

# The Reluctant Fundamentalist



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MOHSIN HAMID

Mohsin Hamid was born in Pakistan, but he spent much of his childhood in Palo Alto, California, while his father pursued a PhD at Stanford University. After the age of nine, Hamid returned to Pakistan with his family and attended Aitchison College, a highly prestigious boarding school founded in the late 19th century. At the age of 18, he attended Princeton University, where he studied with the famous writers Toni Morrison and Joyce Carol Oates, and graduated *summa cum laude* (with highest honors). He attended Harvard Law School, but found it boring. In his spare time, he worked on a novel he had begun writing as an undergraduate at Princeton; in 2000, he published this work, *Moth Smoke*. *Moth Smoke* was a success in the United States and a huge hit in Pakistan (it was even adapted as a TV miniseries), enabling Hamid to devote himself to writing full-time. He didn't complete another novel until 2007, when he published *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, which reflects his experiences at Princeton. His third and most recent novel, *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, was released in 2013. Hamid writes for dozens of magazines, journals, and newspapers, including the New York Times, the New Yorker, and the Paris Review. As of May 2015, he is rumored to be working on his fourth novel.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*The Reluctant Fundamentalist* explores the world, particularly the United States and Pakistan, during the late 90s and early 2000s. The single most important historical event in the novel is the destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001: Hamid shows how the events of this day inspired the War on Terror in the Middle East and Southwest Asia, as well as the impact of that act on the social world of the United States. The India-Pakistan Standoff of 2001-2002, which makes Changez fear for his family's safety, is another important event in the novel. Finally, Hamid alludes to the early 2000s recession, which coincided with the dot-com bubble "bursting," and led to increased unemployment around the world.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

In interviews, Hamid has cited several important influences on *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Like Hamid's novel, Albert Camus's novel, *The Fall*, published in 1957, about a man whose fortunes rise and fall in Paris, consists of dramatic monologues, with the protagonist recalling his life and occasionally interrogating his audience. Tayeb Salih's 1966 novel [Season of](#)

[Migration to the North](#) is another major influence: it tells the story of a Middle Eastern man who travels to the West, is fetishized for his exotic otherness, and eventually leaves his adopted home. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* also bears a noticeable resemblance to the frame narrative of *The Arabian Nights*, in which Scheherazade prolongs her life by telling her executor lengthy, tangential stories.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*
- **When Written:** 2001-2006
- **Where Written:** London and Lahore
- **When Published:** 2007
- **Literary Period:** Post-modernism
- **Genre:** Bildungsroman
- **Setting:** Lahore and New York City
- **Climax:** Changez and the Stranger's confrontation (which may not be a confrontation at all) outside the Stranger's hotel
- **Antagonist:** Underwood Samson, the United States, possibly the Stranger
- **Point of View:** First person monologue (Changez)

### EXTRA CREDIT

**A new point of view.** Hamid experiments with unusual points of view in his writing. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is written as a dramatic monologue, and his subsequent novel, *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, is one of the few English-language novels written in the second person!

**Hamid in Hollywood.** In 2012, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* was adapted into a film by the acclaimed director Mira Nair.



## PLOT SUMMARY

In the streets of Lahore, Pakistan, a young man, Changez, approaches an unnamed man (for the purposes of his summary, we'll call him the Stranger), and asks, in an unclear combination of extreme politeness and menacing familiarity, if he can be of assistance. Changez says that the Stranger looks American, and escorts him to a nearby cafe, where they drink **tea** and eat dinner. As afternoon turns into evening, Changez tells the Stranger about his time in the United States.

Changez comes from a respected but declining Pakistani family. Nonetheless, he gets into and attends Princeton University,

where he makes excellent grades and acts the part of an exotic foreigner, but secretly works multiple jobs to support himself and his family. He comments to the Stranger that he now sees that Princeton was indoctrinating him into a pro-American mindset—teaching him to use his skills to help American companies—but that he didn't realize this at the time. Near the end of his senior year, he interviews for a prestigious valuing firm, **Underwood Samson**, which does analysis to determine the worth of companies. During his interview, Jim, an executive vice president at the firm, learns that Changez is on financial aid, and conceals his economic status from his classmates; Jim tells Changez that he, too, hid his background at Princeton, and gives him a job. Between graduating Princeton and beginning his career at Underwood Samson, Changez goes on a vacation to Greece with Princeton friends and peers. It is here that he meets Erica, a beautiful and charismatic Princeton graduate, with whom he is instantly smitten.

In New York, Changez begins his career at Underwood Samson. He makes friends with another trainee, Wainwright, and wins the admiration of his colleagues and supervisors. Meanwhile, he continues to spend time with Erica, who lives in New York and invites him to parties and dinners. Changez notices that Erica seems deeply lonely, even when she's surrounded by friends, and learns that her boyfriend and childhood friend, Chris, died last year.

While working in Manila, in the Philippines, Changez witnesses the collapse of the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001, and finds himself feeling pleasure at the sight of powerful, arrogant America brought to its knees. Then, on his return flight to New York, he is detained at the airport. He begins to notice and be the subject of increasing racism and discrimination in New York City and at Underwood Samson. Erica, traumatized by 9/11, begins to sink into nostalgia for Chris. One night, Changez and Erica have sex, a "success" Changez achieves partly by telling Erica to pretend that he is Chris. Changez thinks this will bring them closer, but Erica grows increasingly distant from Changez.

Changez, feeling increasingly uncomfortable in New York and the United States as a foreigner after 9/11, travels to Pakistan to see his family, and feels angry with the United States for supporting India's aggression against his home. At the same time, he doesn't feel entirely Pakistani, either. Later, while traveling to Chile for Underwood Samson, he meets Juan-Batista, the president of a publishing company, who compares Changez to a janissary — a reference to Crusades era warriors who were kidnapped from their own culture, and then forced to fight against it. Changez realizes this is true, that he is doing harm to Pakistan by working for Underwood Samson. He returns to New York in the middle of his assignment. Jim fires him, but seems sympathetic to his struggle. Changez returns to Pakistan, where he lectures at a university and supports anti-American demonstrations, although, he insists, he never

encourages violence.

As Changez tells the Stranger his story, he frequently points out that the Stranger seems uncomfortable, and notes that the Stranger has something under his jacket in the exact position where spies keep a gun. The waiter who serves them their food seems angry with the Stranger, but Changez assures the Stranger that there is no danger. Changez then walks the Stranger back to his hotel. As they stand outside, the Stranger notices a group of people, including the waiter, who've been following them, and reaches under his jacket.



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Changez** – Changez, the protagonist of the novel, is a Pakistani man who went to college in Princeton, and who narrates the story of his time in the United States to the Stranger. For most of the novel, he loves the United States and works hard to be accepted by his American friends and colleagues while working at a New York financial firm. Yet, after 9/11 changes his perspective and he faces increasing racism and discrimination, and as his relationship with the beautiful American Erica is thwarted by Erica's obsession with her dead former boyfriend Chris, he eventually becomes disillusioned with his adopted country, viewing it as a danger to the rest of the world. Changez then leaves America and returns to Pakistan, where he becomes an anti-US lecturer. Throughout Changez's narration he sometimes addresses the Stranger directly, and these interactions are never entirely clear; Changez's tone hovers between concern, politeness, and care, and a kind of over-solicitous menace (which one might also say accurately describes his feelings for the US at this point of his life). Ultimately, though, the novel ends without revealing whether or not Changez can be trusted, both as a narrator and as a friend to the Stranger, whether Changez has come to his anti-US views while still to an extent loving America, or whether he has become a terrorist. There is a sense in the cliffhanger ending, which seems poised on a knife's edge between cementing a friendship between Changez and the Stranger or descending into violence, that Changez is in that moment choosing his own path.

**The Stranger** – The unnamed person to whom Changez recounts his time in America, the Stranger never speaks in the book. In fact, the reader's only impressions of him come from Changez's remarks. Because of this, it's left unclear how much Changez can trust the Stranger – it seems possible that the Stranger is merely a tourist, and just as possible that he is some kind of government agent. In fact, there is a sense that the Stranger may even be an American spy sent specifically to investigate, apprehend, or even kill Changez. Yet the novel ends on a cliffhanger, not revealing who or what the Stranger is, and

in that way capturing the uncertainty and tension in any exchange between these cultures in the post-9/11 world.

**Erica** – Erica is a beautiful and popular Princeton graduate, with whom Changez falls in love. She has strong feelings for Changez, though she sometimes seems to view Changez as an exotic foreigner more than a true friend and lover. A writer, she is nostalgic for Chris, a childhood friend and boyfriend who died a year before she and Changez met. After 9/11, she falls into depression and mental illness, focused around an obsessive nostalgia for Chris that thwarts any possibility of a relationship with Changez. By the end of the novel, she may have killed herself, though Changez in his life in Pakistan still thinks fondly of her and imagines – though without any real hope – that she will someday come to him. That the name “Erica” is contained within the word “America” is no coincidence, and Changez’s relationship with Erica can be seen as analogous to his relationship to America.

**Jim** – Jim is an executive vice president at **Underwood Samson**, and Changez’s mentor for most of his time with the company. Because he worked his way up from an impoverished family, Jim identifies with Changez’s financial situation, and regularly communicates this to Changez. Like Erica, Jim’s feelings for Changez may be limited by his minimal understanding of Changez’s culture and personality. The novel also hints that Jim may be interested in Changez romantically, though Jim’s sexuality is never revealed.

**The Waiter** – The Waiter serves Changez and the Stranger while they sit and drink **tea** in the café in Lahore to which Changez steered the Stranger. A member of a tribe victimized by America’s military, he appears hostile and angry with the Stranger, though Changez assures the Stranger that the man is polite and gentle. At the end of the novel, the Waiter is running toward the Stranger in a dark and street, and may be about to attack him, though this isn’t at all certain.

**Wainwright** – Changez’s friend at **Underwood Samson** and the only other non-white trainee, Wainwright is laid-back and popular with his peers. He and Changez quickly become friends, but because he is more comfortable with America and American culture after 9/11, he and Changez grow apart. Nevertheless, Wainwright is the only one of Changez’s peers who shakes his hand when Changez is fired.

**Juan-Batista** – The president of a Chilean publishing company that Underwood Sampson values. Changez works on the project, and becomes friendly with Juan-Batista. It is Juan-Batista’s questioning that leads Changez to see himself as a “janissary” – a person who has been kidnapped and made to fight against his own culture. This revelation causes Changez to cease working at his job at Underwood Sampson.

**Jeepney driver** – One day while traveling to work for Underwood Sampson in a limousine, Changez notices a jeepney (a kind of public bus) driver staring at him angrily. Changez

can’t figure out whether the man seems angry at him for personal reasons, because he’s jealous of Changez’s suit and limousine, or because he hates Americans. After the staring match is over, Changez looks at his blonde Underwood Samson colleagues and is struck by their foreignness, and feels suddenly closer to the driver than to his colleagues. This incident is a first step in Changez’s increasing alienation from the United States.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Chris** – Erica’s dead boyfriend. She describes him as being a dandy, with an “old world” appeal. Erica continues to love Chris throughout the novel, years after he has died, and her growing obsession with Chris after 9/11 ultimately leads her to depression and mental illness.

**Mike** – One of Changez’s classmates at Princeton. He goes on a vacation to Greece with Chuck, Erica, and Changez, and attempts unsuccessfully to flirt with Erica.

**Chuck** – One of Changez’s classmates and soccer friends at Princeton, he travels to Greece with Changez, Erica, and Mike.

**Erica’s Mother** – A kind but reserved woman, who seems to like Changez.

**Erica’s Father** – A powerful businessman, who treats Changez somewhat condescendingly.

**Sherman** – A vice president at **Underwood Samson**, ranked below Jim.

**Changez’s mother** – She lives in Pakistan. When Changez returns to Pakistan, she hopes he will soon get married and wonders why he does not.

**Changez’s brother** – He lives in Pakistan. He gets married not long after Changez returns to Pakistan, and at one point tells Changez that many people are fortifying their houses because they fear a war with U.S.-backed India.

**Changez’s father** – He lives in Pakistan, and fears war with U.S.-backed India though he refuses to discuss it.



## 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.



### PATRIOTISM & POST-9/11 UNITED STATES

As a Pakistani man in the United States, Changez has a perspective and experiences that give him insight about aspects of American patriotism that Americans

take for granted. Reflecting on his time at Princeton University, he realizes that there is a hidden patriotic project in his college education. Young, intelligent students from the United States and the rest of the world are taught to love America, live in America after they graduate, and lend their services to American companies. During his time at Princeton, Changez isn't conscious of this patriotic indoctrination, but after September 11, he witnesses an enormous surge in patriotism—and a patriotic obsession with the United States' own past and purity—that affects him directly. Although he had thought that New York City had its own distinct culture, after the attack he sees the city join with the rest of the United States in forming a single culture whose most obvious characteristic is its hostility to non-Americans like Changez himself.

Even though Changez is naturally resistant to this form of patriotism because it excludes him, he continues to love his new country, which has provided him with a first-rate education and job. His relationship to the United States is similar to his love for Erica (whose name, not by accident, is contained within the word "America"). Like America during the War on Terror, Changez observes, Erica becomes obsessed with her own past, most notably her love for her dead boyfriend, Chris. It's unlikely that her relationship with Chris was remotely as strong while he was alive; she idealizes the past because it's past; because it's safe, unchallenging, and unchanging. Ultimately, it is Erica's failure to escape the past that prevents her from loving Changez in the present. On the one occasion when they have sex, Changez tells Erica to pretend that he is Chris – a clever metaphor for the way Changez must pretend to be someone else to succeed in the United States.

Changez's relationship with America and patriotism has all the turmoil of a love affair. Although he loves America initially, and it seems to love him in return, it becomes clear by the end of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* that both the United States and Erica are too nostalgic for an idealized, semi-mythical past to reward his feelings of love or patriotism. His feelings rejected and disillusioned with the United States, Changez returns to Pakistan.



### COMING OF AGE

*The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is a good example of a *Bildungsroman*, or coming of age novel. In the early chapters, Changez, the protagonist (his name clues us in to the character development he'll undergo) is an uncertain, passive young man. He travels all over the world (to Princeton University, to Greece, to New York City) without ever voicing a particularly strong reason for choosing to go to these places. In reality, he doesn't "choose" to go to Princeton or New York at all – he obeys what others tell him, or does what he thinks he's supposed to do. Because of his passivity in most of the first half of the book, Changez encounters many

different models for how he *should* come of age. One important model is Princeton University, where he absorbs the unstated but accepted idea that a valuable life is one in which he uses his intelligence and knowledge to help a capitalist American company, which in his case is **Underwood Samson**. It's only when he looks back on his life later that Changez realizes that this was the hidden message of his Princeton education and that he has allowed others to control his own development.

In the aftermath of September 11, Changez encounters new hostility from Americans: an aggressive airport security guard detains him, and pedestrians harass him. He begins to realize that the ideal of growing up he's been fed at Princeton and Underwood Samson makes him useful to Americans, but doesn't actually make him a part of America. Despite his contributions, he's still seen as an outsider in the United States. Naturally angry at having been used and rejected in this way, he begins to rebel against America and Underwood Samson in small ways, such as growing out his beard – an expression of his desire to take control of his own life and a symbol of his coming of age. Changez's ultimate choice to leave the United States for Pakistan contrasts markedly with his early, passive traveling.

But even if *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is a book about growing up, it's not completely clear what Changez grows up to be. He returns to Pakistan to become a university lecturer, but the novel never reveals whether or not he has become a supporter of terrorist groups, or simply a peaceful critic of American foreign policy. Changez's identity is unclear to us; it may also be unclear to Changez himself. The ambiguity of the ending, in which it is unclear whether he is about to befriend or attack the Stranger, may be read as a sign that Changez is still growing and still has choices to make, choices that will define who he will become.



### RACISM & FUNDAMENTALISM

Throughout *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, beginning on the first page, Hamid, the author, shows how people judge one another based on their clothing, their skin color, and their mannerisms. These forms of racism shape Changez and his impressions of the United States. Although Changez's friends at Princeton treat him respectfully, they're aware that he is an outsider in the United States. When they travel to Greece together, Changez experiences various forms of "soft" racism. While not rude or disrespectful to him, his friends think of him as an exotic "pet"; even Erica is attracted to Changez because he is "different." Changez accepts and in some ways encourages these feelings, partly because he wants Erica and his other friends to accept him and partly because he himself is unsure who he is.

