—most notably Saboor himself, who has the opportunity to give one of his children (Pari) a "better" life, and decides to do so. The question lingers, however—is Qais really "better off" without his true father? Can wealth and education replace the bond of family?

❝ "You are a cruel beast," Baba Ayub said.

When you have lived as long as I have, the div replied, you find that cruelty and benevolence are but shades of the same color.

Related Characters: The div, Baba Ayub (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

Baba Ayub has been given an impossible choice: he can

either allow his kidnapped son, Qais, to continue living a luxurious life with his kidnapper, the Div, or he can reclaim his child. Baba Ayub faces the tremendous stress of choosing between his own happiness and that of his child--a choice that's too great for any human being to make without pain.

As Baba Ayub puts it, the div is cruel simply for making him choose at all. The div's reply--that cruelty and kindness are just two sides of the same coin--suggests something universal about the story of Baba Ayub. In life, it's suggested, humans are often forced to make impossible moral choices--choices for which there's no perfect solution. In this case, as Baba Ayub implies, it may be that "ignorance is bliss."

❝ He didn't understand why he should hear such a noise, alone in the dark, all the sheep and goats sleeping. Sometimes he told himself he had heard no such thing, and sometimes he was so convinced to the contrary that he called out into the darkness, "Is someone out there? Who is there? Show yourself." But no reply ever came. Baba Ayub didn't understand. Just as he didn't understand why a wave of something, something like the tail end of a sad dream, always swept through him whenever he heard the jingling, surprising him each time like an unexpected gust of wind. But then it passed, as all things do. It passed.

Related Characters: Baba Ayub (speaker), Qais

Related Themes:

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

In the final part of the first short story in the book, Baba Ayub--who's chosen to allow his beloved son to continue living with his kidnapper, the div--is an old man. Baba Ayub has been haunted by his choice--as a result, the div has blessed Baba Ayub with the gift of forgetfulness. Baba Ayub doesn't remember having to choose to abandon his son. And yet he continues to hear the faint sound of a bell--the sound that his son would make when he played with his friends. In short, the sound of the bell reminds Baba Ayub of something he used to know, but he can't remember exactly what this was.

The story's teller insists that all things pass--in other words, Baba Ayub eventually forgets about his son. In a broader sense, the story could symbolize the way that all memories fade away over time. But as we'll see, the successive stories in the book interrogate the theory that "all things pass." The characters forget many things, whether intentionally or not--and to differing degrees of success. Thus, the story of Baba Ayub foreshadows the themes of memory and forgetting that haunt the entire novel.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ He wished he could love his new mother in the same way. And perhaps Parwana, he thought, secretly wished the same, that she could love him. The way she did Iqbal, her one-year-old son, whose face she always kissed, whose every cough and sneeze she fretted over. Or the way she had loved her first baby, Omar. She had adored him.

Related Characters: Iqbal, Omar, Parwana, Abdullah

Related Themes:

Page Number: 22

Explanation and Analysis

In the second chapter of the book, we meet Abdullah, the son of the man who narrated the story from the previous chapter. Abdullah's biological mother has died recently, and following her death, Abdullah's father has married a new woman, Parwana. Parwana simply doesn't offer Abdullah the same affection that she gives her biological children from another marriage--Iqbal and Omar (who died young).

The passage brings up one of the recurring themes of the book--the importance of family and blood ties. The strongest families in the novel are usually literal, biological families--when an adult tries to adopt another child, or when a couple remarries, it's hard for them to muster genuine love for their adopted kids. (Of course this isn't always the case in life.)

❝ Father sat down by the remains of the fire. "Where did you go?" "Go to sleep, boy." "You wouldn't leave us. You wouldn't do that, Father." Father looked at him, but in the dark his face dissolved into an expression Abdullah couldn't make out. "You're going to wake your sister." "Don't leave us." "That's enough of that now."

Related Characters: Abdullah, Father / Saboor (speaker), Pari Wahdati

Related Themes:

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

Abdullah is traveling with his father and his sister, Pari. In the middle of the desert, Abdullah wakes up to find that his father has gone. When his father eventually returns, Abdullah claims that he'd thought his father has been murdered--since there's no way his father would ever leave his family behind voluntarily.

Although we don't know it yet, Abdullah's father *has* planned to leave his family behind: he's going to leave Pari in the care of a wealthy family (paralleling the way Baba Ayub left Qais in the care of the div). Unable to make ends meet, Abdullah's father Saboor has betrayed his own children, yet in a way also sacrificed his own happiness to give one child a "better" life--and so here, Saboor doesn't want to hear Abdullah's plea, "don't leave us."

❝ She hunkered down beside him now, her glasses pushed up on her hair. There was wetness in her eyes too, and when she dabbed at them with the handkerchief, it came away with black smudges. "I don't blame you if you hate me. It's your right. But—and I don't expect you to understand, not now—this is for the best. It really is, Abdullah. It's for the best. One day you'll see."

Related Characters: Mrs. Nila Wahdati (speaker), Abdullah, Pari Wahdati

Related Themes:

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

Here Abdullah meets Nila, the young wealthy woman who's asked to adopt Pari from Abdullah's family. Nila is heartbroken to meet Abdullah--the brother from whom Nila is going to "steal" Pari. Nila, clearly overcome with guilt, tells Abdullah that "this" is for the best. Although Abdullah doesn't realize it right away, Nila is referring to Pari's adoption: Nila believes that by adopting Pari, Pari will get a great education, a loving family, and a stable life that Abdullah's family simply can't match.

Nila's insistence that her actions are for the best convince no one--not even Nila herself. Deep down, Nila knows that she's not acting out of magnanimity--she just wants a child of her own. Her final words to Abdullah, "one day you'll see," foreshadow the book's conclusion in which, decades later, Abdullah and Pari are reunited with one another.

❝ But there was no forgetting. Pari hovered, unbidden, at the edge of Abdullah's vision everywhere he went. She was like the dust that clung to his shirt. She was in the silences that had become so frequent at the house, silences that welled up between their words, sometimes cold and hollow, sometimes pregnant with things that went unsaid, like a cloud filled with rain that never fell. Some nights he dreamed that he was in the desert again, alone, surrounded by the mountains, and in the distance a single tiny glint of light flickering on, off, on, off, like a message. He opened the tea box. They were all there, Pari's feathers, shed from roosters, ducks, pigeons; the peacock feather too. He tossed the yellow feather into the box. One day, he thought.

Related Characters: Pari Wahdati, Abdullah

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

In this important passage, we're reminded of the connection between Abdullah and Pari, who has just been adopted by a wealthy family in nearby Kabul. Abdullah's love and closeness with Pari is symbolized by a small yellow feather, which Abdullah shared with Pari recently. Abdullah hangs onto the yellow feather as a way of remembering his vanished sister: by keeping the feather, he's preserving his preserving memories of his sister, and perhaps ensuring that one day they'll be reunited.

The passage shows how humans go about remembering other humans. Although our memories of our loved ones are powerful, they often fade over time. With the aid of concrete objects--books, photographs, and even feathers, we try to stave off the deterioration of memory, grounding our recollections in a literal, ageless object.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ All her life, Parwana had made sure to avoid standing in front of a mirror with her sister. It robbed her of hope to see her face beside Masooma's, to see so plainly what she had been denied. But in public, every stranger's eye was a mirror. There was no escape.

Related Characters: Masooma, Parwana

Related Themes:

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Parwana (later the stepmother of Abdullah and Pari) competes with Masooma, her beautiful, popular sister. Parwana is constantly reminded that Masooma is more attractive than she: everyone in the community can tell the difference between them.

Strangely, any love Parwana feels for her sister is outweighed by Parwana's obsession with public image. Parwana and Masooma's relationship contrasts markedly with the close, loving relationship between Pari and Abdullah: it's inconceivable that Abdullah and Pari could compete with one another as Parwana competes with Masooma (in no small part because Abdullah and Pari are of different genders). Clearly, there's no guarantee that bonds of blood always mean love.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ A story is like a moving train: no matter where you hop onboard, you are bound to reach your destination sooner or later. But I suppose I ought to begin this tale with the same thing that ends it.

Related Characters: Uncle Nabi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Nabi--the man who first suggests that Pari go to live with the wealthy family in Kabul--explains the history of his employment with the family. Nabi begins his long letter by explaining that even if his story has no real beginning, it'll inevitably reach its conclusion.

Nabi's introduction is intriguing for a number of reasons. First, it mirrors the content of *And the Mountains Echoed* itself. In each of the nine stories in the book, we move a little bit forward, eventually reaching the inevitable conclusion: the reunion between Pari and Abdullah, decades after their separation. Nabi's explanation also suggests that stories are fundamentally about interconnection: lurking behind any story lie hundreds of others. We've already seen such a principle in action, as the first three stories in the book explain and in some ways support Nabi's.

❝ Now, I knew from the start that the marriage was an unhappy one. Rarely did I see a tender look pass between the couple or hear an affectionate word uttered. They were two people occupying the same house whose paths rarely seemed to intersect at all.

Related Characters: Uncle Nabi (speaker), Mr. Suleiman Wahdati, Mrs. Nila Wahdati

Related Themes:

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

Nabi, who's been hired to work as a chauffeur at the Wahdati house, talks about the dynamic between Mr. and Mrs. Wahdati. Right away, it's apparent to him that the happy couple isn't so happy. It's interesting that Nabi describes his employers as people whose paths never intersect, considering that *And the Mountains Echoed* is a book that's all about paths intersecting. Paradoxically, two people who are a "family" and live in the same house--i.e., people whose lives should be interconnected on every level--can have *less* of an influence on one another than two strangers. As we'll see, a person on another side of the world can have an enormous influence over another person, even if they're not related and have never met before.

❝ Then she pulled close and embraced me, her cheek against mine. My nose filled with the scent of her hair, her perfume. “It was you, Nabi,” she said in my ear. “It was always you. Didn’t you know?”

Related Characters: Mrs. Nila Wahdati, Uncle Nabi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 115-116

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Nabi watches as Mrs. Nila Wahdati, the wife of Nabi's employer, Mr. Wahdati, packs her bags and prepares to leave the house forever. Mrs. Wahdat tells Nabi, "It was you," words which we won't understand for some time.

As it turns out, Mrs. Wahdati is talking about Mr. Wahdati's closeted homosexual desire for Nabi. For years, Mr. Wahdati has been in love with Nabi, even though he's been too frightened and repressed to tell Nabi the truth. Mrs. Wahdati has known about her husband's attraction for a long time--but she's never done anything about it until now. Here, Mrs. Wahdati's words to Nabi seem both pitying and angry--she doesn't quite give away her husband's secret, but she comes close. The passage also takes on another layer of tragic irony, given that Nabi is immensely attracted to Mrs. Wahdati, but not her husband.

though Nabi has previously maintained that he's not homosexual in any capacity. While it's certainly possible that Nabi actually does have some repressed gay feelings (or is somewhere else on the spectrum of sexuality), Hosseini suggests that Nabi feels a less erotic form of love for Mr. Wahdati, similar to love for a close sibling or a very good friend. And yet ultimately, there's no way to understand Nabi's relationship with Mr. Wahdati totally. In spite of the vast length of Nabi's letter, this kind of love is a mystery--another example of the various kinds of "families" the book presents us with.

❝ I said nothing even though he had it wrong. I was not joking that time. My staying was no longer for him. It had been at first. I had stayed initially because Suleiman needed me, because he was wholly dependent on me. I had run once before from someone who needed me, and the remorse I still feel I will take with me to the grave. I could not do it again. But slowly, imperceptibly, my reasons for staying changed. I cannot tell you when or how the change occurred, Mr. Markos, only that I was staying for me now. Suleiman said I should marry. But the fact is, I looked at my life and realized I already had what people sought in marriage. I had comfort, and companionship, and a home where I was always welcomed, loved, and needed. The physical urges I had as a man—and I still had them, of course, though less frequent and less pressing now that I was older—could still be managed, as I explained earlier. As for children, though I had always liked them I had never felt a tug of paternal impulse in myself.

Related Characters: Uncle Nabi (speaker), Mr. Suleiman Wahdati, Dr. Markos Varvaris (“Mr. Markos”)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 126-127

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Nabi explains why he stayed with Mr. Wahdati for so many years At first, Nabi stayed with Mr. Wahdati because of his guilt at having abandoned his niece many years before: he allowed Nila to adopt Pari without protest, and has regretted his decision for a long time. But as Nabi makes clear, he eventually comes to enjoy living with Mr. Wahdati for its own sake: he even thinks of his relationship to Mr. Wahdati as a kind of marriage, providing him with comfort and contentment.

The passage is strange, insofar as it suggests a kind of homoerotic attraction between Nabi and Mr. Wahdati, even

❝ As you can see enclosed in the envelope along with this letter is my will, in which I leave the house, the money, and my few belongings to her. I ask that you give her both this letter and the will. And please tell her, tell her that I cannot know the myriad consequences of what I set into motion. Tell her I took solace only in hope. Hope that perhaps, wherever she is now, she has found as much peace, grace, love, and happiness as this world allows.

Related Characters: Uncle Nabi (speaker), Pari Wahdati, Dr. Markos Varvaris (“Mr. Markos”)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 138

Explanation and Analysis

Here Nabi bequeaths his house and possessions to Pari, the niece whom, years ago, Nabi allowed to be adopted by Nila Wahdati. Nabi has addressed his letter to Dr. Markos Varvaris, with the instructions that Markos must find Pari and tell her that her brother Abdullah is still alive.

Perhaps the key word in this passage is "consequences." It is Nabi who first puts the events of the book in motion by suggesting that Pari be sent to live with the Wahdati family. Nabi eventually comes to realize the core truth of the book--that the world is too complicated and interconnected for any one man to control. Nabi thinks that he's correcting a simple problem by sending Pari to live with the Wahdatis; in the end, though, he realizes that there's no such thing as a "simple" problem. Nabi ultimately embodies a cautious optimism about the universe: life is imperfect and unsatisfying, and yet he hopes that one day Pari and Abdullah will reunite and find the happiness and love they deserve.

Chapter 5 Quotes

It's true. Timur has embarrassed him. He has behaved like the quintessential ugly Afghan-American, Idris thinks. Tearing through the war-torn city like he belongs here, backslapping locals with great bonhomie and calling them brother, sister, uncle, making a show of handing money to beggars from what he calls the Bakhsheesh bundle, joking with old women he calls mother and talking them into telling their story into his camcorder as he strikes a woebegone expression, pretending he is one of them, like he's been here all along, like he wasn't lifting at Gold's in San Jose, working on his pecs and abs, when these people were getting shelled, murdered, raped. It is hypocritical, and distasteful. And it astonishes Idris that no one seems to see through this act.

Related Characters: Dr. Idris Bashiri, Timur Bashiri

Related Themes:

Page Number: 153-154

Explanation and Analysis

In the fifth chapter of the book, we meet Idris and Timur, two cousins who've returned to Kabul to reclaim their family's property in the city. Idris dislikes Timur for being extravagant and arrogant--Idris is a quiet, introverted sort, and doesn't like it when Timur makes a show of giving money to beggars or treating strangers like family.

The strange thing about the passage is that nothing Idris describes Timur doing sounds all that bad: Timur gives money to beggars, befriends strangers, and generally tries to improve the lives of people he doesn't know. The only reason Idris offers to *dislike* Timur is that Timur is "showy," an impression that, for all we know, could be exaggerated or wrong. Idris seems to resent Timur for *caring* about Afghanistan to an extent that Idris himself can never match. Idris wasn't any more involved with the war in Afghanistan than Timur--part of the reason that Idris dislikes Timur is that Timur reminds him of his own indifference to his own country.

"We leave in a week, bro. You don't want to get her too attached to you." Idris nods. He wonders if Timur may not be slightly jealous of his relationship with Roshi, perhaps even resentful that he, Idris, may have robbed him of a spectacular opportunity to play hero. Timur, emerging in slow motion from the blazing building, holding a baby. The crowd exploding in a cheer. Idris is determined not to let Timur parade Roshi in that way.

Related Characters: Timur Bashiri (speaker), Roshana, Dr. Idris Bashiri

Related Themes:

Page Number: 162-163

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Idris engages in a subtle battle of egos with his cousin, Timur. Idris has developed a close relationship with a young girl named Roshi. Idris thinks that Timur is advising Idris to avoid Roshi because Timur is jealous of Idris's generosity. But in fact, it's suggested, *Idris* is only befriending Roshi because of his own jealousy of Timur's generosity--Idris thinks of Timur as the petty, jealous cousin, when in fact Idris fits exactly such a description.

It's further implied that Idris is more interested in outshining his cousin than he is in helping another human being. One could say that Idris is meant to represent the narrowness of generosity in the Western world. A well-educated, wealthy man, Idris thinks of himself as a "good" person, even though he's clearly petty, jealous, and generally guilty about his own lack of compassion for other people. Idris tries to show compassion forRoshi, but ends up mostly just being jealous and apathetic.

He is not a criminal. Everything he owns he has earned. In the nineties, while half the guys he knew were out clubbing and chasing women, he had been buried in study, dragging himself through hospital corridors at two in the morning, forgoing leisure, comfort, sleep. He had given his twenties to medicine. He has paid his dues. Why should he feel badly? This is his family. This is his life.
In the last month, Roshi has become something abstract to him, like a character in a play. Their connection has frayed. The unexpected intimacy he had stumbled upon in that hospital, so urgent and acute, has eroded into something dull. The experience has lost its power. He recognizes the fierce determination that had seized him for what it really was, an illusion, a mirage.

Related Characters: Roshana, Dr. Amra Ademovic, Dr. Idris Bashiri (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 178

Explanation and Analysis

Idris had befriended a child named Roshi during his time in

Afghanistan. After promising to take care of the child, Idris has returned to the United States, and is in the process of forgetting about Roshi altogether amidst all his other responsibilities. Hosseini describes the ways that Idris tries to justify his own apathy: Idris tells himself that he's "earned" the right to be selfish by working hard at medical school for many years (even though the link between studying and being compassionate is by no means obvious).

In this passage Hosseini shows another example of the way memory and forgetfulness affect people's lives. Idris had felt genuine compassion for Roshi at first, but as her memory fades, so too does his resolve, and in the end he turns out to have acted callously and selfishly.

Chapter 6 Quotes

Well, children are never everything you'd hoped for.

Related Characters: Mrs. Nila Wahdati (speaker), Pari Wahdati

Related Themes:

Page Number: 190

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Nila Wahdati--who becomes a great poet after leaving her husband, Mr. Wahdati--conducts an interview with a poetry magazine. In the interview, Nila talks about her career and her family, arriving at the depressing conclusion that children are always something of a disappointment.

As we know, Nila had adopted Pari years ago, hoping that having a child would bring her happiness and contentment. As the quotation makes very clear, being a mother hasn't brought Nila the happiness she'd assumed it would--it seems to have made her disappointed and melancholy (and surely quotes like this make Pari herself feel like she's not very loved or valuable). The passage conveys the unpredictability of life, and the unintended consequences of a seemingly simple action. Nila thought that adopting Pari would make both of them happier--and it doesn't, yet the adoption has hundreds of other unforeseen consequences (some of which we've seen, and will continue to see, in the book).

Well, it's hardly a mystery, mon amour, Maman had said. You miss your father. He is gone from your life. It's natural that you should feel this way. Of course that's what it is. Come here. Give Maman a kiss. Her mother's answer had been perfectly reasonable but also unsatisfactory. Pari did believe that she would feel more whole if her father was still living, if he were here with her. But she also remembered feeling this way even as a child, living with both her parents at the big house in Kabul.

Related Characters: Mrs. Nila Wahdati (speaker), Pari Wahdati

Related Themes:

Page Number: 197

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, we're told that Pari--now living with her adopted mother in Paris--feels a vague sense of unhappiness. Pari has no idea that Nila isn't her biological mother--as far as she's concerned, she's a Wahdati, and always has been. And yet Nila feels a strange, deep unhappiness, which she's unable to put into words. Nila claims that Pari's dissatisfaction comes from missing her father, i.e., Mr. Wahdati. But as readers recognize, Pari is clearly missing her beloved brother Abdullah, whom she now no longer consciously remembers. Like Baba Ayub in the first chapter of the book, Pari can remember the emotional fallout of leaving her family, but not the specific incident that *prompted* the fallout.

She wonders often what sort of grandmother Maman would have made. Especially with Thierry. Intuitively, Pari thinks Maman would have proved helpful with him. She might have seen something of herself in him.