After September 11, Changez encounters more overt and hostile forms of racism in America. He's called an Arab, though he's really Pakistani, and is detained at an airport and harassed

by a bigoted security officer. Changez refuses to “cave in” during these confrontations, and, in defiance of what he sees as their profound unfairness and viciousness, deliberately changes his behavior and appearance to appear even more obviously foreign. Put another way: the novel shows how racism helps to create the very thing it fears. In Changez’s case, racism ultimately drives him from his adopted country of the United States back to Pakistan. The racism and prejudice stemming from the fear of fundamentalism leads him, a lover of America, to become at minimum more critical of the United States, and, possibly, a fundamentalist.

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*’s “frame narrative,” Changez and the Stranger judge each other based on their racist preconceptions. The Stranger is suspicious of Changez because of his beard and clothing, while Changez sizes up the Stranger as an American based on his bearing. In the end, Hamid doesn’t reveal if either Changez or the Stranger has judged accurately: Changez could be an anti-American terrorist, and the Stranger could be an American secret agent, or both, or neither. Readers are forced to decide whether the stereotypes of terrorist and spy are, in this case, accurate, and, if they are, whether Changez has been driven to terrorism by the racism he encountered as an outsider in the United States.



### HUMAN CONNECTION

In the face of racism and aggressive nationalism, Hamid questions whether it is possible for two unlike people to genuinely trust and respect one another, while also exploring humans’ fundamental need for these kinds of connections. Most of Changez’s classmates at Princeton are wealthy and take American culture as a given, but Changez works multiple jobs to feed his family in Pakistan. While he tries to forge strong friendships with other students, he can’t shake the sense that he and his peers will never understand each other. He fares somewhat better with Erica, the beautiful Princeton undergraduate with whom he has a long romance, but even this romance ends when Erica becomes obsessed and decides that she is still in love with her deceased boyfriend, Chris. Even when he returns to Pakistan, Changez continues to search the news for information about Erica, suggesting that he’s still committed to finding a connection with her, despite all evidence that such a connection is impossible.

Still another attempt at human connection comes with Jim, the **Underwood Samson** vice president who hires Changez after realizing that they both come from impoverished families, and both feel a drive to succeed unknown to wealthier Princeton students. Over the course of the novel, however, it becomes increasingly clear that Jim tries to forge a connection with Changez for selfish reasons: he’s a lonely middle-aged man looking for a friend, and he may even be sexually attracted to Changez.

While all of Changez’s attempts at human connection in

America can be said to fail, Hamid leaves readers with the image of Changez and the Stranger in a dark alley, deciding whether or not to trust each other. Even if it’s difficult to form an intimate bond of trust with a person from another culture, it might be possible to do so by listening to his story, just as the Stranger has, and just as readers of Hamid’s book have done. And yet there is danger, also, in attempts at making such connections, as Changez and the Stranger’s encounter in the alley seems like it just as possibly might turn to violence.



### AMERICAN IMPERIALISM

Through Changez’s experience, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* paints a picture of the enormous financial and military power that the United States wields over the rest of the world. The novel depicts how the United States’ power is so great because it is both “hard,” meaning that it has tremendous military force, and “soft,” meaning that it encourages foreigners to adopt American customs. Meanwhile, the American characters are often ignorant or naïve about their country’s power and the challenges and impact such power forces a foreigner in America to face.

One of the primary “soft power” tactics that the United States uses to maintain its power is to attract talented foreign students to its universities and then encourage them to work for American companies. Changez notes that he is the perfect example of this process, since he attends Princeton University on scholarship, is given a work visa, and then works for the prestigious valuation firm, **Underwood Samson** (whose initials, U.S., suggest its American allegiance). When Changez travels to South America to evaluate a publishing corporation that hires Underwood Samson, the corporation’s president, Juan-Batista, compares Changez to a janissary officer: a warrior kidnapped by the Ottoman Empire and forced to fight against his own culture. Changez reluctantly realizes that the analogy is accurate: America “kidnapped” him with offers of free education, convinced him to stay with a tempting offer of employment at Underwood Samson, and put him to work keeping America rich and powerful.

The United States also exerts enormous military power over the world. After the events of September 11, Changez witnesses America’s military interventions in Pakistan; these actions, which threaten his family’s safety, remind him how much of an outsider he is in his adopted country, and convince him to return to Pakistan on a visit. Ironically, during the visit, he is faced with the effects of American “soft power,” as his American experiences – particularly his romance with Erica – make him feel lonely and out of place in Pakistan, too. Changez, then, experiences American soft and hard power simultaneously, and in confusing ways: he loves the United States for its opportunities and aspects of its culture; he resents being treated as a foreigner by the citizens of the

country he has come to love after 9/11; he fears the way that American hard power threatens his own family, which has done nothing to America. Ultimately, the resentments outweigh the love, and Changez returns to Pakistan to use his education to organize and educate anti-American demonstrators, to fight the American soft power that attracted him to Princeton in the first place.

Finally, the possibility that the Stranger might be a secret agent sent halfway around the world to assassinate Changez reinforces the constant presence of U.S. imperialism. At the same time, he could be a perfectly innocent tourist. It's this uncertain interplay between menace and friendliness that Hamid associates with the United States throughout *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.



## SYMBOLS

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



## UNDERWOOD SAMSON

As its initials suggest, **Underwood Samson**, the valuation firm Changez works for, symbolizes the U.S. in all of its power, optimism, and under the surface racism. At first, Underwood Samson seems like a perfect meritocracy, feeding its employees a version of the American Dream: if they work hard, they'll be rewarded. Underwood Samson employees travel around the world, performing seemingly useful services for its clients. But as Changez grows critical of America's foreign policy, he begins to see the flaws in the "help" Underwood Samson provides for its clients — in order to restructure a company, it has to fire employees, some of whom will never hold a job again. Changez also realizes that Underwood Samson's meritocracy has limits; when he grows out his beard, he sees his colleagues' formerly hidden racism very clearly. In the end, he feels the same way about America and Underwood Samson: they have good people, but their imperialism and secret prejudices do more harm than good.



## TEA

Changez leads the Stranger to a cafe for a cup of Lahore's famous **tea**, though the Stranger initially seems so paranoid about being poisoned (or at least Changez perceives it that way) that Changez switches their cups after the tea is poured. Later, when their waiter brings them green tea, the Stranger accepts it more readily. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the process of learning to trust another person always hinges upon the exchange of some cultural item: a cup of tea, a book, even a line from the movie *Top Gun*. At the same time, there is an implication in the novel that Changez taking

the Stranger to tea is a kind of charade, an effort to lead the Stranger into a kind of trap in which Changez, the waiter, and others will ambush the Stranger after their interaction. It is not at all definitive that this is the case; it is left an open possibility by the novel's cliffhanger ending. The question becomes, then, can cultural exchanges like Changez's teatime with the Stranger build genuine trust between two different people, or will they always be unsuccessful?



## CHANGEZ'S SCAR

Changez's **scar** seems to worry the Stranger, since it looks like a mark of some violent encounter, but Changez insists that he acquired it as a small child, when a candle dripped molten wax on his arm. It's also possible, of course, that Changez is lying—that he got it more recently, during the course of violent opposition to the United States. The qualities of the scar itself are almost mutually contradictory: it's dark, which traditionally symbolizes evil, but also smooth, which traditionally symbolizes innocence. In this way, the way one interprets Changez's scar mirrors to the way one interprets Changez himself—he could be a sinister figure who conspires to kill the Stranger, he could be innocent of all wrongdoing whatsoever, or he could be a terrorist who's "innocent" insofar as the United States has pushed him to fundamentalism. Interpreting the scar is like an inkblot test: one's interpretation says more about the interpreter than about Changez.





## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Harvest Books edition of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* published in 2008.

### Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ Excuse me, sir, but may I be of assistance? Ah, I see I have alarmed you. Do not be frightened by my beard; I am a lover of America.

**Related Characters:** Changez (speaker), The Stranger

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 1

### Explanation and Analysis

In the opening line of the novel, Hamid establishes the fine line between friendly and sinister. Changez is speaking very politely to the Stranger, offering to be "of assistance." And

yet there's also something unmistakably sinister about the way Changez *comments* upon the Stranger's evident discomfort: the more Changez remarks upon it, we can imagine, the more uncomfortable the Stranger becomes. Changez seems to be toying with the Stranger, manipulating him for his own amusement.


Changez also shows an awareness of the Stranger's background: by claiming to be a lover of America, he's essentially identifying the Stranger as an American, too. But in doing so, Changez is suggesting that the Stranger is a paranoid, prejudicial person—the kind of person who would be afraid of a man with a beard. Again, Changez seems *aware* of the Stranger's potentially racist attitudes toward non-Americans, and yet the more he draws attention to the Stranger's attitude, the more dangerous Changez himself appears.

Of course, it's also possible that Changez really is trying to be of service to the Stranger: because our point of view is so confined (the novel is written as a kind of dramatic monologue, directed at a second-person "Stranger"), we have a hard time judging whether Changez is friendly or sinister. Hamid forces us to *judge* Changez—a judgement that exposes our own prejudices and sympathies.

“... I get where you're coming from Changez. You're hungry, and that's a good thing in my book.”

**Related Characters:** Jim (speaker), Changez

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 9

### Explanation and Analysis

Here, Jim (the first in a long line of monosyllabically-named American characters) interviews Changez for a prestigious job at the consulting firm Underwood Samson. During the course of the interview, Jim comments on Changez's race and income level, and manipulates Changez into "snapping"—a response that Jim seems to find impressive. Jim insists that he and Changez are similar: because they come from working-class families, they're equally ambitious.

The quotation establishes an important idea: finding a "connection" with somebody isn't necessarily the same as sharing life experiences. Jim *thinks* he knows Changez well: he thinks that because Changez is less well-off than some of his peers, they're "kindred spirits." Jim seems unaware (and

uninterested!) that Changez is actually from a relatively well-to-do family, with a huge amount of cultural capital. In short, Jim "sees himself" in Changez, stopping short of forging a real friendship with Changez.

## Chapter 2 Quotes

“... I ... found myself wondering by what quirk of human history my companions — many of whom I would have regarded as upstarts in my own country, so devoid of refinement were they — were in a position to conduct themselves in the world as though they were its ruling class.”

**Related Characters:** Changez (speaker), Chuck, Mike

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 21



### Explanation and Analysis

After getting a first-rate job at Underwood Samson, Changez goes off on a fancy trip to Greece with some of his friends from Princeton University. Changez has always been a little bothered by the level of entitlement he's seen among his classmates in college: they act like they own the world (and in a way, they do). But when Changez travels to Greece with his friends, their entitlement and privilege really makes an impact on him. Even in a foreign country, Changez's classmates act like wealthy, powerful "insiders"—they don't feel any of the discomfort or outsidership one usually associates with travel.

Perhaps the key word in this quotation is "position." What is the "position," Changez wonders, that allows a group of 21-year-olds to behave like spoiled brats? Of course, Changez's question is mostly rhetorical: he knows perfectly well that America, as the wealthiest and most powerful country on the planet, has produced generations of wealthy, powerful families, and therefore, millions of spoiled children. But the fact that these spoiled children can feel like kings even in *other* countries attests to the strength of the American "myth" that they've been fed since birth. Changez's classmates are so used to the idea that America is the greatest country in the world that they've come to believe that *they* deserve the best treatment no matter where they go. As a student who's spent the last 4 years in America feeling like a shy outsider, Changez is understandably irritated with his peers.

When my turn came, I said I hoped one day to be the dictator of an Islamic republic with nuclear capability; the other appeared shocked, and I was forced to explain that I had been joking. Erica alone smiled; she seemed to understand my sense of humor.

**Related Characters:** Changez (speaker), Erica, Mike, Chuck

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 29

### Explanation and Analysis

In this quotation, Changez and his peers are sitting around a table, talking about their ambitions for the future. One by one, Changez's friends make jokes about "world domination," and so on—then, when Changez's turn comes, he tries to joke about being a brutal dictator. Changez is trying to make fun of himself, alluding to the American stereotypes about Middle Eastern and Pakistani people (i.e., that they're terrorists, dangerous, etc.)



The fact that Changez's peers don't laugh suggests a couple things. Perhaps Changez's joke hits a little too close to home—they really *do* think of Middle Easterners in the stereotypical terms Changez is alluding to, and therefore find Changez's joke more frightening than funny. Changez is trapped between a rock and a hard place: he can't really fit in with his peers because of the stereotypes about people from his country, and yet when Changez tries to fit in with the group by making fun of his own heritage, he gets a radio silence.

The fact that Erica—a girl on whom Changez already has a crush—laughs at Changez's joke *seems* to suggest (in Changez's mind) that she "understands" him. But perhaps Erica is no more enlightened than any of her peers: as we'll see, she seems to view Changez through a lens of stereotypes and assumptions about foreigners, just as her other college friends do.

## Chapter 3 Quotes

I was, in four and a half years, never an America; I was *immediately* a New Yorker.

**Related Characters:** Changez (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 33

### Explanation and Analysis

At this early point in the novel, Changez is still willing to believe that it's possible for a foreigner to totally fit in in the United States. One reason a foreigner can do so is that there are American cities where *everyone* is an outsider: in New York City, for example, there's so much activity and excitement that few people really feel at home. For Changez, New York is distinct from America and yet captures America at its very best. On one hand, the city is all about activity and ambition: there's simply no time for people like Changez's Princeton classmates to rest on their families' or their country's success. And yet New York is also quintessentially American: it's a city of immigrants and outsiders, a "New World" where the ambitious and the optimistic journey to start over again. In short, New York represents Changez's conflicted relationship with America: he hates the myth of American exceptionalism, and yet gravitates toward America's legacy of hope, brotherhood, and pluralism.

Four thousand years ago, we, the people of the Indus River basin, had cities that were laid out on grids and boasted underground sewers, while the ancestors of those who would invade and colonize America were illiterate barbarians. Now our cities were largely unplanned, unsanitary affairs, and America had universities with individual endowments greater than our national budget for education. To be reminded of this vast disparity was, for me, to be ashamed.

**Related Characters:** Changez (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 34

### Explanation and Analysis

In his new life in New York City, Changez is at once proud of his Pakistani heritage and yet deeply ashamed of it. Changez is conscious of being "different" from the people around him: his skin is darker, his accent is rare, etc. He feels inferior, since in the present, his country is fairly poor and underdeveloped—in America it's too-often considered a "barbaric" nation. The stereotypes about Pakistan and the Middle East are especially distressing for Changez, since in the past, the Middle East was the "civilized" part of the world, and the Western world was "barbaric."


That Changez is so upset by this suggests that he's been forced to think of himself as a representative and



spokesperson for his culture (often the result for victims of racism and "othering"): he's a kind of ambassador for Pakistan, striving to succeed in New York City in order to prove that Pakistan isn't as backwards or barbaric as Americans want to believe it is. He's like the proverbial unloved child, trying desperately to please a distant parent that seems not to care much for him.

☝ I was aware of an advantage conferred upon me by my foreignness, and I tried to utilize it as much as I could.

**Related Characters:** Changez (speaker), Jim

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 42

### Explanation and Analysis

As a Pakistani, Changez has plenty of disadvantages working in America: people tend to hold him at arm's length, thinking of him as alien and unfamiliar—in short, it's hard for him to build close relationships with his peers. And yet Changez knows that his outsider status gives him some distinct advantages: as an "exotic" creature, he's automatically more visible and interesting to his peers, meaning that people remember him more distinctly, so it's easier for him to make a good impression.

The myth of the "exotic" foreigner, while it seems to endow foreigners with positive qualities, is itself a form of prejudice, however: the "exotic other" and the "dangerous Muslim" are just two sides of the same racist coin. So the fact that Changez knowingly *allows* Americans to treat him as exotic suggests that he is, on some level, okay with his peers judging and stereotyping him: he's participating in his own othering. This shouldn't suggest that Changez is somehow to blame for the racism he receives: rather, it suggests that Changez has become so used to doing what his American friends and supervisors tell him to do that he's begun thinking of *himself* as an "other."

## Chapter 4 Quotes

☝ "I'm more unsettled than nervous," she said. "It's like I'm an oyster. I've had this sharp speck inside me for a long time, and I've been trying to make it more comfortable, so slowly I've turned it into a pearl. But now it's finally being taken out, and just as it's going I'm realizing there's a gap being left behind."

**Related Characters:** Erica (speaker), Changez, Chris

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 51

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Changez's crush, Erica, opens up to Changez about her tragic past. Erica's old boyfriend, Chris, died tragically, leaving her uncertain of her place in the world: she'd grown up with Chris, meaning that she barely understands what life without Chris would be like. Erica's metaphor is especially interesting, as she compares her sadness to a grain of sand becoming a pearl inside her. She's become so used to being sad about Chris that her sadness has become something beautiful and even desirable. Strange as it sounds, she'd rather continue mourning Chris than move on with her life.

On a metaphorical level, one could say that Erica "is" America, or the Western world, and Chris "is" Christianity and Western culture--the Western world's vanished past. But even setting aside this conceit, Erica's speech is important because it establishes a distance between her and her peers. In short, Erica is an outsider like Changez. (Moreover, the way that Erica embraces her pain and sadness parallels the way that Changez tries to embrace his own stereotyping and make the best of it). At this early point in the novel, Changez thinks that Erica's pain and loneliness will draw them closer together—but little does he know that the opposite is the case.

## Chapter 5 Quotes

☝ ... I did something in Manila I had never done before: I attempted to act and speak, as much as my dignity would permit, more like an *American*.

**Related Characters:** Changez (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 65

### Explanation and Analysis



During his early days working for Underwood Samson, Changez travels to Manila to work with a wealthy client. Changez's trip to Manila shows how far he's come since graduating college. While still in college, Changez was disgusted with his friends' entitlement and obliviousness to the dignity of other people. Now, as an employee of Underwood Samson, Changez seems to be trying to act

equally oblivious to other people—to act like a confident, spoiled American.

In the simplest terms, Changez is "moving up" in the world. He finally feels that he has a home and a community in the United States: in New York City, he's surrounded by like-minded, ambitious young men and women. But the unpleasant side-effect of Changez's upward social mobility is that he's become the thing he hated. Changez knows that he's acting like an obnoxious, arrogant American, but he also wants to fit in and feel confident about his identity.

☝ I stared as one — and then the other — of the twin towers of New York's World Trade Center collapses. And then I *smiled*. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased.

**Related Characters:** Changez (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 72

### Explanation and Analysis

The collapse of the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001 is a turning point in the novel (and, of course, in recent American history). There are so many ways to interpret Changez's reaction to the attack that it's worthwhile to list some of the most important:

1) Thus far, Changez has been repressing a lot of hatred for the United States. He's tried hard to fit in with his American peers, even imitating their obnoxious entitlement, but always secretly resenting them (and resenting himself for trying to be like them). With the collapse of the Twin Towers, Changez realizes—almost unconsciously—how much he's come to resent his adopted country, in all its arrogant, pompous superiority.

2) The 9/11 attack pleases Changez because it proves that the myth of American exceptionalism is just that—a myth. But even more importantly, 9/11 seems to balance out the atrocities that Changez believes the U.S. to have committed in other countries. As Changez will go on to explain, the U.S. regularly bombs foreign countries, often murdering women and children, always writing off casualties as "necessary evils." Changez doesn't *enjoy* seeing women and children die inside the Twin Towers, but he seems to recognize a certain poetic justice in the fact that global forces have now banded together to avenge America's war crimes. He also notes the irony that, while America has routinely murdered foreign civilians with little to no remorse, it's suddenly outraged

that 3,000 of its own citizens have been murdered by a foreign power.

3) It's always important to remember that Changez is *telling* his story to the Stranger. As we've already seen, Changez often tries to manipulate his audience—i.e., make the Stranger as uncomfortable as possible. So Changez's description of 9/11 might be designed to shock and infuriate the Stranger—and, in the process, to confirm beyond any reasonable doubt that the Stranger is an American. (The quotation will probably shock and infuriate plenty of readers too—and for good reason.)

## Chapter 6 Quotes

☝ They all seemed to proclaim: *We are America* — not New York, which, in my opinion, means something quite different — *the mightiest civilization the world has ever known; you have slighted us, beware our wrath.*

**Related Characters:** Changez (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 79

### Explanation and Analysis

So far, Changez has fallen in love with New York City because it's both deeply American (in its ambition, its optimism, etc.) and defiantly un-American (in its refusal to fall back on the myths of American superiority and solidarity). After 9/11, however, Changez is angry to see New York join forces with the rest of the country in celebrating American values and American superiority. New Yorkers suddenly seem to believe the same fairy tales that Changez has been dealing with since he arrived at Princeton: that America is the greatest and most moral of all countries; that all other countries are varying degrees of ignorant or evil; that America has the right to invade whatever nations it chooses, etc. As a result, Changez begins to feel like a stranger in his city: the only one who can't buy into America's myths.

## Chapter 7 Quotes

“I wonder now, sir, whether I believed at all in the firmness of the foundations of the new life I was attempting to construct for myself in New York. Certainly I *wanted* to believe; at least I wanted not to disbelieve with such intensity that I prevented myself as much as was possible from making the obvious connection between the crumbling of the world around me and the impending destruction of my personal American dream.

**Related Characters:** Changez (speaker), The Stranger

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 93



**Explanation and Analysis**

In this quotation, Changez speaks eloquently about a familiar problem for immigrants and minorities in their new country. Changez *wants* to be an American—i.e., a privileged, entitled member of a large and powerful community. It's because of his desire for acceptance that Changez joins Underwood Samson, dates Erica, etc. And yet there's a part of Changez that knows that he'll never really succeed in becoming part of his adopted country: because of his heritage and skin color, he'll always be "different"—an exotic other at best, a dangerous criminal at worst.

In a broader sense, the passage is important for understanding how Changez comes to "grow up" over the course of the book. Changez is still very naive at this point. Although he recognizes that the new War on Terror, precipitated by 9/11, will make the lives of Middle Easterners in the U.S. very difficult, he still thinks of himself as an exception to the rule: he thinks he's so wealthy and well-educated that he won't be persecuted for his race. In short, Changez is smart enough to see through his American peers' racism and narrow-minded view of the world, but he's not yet smart enough to see that *he* is still an outsider, and not a full member of his new American community.

“The economy's an animal,” Jim continued. “It evolves. First it needed muscle. Now all the blood it could spare was rushing to its brain. That's where I wanted to be. In finance. In the coordination business. And that's where *you* are. You're blood brought from some part of the body that the species doesn't need anymore. The tailbone. Like me.”

**Related Characters:** Jim (speaker), Changez

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 97

**Explanation and Analysis**

In this passage, Jim—Changez's self-appointed mentor and friend—tries to establish a firm relationship between himself and Changez. Jim uses an unusual analogy, painting a harsh, Darwinian portrait of the world's economy. As Jim sees it, he and Changez are crucial for America's continued success in the future, because they're different; their difference allows them to think creatively and cleverly, ensuring the success of their country's economy.

The way Jim treats Changez seems both condescending and ignorant, however. Jim knows next to nothing about Changez's family or heritage; he just assumes that he and Changez are "buddies" because they both come from somewhat uncommon backgrounds (Jim is from a working-class family; Changez is from Pakistan). Moreover, Jim seems to think of Changez as a mere "tool" in the economy; someone whose value lies in his difference itself, not in his personality or his character. In other words, Jim—no less than any of Changez's other American friends—judges Changez for his outsidership (even if his judgements are all positive). Jim even suggests that Changez's culture is somehow obsolete or vestigial, in the same sense that the tailbone is a vestigial part of the human body: even if Changez himself is useful, his country and culture aren't.

“Are you missing Chris?” She nodded, and I saw tears begin to force themselves between her lashes. “Then pretend,” I said, “pretend I am him.” I do not know why I said it; I felt overcome and it seemed, suddenly, a possible way forward.

**Related Characters:** Changez (speaker), Erica, Chris

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 105

**Explanation and Analysis**

In this scene, Hamid offers us a striking metaphor for the way minorities try to adapt to their new homes. Changez—by this point in love with Erica—tries to understand Erica's obsessive love for her dead boyfriend, Chris. Erica grew up with Chris, and still thinks about him all the time. It's been suggested that Erica's love for Chris is meant as a metaphor for the Western world's love for its own vanished past: in other words, the decaying legacy of



Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman values (or *AmErica's* love for *Christianity*). By the same token, Changez's desire to "become" Chris suggests one of the coping mechanisms that minorities have adopted to survive in America: they've tried to become more American than Americans. (If this idea sounds weird, consider the fact that many of the classic "patriotic" American songs were written by first-generation immigrants.)

Changez is conscious of being an outsider in America: everybody thinks of him as dangerous and threatening because he's from Pakistan, a country where the U.S. is currently fighting a War on Terror. Frustrated with his tormentors, Changez tries to "hide" by becoming perfectly American: first by getting a great American job, then by dating an American, and finally by literally *asking* someone to imagine him as a white American man.

## Chapter 8 Quotes

☹☹ America, too, was descending into a dangerous nostalgia at that time. There was something undeniably retro about the flags and uniforms, about generals addressing cameras in war rooms and newspaper headlines featuring such words as *duty* and *honor*. I had always thought of America as a nation that looked forward; for the first time I was struck by its determination to look *back*.

**Related Characters:** Changez (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 115

### Explanation and Analysis

As America becomes involved in the War on Terror (and as Erica becomes more and more obsessed with Chris, her dead boyfriend), Changez notices that his adopted country is nostalgic for the past. Everywhere, he sees evidence of Americans celebrating their own heritage and history, rather than looking ahead into the future. (In the years following 9/11, cultural historians have noted, America became increasingly patriotic: going all-out for the 4th of July, giving stores and building patriotic names, etc.—this phenomenon seems to be what Changez is reacting to).

Prior to this quotation, Changez has admired Americans for their ambition and hopefulness, for their ability to look ahead to the future. In New York, for example, Changez believes he's finally found an American city where his drive and ambition make him "equal" to his peers. With a renewed

focus on the past, however, it becomes increasingly obvious to Changez and his peers that Changez is *not* "equal"—he's from a foreign country, meaning that he can't really relate to his nostalgic, patriotic American friends.

☹☹ I can assure you that everything I have told you thus far happened, for all intents and purposes, more or less as I have described.

**Related Characters:** Changez (speaker), The Stranger

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 118


### Explanation and Analysis

In this ambiguous quotation, Changez assures the Stranger that the story he's been telling so far is the truth. But of course, the very fact that Changez is saying "this is *more or less* true" makes us—and the Stranger—wonder if the story is true at all.

Changez's words raise some other important questions: why, for instance, is Changez talking to the Stranger so personally and enthusiastically? As Hamid has remarked in interviews, Changez's story may be designed to delay and distract the Stranger, rather than to inform him. Of course, it's impossible to know for sure if Changez is being honest with the Stranger, or if he's plotting to hurt the Stranger. In the absence of perfect information, readers must decide for themselves how trustworthy the narrator ultimately is, and how much of a real connection he is seeking to make.

☹☹ I sat on the airplane next to a man who removed his shoes — much to my dismay — and who said, after praying in the aisle, that nuclear annihilation would not be avoided if it was God's will, but God's will in this matter was as yet unknown. He offered me a kindly smile, and I suspected that his purpose in making this remark was to reassure me.

**Related Characters:** Changez (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 122

### Explanation and Analysis

At this point in the novel, Changez still identifies as an American, in spite of his anxieties about the racism and

brutality of the War on Terror. It's evident from the quotation that Changez feels he has more in common with his American peers than with many people from Pakistan. On a plane to Pakistan, for instance, Changez encounters an Islamic man who prays to God and claims that God, not man, controls nuclear war. Changez's encounter reminds us how thoroughly Western he's become: he lives in an American city, has an American job, seems not to practice Islam, and seems disturbed by those who do so publically.

But of course, Changez's discomfort with the ultra-religious Muslim passenger is only half the story. Changez doesn't seem to have much in common with the passenger, but he also feels like an outsider in New York City. In short, Changez is trapped in between two cultures—he's not fully "at home" in America or in Pakistan.

## Chapter 9 Quotes

☞ I had changed; I was looking about me with the eyes of a foreigner, and not just any foreigner, but that particular type of entitled and unsympathetic American who so annoyed me when I encountered him in the classrooms and workplaces of your country's elite ... I resolved to exorcise the unwelcome sensibility by which I had become possessed.

**Related Characters:** Changez (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 124

### Explanation and Analysis


Changez flies back to his childhood home in Lahore. There, he's shocked to find that he reflexively thinks of the city as run-down and ugly. In other words, Changez's time in the United States has trained him to think of the rest of the world like a "true American": he thinks of non-American cities and countries as inferior. In the quotation, Changez seems to remember the school trip he and his Princeton friends took to Greece years before, and he remembers how obnoxious he found his classmates when they looked down on Greece. Now, Changez is looking down on Pakistan in exactly the same snobbish, entitled way.


For a long time now, Changez has been aware that he's becoming an obnoxious American. But up until this point, Changez was willing to turn a blind eye to his own entitlement, because he was desperate to fit in with his new American peers. When he returns to his childhood home, Changez guiltily realizes how much he's changed.

Confronted with his own family and home, Changez decides that he's not going to pretend to be American any longer.

☞ I know only that I did not wish to blend in with the army of clean-shaven youngsters who were my coworkers, and that inside me, or multiple reasons, I was deeply angry.

**Related Characters:** Changez (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 130

### Explanation and Analysis



When Changez returns to New York from his trip to Pakistan, he decides to grow out his beard—making it crystal-clear that he's a foreigner, not an American. Moreover, Changez has begun to feel a deep, inexpressible anger with America and his American friends.


Changez lists "multiple reasons" for his anger. To begin with, he's angry with American culture for seducing him. During his time in Pakistan, Changez has come to realize how entitled and arrogant he's become: America has shaped him into the very thing he hates. Furthermore, the atmosphere of the United States after 9/11 has convinced Changez that he's still an outsider in America. In spite of his first-class education and excellent job, Changez is still viewed as a dangerous Middle Easterner. Changez has done everything he can to fit in with Americans, and yet he's still being punished for the color of his skin. Furious, Changez decides that he doesn't want to fit in anymore. Instead of trying to hide his outsidership, Changez decides to celebrate his Pakistani heritage, to flaunt it in the face of a racist nation—hence his beard.

## Chapter 10 Quotes

☞ I too had previously derived comfort from my firm's exhortations to focus intensely on work, but now I saw that in this constant striving to realize a financial future, no thought was given to the critical personal and political issues that affect one's emotional present. In other words, my blinders were coming off, and I was dazzled and rendered immobile by the sudden broadening of my arc of vision.

**Related Characters:** Changez (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 145



### Explanation and Analysis

During his time working with Underwood Samson in South America, Changez comes to realize how "blind" he's been to the realities of his situation. Working for the firm, Changez is instructed to "focus on the fundamentals." As Changez has interpreted these words, he's supposed to focus on the dollars and cents of his assignments, rather than the human beings he's putting out of business in the process. In other words, "focus on the fundamentals" is a form of corporate propaganda, designed to repress employees' natural sympathy—which is, apparently, the enemy of good business. Furthermore, the emphasis on fundamentals parallels the way that Changez has tried to conceal his Pakistani heritage while in the United States. By concentrating on work and his career ambitions, Changez has hoped to move beyond his race and heritage and prove himself a "true American."

As Changez's blinders come off, he realizes how foolish and narrow-minded Underwood Samson—and the U.S.—can be. Instead of concealing his heritage and looking down on other people less fortunate than he, Changez decides to celebrate his Pakistani roots and express sympathy for the poor and suffering—in other words, he is reluctant to focus on the fundamentals (hence the title of the book). Changez's epiphany represents a key step in his coming of age: the moment when he stops obeying a master (Underwood Samson and U.S. culture) and begins to make his own choices.

☝ There really could be no doubt; I was a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with kinship to mine and was perhaps even colluding to ensure that my own country faced the threat of war. Of course I was struggling! Of course I felt torn!

**Related Characters:** Changez (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 152

### Explanation and Analysis

Changez analogizes his situation to that of the janissaries.

The janissaries were warriors, kidnapped from their Muslim homeland as children and trained to fight for Christian nations—sometimes fighting against the very countries where they were born. As Changez sees it, he's like a janissary: he was born in Pakistan, but now he's working for the U.S. to keep America's economy strong and the economy of countries like Pakistan weak.