Related Characters: Pari Wahdati (speaker), Thierry, Mrs. Nila Wahdati

Related Themes:

Page Number: 238

Explanation and Analysis

In the end of Chapter 6, Pari is an elderly woman with children. One of these children, Thierry, is quiet and taciturn. Pari doesn't know how to handle Thierry at all--their personalities aren't alike in the slightest. Sadly, Pari thinks, Thierry would probably have gotten along well with Nila Wahdati, who committed suicide years before.

Although Pari herself can't appreciate the full irony of the situation, we can. Nila adopted Pari in the hopes of forming an emotional connection to her new child. When Nila quickly realized that no such connection existed or would ever exist, she became deeply depressed. Had Nila lived a little longer, she might well have found the emotional connection she'd always looked for--between herself and her grandson, Thierry.

"My father is not a thief!" Adel shot back. "Ask anyone in Shadbagh-e-Nau, ask them what he's done for this town." He thought of how Baba jan received people at the town mosque, reclined on the floor, teacup before him, prayer beads in hand. A solemn line of people, stretching from his cushion to the front entrance, men with muddy hands, toothless old women, young widows with children, every one of them in need, each waiting for his or her turn to ask for a favor, a job, a small loan to repair a roof or an irrigation ditch or buy milk formula.

Related Characters: Adel (speaker), Gholam, Baba Jan / The Commander / Commander Sahib

Related Themes:

Page Number: 278

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, we meet Adel, a young, idealistic boy who hero-worships his father, "The Commander." Although it's never explicitly stated, we get the sense that Adel's father isn't such a good man--in fact, he's probably a member of the Taliban,a fundamentalist, terrorist group that hurts and oppresses innocent people. The reason that Adel thinks of his father as a "good man" is that The Commander makes a point of granting special favors to the people of his community--he uses his wealth and prestige to make his neighbors loyal to him. As far as Adel is concerned, The Commander's actions are good and generous--but we can tell that they're just the opposite: selfish and calculating.

The passage brings up an interesting point: is generosity "good" if it's designed to make an evil person more influential in his community? The Commander may be an evil person, but he's still using his money to give jobs and repair roofs, after all. Perhaps there's no simple way of answering the question: as the div said in Chapter One, there's no real difference between cruelty and benevolence.

Adel knew he would not love his father again as he had before, when he would sleep happily curled in the bay of his thick arms. That was inconceivable now. But he would learn to love him again even if now it was a different, more complicated, messier business. Adel could almost feel himself leapfrogging over childhood. Soon, he would land as an adult. And when he did, there would be no going back because adulthood was akin to what his father had once said about being a war hero: once you became one, you died one.

Related Characters: Adel (speaker), Baba Jan / The Commander / Commander Sahib

Related Themes:

Page Number: 303

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Adel finds out the truth about his father: his father is a dangerous, violent man who's caused the deaths of innocent people. The boundless, worshipful love that Adel feels for his father evaporates the instant he learns the truth--and in the process, Adel senses that he's become an adult. As Adel sees is, childhood is defined by unconditional love, like the love he felt for his father (or, we might add, the love that Abdullah felt for Pari). Adulthood, by contrast, is defined by a cautious, cynical, self-deluding love. The only way that Adel can continue to love his father is to lie to himself, just as Adel's mother seems to lie to herself. In short, the passage paints a deeply cynical portrait of adult life: it's only possible to truly love people when you're too young and naive to know the truth about them--the second you learn the facts, you love in a "messier" way and become an adult.

"You've made me proud, Markos."

I am fifty-five years old. I have waited all my life to hear those words. Is it too late now for this? For us? Have we squandered too much for too long, Mamá and I? Part of me thinks it is better to go on as we have, to act as though we don't know how ill suited we have been for each other. Less painful that way. Perhaps better than this belated offering. This fragile, trembling little glimpse of how it could have been between us. All it will beget is regret, I tell myself, and what good is regret? It brings back nothing. What we have lost is irretrievable.

Related Characters: Odelia Varvaris, Dr. Markos Varvaris ("Mr. Markos") (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 358-359

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Markos--the doctor we first met in Nabi's letter--talks to his aged mother, Odelia Varvaris. Markos has always had a strange relationship with Odelia--while he knows that Odelia is a good mother, he's always felt that Odelia is too disapproving and cold with him, as if she doesn't really love him. Now, after decades of coldness between the two of them, Markos learns the truth: Odelia has always loved Markos, and is enormously proud of his achievement as a doctor and a human being.

It's important to notice the fine line between joy and sorrow in this passage. Markos is of course pleased to hear the words he's always craved from his mother. And yet his mother's words also sadden him, because they remind him of the years of happiness he could have had with his mother, and now can't get back.

In short, Hosseini uses Chapter 8 to question the notion of a happy reunion. On paper, Markos and Odelia's reunion is perfectly happy: they say all the right things to one another. And yet no amount of kind words can make up for the intervening years. A tearful reunion isn't always enough for a happy ending, because of the constant power of memory and the past.

Chapter 9 Quotes

And so Baba's little sister, Pari, was my secret companion, invisible to everyone but me. She was my sister, the one I'd always wished my parents had given me. I saw her in the bathroom mirror when we brushed our teeth side by side in the morning. We dressed together. She followed me to school and sat close to me in class—looking straight ahead at the board, I could always spot the black of her hair and the white of her profile out of the corner of my eye.

Related Characters: Pari II (daughter) (speaker), Abdullah, Pari Wahdati

Related Themes:

Page Number: 362

Explanation and Analysis

In this section, we meet Pari II, the daughter of Abdullah (whom we first met at the very beginning of the book). Pari II has never met Pari, her namesake, before, but she's grown up hearing about her from Abdullah, her father. Strangely, the memory of Pari is so powerful that Pari II comes to think of Pari as her own imaginary friend--a constant companion when Pari II brushes her teeth, gets ready for school, etc.

The fact that Pari's memory lives on in Abdullah's children suggests, optimistically, that love and compassion can continue on even after memory and people themselves are gone. No matter whether or not Abdullah and Pari themselves reunite (and they will, as we'll see), the memory of their tender love lives on in Abdullah's family. By the same token, we could argue that the "memory" of the characters in *And the Mountains Echoed* lives on in readers' minds--even though we've never met these people before (and even though they're presumably not real), they attain a certain measure of reality because of their emotional impact.

I hold the note tightly against the blustering wind. I read for Pari the three scribbled sentences. They tell me I must wade into waters, where I will soon drown. Before I march in, I leave this on the shore for you. I pray you find it, sister, so you will know what was in my heart as I went under. There is a date too. August 2007.
"August of 2007," I say. "That's when he was first diagnosed." Three years before I had even heard from Pari.

Related Characters: Pari II (daughter) (speaker), Abdullah, Pari Wahdati

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 418

Explanation and Analysis

Pari II discovers a note that her father, Abdullah, left immediately after being diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Knowing that his disease would destroy his memory--and therefore his ability to remember his beloved sister, Pari--Abdullah wrote Pari a short letter, in which he bid her a touching goodbye. (As we'll see, the letter is attached to a box containing the one concrete reminder of Abdullah and Pari's love: the yellow feather).

The passage is important for a number of reasons. Above all, it reiterates that Abdullah continues to love his sister deeply, even after a long life spent apart. After decades of remembering his sister with nothing but love, Abdullah has finally hit against the finite limits of his own memory: his

brain itself will soon deteriorate. And yet Abdullah doesn't give up hope entirely: he uses the power of writing and mnemonic aids (like the feather) to preserve *some* memory of his love for his sister. In a poignant irony, the memory of Pari will live on in Pari II and the yellow feather, even after Abdullah himself grows too old to remember Pari at all.

❝ She turns her face to look at him, her big brother, her ally in all things, but his face is too close and she can't see the whole of it. Only the dip of his brow, the rise of his nose, the curve of his eyelashes. But she doesn't mind. She is happy enough to be near him, with him—her brother—and as a nap slowly steals her away, she feels herself engulfed in a wave of absolute calm.

Related Characters: Pari II (daughter) (speaker), Abdullah, Pari Wahdati

Related Themes:

Page Number: 421

Explanation and Analysis

In the final passage of the book, Pari II has a strange and vivid dream. In the dream, she imagines Pari reuniting with Abdullah. In real life, Pari tried to reunite with Abdullah, only to find that she was almost too late: Abdullah was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, meaning that soon after their reunion, he could no longer remember his beloved little sister. But if Pari and Abdullah can't reunite in reality, Pari II's dream allows them to reunite in her own mind.

Notably, Pari and Abdullah's reunion isn't perfect, even in Pari II's dream. Pari and Abdullah can't actually see eye-to-eye, symbolizing the fact that humans can never truly connect with or understand one another, except for a brief moment. And yet even if Pari and Abdullah's reunion is imperfect and fictional, it attains a kind of emotional truth in the minds of readers. *And the Mountains Echoed* is a work of fiction, obviously, but because it inspires such an intense emotional reaction in its audience, it itself exists like the yellow feather or Pari II's dream--a fragile reminder of interconnectedness, love, and the lost past.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

The novel begins with an unnamed narrator promising to tell a story to two children, Abdullah and Pari. The narrator mentions the children's mother, who is "away."

Hosseini begins in an uncertain mode, without revealing the identity of his narrator at all (though we later learn it is Saboor). Hosseini will continue to structure his chapters this way—every chapter is almost its own vignette, with a new point of view and different characters. Thus, part of the experience of reading the novel is situating ourselves anew in each succeeding chapter.

The narrator begins his story. "Once upon a time," he says, in a magical age, there was a farmer named Baba Ayub. Baba Ayub lived in a village called Maidan Sabz, and worked extremely hard to feed his large family. He loved his family, especially his youngest child, whose name was Qais. Qais was only a small boy, but he had boundless energy, and loved to laugh. Qais also had a bad habit of sleepwalking. In order to ensure that Qais wouldn't hurt himself when he walked in his sleep, Baba Ayub decided to hang a small bell around Qais's neck—thus, if Qais moved in the night, everyone would be able to hear him. Even as Qais grew older, he refused to stop wearing the bell.

We have almost no information whatsoever about the real characters before we are introduced to the world of this fairy tale. As the opening story, and one with a mythical, allegorical tone, it's suggested that the narrator's story will be important and symbolic, and will set the tone for the novel to follow. To begin with, it establishes the idea of a strong bond between a father and his child. The strength of the parent-child relationship will motivates many of the characters' key actions.

Baba Ayub's fortunes change for the worse one day when a **div**, an evil monster, comes to his village. The div kills and eats anyone who dares look at it. As a result, most of the villagers keep their eyes fastened on the ground to avoid making eye contact with the monster. The *div* announces that it will be patrolling the houses in the village. Whenever it knocks at someone's door, the family inside will have to give it one child to take back to its home to eat—if not, the *div* will eat all of the children inside.

At this point, we still seem to be dealing with a fairy tale—there's a monster that gobbles up small children. The introduction of this antagonist reminds us that being a loyal parent is often a struggle: sometimes, people have to choose between their love for their children and their love for others, or their desire for self-preservation. While the choice is rarely as stark as it is in this tale, it's a fixture of parenting—and a dominant theme of this book.

One night, **the div** knocks at the house of Baba Ayub. Baba and his family are horrified—they know that one of them will be eaten by the creature. After much agonizing, Baba Ayub decides to choose randomly. He labels five rocks with the names of his five children, places them all in a sack, and blindly chooses one. He chooses the rock bearing the name of Qais, his favorite child. Tearfully, Baba Ayub places Qais in a sack, with Qais screaming in horror and confusion the entire time. Baba Ayub places the sack containing Qais outside his house. Later, the *div* takes the sack and leaves the village for good.

Even in this (supposedly) childlike story, the narrator doesn't mitigate the horror of having to sacrifice—and presumably kill—one's own child. This only makes us wonder—why is the narrator telling this *story? Granted, fairy tales are often dark and frightening to begin with, but there seems to be a more specific reason why the storyteller has chosen a story about sacrificing one's children, even if we're not yet certain what the reason is.*

The narrator stops his story for a moment to note that Pari, Abdullah's sister, has fallen asleep. He tells Abdullah to cover Pari with a blanket, and then resumes his story.

We've already established the importance of the bond between a father and his child, and now, Hosseini establishes the importance of the bond between two siblings—one of the most important kinds of relationship in the book.

After **the div** takes Qais from the village, there is a forty-day mourning period. Everyone prepares food for Baba Ayub, telling him that they feel sorry for him. Baba Ayub begins to neglect his family and his work, and people whisper that he is going mad with grief. Baba Ayub feels guilty for not trying to fight the *div*. A real father, he tells himself, would have found a way to kill the *div* instead of cooperating with it.

Baba Ayub's guilt at having sacrificed his son is understandable, but there's an explanation for his decision to have done so: he was trying to save the rest of his family. In a sense, then, Baba Ayub is a good father. Because the world isn't perfect, being a good father necessarily involves making difficult, sometimes agonizing decisions.

Baba Ayub decides to seek out **the div** and kill it as revenge for it taking Qais. After many weeks of climbing and searching, Baba Ayub succeeds in finding the monster's fortress. At the gates, Baba Ayub shouts to the *div*, and to his surprise, the *div* emerges. Baba Ayub angrily says that he has come to kill the *div*. Surprisingly, the *div* doesn't immediately kill Baba Ayub—something about Baba Ayub's appearance, the look in his eyes, or the fact that he is unafraid makes the *div* pause. After a moment, the *div* admits to Baba Ayub that he is impressed—clearly, Baba Ayub is a brave man. Baba Ayub disagrees—he isn't brave, he argues, he just has nothing to lose: after all, the *div* has already taken the thing that mattered most to him.

It's interesting that there's no physical description of the div *in this story—and for that matter, very little physical description of any of the characters in the novel. We should also note the appearance of another important motif in* And the Mountains Echoed*: the combination of passion and nihilism that emerges after one loses a loved one. Baba Ayub can barely go on living, yet his passion for his child makes him seem brave and invincible to the* div*. There will be many characters in this novel who embody a similar blend of spirit and hopelessness.*

The div tells Baba Ayub that he will gladly duel with him. Before the duel, however, the *div* suggests that Baba Ayub should come with him. Baba Ayub agrees, and he walks through the *div*'s fortress, into a room with a big glass window. Beyond the glass window, Baba Ayub is immediately shocked to see a group of happy young children, including his own son, Qais, playing in a beautiful garden. Baba Ayub shouts to his son—who seems older and happier than ever—but Qais does not respond. The *div* explains, very gently, that he had subjected Baba Ayub to a horrible test, a test which Baba Ayub has passed, and for which Qais has been amply rewarded.

That the div *has given Baba Ayub a test is clear—but it's never explained why, exactly, the* div *feels the need to test Baba Ayub. What's to be gained by performing this sadistic experiment? Perhaps the only answer to this question is that we're in a fairy tale: the* div *is the embodiment of the cold, uncaring universe, which often subjects human beings to sadistic choices, to which there are simply no easy answers.*

Baba Ayub can't understand what **the div** is telling him. The *div* explains that in his fortress, Qais is provided with a wonderful home, a good education, and many friends. One day, the *div* will allow Qais to go out into the world, where he may share his kindness and knowledge with others. Baba Ayub begs the *div* for a chance to talk to his son again. Reluctantly, the *div* takes a large hourglass and turns it upside-down. By the time the sand settles, the *div* explains, Baba Ayub must make a second choice: he can either take Qais home and spend the rest of his life with his son, or he can leave Qais in his new home.

There's a fine line between compassion and selfishness, both here and in the rest of the novel. Baba Ayub wants to see his son again—but is this because he wants his son to be happy, or because he *wants to be happy? When it comes to actions, it is often difficult to distinguish between motivations of compassion and selfishness. This is a complex moral issue that Hosseini will struggle with throughout the novel.*

Baba Ayub thinks for a long time. On one hand, he's desperate to see his favorite child again. On the other, he recognizes that Qais's life is better in **the div**'s home—Qais would surely be less happy in the village. After a long time, Baba Ayub becomes so frustrated that he breaks the hourglass and yells that the *div* is a cruel beast. The *div* tells Baba Ayub, "cruelty and benevolence are but shades of the same color." When the *div* asks Baba Ayub for his choice, Baba Ayub gets up to leave, deciding that Qais will stay in the fortress. Before he goes, Baba Ayub tells the *div* that he hopes the *div* will be punished in hell forever. In response, the *div* throws Baba Ayub a small **bottle**, and tells Baba Ayub to drink it when he returns to his village.

Ultimately, the horror of this story is that the div*—or, symbolically, the uncaring universe—isn't really responsible for Qais's misfortune.* Baba Ayub *is the person charged with making the agonizing decisions about his son: whether or not to let Qais die, and here, whether or not to take Qais home. The horror of life, one might say, is that we're required to make difficult decisions, some of which result in suffering for other people. Even opting out of decision-making is itself a kind of decision (we'll see this very clearly in chapter 6). With this in mind, people's only relief is to forget: to forget what others have done to them, but mostly to forget what they* themselves *are capable of.*

After many days of travel, Baba Ayub returns to his home, where he finds his wife and family waiting for him. Baba Ayub drinks from **the div's bottle**, and immediately forgets about his visit to the *div*. He forgets that he saw Qais, and that he had to choose whether or not to take Qais home—he even forgets that he had a son named Qais at all.

It's often pointed out that forgetting is one of mankind's most powerful weapons of self-preservation. If people didn't have the power to forget their misdeeds, then they'd collapse with guilt and self-hatred. The div*'s bottle, one might say, symbolizes mankind's innate ability to forget and move on.*

In the years following Baba Ayub's return to the village, his fortunes turn yet again, and he becomes a hugely successful farmer. His crops bring him and his family great wealth, and his children all marry the finest suitors. He ends his life as an old, happy grandfather, taking great pleasure in the lives of his children and his young grandchildren. He loves taking walks through gardens and forests, where he feels thankful for his good fortune. But now and again, as he walks through the forest, he hears the ringing of a small, high-pitched bell. Although he has no idea where the sound comes from, or if it's even real, it gives him a sense of profound sadness, which he's incapable of putting into words.

The key point of this section is that Baba Ayub can't entirely forget the decision he was forced to make: he is still haunted by a vague sadness that he cannot explain. This suggests a broader point about humanity: although we're excellent at forgetting, we're never perfectly capable of forgetting the past. Here and there, there will always be small reminders of our sins or past suffering. This is a poignant idea that will recur throughout the novel to come, making the story of the div *especially symbolic.*

The narrator ends his story. He tells Abdullah to go to sleep, as he and Pari have to wake up at dawn. He adds that he and Abdullah will say goodbye in the morning.

In hindsight, we recognize that Saboor is the narrator, and he is telling this story just before he gives away his daughter Pari to be adopted by the Wahdatis. It is almost as if the story—predicting Saboor and Abdullah's future sadness—is a way for the terse Saboor to apologize for selling his daughter. This is also an early example of art (storytelling) as a method of transforming and dealing with one's pain. It is easier for Saboor to see himself as sacrificing Pari to a powerful demon than accepting the reality that he is selling her to get money for himself and provide a wealthier upbringing for her.

CHAPTER 2

The chapter begins, "Father had never before hit Abdullah." Father—as of yet, he has no other name—hits Abdullah hard, and because he's doing so for the first time, Abdullah is doubly hurt: he experiences the physical pain of the blow, as well as the sting of surprise. Father hits Abdullah many times, then tells him to "go home." Father has a pained expression, as if the beating was as horrible for him as it was for Abdullah.

The beginning of this chapter comes as a shock—both to us and to Abdullah. The previous chapter had been a fairy tale—dark, but still gentle, simply by virtue of its genre—and now we are reintroduced to the harsh realities of the real world. It will later become clear that "Father" is Saboor, the storyteller of the previous chapter.

Pari, Abdullah's sister, calls out "Abollah," her affectionate name for Abdullah. Together, Father and Pari climb into a wagon and begin riding away from their home, leaving Abdullah behind. Abdullah tries to follow the wagon, but Father throws stones at him to keep him from pursuing any further.

It's not clear why Abdullah is so eager to go with his father and sister, but we begin to sense that his bond with Pari is stronger than his bond with his father. Hosseini narrates these events through a child's perspective, so many things are left to be clarified later.

Refusing to give up, Abdullah keeps running after the wagon carrying his father and sister. Eventually, he succeeds in catching up to them. Father turns around and tells his son, with grudging respect, "You won't give up." Nevertheless, he tells Abdullah go to home to be with his mother, and with Iqbal. Privately, Abdullah thinks that "his mother" is dead—the woman Abdullah is referring to is actually Father's wife, his stepmother. Abdullah looks into Father's eyes, and reluctantly Father agrees to allow Abdullah to ride along with them.

We learn more about this family: the woman who gave birth to Pari and Abdullah is dead, and replaced by another woman. That Father eventually allows Abdullah to spend time with him suggests that there's something uniquely strong about the biological *family: like it or not, Abdullah feels closer and more connected with his father and his sister, the people who share his blood, than with his stepmother.*

Abdullah, Pari, and Father ride along in their wagon—their destination isn't clear. They travel through a vast desert, full of cliffs and rocks. As they travel, Abdullah sees a tiny feather floating through the air. It may have come from a dove, or a falcon. Pari snatches the feather from the air as it drifts to the ground. She keeps a collection of rare feathers: peacocks, hawks, sparrows, etc. The peacock feather was a gift from Abdullah: he traded his shoe for the gift, and had to walk many miles afterwards, bloodying his foot.

This section establishes two things: 1) the setting of this section of the novel—rural Afghanistan—and 2) Abdullah's devotion to his sister, Pari. The family is clearly very poor, and yet Abdullah sacrifices his shoe for a feather to give to Pari without any second thoughts: he's utterly devoted to Pari, for reasons that he can't put into words.

Abdullah turns to thinking about his stepmother, Parwana. She is a kind, wise woman, but he can't force himself to love her. Abdullah's own mother died while giving birth to Pari. Iqbal, Abdullah's half brother, is the son of Parwana and Father—he is one year old. Sometimes, Parwana hits Abdullah, but she's also kind and tender with him at times. She teaches Abdullah and Pari how to cook and make dolls and toys out of cornhusks. Nevertheless, Abdullah recognizes that Parwana has far more love and compassion for Iqbal, her biological son.

Family is the fundamental unit of this chapter of the book: the people who aren't biologically related to Abdullah may be kind, likeable people, but they're simply no replacement for family. Parwana isn't someone Abdullah distrusts, but he can't love her like a true mother. In the same way, Parwana seems not to love Abdullah in the same way that she loved her own child, Iqbal. It's important to keep track of these names, as they will reoccur throughout the novel.

As the three ride in their wagon, Abdullah sees a group of Kuchi nomads (an Afghani tribe that specializes in herding). One of the nomads reminds Abdullah of his late mother, especially her hair. He remembers his mother as a person of boundless joy and goodness. His sister, Pari, has some of the same goodness in her, Abdullah believes. Sometimes, Pari seems to be the only true family he has.

We get a better sense for the environment in Abdullah's world: many of the people in his life are always wandering between places—just as years later Abdullah, and many of the other characters in the novel, will wander around the world in search of peace and happiness.

Pari asks Abdullah if their dog, Shuja, will be all right back at their home. Abdullah assures Pari that Shuja will be fine—he can take care of himself. Pari then asks Abdullah if, when she grows up, they can live together. Abdullah says that they can, but adds that one day, Pari won't want to. Pari insists that she will. Pari asks Abdullah to promise her that they'll be close when they grow up. Abdullah promises.

Immediately after Shuja (the dog) is presented as being able to take care of himself, Pari reaffirms her human need for companionship and family. This childlike promise, along with the story of the div, *adds to the foreshadowing that the family will soon be broken apart.*

It is revealed that the children's "Uncle Nabi" has found a job for Father—the job that Father, Abdullah, and Pari are riding out to perform. Uncle Nabi is actually Abdullah' step-uncle, Parwana's elder brother. The job, which will take a month to complete, involves building an extension for the house of a wealthy family. Abdullah is familiar with the sight of his father working: Father works hard lifting bowls of cement, moving dirt and straw, etc. As Abdullah thinks of all this, he remembers his other half-brother, whose name was Omar. Omar, the son of Father and Parwana, died of the cold recently, and Father blames himself for Omar's death. Abdullah realizes that he can't picture his Father as a young man—it's as if he's always had a shovel in his hands.

The introduction of Uncle Nabi expands our understanding of family in the novel. Nabi isn't related to Abdullah by blood—and yet he seems close to Saboor and his children (at this point). Nabi will be a major character later on, but here he is introduced in the periphery, as Hosseini often does in this novel. Abdullah seems curiously alienated from his own father, an intimidating man who doesn't seem to offer Abdullah much love.

Night falls, and Father, Abdullah, and Pari eat dinner together in the middle of the desert. As they do so, Abdullah remembers "Omar's labored cries." Cautiously, Abdullah asks his Father to allow him to help build the family's guesthouse. Father says that he'll be allowed to fix mortar. He adds that Pari will be in charge of water—people can't work if they're thirsty. Abdullah remembers raising Pari, his younger sister, starting when he was only ten years old. He was with her when she took her first steps, and when she spoke her first word.

Father, it would seem, relates to his family members through work—thus, Abdullah will "become" his son by participating in construction work, and even Pari will have a part to play. By contrast, Abdullah's relationship with Pari seems close and perfectly sincere—it's not mediated by work, age, gender, or any other factor: Pari and Abdullah love one another deeply, and that's that.

As it gets later, Pari and Abdullah ask their Father to tell them a story. Sometimes, Abdullah notes, Father enjoys telling them stories, but often he's too quiet and closed-off to oblige. Tonight, for instance, he refuses, and tells his children to go to sleep—they have a long day tomorrow. As Pari and Abdullah fall asleep, Abdullah sings a song to Pari. The song is about a "sad little fairy / who was blown away by the wind one night." Abdullah likes this song, in part because Pari means "fairy" in Farsi.

In contrast to the fascinating and well-crafted tale we heard in the previous chapter, we learn here that Father is a reluctant storyteller, and usually, he doesn't tell his children any stories at all. This makes the first chapter of the novel more mysterious than ever—why, exactly, did Father choose to tell such a long and thematically complicated story? We should also contrast Father's reluctant storytelling with Abdullah's enthusiastic singing: Abdullah's love for Pari seems unconditional.

Abdullah wakes up in the middle of the night, and sees that his Father is gone. He wonders, frantically, if his father has been kidnapped or killed by bandits or nomads. Then, suddenly, he hears footsteps—it is his Father, returning from a short walk. Abdullah tells his Father that he thought he'd been killed, adding that he knows Father would never leave his family voluntarily. Father tells Abdullah to go to sleep.

The qualifier that Abdullah adds to his statement—that he knows Father would never abandon them—actually weakens his statement, rather than strengthening it. It's as if Abdullah senses, deep down, that his Father is capable of leaving his children, and wants to force himself to forget this fact.

The next morning the three proceed on their journey. The construction site is in the city of Kabul. Abdullah has never been there before , but he has heard about it from Uncle Nabi. When Abdullah first sees the city, it's far louder and more energetic than anything he could have imagined: there are lights, tall buildings, big crowds, and movie theaters. Abdullah hopes that Uncle Nabi will take him to see a film soon.

Abdullah's relationship with the other character in the novel is largely determined by his relationship with various forms of art: stories, songs, and here, movies. Some of the other characters we'll meet bond with their friends and family through art.

Father leads his children through Kabul, to a building where Uncle Nabi has been waiting for them. Nabi embraces Abdullah and Pari warmly, and leads them to his car. He drives the family through the streets, pointing out the buildings and establishments. Eventually, he arrives at the construction site where Father will be working: the luxurious house of his employers. Nabi warns everyone to be on their best behavior around the owners of the property.

So far we've been dealing with characters who are impoverished: they're willing to travel through a desert for nearly a day just to get to a potential source of income. Now, however, Hosseini introduces wealthier, more powerful people into his novel. The large cast of characters can get confusing, but it also highlights the diversity of Afghanistan and the globalized world.

Nabi leads everyone inside the house. Abdullah is immediately struck by the beautiful indoor garden, white pillars, veranda, and indoor plumbing. Nabi leads Abdullah to his boss, Mr. Wahdati. Mr. Wahdati wears a beautiful, expensive suit, and offers Pari and Abdullah cookies, which they both eagerly accept. This charms Mr. Wahdati's wife, Mrs. Wahdati, who is sitting in the living room. Abdullah looks around the living room, and notices old photographs of Mrs. Wahdati being married to a man who, much to Abdullah's surprise, is not Mr. Wahdati. This reminds Abdullah that he has met Mrs. Wahdati before. When Abdullah was about eight years old, Mrs. Wahdati had come to Shadbagh—the town where Abdullah lives—because she claimed to want to meet Nabi's family. Although Abdullah was young at the time, he noticed that Mrs. Wahdati made a great show of seeming to care about Nabi's house and life—a show which nobody, even Abdullah, found very convincing.

In this scene, Hosseini describes the house from a child's point of view. There are some advantages and disadvantages to this approach. One disadvantage is that our knowledge of Mr. and Mrs. Wahdati's lives is limited to a child's understanding—we can't understand who the man in the photograph is or why Mrs. Wahdati married him. On the other hand, the simplicity of Abdullah's observations is striking and sometimes moving. For instance, he has no trouble detecting the showiness and falseness of Mrs. Wahdati's desire to seem like "one of the common people" when she visits Shadbagh. At times, Abdullah comes across as the young child he is, but at other times, he seems remarkably mature and insightful.

In the Wahdati house, Mrs. Wahdati asks Father if he's been to Kabul before. She addresses him as Saboor. Saboor says that he has been a few times before, and he always finds the city very crowded. Mrs. Wahdati goes on to say that while she's "progressive" in her thinking, she's always had a fondness for the Afghani countryside—the "real" Afghanistan. Addressing her husband as Suleiman, she points out that people in small towns live more "authentic" lives and have more pride in themselves. Suleiman seems to find this irritating, and he tells her to be quiet, calling her Nila. Nila offers to take Pari and Abdullah to the local bazaar while Father proceeds with his work.

Here we get a sense for the tension between Mrs. And Mr. Wahdati, but little context for it. Mrs. Wahdati seems more adventurous and eager to explore the unknown, even if her attempts to escape her obvious wealth and privilege don't always pay off. It's not clear how seriously we should take Mrs. Wahdati's talk about "authenticity." She seems to be romanticizing—or even fetishizing—poverty, treating it as an interesting "tourist destination" instead of the nightmare it often is.

Nabi drives Pari, Mrs. Wahdati, and Abdullah to the bazaar. As they drive, Abdullah sees schoolchildren, about his age, wearing black uniforms and walking through the streets. Mrs. Wahdati arrives at the bazaar, which is a huge, lavish spectacle, full of merchants selling jewelry. Mrs. Wahdati shops for earrings and other trinkets. She also buys Abdullah a pair of sneakers. She notices that Abdullah is looking at her oddly, and suggests that he thinks she's a bad person. Abdullah denies this. Though it's unclear why, Abdullah begins to cry. This distresses Mrs. Wahdati, and she begs him to stop, telling him that "it" is for the best.

We're not meant to entirely understand the exchange between Mrs. Wahdati and Abdullah in this scene, but it's also apparent that Abdullah knows more than he's letting on. The story of the div, *his promise to stay close to Pari, and Mrs. Wahdati's mysterious visit all suggest that Abdullah can sense that the Wahdatis are about to have a hand in breaking up Abdullah's family. At the very least, Abdullah can tell that something bad is about to happen, and this is what makes him cry.*

The narrative cuts ahead to the winter of 1952, when Father is busy cutting down an oak tree that grows near his home. Abdullah helps his father move the trunk of the tree. As he works, he notices a small **yellow feather**, a wonderful gift for Pari, and picks it up. Abdullah thinks about the party he'll be attending in the evening: it's being hosted in honor of Baitullah, a local man whose wife has just given birth to a baby boy. Suddenly, Abdullah's thoughts turn to Pari. It's revealed that Pari has not lived in the village for months. Nobody talks about her or mentions her name. Abdullah thinks about the story Father told them before their trip—the story about the farmer who sacrifices his favorite child to **the div**.

We now begin to understand what is going on, and Mrs. Wahdati's apology to Abdullah makes more sense. Pari no longer lives with Father and Abdullah, and the Wahdatis must have been responsible for Pari's disappearance—they've adopted her as their own child. It's heartbreaking to see how the community responds to Pari's absence—nobody talks about her, or even mentions her name. This provides a real-world example of the purposeful forgetting we saw in the div *story: when confronted by crisis, most people try to forget their pain.*

Abdullah returns to his home, carrying the **yellow feather**. He finds Pari's collection of feathers, and adds the new one to it. Though it's not revealed exactly what's happened to Pari, Abdullah resolves to leave his hometown of Shadbagh one day, and to find Pari, wherever she might be.

By the end of chapter two, we've established a potential arc for the novel: Abdullah struggling with his sister's disappearance. In the coming chapters, however, Hosseini will destroy our expectations of what sort of book this is going to be. The yellow feather will come to be a poignant symbol of memory and forgetting, like Qais's bell in the div *story.*

CHAPTER 3

As the chapter begins, Parwana sees "it" smeared down Masooma's buttocks and thighs. Parwana "wants to howl," but she forces herself to be cheerful. It is early morning, and Parwana is going about her normal routine, despite Masooma's presence. She feeds the chickens, chops wood, etc. Between these tasks, she finds the time to take care of Masooma, who is suffering from an unnamed ailment.

This opening comes as a shock, and not only because it includes an image of a grown woman soiling herself. The first two chapters of the novel suggested that And the Mountains Echoed *would be a book about a young boy, Abdullah, in search of his sister. Instead of staying with Abdullah, however, Hosseini now bounces to Parwana, whom we remember as Abdullah's stepmother. The chapter title also reveals that we have been taken back in time—three years before the events of the previous chapter.*

As Parwana goes about her usual business, she sometimes sees Saboor. Saboor, as Parwana sees him, is a mature family man. One day, Masooma asks Parwana about a shared memory of going biking long ago, and as they talk, Parwana refers to Masooma as her sister. That night, Parwana sleeps next to Masooma, and can't help but think about Saboor. She has heard rumors that Saboor is looking for a new wife.

It is here made clear that Saboor is the man Abdullah called "Father" in the previous chapter. This is a common motif in the novel: the same character will be called by three or four different names, making it difficult to determine (from chapter to chapter) who he or she is, at least at first. Hosseini takes us from one complicated sibling relationship to another.

When Parwana was born, she was a surprise. She and Masooma are twin sisters, but their mother didn't realize she was bearing twins until Parwana came out immediately after Masooma. Beginning with her painful and time-consuming birth, Parwana was always a "problem child," especially when compared with Masooma and Nabi, her older brother. Growing up, the children would often eat dinner at Saboor's family's house. Saboor liked to entertain his friends by telling them stories about heroes and **divs**. One day while she is at a market with her mother, Parwana sees a beautiful notebook. Recognizing that she could give it to Saboor as a way for him to write down all his stories, she steals the notebook. Parwana is too afraid to give the notebook to Saboor herself, however. One day, Masooma finds the notebook and asks Parwana if she could buy from her and give it to Saboor. Parwana, too nervous to tell the truth, says she doesn't mind. Secretly she's furious though, and a little jealous of her sister's friendship with Saboor.

In contrast to the close relationship between Abdullah and Pari, Hosseini now presents us with a distant, not particularly affectionate relationship between the two twins, Masooma and Parwana. This reminds us that blood ties don't always mean love and affection. The reference to divs *in this section is another "call-back" to the previous two chapters, the kind of allusion that Hosseini delights in throughout this novel. If there's a lesson to be learned from this section, it's that it's not enough to think or feel something: one has to translate one's thoughts and emotions into definite actions, or risk being outmatched by someone else (just as Parwana is outmatched by her bolder sister, Masooma).*

By the time Masooma and Parwana are 11 years old, Masooma has begun to attract attention from the local boys. One of them throws a rock at Masooma and Parwana's feet, to which he's attached a message, saying that he wants to marry "you." The note also says that "your sister" can marry the boy's cousin. This incident bothers Parwana, because Masooma assumes the note is addressed to her, not Parwana. It's around this time that Masooma begins telling people, including Parwana, that she is "already taken."

There's no guarantee that the boy's letter was *for Masooma—the difference between the two sisters, however, is that Masooma* believes *that she's prettier and more desirable. We can assume, moreover, that by this time, she's in some kind of relationship with Saboor, the boy Parwana had a crush on.*

Some time before 1949, Nabi drives to town from Kabul. He is one of the most successful people in his community, since he's succeeded in finding a job in Kabul, and is sometimes allowed to drive his employers' fancy car. Nabi brings his family money every month. Masooma asks Nabi if he's found a wife yet, and he laughs off the question. Parwana remembers a recent trip that she and Masooma made with Nabi. On the trip, Nabi drove them into Kabul and showed them the beautiful city sights. Parwana is nostalgic for this day—the happiest day of Masooma's life, she thinks, since her "accident."

The reference to an "accident" helps explain the chapter's opening image of Parwana taking care of her sister—there is some big event that led to Parwana's permanent injury. It's also here that we start to get a sense for the vastness of Hosseini's project in the novel. Each chapter seems to be told from a different character's perspective—all of them interconnected in various ways.

During Nabi's visit, he tells Parwana that the rumors are true: Saboor is looking for a new wife, following the death of his former wife in childbirth. He adds that Saboor told him this news personally. Parwana is still a little in love with Saboor, but she finds it unlikely that he would marry her, and she's already fully committed to taking care of Masooma.

Even for Parwana, who isn't especially close with her sister, the sibling bond seems to take priority over her attraction to Saboor. This makes us wonder if something else (like guilt) might be motivating Parwana to take care of Masooma—another example of selfishness mixed with compassion.

When Masooma and Parwana were 13 years old, they used to enjoy going to bazaars to run errands for their mother. Men at the bazaars would always stare after Masooma, who was already a beautiful young woman. Parwana, by contrast, was plain, frizzy-haired, and broad-shouldered. She hated her appearance.

Based on what we know, it's not at all clear if Parwana is, *in fact, uglier than her sister. The chapter is told from Parwana's perspective, meaning that it's often impossible to tell the difference between reality and what Parwana perceives as reality.*

In 1949, Parwana carries Masooma outside for some fresh air. She is careful to take perfect care of her sister, arranging cushions so that she's comfortable. As they sit, Masooma asks Parwana to take her to Kabul. She imagines surprising Nabi in his house. Parwana is skeptical—in Masooma's "condition," it's difficult to travel. Masooma replies that everything has been worked out: a friend has a mule, which can carry them both to Kabul. She begs Parwana to go with her.

Parwana is careful and attentive around her sister, and it's unclear what has made her change her behavior so drastically—we see no signs of the jealousy that she once felt for Masooma. A recurring motif in the novel is the relationship between the invalid and the "nurse" or "doctor." Here, Masooma plays the former role, while Parwana acts as her nurse.

When Parwana and Masooma are 17 years old, they sit in the branch of a tall tree and discuss Saboor. Saboor has made it clear that he's going to ask Masooma to marry her. As she hears this, Parwana's heart sinks. Masooma turns away from Parwana for a moment to pull something out of her pocket. As she does so, Parwana intentionally shakes in her seat, shaking the entire branch. This causes Masooma to slip off the branch and fall from the tree. She hits the ground with a horrifying crunch.

We now understand why Parwana has devoted so much of her time and effort to taking care of her sister. Her care isn't just the result of her natural affection for Masooma—on the contrary, she's acting as Masooma's nurse because she feels guilty for causing Masooma's accident. Overcome with jealousy for her sister, Parwana causes Masooma to fall from a tree, destroying Masooma's chances of marrying Saboor.

Back in 1949, Parwana and Masooma are talking. Masooma tells her sister, "You have to do it now. If you wait until morning, you'll lose heart." As the sisters talk, Parwana reveals that Saboor has asked her to marry him. This will require Parwana to abandon Masooma instead of continuing to care for her. Masooma encourages Parwana to accept Saboor's offer. Parwana bursts into tears. She explains that Saboor loves Masooma, not her. Parwana adds, "This is all my doing." Masooma replies that she doesn't want to know what Parwana means by this. She tells Parwana that if Parwana loves her at all, she'll leave and marry Saboor immediately.

It's heartbreaking to see Parwana confessing—or beginning to confess—her guilt to Masooma, but it's even more wrenching to see Masooma refuse to listen. The goal of a confession is to express one's innermost feelings and secrets, leading to a reconciliation and, hopefully, progress. But Masooma refuses to hear Parwana's confession—implicitly, she's refusing to reconcile with Parwana, while also sacrificing her own health and happiness for her guilty sister.