The analogy Changez is making might seem melodramatic (Changez isn't literally a warrior, after all). And yet he has a point: one could argue that America's War on Terror was largely a financial decision, designed to increase America's hold on oil reserves and eliminate the foreign powers who'd attacked the World Trade Center, its very name a symbol of America's economic supremacy. In other words, by working for an American business, Changez *is* a warrior against Pakistan, in the same sense that a literal soldier would be.

The quotation shows Changez coming to terms with his place in America. By thinking of himself in such broad, historical terms, he arrives at some important truths about his career. Above all, he realizes that he doesn't belong in Pakistan *or* America: he's an outsider in both countries, "torn" between two cultures.

## Chapter 11 Quotes

☝ It seemed to me then — and to be honest, sir, seems to me still — that America was engaging only in posturing. As a society, you were unwilling to reflect upon the shared pain that united you with those who attacked you. You retreated into myths of your own difference, assumptions of your own superiority ... Such an America had to be stopped in the interests not only of the rest of humanity, but also in your own.

**Related Characters:** Changez (speaker), The Stranger

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 167

### Explanation and Analysis



In this quotation, Changez makes some important claims about America's War on Terror, and about what must be *done* to stop this war. Changez has already argued that America is foolish to believe in its own superiority so fervently—he's been aware of this tendency ever since he traveled to Greece with his Princeton friends. But Changez is reminded of the myth of American exceptionalism after the War on Terror begins. America invades and even bombs foreign countries, convinced that its moral superiority gives it the unshakeable right to do so.

The crucial part of this quotation is Changez's insistence that America "must be stopped." Previously, Changez has quietly resented America's delusions of moral superiority—now, however, he's actively trying to *prevent* America from enacting its delusions in Pakistan. Changez never explains what, exactly, he's doing to stop America. But it seems like a distinct possibility that Changez has decided to join or support terrorists, bombing and attacking American soldiers who, in his view, are destroying Pakistan. Changez's attitude toward the Stranger—referred to here as "sir"—suggests that he's still trying to provoke the Stranger, and may want to do the Stranger actual harm. Of course, it's also possible that Changez is using peaceful means to oppose American intervention in Pakistan—it's left up to us to decide.

## Chapter 12 Quotes

☝☝ Not, of course, that I actually *believe* I am having a relationship, in the normal sense of the term, with Erica at this moment, or that she will one day appear, smiling and bent against the weight of her backpack, to surprise me on my doorstep. But I am still young and see no need to marry another, and for now I am content to wait.

**Related Characters:** Changez (speaker), Erica

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 176

### Explanation and Analysis


The irony of Changez's relationship with Erica is that, while he's exasperated with Erica for carrying on a long, tormented love affair with a dead man (Chris), Changez is now doing essentially the same thing. Even if Changez insists that he knows he's not in a "true" relationship with Erica, it's clear that for all intents and purposes, he's still devoted to her—despite the fact that she might not even be alive anymore. Instead of looking ahead to the future, Changez is lost in his own past: he still imagines Erica as he first saw her, cheerful and energetic, wearing her backpack, etc. Once again, Changez has become the thing he hates: a nostalgic "shell" of a man.

While Changez's continued love for Erica might seem tragic or ironic to readers, it's also touching. Given that Hamid has paralleled Erica with America throughout his novel, Changez's love for Erica suggests that he still loves his adopted country, in spite of the hardships he's experienced there following 9/11. By the same token, it's possible that

Changez—in spite of his apparent hostility toward the Stranger, an American—might still have some respect and admiration for his new acquaintance after all.

☝☝ I can assure you that I am a believer in non-violence; the spilling of blood is abhorrent to me, save in self-defense ... I can see from your expression that you do not believe me. No matter, I am confident of the truth of my words.

**Related Characters:** Changez (speaker), The Stranger

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 181

### Explanation and Analysis

As the novel reaches an ending, Hamid suggests that Changez and the Stranger will never see eye-to-eye. Changez insists that since deciding to oppose American intervention in Pakistan, he's used only nonviolent methods. The Stranger seems not to believe Changez: based on everything he's heard, he's decided that Changez is dangerous, and might even be a terrorist. For his part, Changez refuses to try to convince the Stranger that he's peaceful. Changez's refusal to justify himself to the Stranger might imply that he's given up on the project he's been working on throughout the novel; namely, telling the Stranger his story. Even after 200 pages of autobiography, the Stranger seems not to trust Changez, and Changez seems to feel no need to try any harder to prove his reliability.

Without a bond of trust between Changez and the Stranger, the novel seems to heading for a very dark conclusion. Changez and the Stranger don't know each other at all; all they share is the story Changez has been telling the Stranger (in other words, the novel we're almost finished reading). Without the story, Changez and the Stranger might as well be enemies.

☝☝ But why are you reaching into your jacket, sir? I detect a glint of metal. Given that you and I are now bound by a certain shared intimacy, I trust it is from the holder of your business cards.

**Related Characters:** Changez (speaker), The Stranger

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 184

### **Explanation and Analysis**

In the final paragraph of the novel, Hamid forces readers to make assumptions about Changez and the Stranger—to judge and even stereotype them. Changez points out that the Stranger is reaching into his jacket, and pulling out what may or may not be a gun. At the same time, a large, dangerous-looking man is running toward the Stranger—someone who may or not be coming to kill the Stranger.

It's impossible to know to a certainty whether the Stranger is holding a gun, or whether Changez is plotting to kill the Stranger. Paradoxically, the carefree way that Changez is

describing the situation makes him seem more, not less, sinister—he's so laid-back that he has to be hiding something. (And based on what we've seen of Changez so far, he's hardly a laid-back person ordinarily.) But the sinister undertones of Changez's speech don't necessarily mean that he's planning to hurt anyone: perhaps he's planning to sacrifice himself for the Pakistani cause, or perhaps he's just aiming to embarrass the Stranger.

In short, the end of Hamid's novel forces us to choose sides: to decide whether or not Changez and the Stranger can be trusted. By making such a choice, we're forced to come to terms with our own prejudices and expectations about Middle Easterners and Americans—and this is exactly what Hamid wants.





## 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

In the Old Anarkali in Lahore, Pakistan, a Pakistani man, Changez, approaches a muscular, well-dressed man, the Stranger, without introducing himself or giving his name. Changez comments that the Stranger appears to be on a mission of some kind, and adds that he can tell that the Stranger is obviously American, based on his distinctive bearing, as opposed to the Stranger's clothing, skin color, or athletic build. Changez states that because he is a native of Lahore and speaks English, he'll give the Stranger his assistance. Although Changez's observations seem to make the Stranger uncomfortable, a fact Changez remarks upon, Changez continues to question him.

Changez asks why the Stranger has come to Old Anarkali, and suggests an answer: he's come for a cup of **tea**. Changez then guides the Stranger to a local cafe that, Changez insists, makes the best tea, even though it looks almost exactly like all the other cafés around it. The Stranger refuses to remove his jacket and sits with his back against the wall, even though it is a hot day and his position makes him less likely to feel the breeze. Changez notes that the Stranger's behavior is atypical for an American—it's rather too formal—and explains that he knows what is and isn't typical because he has lived in the United States, where he attended Princeton University. When the Stranger asks him what he thought of Princeton, he replies that answering the question will require that he tell the Stranger a story.

*Since *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is written entirely in the first person from Changez's point of view, it's difficult to gauge the Stranger's attitude when Changez approaches him in the street. The only clues come when Changez notes the Stranger's behavior or facial expressions, but it's unclear if Changez is interpreting the Stranger's actions correctly. It's equally difficult to gauge Changez's tone. He tries to find common ground between the Stranger and himself, but he does so by judging the Stranger based on his appearance, much as minorities in the United States are treated. The fact that he thinks the Stranger is uncomfortable around him, but proceeds with his questioning anyway, makes Changez seem rather sinister – his deferential attitude may not be completely sincere. Changez's choice of the word "mission" is another hint that Changez regards the Stranger as more of an adversary than he lets on, possibly that he thinks the Stranger may be some kind of agent.*



*The fact that Changez asks the Stranger a question and then answers it for him suggests that he is less interested in learning about his new friend and more interested in leading, or even bullying him, around the city. On the other hand, Changez could be eager to practice his English with an American and reminisce about his time at Princeton – no clear explanation for his behavior can be found, at least not yet. Similarly, the Stranger's agreement to follow Changez to the café could mean that he is reluctant to make a scene and is still on his guard, or that he is genuinely interested in passing time with Changez. His decision to keep his jacket on and sit near a wall suggests the former (and that he has a military awareness about him that indicates he might really be an agent of some sort), while his question to Changez about Princeton suggests the latter.*



While at first Changez is dazzled by Princeton's bright students and old-fashioned architecture, he quickly realizes that his college is less impressive than it seems. There are a thousand Americans in his entering class but only one other Pakistani student, despite the fact that the United States' population is twice that of Pakistan. Since their odds of being accepted to Princeton are considerably lower, Changez explains, the non-American students tend to be more talented than the Americans. Changez is a brilliant student and a talented soccer player, although a knee injury in his sophomore year forces him to quit the team. He graduates from Princeton with perfect grades and excellent job prospects, of which he is well aware.

The great success of Princeton University, Changez explains, is that it attracts the world's most brilliant minds to the United States, offers them scholarships, student visas, and good educations, and then encourages them to use their ingenuity for America and American companies. For Changez, who studies finance, the company he wants to join is **Underwood Samson & Company**, a small but prestigious valuation firm that estimates the profitability of businesses around the world, and whose analysts traditionally go on to great success. Along with a few other Princeton seniors, Changez is selected for a job interview with the company.

As Changez and the Stranger sit in the café, a waiter comes to their table who, Changez notes, seems to intimidate the Stranger, who reaches under his jacket. Changez tells the Stranger that he can put his wallet away until the end of the meal. Changez also insists that the Stranger would find the waiter polite if he could understand Urdu. They both order **tea**, and Changez resumes telling his story.

*Changez's comparison of international and American students at Princeton is both a cocky statement of his talent and a frank account of international students' experience at American colleges. On the Princeton soccer team, and at Princeton in general, his talents separate him from others instead of ingratiating him with his peers. Even at an elite university, surrounded by students of the same age with similar interests, Changez is conscious of being an outsider, though for the time being, his outsidership is a point of pride.*



*Years after graduating from college, Changez has a broader and more cynical perspective than he does as an undergraduate. At Princeton, he's conscious of his talent, and wants to put it to work for a prestigious company. As an adult, he thinks less about his own career and more generally about the ways that America maintains its power. One reason that Changez doesn't think about these imperialist strategies as a student is that they act in his favor – he has excellent grades to show for his four years at Princeton, and even to be interviewed by Underwood Samson is a sign of respect and a promise of wealth to come.*



*Once again, it's unclear what the characters really think and feel. The waiter could be dangerous and hostile to Americans, or polite; Changez could believe that the waiter is polite, or he could be concealing the waiter's hostility from the Stranger. Finally, the Stranger could be intimidated, as Changez thinks and as his reaching under his jacket might imply (and the Stranger could have a gun under his jacket or something else entirely, like his wallet), or he could be calmer than Changez supposes.*



Changez is nervous for his job interview with **Underwood Samson**. His interviewer, Jim, is well-built – not unlike the Stranger, Changez notes – and, tells Changez to convince him to offer him a job (this moment is the first time that Changez actually mentions his own name to the Stranger). Changez lists his academic accomplishments, his skills as a soccer player and his rapid recovery from his knee injury, which do little to impress Jim. With Jim’s prompting, he admits that he is from Pakistan, and studies at Princeton on financial aid. Jim is uninterested in Changez’s cultural background, but perks up when he hears that Changez is in the U.S. on a scholarship, noting that he must have really needed the money. He points out that most people would assume that he’s from a wealthy family, since he seems polished and sophisticated, and asks him whether or not his friends know that he’s there on scholarship.

When Changez, irritated by the personal questions, asks Jim what he’s getting at, Jim smiles and says that he, too, attended Princeton on scholarship and graduated at the top of his class. He deduces from Changez’s anger that his friends don’t know about his financial needs, and adds that he had to work to pay his way through college, deliberately choosing a job so far from Princeton that his friends would never see him working. He says that he likes Changez’s temper, and thinks he’s ambitious. Changez is impressed with Jim’s observational skills, and flattered that Jim likes him.

Changez takes a moment to explain his financial situation to the Stranger more precisely. His family was once rich and powerful, but its wealth has been shrinking for generations. His relatives, both male and female, work for a living, though they continue to employ servants, live in the most expensive part of Lahore, hold memberships in various elite clubs, and attend the parties and weddings of the Pakistani elite. His family feels the same disdain for the “new money” classes that the 19th-century European aristocrats felt for the middle-classes. In general, he notes, the decline in his family’s economic strength is merely an extreme version of the decline in the upper- and middle-classes around the world. Around his Princeton friends, Changez adopts an air of wealth and sophistication, but like Jim, he secretly works to support himself and his family, choosing places where his classmates are unlikely to run into him. Changez concludes mysteriously that Jim was right to say that he had ambition, but only in “some ways.”

*The casual way Changez communicates his name to the Stranger establishes more trust and closeness between them, but it also underscores the strangeness of their relationship – Changez treats the Stranger like a friend, but he waits half an hour to introduce himself, and then doesn’t even bother to ask the Stranger for his name. In spite of his confidence in his abilities, the young Changez finds it difficult to “sell himself” to Jim, prompting Jim to ask him a series of uncomfortable leading questions – much as Changez asks leading questions of the Stranger. The difference between the two roles Changez plays – in Pakistan, he’s an interviewer; at Princeton, he’s being interviewed – suggest how greatly he has changed, and suggest that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is the story of how Changez moves from being a nervous, passive character to an active one. Jim asks Changez personal questions about his financial situation, but seems indifferent to other aspects of his personality – his home, his city, his culture. As a result, his interest in Changez as a fully-formed human being is questionable.*



*Jim believes that a close connection exists between himself and Changez because of their similar socioeconomic background. His attitude is almost fatherly, especially the way he laughs off Changez’s angry outburst. Jim’s insight into Changez’s character is also the first indication that Changez, at least as an undergraduate, cares deeply about his classmates’ opinion of him, and goes out of his way to control his public image.*



*Changez’s observation that the socioeconomic changes in Pakistan aren’t unique paints a sobering picture of the 21st-century world, in which the middle classes are disappearing, the new rich are getting richer, and the poor are getting poorer. In many ways, Western imperialism and American capitalism are responsible for the decline in Changez’s family’s fortunes: the local elite that once dominated Pakistan slowly lose their power and influence, first to the British colonists, then to businessmen, many of whom work for American companies. As an undergrad, Changez isn’t too concerned with these realities – instead of being honest about his family, he acts the way his friends expect him to act, hiding his financial situation from them (and, in a way, from himself), and pretending to be sophisticated and “exotic”—which in this pre-9/11 world is a beneficial status for him while still leaving him an outsider. In order to grow into the novel’s narrator, he’ll need to undergo a great change, but for now, it’s unclear what the change will be.*



At the café, the waiter brings **tea**, and Changez says that the Stranger seems suspicious again, refusing to add sugar to his **tea**, or drink it until Changez switches cups with him.

Changez resumes telling the Stranger about his job interview. Jim gives him a difficult problem to solve: he has to value a hypothetical company whose only service is a teleportation machine that transports people from New York to London. Changez is surprised, but uses his athletic experience to calm himself, and goes to work solving the problem. His final valuation of the company is far too high; his mistake, Jim tells him, is to assume that many customers would be interested in a product that reassembles them in another part of the world. Jim adds that **Underwood Samson** excels at seeing through “hyped-up” products like the one he’s described to Changez.

In spite of his mistake, Changez succeeds in gaining a job offer from Jim, since his approach to solving the problem was correct, and **Underwood Samson** will be able to train him to assess companies more accurately. As Changez shakes Jim’s hand, he senses that Underwood Samson will change his life and eliminate all his financial problems, as it did for Jim. Afterward, overjoyed with his success, he shouts, “Thank you God!” in the middle of the Princeton campus.

Back in Pakistan, the Stranger has finished his drink. Changez muses that Princeton changed him, but couldn’t make him forget Pakistan’s **tea**, of which he pours the Stranger another cup.