After staring into Masooma's eyes for a long time, Parwana decides to leave her sister and marry Saboor. She walks away from her home, in the direction of Saboor's home. Suddenly, she hears a noise, similar to the sound of a woman crying out. She wonders if Masooma is calling her back, having had a change of heart. Parwana decides to keep walking. As she walks, she thinks about how everyone loved Masooma when they were younger. Parwana resolves to keep her secret—that she's responsible for crippling her sister—and share it with no one except the mountains. With this in mind, she walks through the desert, toward her future husband.

In this final section, Hosseini gives us another clue about the nature of his novel's title (which critic Michiko Kukutani called one of the most awkward titles ever bestowed upon a successful novel!). The "mountains" seem to absorb the secrets and sins of the characters. One could say that the mountains represent the characters' sense of loneliness and isolation in an uncaring, empty universe. Parwana—certainly isolated from her family and from herself—can't force Masooma to listen to her confession, and as a result, she goes through the rest of her life at a distance from others.

CHAPTER 4

The chapter begins with an invocation to Allah (the Muslim name for God). It becomes clear that the chapter is a letter, addressed to one Mr. Markos, the man who taught the letter's author to speak English and Farsi. The author reminds Mr. Markos that he's been instructed not to read the letter until the author is dead—thus, if Mr. Markos is reading, the author has passed on. The author asks Mr. Markos to extend his gratitude to the author's old friend, Ms. Amra Ademovic. The author adds that he intends the letter for Mr. Markos, but also for another person, whose identity will become apparent later on.

In this chapter, Hosseini almost starts teasing us a little. By now we know that each chapter is told from a different character's perspective, but here Hosseini begins by not only disguising the narrator but also mentioning totally new related characters. It's also noteworthy that this chapter doesn't correspond to any particular year—it will cover a far longer period of time, signaling the escalating scope and ambition of this novel.

The author begins by explaining that he finds it difficult to say where he should begin his story. He is about 80 years old (like many men of his generation, he's unsure of his exact age). After some thought, he decides to begin with Nila Wahdati, since his story also ends with this woman.

Mrs. Wahdati is the first familiar name we see in this letter. The introduction of new, non-Afghan characters continues to widen the scope of the novel.

The author met Mrs. Wahdati in 1949, the same year during which she married Mr. Wahdati. At the time, the author had already been working for Mr. Wahdati for two years. The author was born in Shadbagh, and chose to leave because he was tired of caring for his sisters, one of whom was an "invalid." Because the author worked full-time for Mr. Wahdati, he enjoyed the privilege of spending time in Mr. Wahdati's beautiful house. He cooked for Mr. Wahdati, sleeping every night in a small shack beside the house. Over the years, the author came to know Mr. Wahdati very well: his idiosyncrasies, his habits, his sleep schedule, etc. Every few days, the author drove Mr. Wahdati into the city so that he could visit his mother. Sometimes, Mr. Wahdati would ask the author to drive aimlessly for hours.

It now becomes more clear that the character who's narrating the chapter is Nabi, Abdullah and Pari's uncle who worked for the Wahdati family for many years. Nabi is then also the brother of Parwana and Masooma—it seems that he too, like Parwana, abandoned Masooma when caring for her conflicted with his own goals. It's interesting to see how Nabi builds a relationship with Mr. Wahdati without ever really conversing with him.

The author would visit his family, telling them stories about his new life. He was careful never to talk about Mr. Wahdati, however. His brother-in-law, Saboor, would praise him for his career success, calling him Nabi. By this point, the author (Nabi) had come to think of Mr. Wahdati as an unsatisfied man: a man without a profession or a passion, content to live off of his enormous inheritance. Eventually, Nabi notes, he would come to see that this impression of Mr. Wahdati was entirely incorrect.

Nabi is a gifted storyteller, capable of keeping our interest even before we know his identity. The format of a letter allows Hosseini to compress events that take place over the course of decades into one narrative flow. Nabi is writing as an old man, and so he (like the author) has a sense of perspective regarding his past life, and can even find a plot arc within his personal history.

One day, Mr. Wahdati asks Nabi to drive him to a neighborhood of the city where Nabi has never driven before. Following his employer's directions, Nabi drives to a huge house, and as he pulls up, he sees a beautiful woman stepping outside. At this point, Nabi stops to explain that at that time he'd had some considerable experience with prostitutes in the local whorehouse.

Nabi is the narrator, but he talks about himself very little. He's an observer first and foremost, and comments about himself usually arrive as asides, as they do in this case. Nabi, we learn, is sexually inexperienced, but certainly heterosexual—a fact that will become important later on.

The night that Nabi drops Mr. Wahdati off at the beautiful woman's house, Mr. Wahdati tells Nabi that he's getting married. In the coming days, Nabi hears lots of gossip about the woman (the same beautiful woman he saw) from the other workers. Some, including an irritable gardener named Zahib, say that the woman is immoral—she's had affairs with many men, and even writes poetry about it. Nabi tries to defend Mr. Wahdati around the other workers, and as a result he gains a reputation for being a "suck-up."

In this scene, we first see the extent of Nabi's loyalty to his employers. While it's true that Nabi has told us about his punctuality, his talents as a driver, etc. before, it's not until this moment that we realize that his devotion to Mr. and Mrs. Wahdati goes beyond a professional relationship—he's willing to hurt his own reputation in order to defend them as people.

Nabi explains that he'll refer to Mrs. Wahdati as Nila from hereon out. He notices almost immediately that Mr. and Mrs. Wahdati have an unhappy marriage: he sees that Nila spends long hours alone. He can't help but look at her when she passes through the house. Sometimes, when he drives her through the city, he finds small reasons to make their trips last a few seconds longer, so that he can spend more time with her. During one car ride, Nila asks Nabi about his village. Nabi explains that in his village, there are beautiful, delicious grapes. Nila seems to find this information interesting.

There's an old cliché that the "help"—the servants, in other words—always knows what's going on in a house. This is certainly the case here: although Mr. Wahdati seems strangely oblivious to the wellbeing of his wife, Nabi has no trouble seeing the truth of her unhappiness. It's a recurring theme of the novel that wealth and power interfere with people's ability to empathize with others.

Encouraged, Nabi asks to tell Nila another story, and Nila invites him to do so. Nabi explains that there is an old *mullah* (Islamic holy man) in his village. The man knows hundreds of stories. One of his favorite stories was about how all Muslims in the world bear the same lines on their palms, lines which spell out the numbers 18 and 81. Once, the *mullah* was informed that some Jews have the same lines on their hands. The *mullah* only replied that these Jews must have been Muslims at heart. Nila seems to find this anecdote amusing.

It's important that Nabi and Nila first interact as friends through storytelling. While this isn't exactly surprising—Nila is a writer herself, and would naturally want to hear stories from other people—it's worth keeping in mind that the other characters in the novel also use art (stories, photographs, etc.) to share their feelings with each other.

In the coming months, Nabi becomes increasingly fascinated with Nila. She is beautiful, and also highly intelligent and energetic. After a while, Nabi and Nila begin speaking every day. She tells him about the hunting trips she used to take as a girl. For the most part, Nabi listens while Nila talks—an arrangement that suits him fine. He gets the sense that Nila turns to him as a way to fight her loneliness.

Nabi and Nila seem to be developing feelings for each other—or at least Nabi seems to be falling for Nila. It's an interesting side effect of Hosseini's style that we're never sure how reliable his narrators are. At this point Nabi almost seems to be becoming a part of the strange, unhappy Wahdati family.

One day, Nila tells Nabi that she finds Mr. Wahdati aloof and arrogant. When Nabi tries to protest, she insists that Nabi can be honest with her. Nabi remains diplomatic rather than criticize his employer, but Nila continues to insult Mr. Wahdati. She adds that his mother didn't approve of their marriage to one another. Nabi wonders why Nila married Mr. Wahdati in the first place, but can never summon the courage to ask.

Even in the middle of a complicated story, Nabi remains a good storyteller. There are clearly deep, underlying issues in the Wahdatis' marriage, but Nabi is still on the outside—although Nila is more and more coming to him as a confidante.

In the fall of 1950, Nila summons Nabi and asks him to take her to the town of Shadbagh. Nabi reluctantly agrees, worrying that she'll be dismissive of his family's poverty. In Shadbagh, Nabi introduces Nila to his family. Saboor in particular is uncomfortable around Nila. Nila tries to make pleasant conversation, and praises a large rug in Saboor's house. She also asks Parwana how far along she is: at the time, Parwana is pregnant with Iqbal.

It's not clear to us why Nila wants to visit Nabi's family in Shadbagh. Abdullah's perspective on the matter (which we saw in Chapter Two) may be more accurate than Nabi's, as Abdullah better sees how Nila is uncomfortable among the poor, and how she overcompensates with forced politeness.

Nabi stops for a moment to note the intimate connection between Abdullah and Pari, Saboor's two children. For whatever reason, he explains, the two siblings were extremely close. During her visit to Shadbagh, Nila finds Pari adorable. Then, for no discernible reason, she bursts into tears. She asks Nabi to take her home, and Nabi obliges.

It's a constant mystery in And the Mountains Echoed *why certain characters feel connected with one another. Sometimes, the characters are related by blood (like Abdullah and Pari), and sometimes they're strangers. Surprisingly, Nabi's "for whatever reason" is as much explanation as we're given—there's just no way to explain why certain people feel such an intimate bond from such a young age.*

When Nila returns to her home in Kabul, she goes to her room and doesn't come out for days. After four days of this, Nila's father, an intimidating man, arrives at the house. Although Nabi can't eavesdrop on their conversation, while he's working outside he glimpses Nila's father shouting at her. That night, Nila emerges from her room. The next day, she tells Nabi that she's planning a party, and that he'll need to procure alcohol, food, and other things. These parties—frequent since Nila moved in to Mr. Wahdati's house—are lavish affairs, full of American music (mostly jazz). Nabi is somewhat uncomfortable at the parties, because men and women dance together at them—in his village, parties are always separated by gender.

Although our knowledge of Nila Wahdati is always limited by Nabi's affection for her, a few facts about her emerge from this chapter. One is that Nila feels trapped, and glamorizes escape of any kind. There's also something strangely arrogant about Nila's tastes—they seem like a way for her to show off her sophistication and wealth. Nabi, poor and raised in a traditional Islamic household, is highly uncomfortable with the party, reinforcing the cultural—and financial—barriers between himself and Nila.

At parties, Nila likes to recite poetry. Nabi secretly enjoys these recitals, both because he loves the sound of Nila's voice and because Nila's poetry is brilliant and surprising. During the party that she hosts after her father shouts at her, Nila recites a poem about a man and his wife, mourning the death of their infant child. The next day, Nila pulls Nabi aside and tells him that he is her only friend. Nabi is more disturbed than flattered—he's so shy with Nila that he can't understand what they'll do next.

Once again, we can't tell how objective Nabi's admiration for Nila's poetry is—but later we'll see some more confirmation that she is, in fact, extremely talented. In any event, it's hard not to think that Nila is using Nabi—treating him as a vessel into which she can pour her anxiety and guilt, much as Parwana pours her secrets into the mountains.

A few weeks after Nila's party, Nabi has a "dangerous" idea. He realizes that Nila is unable to bear children, and thinks that there's a way for him to find her a child. He speaks to Saboor about this idea. Nabi notes that Saboor was a proud, terse man, like many Afghanis of the time. Saboor died when he was in his late thirties, working hard in a field.

It's important that Nabi is the one who develops the idea to sell Pari to Mrs. Wahdati. Nila doesn't ask Nabi directly, but Nabi has grown so accustomed to his employers' needs that he has no trouble deducing what she wants.

After much agonizing, Saboor agrees to go along with Nabi's idea, recognizing that he can make a great deal of money. Nabi next shares his idea with Nila, who passes it on to Mr. Wahdati. They agree that the idea is worth trying. Nabi says that there is "little point" in explaining what happened next in much detail: one day, Mr. Wahdati summons Saboor, Abdullah, and Pari to Kabul, where he keeps Pari and sends Abdullah and Saboor back to their village. Pari would be living with Mr. and Mrs. Wahdati from now on.

It's difficult to judge Saboor's decision to sell his child. On one hand, the notion of selling one's family seems barbaric—a vestige of slavery. On the other, Saboor has clearly rationalized his actions: Pari will receive a wonderful education and (as far as he can tell) a set of loving, wealthy parents. We know that Saboor has been struggling with this decision because of the div *story he told his children in Chapter One.*

Pari was four years old when she came to live in Kabul. Over time, she grew accustomed to her luxurious life with Mr. and Mrs. Wahdati. She came to stop thinking of Nabi as her uncle, and merely as another servant. In contrast, Pari spends more and more time with Nila. Nila loves playing games and talking with Pari, and eventually, both Nila and Pari cease paying attention to Nabi. When Nabi goes to visit Saboor, Saboor is equally oblivious to his presence. Nabi recognizes that Saboor blames him for the loss of his child. Saboor tells Nabi to never visit him again, and Nabi never does.

The theme of forgetting returns powerfully in this section, again hearkening back to the div *story. Pari forgets who her true family is, even treating Nabi like a servant instead of an uncle. However, it's worth considering why Nabi doesn't remind Pari of his relation to her. The likely answer is that Nabi, no less than Nila, wants to forget what he's done: he's so ashamed that he'd prefer it if he* were *Pari's servant. It also seems to become an unspoken rule to say that Pari isn't adopted at all, but is the Wahdatis' biological child.*

In the spring of 1955, Nabi continues, his life changed forever. One day, Nila screams for Nabi, who rushes to her room and finds her standing over Mr. Wahdati. Mr. Wahdati looks pale, and is making strange gurgling sounds. Thinking quickly, Nabi tells Nila to keep Pari away from the sight, and then shouts for Zahib, who helps him dress Mr. Wahdati and carry him to the car. He then drives his employer to a hospital. It becomes clear that Mr. Wahdati has had a stroke.

Many of the characters in this novel suffer from major medical problems, and rely extensively on the kindness and help of others to survive. Mr. Wahdati is rapidly becoming one of these people, and it remains to be seen if Nabi will continue caring for him or not. It's worth remembering, however, that Nabi first came to work for the Wahdatis because he tired of caring for his own sister, Masooma.

Following Mr. Wahdati's stroke, the Wahdati house becomes chaotic and full of in-laws and family members. These people have come to pay their respects to Mr. Wahdati, but Mr. Wahdati seems utterly indifferent to their words. In the following weeks, Nila becomes the head of her household. Nabi comments that Nila was horrible in this role. She was tasked with feeding her paralyzed husband, among many other things, but Nila didn't have the strength or the compassion to take care of Mr. Wahdati—once, Nabi walked in on Nila weeping before her husband, having thrown his food on the floor. Shortly after this episode, Nila tells Nabi that she and Pari are going to Paris, leaving Nabi to take care of Mr. Wahdati. She doesn't say how long she'll be away—or if she's even planning on returning. Before she goes, Nila tells Nabi, "It was always you," a statement that Nabi hardly understands.

In this section, it becomes even more unclear why Nila married Mr. Wahdati in the first place: clearly, she never had feelings for him. It's also here that we begin to see Nila for what she is: a selfish person, who selectively cares about other people (like Pari), but fundamentally cares most about herself. Even if Nila doesn't love her husband, it's shocking that she would take her adopted daughter and leave him behind forever, especially when he's in such a helpless state. Nila doesn't like to commit to things—she likes to jump between many people and projects, like the hostess of a big party. Her parting words to Nabi are cryptic, increasing the suspense.

As the months drag on, Nila and Pari remain in Paris, and Nabi stays in Kabul, taking care of Mr. Wahdati, who's confined to a wheelchair. Mr. Wahdati seems weary and deeply sad. His mother visits him regularly, but he never enjoys seeing her—on the contrary, he seems to look forward to the moment when she leaves.

It becomes clearer than ever that family is no guarantee of love or trust. Mr. Wahdati and his mother may be related by blood and bound together by years of intimacy, but Mr. Wahdati clearly prefers Nabi's company to his mother's.

One day, Nabi is cleaning Mr. Wahdati's house when he notices an old box of Mr. Wahdati's sketchbooks. Curious, he opens the box and flips through the books. Nabi is surprised to find pages and pages showing nothing but himself: Mr. Wahdati has been drawing him as he works, for years. This, Nabi decides, must be what Nila meant when she said, "It was always you." Nabi isn't sure what to make of the sketches. He's a little disturbed that his employer has been obsessing over him for so many years, but he's also reluctant to resign from his position, especially because Mr. Wahdati needs his help now more than ever.

It's telling that Nabi does nothing, even after he discovers that his employer seems unhealthily obsessed with him. At this point Nabi has fewer job opportunities than ever, and it would be unwise for him to leave his comfortable position in the mansion. Though Nabi doesn't feel anything romantically for Mr. Wahdati, his attachment to him clearly goes beyond that of a mere employee—indeed, he's more faithful to Mr. Wahdati than Mrs. Wahdati was.

In the late 1950s, Nabi is still working for Mr. Wahdati. They spend their spare time playing cards and other games. As a gesture of gratitude, Mr. Wahdati teaches Nabi how to read (Nabi has had some lessons before, but only under Mr. Wahdati's tutelage does he become a confident reader). Nabi tells Mr. Markos that, in secret, he had been looking for a replacement for himself. He'd interviewed many applicants, but none of them had the necessary stamina, loyalty, and skills (cooking, cleaning, reading, driving). As a result, he continues working for Mr. Wahdati year after year.

There's a noticeable contrast between the way that Mr. Wahdati's mother visits him briefly, then leaves, and the way Nabi attentively cares for his employer. Strangely, in this case the bond between employer and employee seems far closer than the bond between mother and child. This is another of the irregular families that Hosseini portrays in the novel. Nabi asserts his heterosexuality by claiming that he wants to resign, but we sense that he doesn't really want to leave Mr. Wahdati.

One day, Nabi decides to take Mr. Wahdati for a "morning stroll" through the streets of Kabul. This is a major breakthrough for Mr. Wahdati, since he'd refused to leave his house since his stroke. Nabi wheels Mr. Wahdati through the streets, something that Mr. Wahdati greatly enjoys. They greet Wahdati's neighbor, Mr. Bashiri, a young employee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. After a few such morning strolls, Nabi begins taking Mr. Wahdati for drives, just as he'd done before Mr. Wahdati's stroke. As he drives, Nabi finds himself thinking of Nila.

On a symbolic level, Nabi becomes a kind of parent to Mr. Wahdati in this scene—Wahdati's "breakthrough" in this moment is on par with a child taking its first steps. This cements the impression we've been getting lately: that Nabi is like family to Mr. Wahdati. He's not an employee so much as he is a brother, a mother, a father, and a romantic partner rolled into one.

The year is 1968, and Nabi is still working for Mr. Wahdati. Wahdati's mother has just passed away, and Nabi is no longer a young man (he's about forty). Mr. Bashiri, Wahdati's neighbor, has had a child, Idris, and his brother has also had a boy, named Timur. One day, while Wahdati and Nabi are playing chess, Wahdati tells Nabi that Nabi should get married before he loses his looks. He adds, quite unexpectedly, that he only hired Nabi because "I had never seen anyone as beautiful." Nabi can't force himself to look at Mr. Wahdati when he hears this. Wahdati says that he's loved Nabi for a long time. He explains that he's telling Nabi this because he wants Nabi to leave him and start a family. Nabi says nothing, but shakes his head as if to indicate that he'll never stop working for his employer. He notes that he had come to enjoy working for Wahdati, and had no intention of leaving. Wahdati then asks Nabi to do something for him. The section ends without Nabi revealing what this favor was.

In this crucial scene, we come to understand some of the mysteries in the chapter—while being baffled by still others. Mr. Wahdati now makes his homosexuality explicit, confirming Nabi's suspicions based on the drawings. This also explains why Mr. Wahdati and Nila never loved one another—Nila obviously knew that Nabi was the true object of her husband's affections, based on her parting words to Nabi. Hosseini throws in a new mystery as well, with Nabi's unexplained favor to Mr. Wahdati. Even if Nabi doesn't share Mr. Wahdati's romantic feelings, the two men become even closer here in this moment of honesty and true communication. They are more like a family than ever.

As time moves on, Afghanistan plunges into war. In the 80s, Kabul is actually less dangerous than the rest of the country (where Russian forces are invading), but in the 90s, Kabul finally succumbs to war. The quiet streets surrounding Mr. Wahdati's house become loud and dangerous. The house sustains considerable damage from explosions. Soldiers sometimes try to loot the local houses, and Nabi isn't always able to defend Wahdati's property. Nevertheless, he continues to live, quite happily, as Wahdati's servant. They bicker, almost like an old married couple.