*The Stranger’s thoughts and behaviors are difficult to read through the “lens” of Changez’s point of view. Changez could be said to switch the cups out of politeness, responding to the Stranger’s discomfort, or an accidental (or deliberate) misreading of the Stranger’s expression.*



*The details of the interview problem bear a resemblance to the details of Changez’s life thus far: like the hypothetical company’s clients, he’s been teleported halfway around the world and “reassembled” into an educated American employee. Though Jim scoffs at the problem’s “hyped up” product, it’s clear by now that many people would be, and in fact, are, interested in being “reassembled” in the United States. Changez’s overestimation of customer interest is one of the earliest indications that his cultural background influences how he conducts work at Underwood Samson.*



*It’s unclear if Jim hires Changez because his approach is correct, as he says, or at least partly because he admires Changez’s background and sees something of himself in him. Underwood Samson’s ability to train its employees to see through hyped up products like the teleporter foreshadows the way it encourages Changez to abandon his Pakistani roots and embrace America whole-heartedly. Young and idealistic, Changez believes that working for Underwood Samson – and, following through on the symbolism of Underwood Samson, living in the United States – will help him and his family because it will change him into a confident, perceptive man, just as it changed Jim. But when Changez yells, “Thank you, God!” in the middle of a secularized American college campus, Hamid implies that Changez is still different from his peers.*



*Princeton and Underwood Samson encourage Changez to embrace America, but in the present day, Changez makes it clear that he hasn’t forgotten Pakistan at all. Meanwhile, the Stranger seems to be becoming more comfortable around Changez.*



## CHAPTER 2

Changez points out a group of young women wearing Western clothing. He says they're attractive, and suggests that they might be students at the nearby National College of the Arts. He contrasts them with the women sitting near them, who wear traditional Pakistani clothing. He observes that one of the young women has caught the Stranger's eye, and asks him if he has a lover, male or female, back in America. When the Stranger shrugs in response, Changez says that he will tell him about his lover back in America, a Princeton classmate named Erica.

Changez meets Erica the summer after they graduate from Princeton. Changez's college soccer friend, Chuck, invites him on a vacation to Greece. Chuck and his friends, including Erica, come from wealthy families, and are members of Princeton's most exclusive "eating club," a kind of social club at Princeton. While they can easily afford to travel to Greece, Changez pays for his trip by cooking his own meals and cashing his signing bonus from Underwood Samson. The group regards Changez as an interesting and exotic friend.

When Changez arrives in Greece, he is so attracted to Erica's "regal" appearance that he offers to carry her backpack. Erica wears a t-shirt with Mao's head on it, and, Changez eventually learns, practices tae kwon do. When he meets her, he's unsure if she finds his manners attractive or old-fashioned.

The Princeton group heads to Greece's coastal city of Piraeus, where Changez sees other men flirt with Erica. One man tries to impress her by playing American pop music on the guitar, but he embarrasses himself, and Erica laughs to Changez about him.

A member of the Princeton group, Mike, tries to woo Erica while they eat dinner at a restaurant in Santorini. He sits next to her and puts his arm around her chair; Erica doesn't ask him to remove it, but, she maintains eye contact with Changez for most of the meal, much to his delight. After dinner, Mike and Erica spend time alone, and Changez finds it hard to fall asleep. The next morning, she comes to breakfast by herself, not with Mike. Changez is relieved, and the two of them eat breakfast together, sharing food.

*Since The Reluctant Fundamentalist is limited to Changez's voice, it's hard to get a picture of the area where he and the Stranger are sitting; the mention of the College of the Arts makes the picture a little clearer. The contrast between the students and the older women suggests that Pakistan, like Changez, is caught between local and Western culture. We also start to get a clearer picture of the Stranger — he's slowly beginning to relax and people-watch, although his apparent shrug when Changez notices his gaze makes it clear that he's still reluctant to open up to Changez.*



*Although Changez recognizes that he's different from his wealthy classmates, his employment at Underwood Samson is already exposing him to richer people and lifestyles. His travel group treats him differently because they recognize that he's exotic, but for now, this "soft racism" doesn't greatly offend Changez because it seems to actually give him certain benefits. His outsidership is interesting to those who are inside.*



*Erica's clothing and interest in tae kwon do suggest that she enjoys the non-Western world, but also takes that world out of context. In a way, she is a "consumer" of the non-Western world without even realizing it. Changez's behavior around Erica represent his feelings toward America itself — he's attracted to her, and becomes conscious of his outsidership in her presence.*



*Even in Greece, Erica and Changez encounter American pop culture, and bond over it.*



*Erica's suitors fail to woo her because they "come on too strong." Changez is clearly smitten with Erica, but he doesn't make his intentions obvious, as Mike does. For this reason, Erica seems to find him more interesting and more attractive than her other friends.*



Erica tells Changez that she'd like to be alone in Greece, writing, but that she isn't good at handling solitude. Changez tells her about growing up with a big family on his grandfather's estate, and Erica replies that he seems calm and peaceful. Changez tries to continue the conversation, but he's soon interrupted by the other members of the group. Still, he senses that he's established a strong connection between himself and Erica, and waits for another time to talk with her one-on-one.

While he waits for another time to be alone with Erica, Changez enjoys his vacation to Greece, especially since he has never seen the ocean, or Europe, before. His biggest annoyances on the vacation, he comments to the Stranger, occur when he sees his Princeton friends spending money too readily, or arguing with the Greeks whose restaurants and hotels they patronize. Since he's been raised to spend money carefully and respect his elders, Changez often feels uncomfortable in Greece. He wonders how it can be that such young, impolite people as his Princeton friends can be some of the most powerful in the world. Still, he tells the Stranger, he may be misremembering or exaggerating his irritation with his classmates, because of his later experiences with the United States.

Changez gradually realizes how difficult it is to catch Erica on her own — she's always surrounded by other people. Although this is because she's attractive and charismatic, Changez also notices that she seems distant, as if she's secretly deep in thought.

Back in Lahore, Changez observes that the Stranger hasn't been paying attention to his story; he's too distracted by the sight of the young women. A bearded man approaches the women, but he quickly moves on. Changez explains that in Lahore, women who feel harassed by men have the right to call upon other people in the crowd for help, and that lewd men who stare at women — as the Stranger is doing, Changez notes — are often beaten up. Then Changez continues with his story.

Changez and his classmates come to the end of their trip on the island of Rhodes, where ancient fortifications against the threat of the East stand alongside modern military forces that serve a similar purpose. One day, Erica sunbathes topless while Changez sits close by. She notices him looking at her, and he blushes. She asks him to accompany her for a swim, which he does. In the water, Erica tells Changez that she likes how respectfully and politely he treats others. In response, he asks Erica, very politely, to join him for a drink. Erica agrees, gently making fun of his politeness.

*Erica doesn't tell Changez about herself, but she's so fascinated with Changez's big family that she can't have come from one herself. Even as he feels a connection with Erica, he begins to see the insecurity behind Erica's charismatic exterior.*



*When Changez wonders how such impertinent people can be so powerful, he's implying that manners — the way we treat other people — have a major effect on politics and foreign policy — how one country treats another, or how the West treats the rest of the world. The fact that Changez is surprised by his peers' behavior, even after four years at Princeton, suggests that he still holds fast to the lessons of his upbringing, but also that his employment at Underwood Samson, which makes his vacation possible, introduces him to a new side of American life. Changez also hints here that he may be an unreliable narrator, that his later experiences may have affected his memory of earlier times.*



*Changez is an insightful observer, and seems to understand Erica in a way that her friends and admirers don't. He may also see some of himself in Erica, since he, too, often feels out of place.*



*The Stranger is "loosening up," allowing his eye and mind to wander. Beneath Changez's casual tone, his explanation of the punishment for lewd men carries a clear threat to the Stranger. It also suggests that the West isn't as "civilized" as it likes to think — the kind of lewd behavior that the Stranger can get away with in America carries strict consequences here.*



*In Rhodes, Changez sees the continued hostility of the Western world toward the East, where Changez is from (The city named "Rhodes" also suggests the historical figure Cecil B. Rhodes, a Western imperialist, and the Rhodes Scholarship he founded, a symbol of Western "soft" imperialism). On the beach, it becomes clearer that Erica likes Changez (she knows he's watching when she's topless). She finds his manners charming, if a little amusing. Like her Princeton friends, she might consider Changez an exotic novelty.*



On their bus ride into Rhodes, Changez notices that Erica is sitting very close to him. In Lahore, Changez tells the Stranger that being in Pakistan, where women wear more clothing, makes men more attracted to women on the occasions when they do see their bodies. Although at the time he met Erica he had already spent four years in America, where women wore less clothing, his Pakistani upbringing continued to make him especially attracted to women's bodies.

Changez tries to make conversation by asking Erica about the men's shirt she's wearing, which is visibly worn. She replies that it belonged to her boyfriend, Chris, who spent some time in the hospital, and died last year. Changez says that Chris had excellent taste in shirts, and Erica agrees — he was handsome, and interested in grooming and dressing himself. She adds that Chris had the appearance of being part of the "Old World."

When their bus arrives at its destination, Erica and Changez have a beer together, and she asks him about Pakistan. Changez tells her about the country's natural beauty, and remembers that he'd have to purchase alcohol through a Christian bootlegger, since it's illegal for Muslims. Erica drinks in his stories, and seems to enjoy them. She says that he must miss home; Changez merely shrugs, since he's enjoying his time with Erica now.

Erica shows Changez the leather notebook she writes in, and asks him to show her Urdu writing. He writes her name in Urdu, and underneath, his.

Erica tells Changez more about Chris. Both he and Erica were only children, and best friends from an early age. Their interests complemented each other perfectly: they both loved comic books, but Chris loved to draw, while Erica loved to write. They kissed for the first time when they were six, and again when they were fifteen. Around the time that they were both accepted to Princeton, Chris was diagnosed with lung cancer. Throughout college, Erica visited Chris in the hospital, up to his death in her junior year. She concludes by saying that she misses "home," and her home is Chris.

*Erica's behavior around Changez indicates her interest in him. Changez's upbringing in Pakistan makes him especially attracted to women's bodies, but also unlikely to act on his attraction. It's possible that this is partly why Erica likes Changez — she knows he's too polite to touch or kiss her. Changez makes clear to the Stranger the extent to which Pakistani culture continues to influence him.*



*Erica reveals her continued feelings for her past lover, Chris — this is also a sign of her obsession with the past in general. From her description, Chris seems as thoroughly Western as Changez is Pakistani. The fact that Erica shares this information with Changez shows that she trusts him, but also, of course, complicates their relationship in that Changez is not competing with out suitors for other suitors, he is competing with an idealized past.*



*Erica is genuinely interested in Changez and his culture, but her interest seems to diminish Changez — he's something exotic for her to consume, not a human being. She seems attracted to the things Changez takes for granted, such as a home and a family, which she feels she lacks. Changez plays up the exotic aspects of his upbringing; his story about a Christian bootlegger seems calculated to elicit a reaction from Erica.*



*Whether or not Erica genuinely respects Changez, she makes an effort to understand him and his culture. By showing him her notebook, she implies that she's willing to share intimate personal information with him.*



*By talking about her dead boyfriend, Erica reveals her feelings for Changez, since she shares personal information, but also pushes him away by implying that she's still in love with someone else. It's as if her love for Chris is an obstacle that she can't get over, even if she'd like to. The "home" Erica misses is the idealized past, which is safe simply because it is idealized and past. Nothing can change or harm it.*



Later, Erica and Changez join the rest of their group for dinner, Erica sits near Changez. Chuck does amusing impressions of his classmates, including Changez. Changez thinks that Chuck's impression of him is too exaggerated, but he finds the other impressions to be perfect. When Chuck asks everyone what they would like to be one day, Changez jokes that he wants to be an Islamic dictator with nuclear weapons. Only Erica laughs, and Changez has to explain that he was joking. Erica tells the group that she aspires to be a novelist. Changez feels as if she's speaking directly to him, even though they're in a large group.

*Even after weeks of living and traveling together, Changez's classmates feel uncomfortable around him because he's Pakistani, making his joke fall flat. At the same time, his joke is somewhat aggressive and implies that he has unresolved resentment about the power of these people and of America in general. Changez, for his part, is still unsure of how to interact with them — he "plays up" his Pakistani roots, but sometimes, he does so too much. This problem makes Erica seem all the more attractive to him. At the same time, it's not clear if Changez judges his peers any more fairly than they judge him. Chuck's exaggerate impressions of Changez's peers may seem accurate to Changez because he sees them unfairly, with their Western qualities heavily exaggerated.*



Changez and Erica aren't physically intimate in Greece, but Erica gives Changez her number, since they're both moving to New York after they graduate. Changez returns to the United States deeply attracted to Erica, and excited to begin his career at Underwood Samson.

*Even after weeks of feeling like an outsider around his Princeton classmates, Changez is still optimistic about living in the United States. There may be impolite people there, but there are also good, respectful people like Erica, and powerful businesses like Underwood Samson.*



Changez notices that the Stranger's mobile phone is ringing. He encourages the Stranger to answer it, assuring him that he won't eavesdrop on the conversation. The Stranger sends a text message instead. While waiting for the Stranger to put his phone away, Changez stares after the women from the National College of the Arts.

*Changez's assurance that he won't eavesdrop on the Stranger he makes him seem even more likely to eavesdrop. The Stranger, perhaps still suspicious of Changez, keeps his communication private. Changez engages in the same behavior — staring at women — that he warned the Stranger about. Perhaps they're not so different.*



## CHAPTER 3

Changez tells the Stranger that he seems uncomfortable, and compares the way he looks around the café to the behavior of an animal that isn't sure if it's predator or prey. He encourages the Stranger to relax and observe Old Anarkali in the afternoon. The gates at either end of the market are being locked, he observes, meaning that no vehicles can enter or exit the area. Although in the newer parts of Lahore, it's better to be in a vehicle than on foot, here, where the streets are usually full of traffic, it's far more convenient to walk. The Stranger seems to compare Old Anarkali to Manhattan, and Changez seizes the opportunity to continue telling him about his early days in New York.

*Changez's comparison seems to heighten the Stranger's anxiety instead of dissipating it. Similarly, his description of the market can be interpreted as alarming instead of relaxing — following Changez's animal analogy, it's as if the Stranger is now trapped in a cage. Changez's observation that walking is better than riding in a car in Old Anarkali reinforces that the Stranger, from the rich, technologically-advanced United States, is out of his element—technology won't do him much good in Pakistan.*





At first, Changez finds New York City to be almost like home, since the cab drivers speak Urdu, it's easy to find Pakistani food near his apartment in the East Village, and the South Asian Gay and Lesbian Association sometimes marches through his neighborhood. When he walks through the street or takes the subway, he doesn't seem out of place; indeed, tourists often ask him for directions. In general, he feels like a New Yorker, not an American. The Stranger points out that Changez's voice is rising; Changez explains that he is often sentimental about Manhattan, even though he only lived there for eight months.

On his first day at Underwood Samson, Changez is overwhelmed by the view from the lobby, located high in a skyscraper. America is truly the most technologically advanced civilization on the planet, he thinks. At times, he is shamed and saddened by the disparity between his homeland and the United States. Thousands of years ago, Pakistan had sophisticated cities, while the Western world was barbaric; in the 21st century, the tables have turned, and the West is powerful while Pakistan's cities are dirty and unplanned. In spite of his occasional shame about his country, Changez doesn't feel Pakistani on his first day at Underwood Samson — he feels proud to be a part of such a prestigious company.

Sherman, one of Underwood Samson's vice presidents, explains to Changez and the five other new employees that Underwood Samson is a meritocracy. The trainees have been recruited from excellent schools and chosen for their huge potential. At Underwood Samson, they'll be ranked every six months, and low-ranked employees will be fired. Changez notices that the other trainees sit up very straight, except for one named Wainwright, who slouches and makes jokes. Changez and Wainwright soon bond over their love of *also*.

For the next few months, Changez, Wainwright, and the other trainees take complicated classes designed to give them a year's worth of business knowledge: computer programs, personal skills, negotiation tactics. The instructors are excellent, and the trainees are tested constantly on their new knowledge. Back in Lahore, Changez says that the Stranger seems impressed with the training program. He comments that Underwood Samson exemplified the professionalism that has made America successful in many different fields: trainees are encouraged to be creative but also efficient.