Hosseini alludes to the Soviet-Afghan War here, one of the bloodiest and more prolonged conflicts in either country's history (this war is frequently compared to the Vietnam War For more information, see Background Info.) We also notice that Nabi is becoming still closer with Mr. Wahdati. While it's never clear that he shares his employer's romantic feelings, it's suggested that by now he's come to respect and even love Mr. Wahdati.

By the year 2000, the Taliban have engulfed Kabul. Nabi carries on as Mr. Wahdati's servant. In the spring of 2000, Nabi discovers Wahdati lying in bed, gurgling just as he did when he had his stroke. Nabi whispers that he's going to fetch a doctor and cure Wahdati. Wahdati motions for Nabi to listen to him, but Nabi can't hear anything Wahdati is saying except, "You promised." With these words, Wahdati falls silent, and dies. Nabi, heartbroken, kisses his old friend and employer on the lips, and then shuts his eyes.

It's still not clear what the nature of Nabi's promise to Mr. Wahdati was—it may have been a request for this kiss, or something to do with Pari. The kiss also may just be a pure expression of Nabi's love for Mr. Wahdati. Hosseini suffuses the chapter with a sense of mystery, even at moments of great poignancy, like this one. Mr. Wahdati is a truly tragic figure: isolated from his wife, his community, and even (to an extent) Nabi, the person he loves most.

After Mr. Wahdati's death, Nabi discovers a note leaving him all of Wahdati's property and wealth. Nabi is stunned, both by the will and by his friend's death: he's now been caring for Wahdati for more than half a century. For the next year and a half, Nabi lives in Wahdati's house, cooking for himself and entertaining himself in small, silly ways. He's dissatisfied with solitude, however.

Nabi has been so accustomed to Mr. Wahdati's presence that he can barely stand living on his own. This tells us that, while Nabi may not have been romantically interested in his employer, he had still developed strong feelings for him, and the two were basically living as partners.

Nabi's fortunes change once again in 2002, when he hears the bell ring at his front door. At this point in time, Taliban have been driven out by American soldiers, and aid workers are busy repairing the city of Kabul. Nabi finds that his visitor is Mr. Markos—the man to whom the letter is addressed (and whose identity is still not clear to us). Mr. Markos requires a translator to understand Nabi, but Nabi invites both the translator and Markos into his house for tea.

The scope of the novel keeps growing and growing—and we are reminded that Nabi is only one of the millions of residents of Kabul, meaning that there are millions of other stories to tell as well. The novel also becomes more global in this section, as we realize that Nabi's story overlaps with the stories of people from Europe and America.

Inside the house, Markos explains that he is a surgeon, sent from Greece to help sick Afghan children. He explains that he needs a place to stay. Nabi, delighted to have company, tells Markos that he can stay at this house for free for as long as he wants. Markos is overjoyed at this news, and agrees to stay. In the coming months, Nabi comes to meet Markos's friends and associates, including Amra Ademovic, whom he admires greatly. Amra Ademovic, who's been researching the former occupants of the house, tells Nabi that Nila is long since dead: she killed herself in 1974.

As we get a sense for the structure of the novel (each chapter told from a different perspective), we can't help but wonder which characters will be entrusted with a chapter of their own, and which characters will remain in the backdrop. Hosseini gives us crucial facts about important characters (like Nila's suicide) at random points—not necessarily in chronological order, or in a chapter otherwise focused on that character.

Nabi brings the letter to a close by saying that he doesn't have long to live. He thanks Mr. Markos for his friendship, and for his devotion to helping the people of Afghanistan. He humbly asks Markos for two favors: 1) to bury him next to his greatest friend, Mr. Wahdati, and 2) to find his niece, Pari, tell her that he's leaving her all his money and property, and let her know that he loves her. With this, Nabi ends his long letter.

The chapter ends on a melancholy note—both an ending and a beginning. Nabi's life is at an end, since Markos could only read the letter when Nabi dies. Yet Pari, we sense, is still alive, and needs to hear the truth (which Nabi himself wasn't brave enough to tell her): she has a brother.

CHAPTER 5

Amra Ademovic stands in the wing of a vast Afghan hospital, speaking to Idris and Timur (two characters Nabi mentioned in the previous chapter). Idris has just returned to Kabul, though it's not clear where he's come from. Timur is a prominent businessman in the United States, who, as Idris is well aware, cheats on both his wife and his taxes. Idris suspects that Timur is a fraud. Yet Timur gets away with everything, it sometimes seems to Idris, because he's charismatic and good-looking.

Hosseini still doesn't give us what we want: Pari's reunion with Abdullah. Instead, he takes us off on another journey, again involving supporting characters from previous chapters. We remember Idris as the son of Mr. Bashiri (Mr. Wahdati's neighbor), and Timur as the son of Mr. Bashiri's brother. Hosseini continues to expand his web of interconnectedness.

Idris, Timur, and Amra stand in the hospital, surveying a young girl named Roshana, who is very ill. Idris notices, with a flash of irritation, that Timur and Amra are flirting slightly. Back in the United States, where Timur lives, Timur goes by "Tim." He's changed his name following the events of September 11, a decision that, he claims, doubled his real estate business. Idris, in contrast to his brother, is quiet and sensitive, and works as a doctor.

At first it seems clear that Idris is the "better" and more moral of the two cousins: Timur, by contrast, is conceited, selfish, and generally indifferent to other people. Yet we should take these impressions with a grain of salt. As in the previous chapters, we're limited to a single character's impressions, and Hosseini's narrators are often unreliable. We add the relationship between cousins to the many kinds of families portrayed in the novel.

Amra asks Timur and Idris what they're doing in this hospital in Kabul. Timur explains: he and Idris are cousins, whose families fled to Pakistan following the Russian invasion of the 1980s, and then moved to California. This is the first time they've returned to their home in twenty years. They've decided to reconnect with their heritage, and, in the long run, donate money to Afghan charities. Privately, Idris thinks that Timur is concealing the real reason they've come back to Afghanistan: they want to reclaim the property their parents left them, property whose value is astronomically high now that Kabul is stable once again. Amra nods along as Timur explains why he and Idris are in Afghanistan. She then invites them to a party that night.

Idris and Timur are the first major characters in the novel who have lived in the United States (the country where Hosseini himself immigrated when he was fifteen years old). This further expands the novel's scope, and introduces new themes like distance, international politics, and foreign wealth. Evidently, Timur and Idris are rich and fairly successful—it remains us to be seen how they'll use their wealth and power upon returning to their war-torn homeland.

Timur and Idris have been sent to Kabul by Idris's uncle (Timur's father). Timur's father wants his son and nephew to regain his old property, bribing officials if necessary. Idris's own father died of cancer, and Timur was highly supportive of Idris during this difficult period. During the funeral, Idris was slightly irritated with Timur, because Timur was more capable of crying in public than he—strangely, Idris felt that Timur was "upstaging him" during his father's funeral. Idris is also resentful of Timur for quickly becoming wealthy and successful in America as a car dealer. Idris, by contrast, is currently working long, hard hours as a resident at UC Davis, in preparation for his career as a doctor. His wife, Nahil, is studying hard for her LSATs. In spite of the tension between Idris and Timur, Timur has always been generous with Idris, and he loans him money frequently. Nahil tells Idris that he's foolish to dislike Timur, since Timur has been so generous. Idris insists that Timur's generosity is all an act, a part of his sleazy showmanship.

Idris and Timur have arrived in Kabul for the same reason, and their selfishness is disguised by a show of compassion. The fact that they're there to do exactly the same thing underscores how silly it is for Idris to claim that he's "better" than Timur. His complaints that Timur was "better at crying" at the funeral seem particularly narcissistic, as if Idris was focused more on competing with his cousin than on his own father's death. As we learn more about Idris, it becomes increasingly obvious that he's mostly just jealous of Timur for making more money and being more respected and liked by his friends. This chapter is partly about the distances that can exist even between "close" character, like Timur and Idris. While they're cousins, it's clear that they don't particularly like or understand each other. This is an echo of the sister-relationship between Parwana and Masooma.

Timur and Idris have arrived at Mr. Wahdati's home, prepared for the party Amra mentioned. The house is lavish by Kabul's standards, though it's sustained a great deal of damage in the past twenty years. Inside, the cousins notice that workers have begun repairing the property: planting new flowers in the garden, bricking the walls, painting the fences, etc. There are about twenty people inside, all of them smoking and drinking. Idris and Timur greet Markos, who introduces them to the owner, an elderly man (whom we know to be Nabi). Together Timur, Markos, Nabi, and Idris discuss Nila Wahdati. Markos mentions that Nila became a successful, renowned poet before she killed herself. Timur changes the topic to rent—he reminds Nabi that he could make a fortune by charging his guests high rent. Nabi acknowledges that Timur is right, and says that he refuses to do so.

One of the simplest yet most rewarding pleasures of this novel is the "eureka" moment when we connect some of the dots and recognize a character who has narrated a previous chapter. Here, for example, we recognize that Idris and Timur are speaking with Nabi—whom we know well now, though the cousins don't know him at all. Each character in the novel is surrounded by many other characters, each of whom has their own unique experience and knowledge. And yet for the most part, the characters in the novel (like people in real life) don't make an effort to understand one another—their stories remain trapped inside their heads, and no one recognizes the many threads connecting us all.

The party proceeds. Idris is uneasy, as he always is at parties. To his surprise, Amra greets him and strikes up a conversation. She points out that Idris clearly doesn't like his cousin very much, and Idris doesn't disagree. He explains that Timur has always embarrassed him by behaving like the stereotypical Afghan-American: arrogant, flirtatious, and crude. Amra reveals that she knows why Timur and Idris are in Afghanistan: they obviously want to reclaim their old property. Idris is surprised by Amra's insightfulness, but she explains that she can see through anyone. Idris notes that Amra is very beautiful, though her beauty seems trapped inside tiredness and disillusionment.

Once again, we get the distinct sense that Idris isn't as good a person as he thinks. While Idris claims to be less arrogant and conceited than his cousin, we can tell that he and Timur are attracted to the same woman, Amra. It's easy to imagine that much of Idris's resentment of Timur, at least while they're in Kabul, isn't based on Timur's moral inferiority, but rather the fact that Timur and Idris are "competing" for the same woman. Idris isn't any better a person than Timur, he just likes to think he is.

Amra explains to Idris what will happen to Roshana, the young girl in the hospital. Roshana lived with her family outside of Kabul, Amra explains. Roshana's uncle and father had a fight over their property. The fight was bitter, but after many weeks, it seemed that her father and uncle were about to make up. The uncle visited the father in his home, and they embraced—the traditional sign of ending an argument. Afterwards, the uncle excused himself, and when he returned to the house, he was holding an axe. He killed Roshana's father, mother, and brother. Roshana miraculously survived her uncle's attack, though she has a cracked skull, and probable brain damage.

It's truly shocking to move from the petty family rivalries of the previous section to the doctor's description of how Roshana almost died. Timur and Idris's mutual resentment seems absurdly insignificant next to the life of a little girl almost murdered by her uncle. This is exactly the effect Hosseini has in mind—he wants to show us how absurd it is to value our own silly desires more highly than the needs of other people.

The chapter cuts ahead to the next day. Timur wants to go to the town of Istalif, but Idris refuses, claiming to have a bad hangover. After Timur leaves, Idris finds a cab and asks to go to the local hospital. He makes a stop at the local bazaar first.

It's not yet clear what Idris is going to do, but we can be sure that it will be partly motivated by his desire to prove himself a better person than his cousin.

Idris arrives at the hospital, carrying a box. He makes his way through the halls to where Amra is sitting by Roshana's bed. Idris greets Roshana and shows her the presents he's bought her: VCR tapes of old American films, such as *Toy Story* and *E.T.* Because there's a television in the hospital, Roshana is able to watch a film immediately.

Much like the earlier characters in the novel, Idris interacts with other people using art—in this case, connecting with Roshana through children's DVDs that he picks up at a bazaar.

Halfway through the film, the power goes out, and Idris decides to leave the hospital. As he leaves, he runs into Roshana's maternal uncle (not the man who attacked her with an axe). The uncle complains that it would have been better if Roshana had died—now, she'll have to go through life without a husband. He asks Idris for money, and Idris gives him some, which he instructs the uncle to use to buy Roshana some shoes.

Once again, we see that family is no guarantee of affection. Roshana's uncle (or rather, the man who claims to be her uncle) seems to have no real love for Roshana—and also holds the sexist idea that a woman's life is only fulfilled by having a husband. Idris's attempts to care for Roshana seem clumsy and naïve—assuming that the uncle asking for money will actually buy shoes and return

Idris develops a routine of visiting the hospital to see Roshana. He brings Roshana presents, and spends more time with Amra. Timur warns Idris to be careful—Roshana can't become too attached to him. Idris grudgingly accepts that Timur is right, though he wonders if Timur might be jealous of Idris's concern. Idris is scheduled to fly back to the U.S. in less than a week. During one visit to the hospital, he tells Amra that he wants to help Roshana get better. She needs a neurosurgical operation, he recognizes, one that she'd be more likely to get in the U.S. He even offers to pay for the operation. Amra is surprised and overjoyed with this news. She also tells Idris that the uncle to whom he gave money has disappeared.

In this scene, Idris makes a big, bold promise to an essentially helpless girl. It's easy for him, from his position of relative privilege and power, to say things like this to Roshana, but to Roshana his whims could have huge repercussions. It's also possible that Idris is partly trying to impress Amra with his charity. It remains to be seen if Idris will have the willpower and compassion to follow through with this offer. As usual, Idris feels like he is competing with Timur in everything—even compassion.

Idris is sitting on a plane back to the United States, next to Timur. Timur brags about having sex with many women in Kabul. He also explains that he's hired a lawyer named Farooq to monitor their family's property in Kabul. Timur plans on returning to Kabul in another month. As Timur goes on, Idris silently remembers saying goodbye to Roshana, and telling her that he'd see her again.

The contrast between Idris's concern for Roshana and Timur's indifference seems perfectly straightforward: Timur is a hedonist, and doesn't care about other people, while Idris is compassionate, and cares deeply for others. And yet we're also seeing all this from Idris's biased perspective.

Idris returns to the U.S. and reunites with Nahil, his wife. Idris is overjoyed to see his two children, Zabi and Lemar, but he's also reminded that they're growing up ignorant and spoiled—precisely the qualities he tried to discourage in them. Idris suggests that the family get lunch at an Afghan deli. At the deli, Idris notes that the owner is a man named Abdullah, who's married to a woman named Sultana. Abdullah is one of Idris's medical patients: he married Sultana in Pakistan in the 70s, and moved to the U.S., where he has a daughter named Pari (II). Abdullah greets Idris and asks him how Timur is doing. They banter briefly, and Abdullah tells Idris that he can eat for free. As Idris and his family leave the restaurant, Lemar asks Idris why Abdullah gives them free meals. Idris says it's because he's Abdullah's doctor, but secretly, he knows the real answer: Timur lent Abdullah the money to start his restaurant.

At every turn of Idris's life, he's reminded of his dislike for Timur. Here, for instance, we learn that Idris's family can eat free at Abdullah's restaurant because Timur lent Abdullah money long ago. The more important and exciting news in this section is that Abdullah—Pari's brother!—lives in the United States, is married, and has returned to the narrative. Idris's annoyance in this scene is ironic as well—at the restaurant Idris is reminded of his cousin, whom he finds obnoxious, but he's reminded precisely because *of Timur's own charitable actions.*

In the next few days, Idris is quiet and thoughtful. He asks Nahil if she thinks they need so much "stuff" —their home theater, their house, etc. Nahil insists that she and Idris have earned their lifestyle with hard work, but Idris doesn't find this answer satisfying. That night, he can't sleep. He stays up, looking at his computer. Suddenly, he receives an email from Amra. In the email, Amra explains that Roshana wants to send him a message: she's been enjoying the videotapes Idris bought her, and wishes that Idris would return to Kabul very soon.

Idris's time in Kabul has made him question his career path in the United States. Having visited a war-torn country, where the majority of people have very little, it makes sense for Idris to now be questioning his comfortable lifestyle. Nahil has clearly sublimated the materialistic rhetoric of the U.S.—and again Hosseini gives us an example of how wealth and luxury interfere with one's innate sense of compassion and empathy.

Idris resumes his work. He's extremely busy—overbooked for the next two weeks. His chief, Joan Schaeffer, tells him that he misdiagnosed one of his patients, meaning that many of his colleagues will know about his mistake. In the hurry of work, Idris doesn't have the time to talk to Joan about Roshana's operation. He receives another email from Amra, in which she asks if Idris has looked into an operation for Roshana. Idris is irritated by the email, but then feels guilty for his irritation.

With every section in this chapter, Idris seems to be drifting further from his goals of helping Roshana. He's busy, works hard, and has many other concerns—yet we can't help but think that Idris's inaction is also the result of his laziness and complacency, not his stress. We start to realize that Idris simply isn't a very good person, even if he likes to believe otherwise.

Later in the week, Idris approaches Joan Schaeffer about Roshana's operation. He explains the circumstances, and asks her if American healthcare could pay for her procedure. Joan replies, sadly, that her board of directors probably wouldn't approve of the operation. Joan suggests that Idris look into humanitarian groups that would perform the operation. Idris, much to his own surprise, isn't disappointed by Joan's response—he's almost relieved.

Idris is relieved at Joan's answer because it makes him look good while also freeing him from responsibility. Idris can go on with his life, secure in the knowledge that he's made a sincere effort to help Roshana. He thinks that he is compassionate, but really he just wants to be thought of *as compassionate.*

The weeks go on, and Idris begins to concern himself more and more with his material needs. He installs a home theater system, and begins telling himself that he's earned everything in his life with hard work and study. He begins to forget about Roshana, very slowly, until eventually she becomes nothing more than a character in a movie. He begins ignoring Amra's emails, too.

Hosseini is brutally insightful about the relationship between compassion, and selfishness. Idris becomes more invested in his material life because *he believes that he's a good person, and has made a sincere effort to help Roshana. Paradoxically, believing that he's a good person makes him a worse person. From the viewpoint of Idris's life in the U.S., it's easy to forget about his connection to suffering Afghans, and Roshana becomes unreal to him.*

The narrative cuts ahead by six years. Idris is standing in line at a bookstore, holding a book. The book, ghostwritten by a journalist, is about Roshana. Idris thinks, with great pain, about the love and respect Roshana gave him when she was in the hospital. He opens the book and looks at the dedication page, which reads, "To the two angels in my life; my mother Amra, and my Kaka Timur."

The final sections of this chapter read like a nightmare—Idris's worst fears are confirmed when Timur accepts the responsibility for Roshana, making Idris look like a negligent fool (which he probably is). The supposedly selfish, obnoxious Timur is the one who actually followed through with compassionate acts, instead of just empty promises.

It's revealed that Idris is standing in a book-signing line, and he's only a few feet away from Roshana. When it's his turn to meet Roshana and have his book signed, Roshana barely looks at him—it's not clear if she recognizes him or not. Idris tries to tell her who he is, but a clerk sternly tells him to move along. He takes his book and moves outside. When he opens the book, he sees two sentences: "Don't worry. You're not in it."

In the nightmarish final lines of this chapter—the most self-contained, and one of the most disturbing in the book—Roshana speaks directly to Idris through writing. Roshana now recognizes the truth about Idris: he's a fundamentally selfish person, more concerned about his own "image" than other people's well-being.

CHAPTER 6

The chapter begins with an "editor's note" for the literary journal *Parallaxe*, dated winter 1974. The note explains that the journal features an interview with a young, promising poet named Nila Wahdati. The editor is sad to say that though Nila gives a wonderful interview, she has died recently. She's survived by her daughter.

Much like Chapter Four, Chapter Six "begins at the end"—we learn, right off the bat, that Nila Wahdati, an important character in the previous chapters, has died. It seems that Nabi was right, and Nila was indeed a very talented poet.

After the editor's note, the chapter describes a meeting between Pari—in her mid-twenties—and a middle-aged man named Julien. Pari and Julien are standing in Julien's apartment, preparing to meet with old college friends of Julien, Christian and Aurelie. Just as Pari and Julien are about to leave, the phone rings. Knowing that it could be important, Pari answers. She is surprised to hear the voice of a man who introduces himself as Dr. Delaunay. The doctor explains that Pari's mother has had "an accident." He says that the accident is not serious, but that Pari should come to see her anyway. As he goes on, Pari thinks back to when she was ten, and her mother left her alone in the house for a few days. She tells the doctor that she'll be at the hospital in half an hour.