*Changez makes several mentions of homoeroticism in The Reluctant Fundamentalist. It could be that Changez is gay, or simply that he notices and identifies with other outsider groups in America. Changez distinguishes sharply between New York specifically and the United States in general, almost as if he's since become disillusioned with America but still remembers specific people and events fondly. Though it's still difficult to tell what the Stranger does and does not do, it seems as if he's becoming more invested in Changez's story, asking questions and commenting on his tone.*



*As a Pakistani man in the United States, Changez alternates between identifying with his native and his adopted country. Ironically, working for Underwood Samson (which, by the way, shares initials with the United States) makes him feel like more of an American, but also more of an outsider. He feels as if he's representing his entire country, even though he's made it clear that he's not a very representative member of Pakistani society. On his first day at Underwood Samson, though, he feels like an American.*



*Sherman's explanation of the "rules" at Underwood Samson sounds like the American dream at its finest, promising that talent and determination will always be rewarded, and nothing else (race, background, etc) matters. Always an observer, Changez tends to bond with other people who seem out of place, in this case, Wainwright. Even though their connection is based on feeling out of place in America, Wainwright and Changez bond over American pop culture.*



*Changez's detailed descriptions of his training reflect Hamid's real-life experiences as a young man in the world of New York finance. The training seems to honor Sherman's promise of meritocracy. The Stranger's apparent admiration for Underwood Samson suggests his personal experience with similarly strict training. The parallels between Underwood Samson and the United States become more explicit: both appear to be strict meritocracies whose combination of efficiency and spirit make them hugely successful.*



Changez enjoys the excitement of his financial training. He also feels especially powerful when the firm gives him an expense account — essentially, a promise from Underwood Samson that the company will pay for anything Changez purchases, as long as it relates to business somehow. Suddenly, Changez has access to more money than he ever did in Pakistan or at Princeton. He also notices that his colleagues are diverse and yet alike in many ways. Two of the six new trainees are women, and two, Changez and Wainwright, are non-white. Still, all six are graduates of top-tier American universities, tall, and physically fit. The only other trainee who seems even slightly uneasy with these arrangements is Wainwright, who worries, mostly jokingly, about going over to “the dark side.” Even so, he, Changez, and the other trainees are happy to be working for Underwood Samson, and toast their new careers with expensive champagne.

Later that night, Changez and Wainwright, having gotten drunk with the other trainees on Underwood Samson’s dollar, share a cab back to their homes. They talk about cricket: Wainwright admits that he doesn’t enjoy the game much, and Changez says that the Pakistani team isn’t as good as it used to be. Changez also learns that Wainwright’s father is from Barbados.

Wainwright and Changez are hungry, so they go to the Punjab deli where Changez received a free meal that morning. Speaking Urdu, Changez greets the man who gave him his food, and asks if he ever goes home — not enough, the man replies. Changez insists on paying for his food this time, adding that he has an expense account, but the man apologizes and says that he doesn’t accept American Express. As the other customers watch in amusement, Wainwright offers to pay for both of their meals in cash, which impresses Changez, since in Pakistan it’s a mark of true friendship to buy someone else food. He senses that he’s found a kindred spirit at Underwood Samson.

In Lahore, Changez asks the Stranger why he is recoiling from the beggar soliciting him for money, and wonders aloud what accident could have disfigured the beggar so horribly. The Stranger gives the beggar nothing, and Changez says that he’s right to refuse — it’s better to give to charities, since they address the sources of poverty. Changez gives the beggar money anyway, and the beggar responds by, according to Changez, offering them both his prayers.

*Changez begins to enjoy the luxuries of a high-paying job, luxuries with which he’s had little familiarity up to this point in his life. Underwood Samson is changing his life, apparently for the better. However, Changez begins to notice also that Underwood Samson isn’t as meritocratic as Sherman promised. His colleagues are intelligent and fairly diverse, but still seem to have been selected for other, more arbitrary qualities, such as their looks. As a person of color in a largely white environment, Changez is particularly conscious of the limits of supposed diversity, as is Wainwright, the other non-white trainee. But even if Changez has some doubts about Underwood Samson, they are gathering very slowly — for now, he is proud to be there.*



*The game Wainwright and Changez bond over, cricket, is a remnant of British colonial rule. By laughing at how dull the game is, and how poor their countries’ teams have become, Wainwright and Changez are implicitly laughing at the decline of Western imperialism in their native countries, and bonding over their shared non-Western identity.*



*Even as Changez finds a good friend at Underwood Samson, he begins, very slowly, to alienate the people with whom he once felt a strong connection. From the beginning of his first day to the end, Changez has gone from nervous and humble to proud and a little arrogant. When he first finds the Punjab deli, he feels at home; now, the other customers regard him as a wealthy outsider, not one of them.*



*Though he uses the word “accident,” Changez may be speaking sarcastically, since the beggar might have been injured by an American-sanctioned bombing. Though we cannot know for sure, the sinister or sarcastic undertones of Changez’s comments to the Stranger are beginning to add up, and it’s hard not to hear his contempt for the Stranger’s miserliness, even as he compliments the Stranger for it.*



In the following weeks of training, Changez begins sizing up his new colleagues. Wainwright is laid back, funny, popular, and a clear contender for first place in the all-important rankings. Changez, using his training in competitive sports, works hard to succeed, getting only a few hours of sleep a night. He's pleased to find that his formality impresses his supervisors, instead of alienating them, as it sometimes did at Princeton. He tells the Stranger that his accent, which sounds English, may have given him an advantage at Underwood Samson, since American, like Pakistan, is an English colony, meaning that English accents still symbolize power. He also thinks that his Pakistani upbringing trained him to treat his bosses with respect and courtesy. In either case, he concludes, being foreign was an advantage at Underwood Samson.

Changez notices signals that he is doing well at Underwood Samson. When it's time for the company's yearly summer party, Changez and Wainwright ride in a limousine with Jim, who is hosting the party at his house in the Hamptons, while most of the other trainees ride with Sherman, Jim's junior at work. During the ride, everyone is talkative, except for Jim and Changez. Jim tells Changez that they're both watchful people, a quality which comes from being out of place.

Jim's party is extremely luxurious. While Wainwright enjoys himself, Changez steps outside and watches the waves crash on the beach. He thinks how strange it is that, only a few months ago, he had never seen the sea, whereas now it's a part of the yearly routine of working for Underwood Samson.

While Changez is watching the waves, Jim approaches him, and recalls his first Underwood Samson party at the Hamptons. Jim tells Changez that he felt out of place, but eager to acquire the luxury he saw. Changez says that he knows what Jim means, and Jim pats him on the back and leads him inside for food. Later that evening, though, Changez thinks of Erica, and wishes that she were at the party with him. He imagines that even she would be impressed by Jim's house.

*Changez begins to feel more at home than he ever has in the United States. His politeness and concentration made him seem unusual at Princeton, but here, they are assets. Even so, Changez experiences much of the same treatment that he experienced in college. His colleagues continue to regard him as unique and sophisticated simply because he's from another country, not because of his work. Once again, Changez is conscious of his peers expecting him to behave in a certain way, but for now, he is happy to meet their expectations.*



*Changez and Wainwright's success at Underwood Samson seems to indicate that meritocracy is strong: there is no apparent bias against people of color. Jim tries to establish a connection with Changez based on their shared experiences, yet he knows almost nothing about Changez except that he attended Princeton on financial aid.*



*Even as a young man, Changez shows signs of the self-awareness and thoughtfulness he displays around the Stranger. At this point in his career, all the changes Underwood Samson has afforded him seem to be positive.*



*Jim shows some signs of being romantically interested in Changez, such as touching his back and approaching him while he's alone at a party (much as Changez attempted to do with Erica in Greece). Jim's desire for wealth and power made him successful; he feels close to Changez because he thinks that Changez desires these things, too. But Changez doesn't seem obsessed with luxury; when Jim meets him, he's staring at the sea, not the house, and thinking about his past, not his future. Even when Changez thinks of Erica, he thinks she would be impressed with the house — not that he is.*



When the analyst training program ends, Changez learns from Jim that he is ranked first in his class, and that his instructors admire his drive and energy. Jim advises Changez to nurture these qualities, and invites him to be part of a new project he's working on, which involves a music business in the Philippines. Changez, happy with his performance, meets Wainwright, who is happy to have finished second in his class, and had already assumed Changez would be first.

*Changez's training evaluation represents the height of his happiness at Underwood Samson. He has a mentor in Jim, who continues to believe that he and Changez are alike, and a loyal friend in Wainwright, who isn't at all disappointed to be ranked second. Yet Changez is still unprepared to make his own choices. When Jim asks him to go to the Philippines, he agrees, just as he's agreed to go to Princeton and Greece: because he wants to please others. It will be a long time before Changez is ready to follow his own path.*



While he was overjoyed at the time, Changez tells the Stranger, his world would soon change. He encourages the Stranger to notice how quickly the streets have transformed into a market, and observes that, if they hadn't been sitting at the café for so long, they might think that Old Anarkali always looked this way. Because they know the area's "recent history," they can better understand the way it looks now.

*When Changez comments on the appearance of the market, he is talking about himself. By understanding Changez's recent history, including his time in Princeton and Greece, the Stranger can get a better grasp on the kind of person he is. While the Stranger doesn't yet know what the sudden change in Changez's life will be, he can only appreciate how sudden this change is by learning something about Changez's life up to this point.*



## CHAPTER 4

The Stranger has noticed the **scar** on Changez's arm, Changez says. The scar, which is darker but also smoother than his skin, looks something like a rope burn. Changez says that the Stranger must be wondering what kind of training camp could have given him this mark, but he reassures the Stranger that the scar actually comes from a childhood accident. During Pakistan's frequent blackouts, Changez's family would light its home with candles; once, Changez grabbed a candle and spilled molten wax on his arm.

*Changez's scar is smooth, a traditional mark of innocence, and dark, a supposed mark of evil. In this way, his scar encapsulates the way he seems to the Stranger: his comments could be taken either as innocent or sinister. Changez's explanation of his scar is a perfect example: the Stranger can either take Changez at his word, or believe that Changez has been involved in violence.*



As the sun sets, the merchants selling their products in the outdoor market turn on colorful electric lights, prompting Changez to remember the colors of the Empire State Building at night. While he works for Underwood Samson, he explores the city at night with Erica as his guide.

*Changez continues to find connections between Pakistan and his memories of New York. These connections are usually so forced that it's difficult to tell why he is bothering to make them. It could be that Changez is trying to put the Stranger at ease by linking everything to the United States, or that he is desperate to tell someone about his time there. It could also be that Changez is deliberately stalling for time, though we don't know exactly why.*



Changez's first New York encounter with Erica takes place at her apartment on the posh Upper East Side. Unsure of what to wear, Changez opts for white Pakistani robes and a pair of jeans, reasoning that foreigners aren't strictly scrutinized for breaking the rules of etiquette in America. Even in Pakistani clothing, he feels comfortable on the subway to Erica's house — the only attention of any kind that he receives is eye contact from a flirtatious gay man.

Erica welcomes Changez to her family's apartment, located on the top floor of the building. Changez notices that she looks fit and beautiful. She compliments Changez on his clothes, though she's only wearing a casual T-shirt, and shows him her enormous room, in which, he guesses, she's lived her entire life. Changez feels at home in this new place, partly because he's had to change locations so often in the last four years, and the sight of a long-term home is comforting. He also notes that Erica's home is the socioeconomic equal of the one in which he grew up.

Erica shows Changez an envelope containing a manuscript that she plans to send to an agent tomorrow. She admits that it has been finished since before they traveled to Greece, and compares herself to an oyster: she's dealt with the painful grain of sand inside her by transforming it into a pearl, but now, she's reluctant to let it leave. Changez is flattered that Erica is telling him such personal information, but also notices for the first that Erica seems somehow "broken," and wonders what the grain of sand she refers to was. Even so, he doesn't pry, recognizing that Erica will tell him this information when she's ready.

Changez notices a sketch hanging on the wall in Erica's room; Erica explains that Chris, inspired by the Tintin comics, drew it when he was a child. Changez is reminded of Pakistani miniature paintings.

Erica shows Changez the rest of her apartment, including a terrace with a beautiful view of the city, and introduces him to her parents. Regarding Changez, Erica's mother tells her "Very nice." Changez can tell immediately that her father is an important businessman. He asks Changez if he drinks, and remembers that a Pakistani man who once worked for him never drank; Changez assures him that he does.

*As a foreigner in New York, Changez is able to avoid attention, as he does on the subway, or use the different standards for foreigners to his advantage, as he does when he's dressing himself. His brief encounter with a gay man on the subway implies that he might be gay himself, or that he seems like an outsider to other outsider groups.*



*Changez has worried too much about what to wear, indicating that he's still a little too formal to fit in in America. In the same way that Erica admires Changez for having a peaceful home despite seeming to have one herself, Changez admires the peacefulness of Erica's home, even though he has a home to go back to whenever he wants. The connection between Erica and Changez is strengthening.*



*The "grain of sand" analogy that Erica articulates is a hint that she continues to experience pain from events that happened in the past, to the point where she's come to need and even love her pain: she sees something beautiful as coming from that pain. Changez is respectful enough not to ask Erica what pains her; this is partly what Erica likes about him, though it also means that she remains unchallenged in her obsession with her idealized past. For the time being, Erica demonstrates that she trusts Changez and feels comfortable around him.*



*Erica surrounds herself with relics of Chris, including the drawing and the blue shirt she wore in Greece. Changez tries to find a connection between the drawing and his own experiences, evidence of his desire to find a connection with Erica.*



*Erica's parents' aren't openly rude to Changez, but they seem to treat him differently than they would if he were white. Erica's mother appraises him as if he's an object, not a person. Erica's father immediately assumes that Changez is different because he's Pakistani, though Changez is eager to show him that they are alike.*



Back in Lahore, Changez explains to the Stranger that the attitude toward alcohol in Pakistan is roughly similar to the attitude toward marijuana in the United States: it's illegal, but still popular and available. In Pakistani culture, drunkenness is an important social state. It may be a sin to drink alcohol, but then again, Changez observes, so is coveting thy neighbor's wife. The Stranger smiles.

For the most part, Changez's meal with Erica's family goes well. One awkward moment comes when Erica's father asks Changez about Pakistan, and says that the elite have raped their own home and that Pakistan has a problem with fundamentalism. Though irritated by Erica's father's condescending and quintessentially American tone, Changez forces himself to respond politely, assuring him that his family lives there, and that the situation isn't as bad as it seems.

After dinner, Erica and Changez travel downtown to Chelsea to attend a party at an art gallery. Even though their cab driver is Pakistani, and Changez would ordinarily talk to him, he doesn't do so. Erica tells Changez that she hopes he isn't upset about her father. Changez denies being upset at all, but Erica laughs, and says that he's a bad liar, and touchy about his homeland. Changez admits to being annoyed, and apologizes to Erica, but Erica tells him that she likes that he cares about something.

At the gallery, Changez experiences the trendy, minimalist styles of New York City. Mingling with artists in "outrageous" clothing, he feels relieved that he's wearing Pakistani robes. Erica is surrounded by friends, and Changez is reminded of her magnetic personality. At the end of the night, she kisses Changez on the cheek and thanks him. Changez is puzzled, both because he thinks that he should thank her, and because he feels as if he's spent an intimate evening with her, even though they barely spoke.

Changez accompanies Erica to parties, restaurants, and galleries, but always with other friends. He notices that she seems most thoughtful when she is surrounded by others, and compares her to a child who can only sleep with the lights on. While they don't talk to each other very often, Changez thinks that he is developing a personal relationship with Erica. At the end of every night, she kisses him on the cheek — each time, Changez thinks, she holds the kiss for a fraction of a second longer.

*Changez tries to help the Stranger understand a foreign culture. Pakistani culture, he explains, isn't as strict and authoritarian as an American might believe. There are sins, but everyone is also human, and everyone understands this. That the Stranger smiles supports this idea of everybody understanding that everyone is human, and of that being a potential common bond between people.*



*Changez's irritation is an early sign that he is beginning to dislike the United States, although for the time being he doesn't show or even entirely recognize his feelings. The facile way Erica's father dismisses Changez's country represents exactly the kind of easy generalizing about Pakistan that Changez rejects when he speaks to the Stranger.*



*Just as Pakistan can't be reduced to a blanket statement, the people of the United States cannot be characterized as condescending: some, like Erica's father, are, while others, like Erica, appear not to be. Changez admits his feelings to Erica, showing that he trusts her.*



*For now, New York continues to be a welcoming place for Changez; he doesn't feel out of place in his traditional clothing. He feels closer than ever to Erica, even though they don't speak much at the gallery. Changez also begins to notice that Erica feels the same connection to him.*



*Changez notices more signs that Erica feels close to him. Still, it isn't clear if Erica actually holds her kiss for a little longer each time, or if Changez imagines it. Changez also begins to see Erica's loneliness. The friends she attracts seem almost like a defense she uses, though Changez cannot tell what she's defending against.*



The weekend before Changez leaves for the Philippines to assist Underwood Samson with the music business, Erica invites him on a picnic; he's pleased to find that they're alone. Erica tells him that she and Chris used to go on picnics, but after he died, she stopped picnicking, communicating, or eating, and had to go to the hospital. Her parents encouraged her to forget about Chris and take medication, and since the summer took up most of her hospital time, she was able to return to Princeton in the fall and complete her senior year. Changez is sorry for Erica, and feels as if she is a part of his family. Amazed that someone so physically strong and healthy can be so deeply unhappy, he puts his arm around her, a gesture he thinks about often during his weeks to come in the Philippines.