Because of the opening section, we assume that the news Dr. Delaunay is going to tell Pari concerns her adopted mother's death—but at this point, Nila is only injured. Hosseini likes to play with our expectations, forcing us to pay close attention to the novel. While Pari seems perfectly attentive to Nila's needs—even staying with her past the point where she's required to do so—we also sense that Nila hasn't been a very attentive mother, and Pari may be hiding feelings of resentment.

We cut to another excerpt from *Parallaxe*, Winter 1974. In the issue, the editor asks Nila Wahdati about her heritage. He describes Nila as a strikingly beautiful woman, who does not consider herself to be an Afghan. Nila explains that her family moved to Afghanistan to advise the king at the time, Amanullah, who wanted to introduce secular reform to the country. When Amanullah tried to ban the female headscarf (a fixture of many Muslim societies), Nila explains, the people of Afghanistan revolted, and cast Amanullah out of the country. Nila concludes by saying that she wanted her daughter to grow up happy and strong, and this would have been difficult had she grown up in Afghanistan. She adds, darkly, that "children are never everything you'd hoped for."

It seems that Nila doesn't particularly like her daughter, and her decision to adopt Pari turned out to be a disaster for her. We also learn more about Afghan history, and about Nila's relationship to Afghanistan. She's never felt entirely comfortable, either in Europe or in Afghanistan—she's caught between two highly different worlds. This is excellent material for poetry, but not necessarily for happiness and fulfillment.

Pari arrives at the hospital where her mother is being held. She greets her mother, who is lying in a stretcher, her forehead wrapped with thick bandages. Pari asks her mother what happened, and repeats something the doctors told her: she'd been driving. As Pari and her mother talk, Pari remembers meeting Julien, her lover, ten years ago, when she was only 14. Her mother had driven her to the hospital after she sprained her ankle. In the hospital, Julien, also in medical care for an injury, struck up conversation with her. In the coming weeks, Pari and Julien became close friends, despite the fact that Julien was far older (in his early thirties). Julien was working as a professor at the Sorbonne. Pari quickly developed a crush on him. Julien also bonded with Nila over discussions of jazz. Pari noticed Nila flirting with Julien, and felt jealous of her mother.

Julien first appears as Pari's lover, but now we learn that he used to be Nila's lover as well. This adds a sexual element to the competition between Nila and Pari. The family dynamics in the novel often include lots of jealousy and competition. This is apparent in the case of Parwana and Masooma, Idris and Timur, and Pari and Nila—the only real exception seems to be the pure, unselfish love between Abdullah and Pari. Like several other characters in Hosseini's novel A Thousand Splendid Suns, *Julien and Nila bond with each other over an appreciation for art: in this case, jazz.*

Pari often thinks about her appearance, and about the lack of resemblance between herself and her parents—whom she believes to be Mr. and Mrs. Wahdati. Nila often tells Pari that Pari was lonely because she wasn't living with her father—whom Pari believes to be Mr. Wahdati. Pari also thinks about the brief romance between Julien and her mother, a romance that lasted only half a year. Pari was always resentful of their relationship, and made excuses for not spending time with them. Instead, she became closer with her friend, Collette. After six months, Julien and Nila ended their relationship, just as all men ended their affairs with Nila. Pari has become very familiar with the pattern in her mother's romances: passion, followed by a breakup, followed by a period of solitude and sullenness.

Like Parwana in the earlier chapter, Pari seems insecure and concerned with the flaws in her own appearance. There's something poignant, though also amusing, about Pari's familiarity with her mother's "romance routine"—Nila has had so many boyfriends that Pari knows the discrete "steps" in their relationships. Just as Abdullah sized Mrs. Wahdati up as a small child, Pari has no problem sizing her mother up as a young adult.

Back in 1974, Pari and Nila are leaving the hospital. Nila mentions that she has an interview the next day with a poetry magazine. Pari congratulates her, and assures her that she'll be able to hide the stitches on her forehead.

For all her resentment and jealousy of her mother, Pari is remarkably supportive of her, at least on the surface of things. This is another unique kind of family unit, among the many Hosseini portrays.

We cut to another excerpt from Nila's interview in the poetry magazine *Parallaxe*. Nila explains that her daughter studies mathematics at the Sorbonne, and that she's living with someone "far older," someone with a huge ego. She adds that she's given her daughter everything she could possibly want in life. The editor asks her about her father, and Nila explains that her father was a pretentious, wealthy man who aspired to be European in every way, from his clothing and manners to his French wife. Nila recalls that her father used to call her his "fawn," a nickname that she later realized to be rather sinister—as her father shot deer for a hobby.

One recurring theme in this chapter—and the ones that precede it—is that people are far more insightful about others than they are about themselves. Thus, Nila does an excellent job of sizing up her father, but seems not to realize that her description applies almost perfectly to herself as well. Like him, she exploits her children, aspires to be perfectly European, and is wealthy to the point of being spoiled.

After leaving the hospital, Pari drives Nila back to her apartment, which Pari hasn't seen in years. As she drives, she notices that Nila looks old and tired, far older than her 44 years. Inside the apartment, Pari asks Nila if she'll be all right on her own—Nila insists that she will, and goes to sleep. Instead of leaving, Pari washes her mother's dirty glasses, as there are many lying around the apartment. As she cleans, she thinks of her romance with Julien.

Pari's sympathy for her mother seems to have increased—not coincidentally, at the time when Nila is beginning to lose her looks. It's as if Nila is no longer a romantic threat to Pari, and so it's easier for Pari to sympathize with her. The two women also have no other family, essentially, so they will always be connected, no matter their problems.

Pari reconnected with Julien at a student protest in 1973. Julien greeted her, and Pari noticed that he seemed refined and elegant. The go to drink coffee together at a nearby café, and talk about their lives. Julien has been working for the International Monetary Fund, and enjoys his work because he gets to travel. Pari confesses that she wishes she could travel back to Afghanistan to see her old home. She remembers her old family cook, a man named Nabi. The conversation moves abruptly to Nila. Pari explains that Nila has supported herself by owning a bookstore, but she is now in danger of having to close down the store.

It becomes apparent that Pari is attracted to Julien because he's something of a father figure to her: Pari has no father of her own (not even an adopted father), and so Julien's age and sophistication are attractive to her. This section is also important because it shows us that Pari still remembers her cook, Nabi—even if she doesn't remember that Nabi was her uncle, she's capable of sensing some kind of intimate connection with him.

A few weeks after their coffee date, Julien asks Pari to move in with him. Pari accepts, largely because she's been arguing with her friend and roommate, Collette. An unclear amount of time after Pari has begun living with Julien, they strike up a romance. Neither one of them tells Nila about their living arrangement. Eventually, Pari works up the courage to call her mother. When she explains to her that she's in love with Julien, her mother only laughs. Then she explains that Pari is now a stranger to her, and hangs up.

The power dynamic between Julien and Pari is tipped in Julien's favor— Julien is older, more experienced, and has more money. This becomes especially clear when he asks Pari to move in with him: he's confirming his greater wealth and power in the same breath that he expresses his romantic interest. Pari, for her part, seems perfectly willing to live with an older man—he's an attractive father figure.

In *Parallaxe*, the editor proceeds with his interview with Nila. Nila explains that her parents divorced in 1939, when she was only 10 years old. Her mother died of pneumonia during World War II, during the Nazi occupation of Paris. Growing up in Afghanistan, Nila was often beaten by her father, who accused her of embarrassing him with her frequent relationships with local boys. The editor praises Nila for her literary innovations, and suggests that if she'd been born in a wealthier nation, she'd have a reputation as a major literary pioneer. Nila laughs and says that her reputation in Kabul is that of a whore. When she was about 18, she explains, she fell very ill and nearly died. Afterwards, she felt "lost" and lonely—as a result, she married Suleiman Wahdati in 1949.

It's both ironic and depressing when the editor points out that Nila could have been a famous poet, had she lived in another country. It is explicitly stated to Nila's face that she was unlucky in being born in Afghanistan—because in many ways international prestige and value is dependent on luck and privilege as much as talent. This is also ironic because we know that Pari *is actually the one who was snatched from her life in Shadbagh and moved to a different country, where her interests and abilities are treated very differently than they would be in Afghanistan.*

The *Parallaxe* editor continues talking with Nila. She explains that she slipped and hurt her head the previous night, which is why she's wearing a bandana. She then says, abruptly, that she hated her husband because he was in love with his chauffeur. As a result, she packed her bags and brought her daughter to Paris. She explains that her daughter can be "breathtakingly thoughtless," and that she's Nila's "punishment."

The abruptness with which Nila reveals that her husband was gay implies that the issue has been weighing on her for many years now, or else that she finally feels comfortable discussing it now that he is dead and she is in Europe. The ease with which Nila criticizes her daughter in public shows that she certainly wasn't a very loving mother, and her adoption of Pari was mostly an impulsive, foolish move.

In 1975, Pari comes home to her apartment. She has left Julien several months previously, and now lives with a young nursing student named Zahia. She sees that she's received a letter. The letter bears a note from Julien, explaining that it was first sent to Nila, and then to Collette's former apartment, and then to Julien. Julien adds that Pari should read the message "at her own peril." Pari opens the letter, and finds that it's really a copy of *Parallaxe*, containing her mother's interview.

This chapter echoes Nabi's letter, as both chapters consist in large part of their main character's "last will and testament." In Nila's case, her interview with the magazine is something like a suicide note: a confession of the intimate details of her life. Of course, it's impossible to know if Nila was already planning to kill herself at the time of the interview, and so knew she wouldn't have to face the consequences of her words.

Pari proceeds to read her mother's interview. As she does, she thinks about her mother's recent suicide, and about how Collette read her mother's poetry at the funeral. She reads the interview, and isn't sure whether she can believe it or not. It's not clear, for example, if her father was in love with Nabi, the old chauffeur and cook, or if Nila is only being dramatic. She wonders if it's possible that someone could endure as much pain and humiliation as her mother claims to have done. As she finishes reading, Pari resolves to go to Afghanistan with Collette and investigate her family's heritage.

Pari seems remarkably level-headed about her mother's rather cruel interview. For all her dislike for Nila, Pari still manages to respect her—here, for instance, she recognizes that Nila was going through a great deal of pain and self-doubt, and implicitly admits that this personal suffering could have made Nila resent her daughter. Pari understands and sympathizes with her mother, even if she doesn't love her.

Pari meets with Collette to discuss Afghanistan. Instead of planning a trip, Collette introduces Pari to a young man named Eric Lacombe, who would often attend student protests with Collette. Eric and Pari end up marrying in 1977. Pari trusts and respects Eric. When she tells Eric about her plans to go to Afghanistan and learn more about her family, he responds that she may have been adopted. Pari is surprised to hear Eric say this, but realizes that she'd been thinking it for many years.

In this section, and continuing for the rest of the chapter, the pace of events increases dramatically. In a few paragraphs, Hosseini covers many years of Pari's life. It's as if the death of Pari's mother was the defining event of her early adulthood, and everything that came after it was deeply influenced by it.

Eric and Pari prepare to travel to Afghanistan together. They learn Farsi and take lessons, and at the same time, Pari pursues a Ph.D. in mathematics. Shortly before they're scheduled to go to Afghanistan, however, Pari learns that she's pregnant. Pari says that there's no way they could go to Afghanistan now: it's not safe for her to travel with a child inside her. The next year, Pari gives birth to Isabelle, a beautiful, happy child. As time goes on, Pari forgets her urge to go back to Afghanistan.

Much like her adopted mother, Pari is limited and constrained by her obligations to her child. And yet, unlike Nila, Pari seems not to resent her daughter in the slightest—she's clearly learned from Nila's mistakes. This is an interesting variation on the novel's theme of forgetting. Sometimes, obligations to certain loved ones make one forget other loved ones.

In 1981, Isabelle is three years old, and Pari has traveled to Germany to present a paper on mathematical research. At night, Eric calls her to say that Isabelle has a fever, and is bleeding profusely. Frantically, Pari places a call from Germany to Collette's new husband, a psychiatrist named Didier. Didier assures Pari that Isabelle will be fine—she probably has a cold sore. Relieved, Pari continues with her work in Germany, and then travels back to Paris to be with Isabelle. At the moment when she reunites with Isabelle, Pari feels a strong sense of connection with her deceased mother. She tells Eric that they shouldn't have any more children after the one she's currently pregnant with, Alain.

As Pari becomes a mother herself, one might think that she would grow to resent Nila more, and recognize every single thing that Nila didn't *do for her. Yet the opposite is actually true—as Pari becomes a mother more than once, she feels a strong sense of sympathy and compassion for Nila. She recognizes that being a mother is difficult, and perhaps understands that Nila didn't know what she was getting herself into.*

In 1985, Isabelle is seven years old, and Pari has two more children: Alain, aged four, and Thierry, aged two. Pari is teaching mathematics in Paris, and has become very successful in her field. She hasn't told her children about their grandmother's suicide, and probably never will, she thinks.

We see that Pari's plan to have one more child hasn't exactly worked out. Just as Nila concealed from Pari the truth about her parents, so Pari conceals from her three children the truth about Nila's death.

In 1994, Pari and Eric go on vacation to Majorca (a popular tourist destination in Spain). They stay for two weeks with Collette and Didier, who now run a prominent travel agency. Pari has been unhealthy, and taxes regular steroids and methotrexate. As she's walking through the avenues in Majorca, she sees herself in a mirror, and has a sudden, profound realization that she's middle-aged, and plain-looking. Shortly after she returns from Majorca with her family, Eric has a heart attack, and dies a few years later of cardiac complications. Pari is left a mother and a widow, just like her own mother was.

As Pari grows older, she comes to feel a more powerful connection with Nila. Eric's death is sudden—but so is his introduction in the text (he comes as quickly as he goes). The events of Pari's childhood and early adulthood seem much more concrete and vivid—at least how Hosseini portrays them—than her life as an adult, even though the latter includes many traditional milestones like getting married and having children.

In 2010, Pari is living in Paris, and is virtually confined to a wheelchair. Isabelle, who's now married to a man named Albert, visits her regularly to bring her food. Isabelle works as a musician for film and television. Her younger brother, Alain, lives in Madrid, with his wife, Ana. His apartment is small, but he seems happy with his four children. Thierry lives in Chad, where he works with Darfur refugees. Thierry doesn't speak with his mother very often—Pari knows that he lived in Vietnam, and was married to a Vietnamese woman very briefly. She guesses that Nila would have been a good grandmother to Thierry, had she lived long enough.

Pari, like Mr.. Wahdati and Masooma, can no longer walk, and so provides another example of the nurse/patient aspect of a family relationship with her daughter Isabelle. We never get to see details of Pari as a mother (the character seems to necessitate this, but Hosseini is frustratingly withholding), but it seems likely that she was a better parent than Nila, and learned from her adopted mother's mistakes. No matter one's strength of affection, however, not all family members are close, as with Thierry.

One day, Pari sends Isabelle home earlier than usual, and receives a phone call she's been expecting. The call is from Markos Varvaris. Markos has contacted Pari via email, saying that he has information that she'll want to hear. On the phone, Markos gets to the point: he explains that Nabi, whom Pari thinks of as her cook, was actually her uncle. He then reads her the end of the letter Nabi wrote to him (the contents of which can be found in Chapter Four).

We've been waiting for this scene for nearly a hundred pages so far—ever since Nabi passed on the information about Pari and Abdullah to his friend, Dr. Markos. It's extremely satisfying, in the dramatic sense, to see Pari receiving this news at last, after decades of forgetting. At the same time this also must be a huge blow to Pari's concept of her identity, as everything she though she knew about her past was basically a lie.

Pari hangs up the phone, shocked—she's just learned that her supposed parents were actually her adopted parents, and that her real family lived in an impoverished Afghan village. As she reels from the shock of this information, she feels something strange—the sense of a person who she's suddenly aware of, as if for the first time. She whispers, "Brother."

In this optimistic conclusion to the chapter, the power of love and memory is confirmed. Just as Baba Ayub can't entirely forget his son, Qais, Pari can't entirely forget about Abdullah, even though she hasn't seen him since she was four years old.

CHAPTER 7

The chapter begins with a teacher, Malalai, telling a young student, Adel, that his father is a great man. Adel lives in a town called New Shadbagh, the population of which consists of refugees from the old town of Shadbagh. Adel, Malalai, and many others are standing outside, listening to a speech from Adel's father, Baba jan. Baba jan has built a school for young Afghani women, and this is the opening ceremony. He walks by his young pupils, all of whom address him as "Commander Sahib."

This is the first time we've returned to Shadbagh since Chapter Two, and we see that Shadbagh has changed completely, thanks (we can assume) to the decades of war and violence in the country. Hosseini once again puts off the reunion between Pari and Abdullah, and instead introduces still more new characters. We can tell that this new narrator is a young boy, and that he greatly admires his father.

Adel thinks about his relationship with his father, Baba jan. As a younger man, Baba jan fought against the Russians during their war in Afghanistan. He was shot twice during this conflict, and still shows off his wounds. He is openly committed to the principle of *jihad* (the Islamic principle of constant struggle for faith). Adel wishes that he could have joined in the *jihad* alongside his father. He also recognizes that he's extraordinarily lucky to be the son of such a great man.

Many of Hosseini's readers might have their own preconceptions about jihad*—it is usually seen as an inner struggle against sin, but some regard it as a principle of holy war and terrorism. Hosseini doesn't refute or accept either interpretation, but continues to tell his story from the limited perspective of one character—in this case a child who parrots his father's beliefs about violent* jihad.

The opening ceremony draws to a close, and Baba jan motions for Adel to accompany him to his car. An old man, accompanied by a child, stops Baba jan and tells him that they need to speak. Baba jan speaks quietly with the old man for a few moments, and then climbs into the car, alongside Adel, to be driven home by his private chauffeur, Kabir. Kabir drives Abel and Baba jan through New Shadbagh, past shops, houses, and a huge public square. In the center of the square there is a statue of a man wearing a turban and holding a rocket-powered grenade launcher. Adel knows that his father has been personally involved in the building of many of these sites in town.

We're given the distinct sense that The Commander is doing things that he doesn't want Adel to know about. For the time being, however, Adel lives in state of bliss: he loves his father unconditionally, and can't imagine that The Commander is capable of a single evil action. This is an important variation of the theme of family: sometimes, the familial bond between a father and son can be based on lies or ignorance.

The car swerves out of New Shadbagh toward Adel's home in Old Shadbagh. Adel remembers growing up in the larger city of Kabul. When he was still very young, Baba jan moved Adel and Baba jan's wife to Shadbagh, where they still live. Baba jan and Adel arrive at their home, and before they get out, Adel tells his father that he feels proud today. Baba jan responds that Adel must learn to help other people, using his power and talent for the good of his nation. Baba jan adds that he'll be visiting Helmand, a nearby city, soon. He reminds Adel that nothing in the world is more important to him than his son.

We get the sense that The Commander has made an effort to isolate his wife and son from his "operations," but it's still not clear why this is the case. Nevertheless, we can sense that he's hiding something bad from his family. At the same time, The Commander seems utterly sincere in his devotion to Adel. But it is possible to commit evil acts in the public sphere and still be kind and loving to one's family.

Later in the evening, Baba jan has left for Helmand. The old man who stopped Baba jan earlier in the day stops by the house. Kabir, the servant and assistant, walks outside and tells the old man to go away. The old man stubbornly says that he'll wait as long as it takes for "the commander" to return. Adel, listening to the conversation, asks Kabir what he does for his father. Kabir explains that he's there to protect "the commander" from nuisances and enemies. Adel is close with Kabir: they play games and watch movies together. He often notices that Kabir carries a gun, a Kalashnikov (the "K" in AK-47).

It becomes increasingly obvious that The Commander is a dangerous or violent man, as evidenced by the constant presence of guns in his house, and the fact that Adel has bodyguards, seemingly around the clock. And the Mountains Echoed *is perhaps the least "political" of Hosseini's novels, but it is impossible to write a multi-generational epic about Afghanistan without at least referencing all the political turmoil and violence the country has experienced. Clearly The Commander is a part of this violence.*

A few days after Baba jan leaves for Helmand, Adel walks into his parents' bedroom. There he finds his stepmother (whom he thinks of as his mother), working out in front of a television. She is a small, pretty woman. Adel rarely sees his biological mother, since she lives in Jalalabad with her three sons (Adel's half brothers). Adel enjoys spending time with his half-brothers, and he wishes he lived with them. He recognizes that his stepmother is very lonely in Shadbagh—she does nothing all day but work out and watch television. Adel recently learned that his stepmother wasn't originally intended to be Baba jan's wife: Baba jan had wanted to marry her older sister, Adel's Aunt Nargis.

In spite of his innocence about his father's life, Adel proves himself to be remarkably insightful about other people. He's conscious that his mother is sad and lonely (not unlike Nila in the previous chapters). This reminds us that material possessions aren't a replacement for human love and contact—not for Adel (who obviously wishes he could live with his half-brothers), and not for his mother. The Commander's sinister endeavors have made his family rich, but that doesn't mean that they are happy.

Adel decides to spend the day walking around his house's enormous grounds. He wanders by his father's prized orchard. Suddenly, he sees a young boy—the same boy who was standing with the old man who accosted Baba jan. Adel asks the boy what he's doing there, and the boy explains that he's only looking for some shade. The boy points out the man on Adel's T-shirt, the great soccer player Maradona. They get into a lively conversation about soccer, and afterwards, the boy introduces himself as Gholam. Adel introduces himself as well. Adel enjoys talking with his new friend, as he hasn't talked to a boy his own age in nearly two years. Adel and Gholam decide to play soccer together. Adel easily defeats his opponent—he notices that Gholam is weak, has bad vision, and seems to be in poor health.

Although Adel thinks that he's defeated his weaker, clumsier opponent, other impressions of the scene run deeper. Gholam is clearly in horrible health—something that Adel, who's been taken care of by The Commander for his entire life, notices immediately. Gholam is obviously living in poverty, like the old man who takes care of him. Extreme economic inequality is a hallmark of a corrupt government, and here we see the two extremes of Afghan society—but represented by children, who naturally feel a sense of equality and companionship, despite the deep divides between their economic states.

Adel and Gholam continue talking. Gholam explains that he was born in a Pakistani refugee camp outside of Jalozai. He mentions his father's half brother, Uncle Abdullah, who lives in America and sends his family money. One day, the Pakistanis sent the Afghan refugees, including Gholam and his family, back to Afghanistan. It was around this time that Abdullah stopped sending money. Gholam lives in a tent in a field, with his father. Gholam also mentions that his father has an uncle, Nabi, who lives, or lived, in Kabul.

We now realize that Gholam is Abdullah's nephew, and so at least have a better reference point for this chapter now. At moments like this, we are also reminded that Hosseini has set himself the enormous, ambitious project of telling a story that unfolds across six decades and many continents.

Gholam and Adel continue talking. Gholam mentions that Adel's father has many enemies. Adel has heard this from his own father: Baba jan told him that many of the same people who fought alongside him against the Russians in the 1980s have now turned against him, and spread rumors about him. Adel mentions that his father is currently inspecting his cotton fields in Helmand—fields that Adel has heard about for many years. Gholam laughs and calls Adel "a piece of work." Adel isn't sure what this means.

The Taliban figure prominently in Hosseini's novels. Here, they're not mentioned by name, but we can guess that The Commander, who fought in rebel groups during the Soviet-Afghan War, is now a member of the Taliban, the terrorist group that wreaked havoc on Afghanistan during the 2000s (when the chapter is set). Gholam doesn't have the luxury of having Adel's childhood innocence—he is all too aware of violence, poverty, and war crimes.

In the coming days, Adel sees little of Gholam. Then, about a week after meeting him for the first time, Adel sees Gholam near the orchards, carrying a paper bag. Gholam explains that his father has found a job making bricks, and Gholam's new job is to mix mortar. This is hard work, and gives him horrible blisters. Gholam suggests that they play more soccer, and Adel agrees. For the next few days, they play every afternoon. Adel learns more about Gholam's father, whose name is Iqbal. Iqbal is struggling to find regular work as a brick maker.

In this section we're given the final piece of the puzzle, and we learn that Gholam's father is Iqbal (Abdullah's half-brother, the son of Saboor and Parwana). We can guess that Iqbal learned how to make bricks from Saboor—who, as the novel was beginning, was preparing to do work on the Wahdatis' mansion.

One day, Gholam tells Adel something unpleasant: Adel's father built his mansion on Gholam's family's land. The orchard area used to be dotted with people's houses. Adel can't believe this is the truth. He accuses Gholam of lying, and tells him that Baba jan is a great, generous man. Gholam continues, talking about how horrible his family members felt when they returned from Pakistan to find that Adel's father had destroyed their homes and built a mansion there. Gholam insists that his father has the ownership documents for Adel's father's land—documents he has tried to show Adel's father, with no success. Gholam leaves Adel, but before he does, he tells Adel to ask his father to show him the "cotton fields" in Helmand.

It's not immediately clear why Gholam waited to tell Adel this important information. Perhaps Gholam was looking for a friend in Adel, and didn't want to spoil their friendship before it even began. It's also possible that Gholam himself is just learning about his family's property situation, and tells Adel as soon as he realizes the truth. It also becomes clear that the "cotton fields" The Commander had mentioned to Adel are dangerous places (though we're not told exactly why).

The evening after his fight with Gholam, Adel still isn't sure what to believe. On one hand, he worships his father, and finds it hard to believe that he could do any wrong. On the other, he can't understand what Gholam meant when he mentioned cotton fields. He asks his stepmother if she's ever seen the cotton field in Helmand. His stepmother says that she's never even been to Helmand, since Baba jan says it's unsafe to stay there.

In this transitional stage, Adel is still very loyal to his father, but can't understand why Gholam would be lying. We get the sense that Adel's stepmother is almost as ignorant of The Commander's life as Adel is—but Adel's stepmother tries *to delude herself into ignorance, while Adel still sincerely believes in his father's greatness. Thus Adel's stepmother is another example of a kind of "willful forgetting."*

A few days after he speaks with his stepmother, Adel sees Gholam wandering through the orchards. Gholam tells Adel that there's been a highly suspicious mix-up at the courthouse. Iqbal brought the judge his ownership documents, but the documents have now, according to the judge, been mysteriously burned. The judge insists that without ownership documents, Iqbal has no case for reclaiming his land. Iqbal had also noticed that the judge was wearing a gold watch. With this, Gholam walks away from Adel, looking furious.

No matter what other crimes The Commander may or may not have committed, it's clear that he also uses bribery and extortion to control other people. It's implied that The Commander paid off the judge with a new watch in exchange for "disappearing" Iqbal's documents.

A few days after Adel's talk with Gholam, Baba jan returns to Shadbagh. Adel is overjoyed to see him, though he can't stop thinking about what Gholam has told him. Baba jan sits down to tea with Adel and his wife. He tells a story about his battles with the Russians in the 80s. Suddenly, there's the sound of breaking glass. Baba jan rushes to the broken window, where he finds a rock lying on the ground. He looks out of the window and sees the old man who accosted him outside the school. Baba jan tells his wife to take Adel upstairs. Upstairs, Adel asks his stepmother what Baba jan will do with the old man. She replies that he'll try to use reason to make peace with him. Adel begins to weep, and eventually he falls asleep in his stepmother's lap.

It's suggested that nothing has changed about The Commander himself—it's only Adel's perception that has changed, and now he is better able to notice how self-aggrandizing his father is. It becomes especially obvious that Adel's stepmother is willfully delusional: she's convinced herself that The Commander will use "reasoning" and "peace," despite all the evidence that he's actually about to murder Iqbal. Hosseini builds a sense of terror and suspense without ever showing any real violence—we see everything through the relatively sheltered worldview of a child, but are left to draw our own conclusions.

Shortly after the incident with the window, Adel sneaks into his father's study and uses his computer to look up information about the event. Online, he finds a story about an "Assassination Attempt" on his father. The story explains that Baba jan tried bravely to protect his wife and child from a dangerous assassin with ties to the Taliban. The story doesn't say what happened to the supposed assassin.

Hosseini never really reveals what The Commander does—instead, he shows us that The Commander is a liar, manipulates the press, and bribes judges. While these aren't the worst crimes imaginable, they suggest others—crimes that Adel can't see (and so we can't either).

Adel leaves his father's study, thinking about everything he's experienced. He realizes that he'll never be able to worship his father as he used to. He also realizes that his stepmother must know some disturbing things about her husband—things which she keeps hidden from Adel. In the end, Adel assumes, he'll probably come to accept everything his father does, except that he'll never be able to love his father again.

In this heartbreaking section, Adel "comes of age"—he realizes that his father isn't the idol he'd thought he was. As a result of this, he comes to pity his stepmother, recognizing that she's a sad, lonely woman who has to lie to herself to keep her sanity. Hosseini leaves Adel to an uncertain fate—we don't know if he'll grow up to emulate his father half-heartedly, or if he'll break away from his father's dangerous influence. Either way, this is a depressing conclusion for a child to reach.

CHAPTER 8

An unnamed narrator comes home from the clinic where he works and finds a message from a woman named Thalia, in which Thalia insists that the narrator call his mother. Thalia wants to know how his work in Kabul is going. Thalia refers to the narrator as Markos (whom we know from earlier chapters of the book). Markos keeps a picture of Thalia on his desk, one that he took years ago. A "crazed Italian girl" once tried to burn this photograph, though Markos doesn't explain who the girl is or why she tried to burn the photo. Markos proceeds with his work. He's been residing in a large house in Kabul since 2002. His landlord, Nabi, died very recently. Because Markos is distracted by thoughts of Thalia's call, he decides to call his mother.

Dr. Markos Varvaris has been a peripheral character in this novel for some time—ever since he learned that he was the recipient of Nabi's letter. By beginning the chapter in a nebulous, unclear way, Hosseini reiterates one of his most important points: everyone has a story to tell, but sometimes, it takes a while to hear it. We wonder who Thalia is, who the Italian girl is—and if either of these characters will also get a chapter devoted to their perspectives and stories.

Markos jumps back to explain how he met Thalia. They met in 1967, when he was only 12 years old. Thalia and her mother, Madaline, traveled to his home in Tinos, Greece to visit Markos, his mother, Odelia. Odelia had known Madaline since they were children—they went to mass together, and had always sworn to remain lifelong friends. Madaline, a beautiful woman, was then married to a wealthy man named Andrea Gianakos. Odelia warned Markos not to stare at Thalia, who had a large scar. Markos would later learn that Madaline was highly unhappy living with her husband. He was a right-wing figure, who supported fascists and opponents of democracy. Markos grew up respecting his mother, who was also his schoolteacher.

Hosseini jumps around more than usual in this chapter, perhaps in imitation of Markos's frenetic lifestyle, which entails a great deal of traveling. He also presents us with a different kind of family relationship than the ones we've seen previously. Markos respects and almost fears his mother, but it's unclear what his mother thinks of him. There's an uneasy distance between mother and son—they don't hate each other, but they don't seem to love each other very warmly or affectionately either.

When Madaline and Thalia arrived in Markos's home, Madaline introduced the two children. Markos noticed that Thalia was wearing a dark veil that covered her face, presumably to hide the scar Odelia had mentioned. Markos can still remember the moment, a few hours after meeting Thalia, when he caught a glimpse of her face for the first time. She was bending over to pick up a suitcase, and her veil came loose. Markos was so terrified by what he saw that he dropped the tray he was carrying. Thalia didn't just have a scar—a significant chunk of her face seemed to have been torn off.

We recognize the stark contrast between the "two Thalias" in the chapter: the fearsome Thalia, who repulses Markos when he lays eyes on her, and the Thalia with whom Markos has been good friends for most of his life. In actuality, however, we should be speaking of the "two Markoses"—the young, callous boy who grimaced at Thalia, and the mature, understanding young man who emerged later on.

Back in 2010, Markos calls his mother. She asks him about his conversation with "the French woman" (whom we know to be Pari). Markos explains that Pari visited him last summer. He found her to be a beautiful woman, but prematurely aged, as if by deep tragedy. Paris stayed with Markos for a week in Kabul. He showed her the house where she lived as a child. It was during Pari's stay in Kabul that she asked to visit Shadbagh. She also told Markos that he's welcome to stay in the house in Kabul for as long as he likes.

Hosseini doesn't waste our time by repeating information: we've already read about the scene in which Markos calls Pari about Abdullah, albeit from Pari's perspective, so we don't need to read about it again. This is section again reminds us that Hosseini's narrators' self-worth is always biased. Thus, Pari thinks of herself as an ugly woman, while Markos—surely the more objective witness—thinks that she's beautiful.

Markos continues talking with his mother on the phone. He thinks to himself that his mother is suffering from neurological problems—she has muscle spasms, and finds it hard to hold anything for longer than a few seconds. At home, Thalia helps her get around the house.

Like many of the other characters in the novel, Markos's mother is suffering from medical problems, and relies on those who are younger and healthier to take care of her. This is another important part of the "family dynamic" for Hosseini.

As a child, Markos was fascinated and horrified by Thalia's appearance. Madaline and Thalia would visit Tinos often, and though Thalia was usually careful not to lift her veil, Markos would catch glimpses of her face whenever she visited. Eventually, he trained himself not to look at her. On the other hand, Markos grew to enjoy Madaline's company. He came to understand that she was an enormously talented actress, who concealed her inner sadness behind a facade of happiness. Madaline told Markos about how her father used to beat her—and how, years ago, Odelia bravely protected Madaline from these beatings.

As a child, Marko was both insightful and naïve, like many of the other children in the book. He was utterly immature about Thalia—refusing to look at her because he didn't like the way she looked—but at the same time Markos was observant enough to realize that Madaline used happiness and cheer to disguise her inner depression—a rather impressive observation for someone so young.

When Markos was a child, Odelia told him to spend more time with Thalia. When Markos protested that Thalia was a "monster," Odelia angrily told him never to use that word to describe Thalia again. She ordered him to take a walk with Thalia along the beach—an order that he reluctantly agreed to follow. On the beach, Markos didn't know what to say to Thalia, and she walked away from him, irritated with his awkwardness. Back at his mother's house, Thalia lied and said that she and Markos had a nice time. As Markos watched Thalia lie to her mother, he became conscious of his own mother's bad relationship with Madaline. Although Odelia was outwardly friendly to Madaline, she seemed to be getting tired of Madaline's stories of her husbands.

In this chapter we rarely, if ever, see interactions between Markos and his mother that don't contain a dash of anger and irritation. In this case, Odelia's irritation with her immature son seems perfectly justified—Odelia can't believe that Markos could be so cruel about her friend's daughter. Once again, Markos proves that he's a good observer of other people: he deduces that Odelia doesn't particularly enjoy Madaline's company, since Madaline talks about nothing but herself all day long.

Thalia and Markos spent more time together, but only because Markos didn't enjoy being around Odelia and Madaline together—as he could sense Odelia's discomfort. One day, as they're walking by a shop, Markos notices a camera, and is surprised when Thalia names the exact brand of the camera. Markos reveals that he wants to be a photographer when he grows up, and Thalia displays more of her knowledge of cameras. Thalia is impressed with Markos's ambition, and seems to smile as if for the first time.

Markos and Thalia forge an important connection in this scene—one that, like some other connections in the novel, is mediated by the presence of art. However, unlike Idris and Roshana boding over DVDs, or Nila and Julien bonding over jazz, Markos and Thalia actually succeed *in establishing a stable, loving friendship by talking about the arts.*

Several days after their conversation about photography, Thalia and Markos are standing in Markos's house. Markos is preparing to take some photographs of his family. Rather than ask Odelia to buy him a camera, he's made a homemade pinhole camera, using cardboard, a flashlight, cellophane, and simple chemicals. Thalia whispers to him that Madaline is upset: she's had a big fight with her current husband, Andreas.

Markos's fondness for photography seems to correspond to his impressive skills as an observer of human beings. This is a common trope in literature, and especially film: the character who holds the camera is often the voice of reason.

The next day, Markos assembles Odelia, Thalia, and Madaline on the beach near his house. He directs them to stand still and look at the makeshift camera he's built. He then counts to 120—the number of seconds his subjects need to stay still.

Markos's photography introduces a new aspect to the novel's theme of memory and forgetting. Pictures are often crucial aids to memory, and act as reminders of the past that don't age or change.

As Markos counts, the narrative cuts ahead to a scene from his early twenties, when he's in college. Madaline has died, leaving her money (a large amount, given her first marriage to a powerful general) to Thalia. Because Thalia doesn't want all this money, she gives half of it to Markos, telling him to use it for his college education. As the scene begins, Markos is in his bedroom with a woman named Gianna. Gianna notices that Markos's room is decorated with photographs from all over the world. Markos explains that he's been traveling and improving his skills as a photographer. Gianna notices one photograph of Thalia, which Markos took years ago with his pinhole camera. She asks if she's his girlfriend. Markos denies this, but Gianna insists that he and Thalia are in a relationship. Suddenly, she takes a lighter and sets the photograph on fire.

We now come full circle to the scene of Gianna burning Markos's photograph of Thalia. And yet we're almost no wiser about the relationship between Markos and Thalia than we were at first: are they lovers? Are they friends? Hosseini's depiction of the love between Thalia and Markos reminds us of the friendship between Mr. Wahdati and Nabi: even if Nabi isn't physically attracted to his employer, he feels a sense of connection and closeness that is certainly a kind of love. The image of the burning photo potently reminds us that no memory, even one preserved in a photograph, is invincible. Over time we forget about people, even if they're the people who matter most to us.

Markos remembers other times when he's jealously guarded the photograph of Thalia. Once, in South America, he realized that he'd lost the photograph in the middle of a forest, and had to part ways with his friends in order to go back and retrieve it. When he found the photograph caught in a tree, he wept tears of joy.

Evidently, Markos treats his photograph of Thalia like a kind of talisman: reminders that Thalia exists, and is still his close friend. We should be reminded of the way that Abdullah used to carry the yellow feather for his beloved sister, Pari.

Markos remembers other episodes from his life. Once, as a young man, he was traveling through Caracas, and felt an intense sense that he was searching for something that he couldn't put into words. Another time, in India, he collapsed in the streets from nausea and exhaustion. When he regained consciousness in an Indian hospital, he learned from a doctor that he had hepatitis. He also learned that a thief had taken all his possessions—except for the photograph of Thalia. Delirious, Markos thought to himself that he didn't want to die so far from Thalia. In the hospital, Markos met a young boy named Manaar, who was rapidly dying of a tumor. As Markos slowly recovered from his hepatitis, he bonded with Manaar, often singing him songs and massaging his body. Despite Markos's kindness, he couldn't save Manaar's life—Manaar died a few weeks after Markos arrived in the hospital. Markos is so moved by Manaar's death that he stops traveling the world as a photographer and decides to apply to medical school.

There are many characters in the novel who say that they're searching for something inexplicable. In some cases, Hosseini implies that this "thing" is a parent: Pari with her real family, for example. Yet Hosseini isn't so literal in the case of Markos (or Nila, another artist-figure). Markos's predicament isn't an uncommon one: people can't always put into words what they want out of life. Hosseini suggests here that the best way to discover one's true goals is to explore the world, and to help others. Markos doesn't realize that he wants to help other people until he meets Manaar, and fails to save his life. It remains to be seen if medicine can provide Markos with the sense of peace and stability that he craves, however.

The narrative returns to Markos's childhood, when Madaline and Thalia were visiting Tinos. Madaline announces that she's leaving Tinos, leaving Thalia to live with Markos and Odelia, supposedly for a few weeks. Madaline claims that she's returning to her home to shoot a film. That night, Thalia and Markos play checkers, and Thalia explains that Madaline has found a new lover: the director of her film. As the game goes on, Markos finally works up the courage to ask Thalia how she sustained her facial injury. Thalia explains that Madaline's first husband, Dorian, had a dog named Apollo. When Thalia was five years old, Apollo attacked her. In future years, Markos notes, Thalia would explain the rest of the story—the dog bit her, the surgery was a failure, and she got an infection that destroyed much of her face, including her left cheek and jawbone.

In this section, we learn more about Thalia's injury: where it came from, and what affect it's had on her life. This process of narrative "revealing" seems to correspond to Markos's growing love for Thalia—it's as if Thalia is telling Markos about her injury for the first time, in the same instant that we as readers are also learning about it. As we learn more about Thalia, we also get a better sense for Madaline's shallowness: she's willing to leave her daughter behind in order to get a shot at being in a movie and finding a new romantic partner. This is another deeply troubled mother-daughter relationship, like Pari and Nila.