While Changez is telling the Stranger about Erica, the lights suddenly go out in the café. The Stranger jumps to his feet, but Changez insists that he calm himself; blackouts are common in Pakistan. Changez says that he can clearly see the Stranger reaching into his jacket, and tells him that there's no need to be afraid of pickpockets stealing his wallet. When the Stranger remains standing, Changez stands as well.

The lights return as suddenly as they disappeared. Changez scolds the Stranger for jumping up so quickly, as if he were a mouse about to be eaten by a hawk. He offers the Stranger a Jack Daniels to sooth his nerves, but then, after observing that the Stranger is smiling, he reveals that in fact the only American drinks in the café are sodas. Changez summons the waiter.

## CHAPTER 5

Bats begin to gather in the square; the Stranger says they're "creepy," a word Changez finds delightful, and highly American, though he disagrees with using it to describe the bats. As a child, Changez's father pointed out large, bat-like creatures called flying foxes; Changez associates them with the countryside, and a way of life that can't exist in large cities. Even so, he admits, bats have survived in the city of Lahore by being cunning and predatory — much like the Stranger and himself, he notes. By contrast, smaller winged creatures like butterflies and fireflies, or larger winged creatures like flying foxes, don't survive in big cities because they fly into windows or large buildings.

*At the picnic, Changez finally comes to understand the source of Erica's melancholy and loneliness: Chris's death drove her into depression. Ironically, Erica's parents' insistence that she forget about Chris seems to have guaranteed that she remember him. Like Changez, Erica is adept at disguising her true feelings — while she's at Princeton she manages to conceal her hospitalization. Perhaps connecting with this aspect of her depression, Changez feels close enough with Erica to touch her. It's the same gesture that Mike used to flirt with Erica in Greece, except that Changez seems to have earned the right to use it.*



*Prior to the blackout, the Stranger had seemed to be relaxing and enjoying Changez's story. In the dark, he is anxious once again; the way he keeps reaching into his jacket suggests that he's concealing something from Changez—perhaps a gun, or perhaps he's just making sure he still has his wallet. The way Changez and Stranger each refuse to sit during the blackout indicates that, in spite of their time together, they still regard each other as adversaries.*



*Changez's comparison between the Stranger and a mouse is both humorous and sinister: it's impossible to tell whether he was planning to ambush the Stranger during the blackout or not. When he offers the Stranger whiskey and then revokes the offer, Changez seems both polite and aggressive — a combination that is far more sinister than aggression by itself. If nothing else, Changez's offer seems to confirm that the Stranger really is American — this may have been Changez's goal.*



*Changez continues to imply comparisons between Pakistan and the United States. The flying creatures he names seem to correspond to the different immigrants in the United States. Some are too weak to survive, while others die because their power is actually an obstacle to success. Changez's comparison between himself and a bat foreshadows his disillusionment with loyalty and cooperation, and his adoption of the cunning he exercises on the Stranger. The image of animals flying into large buildings also foreshadows 9/11.*



Changez flies first-class to Manila in the Philippines. He is feeling self-satisfied, a feeling that will quickly disappear, he tells the Stranger. Changez asks the Stranger if he has traveled to the East before; the Stranger seems to acknowledge that he has, and Changez notes that the Stranger is exceptionally well-traveled. He tells the Stranger that he's curious to learn more about the nature of his business, but, since the Stranger seems so eager to hear the rest of Changez's story, Changez will ask him about it later.

Changez expects Manila to be as run-down as Lahore, but instead finds a city with both slums and skyscrapers. He feels defeated and strangely jealous of the Philippines, since it's a non-Western country that nonetheless outstrips Pakistan economically and technologically. For this reason, he adopts a different manner in Manila: instead of playing up his Pakistani roots, he acts as "American" as possible. Filipino businessmen seem to respect Americans almost immediately, and Changez wants to be respected, too. He becomes less polite and more insistent, even when dealing with older businessmen, and begins to say that he's from New York, not Pakistan. The Stranger seems to ask Changez if his changed behavior made him feel guilty; Changez admits that it did, but he kept his shame to himself. In the meantime, he continued to rack up impressive reviews from his colleagues.

The music business Underwood Samson has come to Manila to evaluate is run by a famous, colorful musician who, in spite of his hippie demeanor, claims to have become hugely successful. Changez and his colleagues set to work measuring the profitability of the company. Changez visits the music business's factories and stores, and feels immensely powerful: by deciding how much the company is worth, he's deciding who will be fired and who will stay.

One day, in a limousine, Changez notices a *jeepney* (a kind of public bus) driver staring at him angrily from outside the car. Changez is unsure why the man seems so furious: it could be personal; it could be because he's jealous of Changez's suit and limousine; it could be that he hates Americans. After the staring match is over, Changez looks at his blonde Underwood Samson colleagues and is struck by their foreignness; he feels suddenly closer to the driver than to his colleagues. Changez is so preoccupied with this incident that he finds it difficult to sleep that night. Nevertheless, he is so busy with work that in the days after he doesn't stay up at night thinking about it any further.

*The Stranger's response suggests that he has quickly become comfortable around Changez again. Nevertheless, his apparent reluctance to tell Changez about his business implies that he still distrusts his companion a little, or that his business by definition is something that he wants or needs to keep secret.*



*The way Changez can shift his manner from being "foreign" in America to being "American" in Manila shows how he exists between both worlds, and how this can both be a benefit but also means he doesn't necessarily have a solid sense of who he is. When he is "being American," Changez adopts the impertinent behavior that he previously criticized in his Princeton peers. The Stranger seems to ask Changez a question, indicating his renewed investment in Changez's life story.*



*The president of the music company has gone from hippie to businessman, suggesting the enormous influence of capitalism in recent decades. Changez begins to enjoy the power associated with his job. In this way, he becomes less respectful of others, speaking rudely to them and even fantasizing about firing them.*



*Changez lists three possible reasons why the driver is angry with him; what's more interesting is the possible reason he doesn't list: the driver is furious that Changez, a non-Westerner, has sold out and begun working for a Western company. It's as if Changez is becoming less self-aware as he becomes more and more powerful. Even so, his encounter with the driver makes him feel uncomfortable around his American colleagues — even after making an effort to become American, he still identifies with non-Americans.*





Changez receives many emails from Erica during his time in Manila. The messages, which Changez treasures and looks forward to, are usually short and succinct — in one of these messages, Erica mentions the beauty of tide pools, which seem to be frozen in time. While it may seem odd to derive so much pleasure from such a simple note, Changez admits to the Stranger, his upbringing in Lahore, during which he was often forbidden to see his girlfriends for long, has trained him to enjoy the denial of contact.

At the end of Changez's time in Manila, Jim flies in to evaluate his work. Jim tells Changez that his work is excellent, but he's working too hard. When Changez insists that he gets plenty of rest, Jim candidly tells Changez that he admires his determination, and remembers that Underwood Samson encouraged him to get more rest when he started out. Jim adds that, like Changez, he never admitted that he felt as if he didn't belong in the world of high finance. Changez, uncertain how to answer without embarrassing either Jim or himself, asks Jim why he felt like he didn't belong. Jim responds that he grew up "dirt poor," and that his father died of gangrene. Television gave him an idea of what it was like to be wealthy, but he continues to treat the trappings of wealth with skepticism and disdain.

Changez tries to connect with Jim's sense of outsidership. Though he didn't grow up in poverty, he felt a longing for the prosperity his family had in previous generations. Other members of Changez's family felt a similar sense of a longing: nostalgia. On many occasions, his family's nostalgia led to debt, alcoholism, and suicide. Thus, he feels a connection with Jim: they were both conscious of their family's fortunes, though Jim's family's situation was meager, while Changez's was still in the process of declining. Jim puts his arm around Changez's chair, and Changez enjoys the feeling of sitting with him, both because he thinks that Jim likes him, and because he enjoys the attention Jim receives from the staff of the hotel where he is staying.

Changez hesitates to continue telling the Stranger about his experiences; he says that he is afraid that what he says next will offend the Stranger. The Stranger seems to ask Changez to continue. Before he does, Changez asks the Stranger if he'd like another soda, and, when he seems to decline, signals the waiter, supposedly to bring Changez a bottle. The waiter arrives very promptly.

*Erica's obsession with tide pools suggests her reluctant to move on quickly from Chris's death. Changez's enjoyment of Erica's emails confirms the influence of his Pakistani upbringing: even when he's surrounded by American businessmen, his non-American roots remain strong.*



*With every encounter between Jim and Changez, Jim becomes surer that he and Changez are alike. At the same time, Jim seems indifferent to Changez's thoughts and feelings — he has no idea, for instance, that Changez feels guilty about acting American — and so his connection to Changez seems very superficial. Jim insists that he treats wealth and power with skepticism, even though at the summer party he told Changez that he desired these things as a young man. It's also important that Jim notes the role of television in fostering his ambition — pop culture and entertainment are crucial in furthering America's business power throughout the world.*



*Changez is eager to feel a connection to Jim, and so he focuses on what he and Jim have in common, not their differences. While the sense of nostalgia he names is destructive, leading to death and debt — it resembles Erica's nostalgia for Chris. Jim's behavior around Changez is homoerotic once again — it's the same gesture Mike uses to flirt with Erica, and it's the same gesture Changez uses to show his affection for Erica in the park. Changez seems unaware of any romantic interest on Jim's part, and enjoys the sense of power Jim's friendship affords him.*



*Changez asks the Stranger if he should continue, even though he seems to have decided to continue already. The return of the waiter reminds us that he is paying close attention to Changez and the Stranger, and that the Stranger still seems to be on his guard.*



On his final evening in the Philippines, Changez turns on the television and sees what he thinks at first is a film, but is actually the collapse of the Twin Towers — it is September 11, 2001. Changez's initial reaction is to smile. The Stranger seems disgusted by this information, Changez notes: his fist is clenched. Changez insists that he is no sociopath: he's sympathetic to the sick and injured, and he donates to the poor. Even he acknowledges that his reaction to 9/11 was unusual, and says that he is still trying to understand it himself. Changez explains that he thought of the attack's symbolism, rather than its victims. He is pleased that someone has succeeded in attacking the United States. Changez now observes that the Stranger looks more displeased than ever. He asks the Stranger, if he can honestly say that he's never been happy while looking at TV footage of foreign lands being bombed by American forces. The Stranger responds that America is at war. Changez admits that the Stranger has a point — Changez was not at war with American while working for Underwood Samson. On the contrary, he was enjoying the best that America had to offer.

When Changez meets other members of **Underwood Samson**, he initially pretends to be shocked and upset about the attacks. But soon, he begins to think of Erica, and he no longer has to feign emotion. He is worried that Erica might have been near Ground Zero, and finds it difficult to sleep for days.

The **Underwood Samson** team is unable to fly back to the United States because so many flights are cancelled. When Changez does eventually go to the airport to fly back to New York, armed airport guards take him to a secure room and force him to strip down to his underwear, a humiliating experience. Changez is the last person to board the flight, and when he boards it, other passengers look concerned. Changez feels guilty, and though he tries to act calm, he knows that he seems uncomfortable. Jim asks him many times if he's all right.

When Changez's flight arrives in the United States, he is again separated from the other passengers. An officer asks him for the purpose of his trip to the United States. When Changez responds that he lives in America, and attempts to charm the officer, she insists on knowing the *purpose* of his trip. Changez is then sent to another room and forced to wait for inspection next to a handcuffed man. When the guards have finished interrogating him, Changez finds that the **Underwood Samson** team has not waited for him; he travels back to Manhattan alone.

*Changez's feelings of satisfaction at the destruction of the towers demonstrates that he still considers himself an outsider in the United States, or perhaps even that he didn't realize how much resentment he felt toward the powerful United States for its affect on the world and on Changez himself until this moment. At the same time, his memories of 9/11 seem calculated to enrage the Stranger, and his insistence that he donates to the poor echoes his sarcasm when the Stranger refused to give the beggar money. Similarly, his comparison between footage of 9/11 and the Middle East seems to expose American hypocrisy. At the same time, Changez also seems genuinely confused by his reaction, and wants to talk it out with the Stranger. He admits that he had no rational reason to hate American, since he was wealthy and content, and finds it hard to put into words why he had the reaction he did. The Stranger's insistence that America is at war may be another clue to his identity.*



*Changez feels uncomfortable with America as a whole, but he still feels great affection for individual people, none more so than Erica.*



*After 9/11, other people's attitude toward Changez changes overnight. When he left his foreignness was interesting to people. When he returns, he is made to strip in a secure room, and is nonetheless humiliated in front of his colleagues. Even so, it's not yet clear if Americans will treat Changez differently, or if the change is confined to Manila. Jim's concern for Changez would seem to suggest the latter.*



*When he lands in the United States, Changez quickly realizes that his adopted country has become hostile to him. He fails to use his politeness and charm to escape detainment, signaling that his old strategies for dealing with Americans no longer work. Further, that Jim looked after Changez's feelings when they were in the Philippines but left without him in America suggests the way that Americans after 9/11 become blind to the impact of their sudden distrust of foreigners on the foreigners themselves. The abandonment also makes Changez reconsider just how much he can trust his colleagues and Underwood Sampson to support him in these new times.*



Changez notes that the Stranger is flinching, perhaps because of the bats. Changez assures the Stranger that the bats won't do them any harm; the Stranger replies that he knows. Changez calls the Stranger's tone curt, and notes that the Stranger seems unsurprised by what Changez has told him so far. Changez wonders aloud why this is the case, since they've never met before: it may be because the Stranger has judged Changez based on his appearance; it could also be that he is a good listener, and predicts the direction Changez's story will follow. In either case, Changez concludes, it is time for the Stranger to explain who he works for and why he is in Pakistan.

*Changez's reassurance seems calculated to annoy the Stranger rather than calm him. Perhaps in response to the Stranger's rudeness, Changez presses the Stranger for information about himself that he is clearly reluctant to reveal. Changez demonstrates his suspicion of the Stranger by suggesting that the Stranger already knew about his detainment. Since the Stranger could only have obtained this information from a government source, this is another clue to Changez's suspicions about the Stranger's identity.*



## CHAPTER 6

Changez observes that the Stranger is hesitating to explain who he is, and comments that the Stranger is almost certainly not a tourist, but tells him that he need not reveal his identity if he doesn't want to. The Stranger then seems to change the subject to the table next to theirs.

*Changez acts so casually around the Stranger that he already seems to know who the Stranger is. It is unclear if the Stranger is genuinely reluctant to explain who he is, or if Changez is only imagining his reluctance. Similarly, it's unclear if the Stranger changes the subject, or if Changez does.*



Changez observes the strangeness of having a romantic meal while eating dead animals, and wonders if humans intuitively see a connection between love and death. He remembers being sixteen and driving to buy flowers for his grandmother's death; the car broke down and he was forced to walk.

*The link Changez draws between love and death foreshadows his relationship with Erica. His memories of walking to buy flowers reinforce the unreliability of technology in Pakistan.*



After 9/11, Changez notices a spike in American patriotism. Although in the past New York City had its own unique culture, now he experiences it as being replaced by a national American culture. The new patriotism, Changez feels at the time, has a threatening undertone, as if America is eager for revenge after 9/11.

*New York's renewed emphasis on American culture indicates Changez's growing discomfort in the United States, since in the past he'd enjoyed New York's unique culture. He also senses the danger of this patriotism, though he doesn't yet feel that he is in danger personally.*



Changez meets Erica shortly after he returns from the Philippines. She seems older, he notes, but still beautiful. Erica tells him that she feels depressed, and can't stop thinking about Chris. Her mother suggests that she and Changez go to the Hamptons, but Erica insists that she doesn't want to be alone.