Madaline leaves Thalia in Tinos with Markos and Odelia. Thalia doesn't seem very sad to see her mother go. In the coming weeks, Odelia proceeds to homeschool both Thalia and Markos. Thalia's presence in Tinos attracts lots of attention—boys sneak by Markos's home in the hopes of seeing her face. One day, Markos tells Odelia that boys think of Thalia as a circus attraction. Odelia is so furious that she immediately brings both Thalia and Markos to the local school, tells the teacher that, as of today, Thalia is a student at the school, and removes Thalia's veil. For the rest of her life, Markos notes, Thalia never wears the veil.

As Markos's calm count to 120 (in the earlier section) might suggest, the key player in this chapter is time. Over time, Thalia adjusts to her new life in Tinos, and Markos becomes increasingly comfortable spending time with Thalia—to the point where he can't imagine living any other way. In a novel about the importance of love and familial bonds, Hosseini uses this section to make an important point: family bonds can't arise overnight. They need time to grow strong and secure.

Madaline sends word to Odelia that her film's shoot is delayed—Thalia will have to stay in Tinos for longer than expected. Thalia immediately recognizes that Madaline is never coming back to Tinos. Over the course of the next few months, Thalia gradually adjusts to her new life, until the people of Tinos treat her as an ordinary person. One day, Thalia receives a letter from Andreas saying that Thalia needs to come to England, where she's to enroll in a private school. The letter also explains that Madaline has eloped with her film's director.

Here Hosseini confirms the immense power of time in this section. Eventually the people of Tinos come to accept Thalia as one of her own, in spite of her facial injury. While Hosseini doesn't reveal what Thalia's response to her stepfather's letter will be, we can surmise that she'll choose to continue living in Tinos and spending time with Odelia and Markos—her adopted family.

The narrative cuts ahead to 2002, more than thirty years after Thalia's letter arrives. Markos discovers that Madaline has died. He learns that she was a successful actress and theater manager, and her company produced successful runs of major international plays. Markos is stunned to learn that Madaline lived less than six blocks from his own home in Athens. Markos is furious with Madaline—furious that her life turned out to be so successful, given that she cruelly abandoned her own daughter. He decides not to tell Thalia about Madaline's death.

This is one of the most important sections in the chapter, as we learn that Madaline—by all accounts, a shallow, narrow-minded, selfish woman—ends up living "happily ever after." Hosseini again reminds us that the universe isn't fair, and that in the tangled web of human interconnectedness there will always be tragedy and injustice. This is also basically the lesson that the div tried to teach Baba Ayub in the first chapter.

After he finishes medical school, Markos decides to become a plastic surgeon. He realizes, partly because of Thalia's advice, that physical appearances are extremely important, in contrast to what many people idealistically say. There were many reasons that Markos became a plastic surgeon, one of the most important of which, he admits, is because of his friendship with Thalia. He begins his career, and spends many months of the year traveling around the world to help children in impoverished parts of the world. In 2002, he takes a call from Amra Ademovic, a Bosnian nurse. She convinces him to move to Kabul to help Afghan war victims.

Markos's friends and family influence his career path at every turn. Here, we learn that he chooses to be a plastic surgeon—while there are many reasons for his choice, he admits that one of the biggest is his relationship to Thalia. It's important that Hosseini renders this point a little ambiguously, as Markos (the narrator) might not be the best judge of his own motivations and life decisions.

Some time in the 2000s, Markos arrives in Tinos, and Thalia picks him up from his ferry. He's returned to Greece from Kabul for a brief time. Thalia shows Markos through Tinos, a city she now knows far better than Markos does. At the present, Thalia works as a "one-woman IT department"—she troubleshoots people's computers and electrical devices. She does these things because she enjoys the work, not because she needs the money.

We learnt that Thalia, at least, has had a long, happy life: she's found rewarding work, which she clearly does because it brings her pleasure, not because she needs the income to survive.

Thalia takes Markos back to his old house, where his mother still lives. Inside the house, Markos reminds Thalia of the offer he's extended to her for many years: he's willing to perform plastic surgery on her face for free. Thalia has always turned the offer down—she's genuinely more comfortable with her "real" face. Thalia and Markos also discuss the eclipse that will take place over Tinos the next day. They'll watch the eclipse through a pinhole camera.

At this point in her life, Thalia is totally comfortable with a face that most people would consider to be hideously ugly. This is an important decision, and it reminds us that it's possible to be happy with one's own body (in contrast to what we've seen in the cases of Pari and Parwana).

In the afternoon, Odelia, who's been taking a nap, comes downstairs and greets Markos. Odelia and Markos drink coffee together, and Markos expresses his worry that Odelia is becoming lonely and sad in her old age. Odelia doesn't disagree with Markos at all, but she reminds him that she's impressed with the work he's been doing in Kabul. She says, "You turned out good. You've made me proud, Markos." Nevertheless, she doesn't understand why Markos would leave his home in Athens to be in a violent, dangerous place like Kabul. Markos only says, "I had my reasons." Suddenly, Odelia reveals that she's suffering from Lou Gehrig's disease. Markos is crushed, though he doesn't show it.

In this crucial scene between Odelia and Markos, Odelia shows her son some of the love and respect that he seems to have been craving for the better part of his life. It's enough to make one wonder if the "thing" Markos was missing in life was precisely this: a loving mother. And yet even in this touching reunion scene (prefiguring the reunion scene in the next and final chapter of the novel), Markos isn't entirely satisfied. He has to face the fact that 1) Odelia still doesn't understand what he does, and thus can't be entirely proud of him, and 2) Odelia is going to die soon, so they have very little time together as a closer, more loving family.

The next day, around ten-thirty in the morning, Markos, Odelia, and Thalia gather outside to watch the eclipse. As the eclipse proceeds, Markos notice that his mother is smiling more "purely" than he's ever seen before. As he watches his mother, Markos thinks about his conflicted relationship with her. For years, he's wanted her to tell him, "You've made me proud, Markos"—words she's never said until the day before. Markos realizes how different his relationship with his mother could have been—the happiness and warmth he and his mother feel for each other now is only a painful reminder of the coldness that existed between them for so many years before.

Markos confirms the implications of the last section: his reconciliation with Odelia was bittersweet at best and heartbreaking at worst. Hosseini doesn't idealize his subjects or their interactions with each other. Just because the novel seems to be pushing toward a tearful reunion between Abdullah and Pari doesn't mean that Hosseini will give us one. Markos's exchange with Odelia is an early sign of Hosseini's fondness for anticlimax disguised as climax.

CHAPTER 9

The chapter begins with an unnamed narrator discussing the nightly ritual she had with her father, whom she called Baba. He would tell her about a memory he had of his little sister—a memory which took place decades ago. The narrator grew up an only child, and was often lonely as a result. She always wanted to have a sibling, but never got one. Because her father spoke about his own little sister, Pari, so often, the narrator—whose name is also Pari—began to think of Pari as her own companion and imaginary friend. The narrator knows that her father (who we know is Abdullah) lost his sister when he was a child—his own father (Saboor) sold Pari to a wealthy family. From a young age, the narrator can tell that her father is still deeply sad about losing his sister. [NOTE: For the purposes of this summary, we'll refer to the narrator of this chapter, whose name is Pari, as Pari II.]

For the final chapter of And the Mountains Echoed, *Hosseini gets to the point right away, rather than drawing out our introductions to the characters. We recognize almost right away that we're dealing with Abdullah and his daughter—precisely the people it seemed the novel ought to finish with (as long as the original Pari shows up too). It's instructive to compare the "two Paris"—Pari and her niece. Pari II seems utterly devoted to Abdullah, much as Pari herself was as a child. Pari II is also intelligent and perceptive enough to recognize that her father still misses his sister enormously, despite having been separated from her for decades.*

The chapter cuts ahead several years. Pari II, now a young woman, is driving on the freeway. Her mother has passed away recently, causing Abdullah to grieve. Pari II drives to Abdullah's house—the house where she still lives. There, she finds Abdullah talking on the phone with her friend, Hector Juarez, a soldier who's recently come home from the Middle East, and is now confined to a wheelchair. Hector is cheerful, despite his condition, and often drops by Abdullah's house to say hello and make sure he's in good health.

Pari II's mother, like many of the characters in the novel, is "dead on arrival"—the second that we learn of the character's existence, we also learn that the character has died (this was the case with Eric, and also Nila, for the most part). We also see Hosseini echoing his motif of someone in a wheelchair needing assistance and care from others.

The chapter cuts ahead several days. Pari II is reuniting with Pari, who has traveled to the United States. Pari II explains that she's always pictured Pari, her aunt, as a young girl—the girl Abdullah talked about in his bedtime stories. Instead, Pari is gray-haired, well-dressed, and elegant in a European way. Pari II can barely believe that she's meeting Pari after so many years. She explains to Pari that she hasn't told Abdullah that Pari is coming. Pari II drives Pari to Abdullah's house, and as she does so, Pari tells Pari II about her three children. Pari II tells Pari that Abdullah used to own a restaurant, but that she had to sell it several years ago, when Abdullah became sickly. Pari II explains that she works as an artist, but makes money working as a transcriptionist: she writes up receipts, emails, and other documents for a large company. She does this to make money to support Abdullah.

Hosseini is an economical writer, and he cuts ahead to the part of the novel he knows we want to read most: the reunion of Abdullah and Pari. Yet this "economy" of style also means many tragic anticlimaxes and heartbreaking twists of fate, as Hosseini tries to echo the actions of the uncaring universe, which has no sense of dramatic timing or happy endings. We also learn much more about Pari II's life in this section: she's so devoted to her father that she's willing to take on menial, unfulfilling work to support him, effectively giving up (for the present) her ambitions to be an artist.

As Pari II approaches Abdullah's house, Pari confesses that she's very nervous—she hasn't seen her brother in 58 years. Pari II remembers something that Idris Bashiri, Abdullah's doctor, told her: Abdullah needs stability in his life, rather than sudden surprises.

Idris's chapter of the novel was the closest to being a self contained short story, so it's appropriate that Hosseini mentions Idris here, reminding us that all the characters are interconnected. Hosseini also forces us to recognize that there's no way of predicting how Abdullah will react to meeting his sister.

Pari II thinks back to her youth. When she was 11, Abdullah drove her to the aquarium in Monterey. Although Pari II had been looking forward to the visit for weeks, she found the actual spectacle of the aquarium underwhelming and disappointing. As she grew older, Pari II also became unsatisfied with her body: she was "big-boned" and plain looking. Abdullah would take Pari II to special schools where she studied the Quran and learned Farsi. Pari II embraced Islam—something that often alienated her from her American classmates.

Many of the characters in the novel are dissatisfied with their physical appearances, and Pari II is hardly an exception. Here Hosseini alludes to his own childhood in the United States. When he was fifteen, he moved to California from Afghanistan, speaking no English whatsoever. Hosseini still speaks of his time in the U.S. as extremely uncomfortable and alienating, so it's no surprise that his characters speak of their adolescences in America in the same terms.

In high school, Pari II developed considerable skills as a painter. She applied to go to a prestigious art school in Baltimore, and was awarded a generous scholarship to attend. When Abdullah heard this news, he was a little disappointed that Pari II would be leaving him. As Pari II prepared to leave, she came to realize that her father loved her with a love "as permanent as the sky." Shortly before Pari II was scheduled to fly to Baltimore, her mother discovered that she had cancer.

At first it seems rather selfish for Abdullah to expect his daughter put aside her dreams to spend more time with him, but it's almost epiphanic when Pari II realizes that her father loves her unconditionally, and that she should then return this love. One could say that Pari II, now a mature adult, chooses to sacrifice her freedom and happiness for her father's sake, rather than being coerced into doing so.

Back in 2010, Pari II lets Pari into the house. She calls to Abdullah, and tells him he has a visitor. Pari walks into the room, and focuses her eyes on Abdullah, the brother she hasn't seen in more than half a century. Pari II tells her father that the woman she's brought to his home is Pari, his sister. Abdullah can't speak at first. Then, he asks Pari where she lives. They talk about Pari's life in Paris. Eventually, Abdullah shrugs irritably and says, "So your name is Pari. So there you have it."

And the Mountains Echoed *may be an "ensemble novel" (with many different characters), but this still feels like the dramatic climax of the book. We've been following Pari and Abdullah's lives for three hundred pages now, and Hosseini has been preparing us for a scene of reconciliation. And yet the scene he gives us here is anything but reconciliation, as Abdullah stubbornly refuses to believe that the woman standing next to him is his sister. This is also, frankly, a quite rational response to such a strange situation.*

As Abdullah sits in his chair, stubbornly refusing to speak to Pari any further, he begins absent-mindedly singing a song—the nursery rhyme he sang to Pari II when she was a child. Slowly and quietly, Pari begins to sing the song as well—it is the nursery rhyme that Abdullah used to sing to her when she was a small child, years and years ago. Pari sings the entire song—even the words that Abdullah has long since forgotten. Pari and Abdullah both begin to weep. Pari can see that she's "broken through"—she's summoned her brother back to her.

For the last and most important time in the novel, art helps people come together. By singing the same children's song, Abdullah and Pari realize—to a certainty—that they're siblings, not strangers. This process is a little more complicated than it looks. By remembering their nursery rhyme, the two siblings not only confirm who they are in a literal, straightforward way, but they also "unlock" other *memories of each other, of which they'd previously been only dimly aware. Art is a powerful force for uniting strangers partly because it* can *summon such unexpected memories and emotions.*

The chapter cuts back to Pari II's early twenties. Shortly before her mother (whose name, we know, was Sultana) died of cancer, Pari II and her mother traveled to Santa Cruz for a weekend. Her mother had been going through chemotherapy, and she enjoyed observing nature, especially trees and animals. Pari II's mother is at this point confined to a wheelchair, and Pari II wheels her through a path overlooking a beautiful forest. Suddenly, Pari II's mother tells Pari II the truth: Abdullah has a half-brother in Pakistan, whose name is Iqbal. Abdullah has been sending Iqbal money for many years, she explains. Pari II's mother is telling Pari II this news because one day, Pari II herself will be responsible for sending Iqbal money. Pari II's mother tells Pari II that Abdullah needs people in his life—especially Pari II.

Instead of lingering on the encounter between Abdullah and Pari, Hosseini cuts away from it, leaving it up to our imaginations what they say to each other (what could *they say to each other after all this time?) In general, Hosseini keeps the pace of his novel extremely brisk—as soon as one problem or mystery is solved, he throws another one in our way. Here, the new problem becomes how Pari II will take care of her family. The implicit message here is that the universe knows no happy endings—there are long-awaited, tearful reunions, but no story ever ends without a new one beginning.*

Back in 2010, Abdullah has fallen sleep, with Pari sitting next to him. Pari turns to Pari II, and explains that she's brought photographs. Some of the photographs show the town where Pari and Abdullah were born. Pari explains that this town, Shadbagh, is now the home of a notorious "criminal of war," who has planted enormous orchards across their family's old property. Pari also shows Pari II photographs of her own children, and even her grandchildren. Pari asks Pari II if she's married, and Pari II replies that she's never been married—but she "almost" married someone.

The "criminal of war" who Pari mentions is clearly Baba jan, Adel's father, from the seventh chapter. This confirms what we'd already surmised about "The Commander"—he's a murderer who pretends to be a hero to the people of New Shadbagh and to his family. It's not clear who Pari II "almost" married—if this is another story (one which we're not going to hear), or if Pari II is speaking figuratively.

Pari stays with Abdullah and Pari II for the next month. They spend their time laughing and catching up. Pari also takes care of Abdullah, leaving Pari II with more time to herself. One evening, Pari II is working in her room when she hears a loud sound. She rushes out to find Abdullah on his feet, screaming at Pari. He claims that she's stolen his pain medication, and shouts that she must leave his house immediately. While Pari II insists that Abdullah is wrong—Pari has pills of her own—Abdullah maintains that Pari is a thief, and yells that he's incapable of trusting her. He adds that he'll tell his wife about Pari very soon. This makes both Pari II and Pari teary-eyed.

It's clear in this moment that Abdullah is suffering from dementia brought on by old age. This is heartbreaking for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that Abdullah has always been able to remember Pari, his little sister, no matter how many decades elapsed. Now, he forgets Pari, not because he doesn't care about her (this was the case with Idris and Roshana) but because his body and mind simply aren't strong enough. Just as when Odelia was near death when reconciling with Markos, so Pari and Abdullah have a heartbreakingly short amount of time to be truly together again.

Alone, Pari II and Pari talk about Abdullah's deteriorating mental state. Pari suggests that Pari II find medical attention for Abdullah, but Pari II insists that she wants to take care of her father for as long as possible, rather than turn him over to someone else. While Pari II doesn't admit it, she secretly thinks that she *needs* Abdullah in her life. Pari II tells Pari that as a child, she always fantasized about being friends with Pari. She tells Pari she's sorry that Pari and Abdullah found one another too late in their lives.

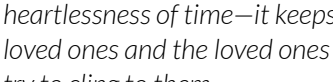
By agreeing to take care of Abdullah year after year, Pari II has structured her entire life around her father, to the point where she feels aimless unless she is sacrificing her own happiness and creativity for his sake. The major lesson of this chapter—and, we might say, of the book as a whole—is that reunions never work out as neatly as we'd expect. Time always interferes with people's feelings and memories.

A short time later, Pari and Pari II sit on a wooden park bench, exchanging poetry in French, English, and Farsi. They're in Paris, having put Abdullah in a nursing home. Abdullah has had a stroke, meaning that he needs a wheelchair at all times, and can barely talk. Before she traveled to Paris, Pari II told Abdullah that she was going to visit Abdullah's own niece, Isabelle. Abdullah smiled, but remained silent. Pari II has been in Paris for two weeks—the longest she's ever been away from her father.

It's remarkable that Pari II has never spent more than fourteen days away from Abdullah before. This reminds us of how much her life had revolved around her father. There's something both impressive and horrifying about this level of devotion to a family member: a father's job is to help his children grow up and become independent—not require them to stay at home, doing chores.

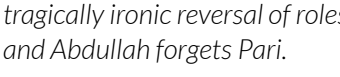
As they sit on the bench, Pari II gives Pari a package. Pari II found the package while she was packing for her trip to France. It's labeled "To my sister Pari." Pari opens the package, and finds that it contains a note, which reads: "I must wade into waters, where I will soon drown. Before I march in, I leave this on the shore for you. I pray you find it, sister, so you will know what was in my heart as I went under." The note is dated 2007—the year Abdullah was first "diagnosed," Pari II explains.

In this crucial section, we learn that Abdullah did *remember Pari for as long as he was mentally capable of doing so. When he recognized that his mind was slipping away, he turned to art—just like Markos with his photo—as a tool to help him remember the person he cared about most. Abdullah's note is a tragic encapsulation of the heartlessness of time—it keeps moving on, erasing memories of loved ones and the loved ones themselves, no matter how hard we try to cling to them.*



Pari finds another item inside the package—a small **yellow feather**. Pari II asks her if she knows what this item means, and Pari confesses that she doesn't. At the same time, she recognizes that the pain Abdullah experienced when they were separated as children far exceeded the pain she felt, because she was younger—only four years old. Now, she barely remembers her life before being adopted by Mrs. Wahdati.

Hosseini throws another wrench into the neatness of Pari and Abdullah's reunion, with the fact that for the majority of her life, Pari didn't remember Abdullah at all. Only recently has there been a tragically ironic reversal of roles, so that Pari remembers Abdullah and Abdullah forgets Pari.



The night after Pari receives her package from Abdullah, Pari II finds it difficult to sleep. Eventually, she falls asleep, and has a strange, vivid dream. In the dream, Pari II sees Pari sleeping next to Abdullah. They are both young children. Pari turns to look at Abdullah, her big brother, but Abdullah's face is too close to her own, meaning that she can't see the whole of it. Nevertheless, Pari is satisfied to be so close to Abdullah. Slowly, she and Abdullah fall asleep in one another's arms.

In the final paragraphs of the chapter, Hosseini steers the reader toward a frustrating, moving, but ultimately peaceful conclusion. Pari and Abdullah can't ever know each other perfectly—there will always be things separating them (age, time, distance, etc.). But the image of Abdullah and Pari pressed close together implies that perhaps it's enough that they were together for a short time—perhaps we shouldn't expect a "happily ever after." Hosseini brings his book to an end, and yet he's also attacking the very concept of an ending. Even if this particular story—the story of Pari and Abdullah—is ending, a legion of other stories continue on: the stories of Pari II, her relatives back in Afghanistan, etc. Books are finite, meaning that the stories they tell are only a small portion of the truth. Pari can see only a portion of Abdullah's face, but the fact that she is close to him is enough.

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