*9/11 worsens Erica's obsession with her past, and her loneliness. As a result, the connection Hamid draws between Erica and America becomes more explicit, as Changez describes the United States, too, as reacting to the 9/11 attacks by delving into its own idealized past and embracing its exceptionalism.*



Changez tells Erica that his aunt went insane and never married again after her husband died, even though they only met a few times (it was an arranged marriage). Erica laughs and says that it's good to have Changez back. She adds that she likes when Changez talks about his home.

*Changez's story appeals to Erica because it includes details, such as the arranged marriage, that Americans would find exotic. Erica feels close to Changez, but she also continues to view him as an exotic novelty.*



Changez is flattered that Erica tells him about Chris, but worried that she will never move past Chris. He neglects to tell Erica that his aunt was once beautiful and lively, but eventually became old and unstable, and fears that Erica will end up the same way. He notes that Erica seems anxious, since 9/11 has brought back old, painful memories, and wonders if the same is true of him.

Changez takes Erica back to his apartment, which is far smaller than hers, and she falls asleep. He is tired, but finds it difficult to sleep. When he wakes up, Erica is gone, having kissed him on the forehead before she left.

Erica continues to invite Changez to parties and fundraisers, where he feels that his poise, education, and employment at **Underwood Samson** impress others. Changez observes to the Stranger that he was entering the elite classes in New York at the same time that his family was leaving the elite in Pakistan.

Changez is attracted to Erica, but feels protective around her. He notices that she seems lonely and introverted in public, and feels a desire to make her feel comfortable. It may have been his protectiveness or his awe at her beauty that stopped him from kissing her, he tells the Stranger.

Erica has found an agent for her manuscript. The agent, who she obtained through a family friend. Despite the fact that the agent is reluctant to try to publish the manuscript because it's short, Erica is delighted at this step in becoming a writer. To celebrate, Erica and Changez go to his flat. They both sense that their time at the flat will be important and exciting, and Changez is nervous.

At Changez's apartment, Changez and Erica drink champagne, and Erica asks Changez if he wants to see a bruise she sustained while practicing tae kwon do. Changez is initially reluctant to see her remove her clothing, but he ultimately agrees. Erica removes her shirt, and Changez notes that she looks paler but also healthier than she did in Greece. He touches and kisses her body, while Erica does not respond in any way. They begin to have sex, but Erica seems uncomfortable, and so Changez stops.

*Changez continues to put on an image of exoticism for Erica, hiding details of his story that wouldn't charm her. Although he begins to realize how serious Erica's depression is, he remains deeply attracted to her, even making an effort to compare himself to her by wondering if 9/11 has made him anxious, too.*



*Despite Changez's financial success at Underwood Sampson, his wealth is no match for Erica's older money. Changez and Erica's relationship continues to be caring, but chaste.*



*Changez is growing more distant from his family and his Pakistani roots. He feels that he "fits in" in New York high society, because of his education and employment, not his upbringing in Lahore.*



*Changez notices Erica's melancholy, and wants to help her. His explanations for not kissing her may be sincere, or they may be attempts to mask his homosexuality to the Stranger, or even to himself.*



*Erica seems to have found her agent by making use of her family connections as much as her talent as a writer. She and Changez sense their attraction to each other, but Changez is more nervous than Erica, since he is inexperienced with women.*



*Erica seems attracted to Changez, as evidenced by her willingness to remove her clothing in front of him. Yet at the same time she is afraid to pursue her attraction to him, since she is still in love with Chris. The discord between her feelings and her appearance has grown even greater, in part because 9/11 has made her remember the pain of Chris's death.*



Erica tells Changez that he is the only man she has been with other than Chris. Since Chris's death, she finds it almost impossible to have sex. Changez, disappointed that Erica won't reciprocate his feelings, but also flattered that she is so honest with him, asks Erica about her relationship with Chris, and she explains that she was so close to him that when he died she felt as if she had lost a part of herself. Erica seems to relax as she talks to Changez.

Erica asks Changez about his experiences with women, and he admits that he never had sex before coming to the United States. He says that he has enjoyed relationships with women, but that they are insignificant compared to Erica's relationship with Chris. Erica and Changez talk until it is morning, and Erica tells Changez that he is good at calming her. They fall asleep, but with only their backs touching.

Changez observes that the Stranger is looking at him oddly. He asks if the Stranger finds his story too intimate or explicit to share with others, but notes that the Stranger seems to shake his head in response. Changez insists that the night is an important one, and that he isn't usually this open.

*Changez begins to understand Erica's feeling for Chris in more detail: Erica is so attached to Chris that she finds it difficult to have feelings for anyone else, even Changez. The fact that Erica begins to relax while she tells Changez about Chris suggests that connection and discussion are valuable ways to deal with grief.*



*Changez admits to never having sex before coming to America; strangely, he doesn't reveal if he's had sex since coming to America – in this way, his sexuality becomes more of a mystery. The closer Changez gets to Erica, the further apart he feels: they sleep together yet apart, symbolizing this paradox.*



*The Stranger may indeed be looking at Changez oddly, or Changez may be conscious of his story's oddness and imagining the Stranger's reaction. His insistence that tonight is important is enigmatic, but his candor with the Stranger suggests that he feels a strong need to share information now, possibly because he'll be unable to do so in the future. At the same time, the importance of this night echoes the sense that Erica and Change had that the night at his apartment after she secured an agent would be important, and thus it may be that the connection with the Stranger that Changez seeks—whatever it is—is similarly tenuous.*



## CHAPTER 7

While living in New York, Changez tells the Stranger, he noticed rapid changes in America, but didn't notice that his own career and his relationships with others were about to end.

In the aftermath of 9/11, America seems to him to become aggressively patriotic and nationalistic. Changez hears rumors of violent attacks on Muslims and Pakistani men in the city, but is convinced that the rumors are merely exaggerations. He tells his family and Wainwright that he isn't worried, since Pakistan has pledged allegiance to the United States. He notes privately that even if Muslims are being attacked, he is wealthy and powerful, and isn't in any real danger.

*Changez the narrator looks back on his earlier naiveté: clearly, he has become more mature and realistic. While it's still not clear why he changes, it seems likely that the change has something to do with hostility he experiences in New York.*



*Changez continues to be optimistic about his relationship with the United States, but his optimism is more obviously selfish and narcissistic than it was previously. In only a few months, Underwood Samson has pulled him away from his roots, so that he feels that he's fundamentally different than the Muslims who are being attacked.*



At **Underwood Samson**, Jim, still very impressed with Changez, assigns him a new project at a cable company in New Jersey. The company has been declining in recent years, meaning that Changez and his colleagues have the unpopular job of downsizing its staff. Changez notices that the company seems to be sabotaging Underwood Samson's work in small ways, such as misplacing notebooks or puncturing tires.

*Underwood Samson's frosty reception in New Jersey symbolizes the world's growing dislike for America and the American economy and culture. Note how the description of the company might also be used to describe Afghanistan or Pakistan, and how "downsizing" can be taken as a euphemism for killing people. Also notice how the people of the company—which Underwood Samson has supposedly come to help—actually resent the Underwood Samson staff. This is another echo of the reception that American troops received in Afghanistan.*



Jim advises Changez not to be concerned. He remembers living through the 70s, when the economy was bad, and seeing the growth of the service sector. He adds, while playing with his watch, that his father worked with his hands, meaning that Jim saw the decline of manufacturing firsthand. He tells Changez that they both come from places that are in decline, and that to be successful, people have to accept change instead of resisting it. Changez agrees with much of what Jim tells him, but finds it impossible to accept that Pakistan is a country in permanent decline. Still, he feels confident that his profession is valuable, and imagines that the acts of sabotage he's experienced in New Jersey are short-term.

*Jim seems to be concerned with Changez's problems in New Jersey, but he talks about himself instead of asking Changez questions. In encouraging Changez to forget the past and embrace change, Jim represents the opposite of Erica's nostalgia for Chris: while Erica obsessed over Chris, Jim seems to have accepted his father's death. His attitude is optimistic, but Changez, whose family fortunes have been declining for generations, cannot entirely share this optimism. Although he continues to agree with most of what Jim tells him, Changez is slowly beginning to resent him, and Underwood Samson, and see that their belief in always looking forward and extreme meritocracy actually blinds them to the ways that these ideas harm the less powerful and less privileged.*



Changez that many of the people who will be fired at the company in New Jersey are middle-aged and older, and can't afford to be fired. When he points this out to Wainwright, Wainwright jokes that Changez works for "the man," but then acknowledges the problem. Wainwright tells him that **Underwood Samson** would make the same business decisions whether Changez worked there or not, and encourages him to "focus on the fundamentals," the slogan Underwood Samson teaches its employees during training. Changez feels occasional guilt at firing people, but for the most part he is too focused on the details of his job to think about the people he is firing.

*Changez finds it difficult to follow Jim's advice and embrace change because he sees the people who change will leave by the wayside. A distance is beginning to grow between Changez and Wainwright: while they're still friends, Wainwright is more adept at dealing with his guilt at firing people, and more eager or at least willing to repeat the slogans Underwood Samson teaches him. Changez implies that the goal of such slogans may be to encourage employees not to feel guilty by distracting them. Hamid also reveals where at least part of the title of his novel comes from: Changez focuses on the "fundamentals," as Underwood Samson tells him to do, but he still feels guilty.*



Shortly after Erica and Changez try to have sex for the first time, the United States begins bombing Afghanistan. Changez sees footage of American soldiers, which the news network describes as a daring raid on a terrorist base. Changez is upset and angry, since Afghanistan is friendly with Pakistan, and neighbors it. He drinks heavily, and when he goes to work the next day, he finds that he can't concentrate.

*Changez begins to resent the United States for attacking his native country's ally. He also begins to see that the American media distorts the truth in order to reinforce patriotism — the raid on the terrorist base strikes Changez as horrifying, not daring. The War on Terror begins to alienate Changez from Underwood Samson.*



In Lahore, Changez suggests that he and the Stranger order dinner. The Stranger says he would prefer to wait until he returns to his hotel, but the Stranger insists, adding that Pakistan specializes in big, carnivorous meals that symbolize the country's aggression, power, and its willingness to do anything to achieve what it wants. Changez tells the Stranger that Pakistan is the sixth most populous country in the world, and that while the United States was still small and weak, Pakistan built enormous buildings. This is very different, Changez acknowledges, than the stories of poor, dangerous terrorists Americans see on the news. He observes that he is raising his voice and making the Stranger uncomfortable, and apologizes.

Changez sees Erica a few days after the bombings in Afghanistan, and notices that she looks pale and nervous, and that he barely recognizes her. She tells him that she hasn't felt so sick since Chris's death, that she is on medication that doesn't make her feel any better, and that she constantly thinks dark thoughts about Chris, Changez, and her book. Changez notices that Erica still has some of her old energy, but it's only visible at times. Erica tells Changez that she doesn't think it's good for Changez to see her so often. Changez is upset and confused.

Changez and Erica go back to his apartment. He tries to kiss her, but she doesn't reciprocate. She tells him she misses Chris, and, for reasons he can't quite understand, he tells her to pretend that he is Chris. They have sex, and Changez tells the Stranger that he didn't feel like himself. The sex is highly intimate, but Erica closes her eyes the entire time, as if she's picturing Chris. As he has sex, Changez feels as if he is penetrating a wound, and at times he imagines that she is bleeding.

After Erica and Changez make love, she tells him that he is a kind person. Changez feels satisfied but also ashamed. Erica falls asleep without any medication. In the coming weeks, Changez tells the Stranger, Erica would come to harm, and at times he feels responsible for it. He notes that the Stranger's expression is unreadable, but that he is probably disgusted. He apologizes for telling him such things, but assures him that their food will be delicious.

*Changez's insistence that the Stranger stay for dinner seems aggressive, especially given his descriptions of Pakistan's aggressiveness. At the same time that he denies stories of Pakistani terrorism, he boasts that Pakistan is very dangerous to its enemies. While Changez uncharacteristically admits to being angry, it's unclear if he is responding to the Stranger specifically, or to his memories of the bombings in Afghanistan.*



*Erica's declining health takes place in the aftermath of 9/11, but it's not clear why she is suffering. She is declining in health fairly slowly, since Changez still notices some of her old charisma. She continues to trust and feel attracted to Changez, but she's also pushing him away, hence her insistence that it's not good for him to see her so often.*



*Changez's lovemaking session with Erica may represent the height of his connection with her. Yet even here, Erica and Changez have to pretend that he is someone else, and this "lie" makes the sex disturbing for him. If Erica can be said to represent America, then Changez only succeeds in connecting with "America" by pretending to be Western — much as he does, one could say, at Underwood Samson. He can only succeed in America if he gives up himself.*



*Erica and Changez feel a close connection, and she falls asleep naturally for the first time in weeks. At the same time, Changez dislikes the fact that he's been forced to pretend to be someone else in order to connect with Erica. In Pakistan, Changez admits, for once, to being unable to read the Stranger's expression — the disgust he imagines on the Stranger's face may really be his own disgust with himself*



## CHAPTER 8

Changez notices that the Stranger is uneasy around the waiter. He acknowledges that the waiter seems intimidating, but says that this is only because he is from the mountains, where life is difficult, and because his tribe has been attacked by American soldiers in Afghanistan. The Stranger asks if the waiter is praying, and Changez replies that he is actually reading the menu. Changez orders food for himself and the Stranger.

Erica leaves Changez's apartment before he wakes up; he doesn't see her for a few days, but eventually they agree to meet at her apartment. Changez arrives, and speaks with Erica's mother, who tells him that Erica needs stability, and a friend, not a boyfriend. Changez is alarmed by Erica's mother's desperate tone, and when he sees Erica, he is saddened to learn that she can't concentrate because of her medication.

Changez asks Erica about her novel, and she begins to cry: she can't find the energy to work on it, or even return her agent's calls. She adds that she finds it difficult to translate her thoughts and feelings into words. Changez tries to comfort her, but Erica doesn't respond, and when Changez leaves, he senses that he has merely interrupted a conversation between Erica and Chris. He does not see Erica for many months.

Changez is unable to deduce what causes Erica's sickness, but thinks that she is suffering from a powerful nostalgia for her relationship with Chris. He feels inadequate for being unable to make Erica love him more than she loves Chris, if indeed she ever did love him. He realizes also that America, like Erica, is becoming obsessed with its own past. He wonders if America's past was ever real, and if there is a place for him anywhere in it.

The Stranger's cell phone beeps, and Changez comments that he has been called exactly every hour. While the Stranger sends a text, Changez points out the chickens roasting on the grill.

*Changez allusion to the American attacks on the waiter's tribe both humanizes the people who are suffering under American bombardment and gives the waiter more motive for possibly disliking the Stranger. The fact that the Stranger can't understand what the waiter is saying reinforces his isolation in Lahore; the waiter and Changez could be saying anything to each other, and he wouldn't understand it. But it also highlights the way that American's stereotype Muslim foreigners.*



*Erica's mother wants stability for her daughter. This seems to be the opposite of what she needs — Erica has been trapped in the past for too long, and needs to move on. The medication Erica takes seems similarly counter-productive — instead of allowing her to move past Chris's death, it makes her days dull and forces her to think back to Chris.*



*Changez feels a great distance growing between Erica and himself. While he is usually good at calming her, he finds himself powerless to make her better. The reason, it is clear, is that Erica is too in love with Chris, too lost in the past, to be accessible to Changez.*



*Hamid makes the link between Erica and America explicit here. Both Erica and America have become obsessed with a past that may be utterly fictitious: it's not clear that Erica loved Chris when he was alive as much as she does when he is dead, or that America was ever the utopia patriots think it was. In the past, when Changez was uncomfortable with some aspects of America, he turned to Erica for comfort. Now, he feels out of place alongside Erica, and in America in general.*



*It becomes clearer that the Stranger is working for a highly organized, regimented company or organization. The sight of the chickens grilling seems to suggest an undertone of violence, or even an implied threat from Changez to the Stranger.*





Irritated with the nostalgia of Erica and America, Changez turns to **Underwood Samson**, which is never nostalgic, since it looks to the future. Because he is desperate for certainty in an uncertain time, he focuses on the fundamentals, and, he tells the Stranger, performs his job as well as he has ever done.

One day, on the street, two strangers harass Changez and call him a “fucking Arab.” Changez is furious, and wants to fight them both, but they walk away. The Stranger asks Changez what the men looked like, and Changez replies that he cannot remember. He sometimes forgets the details of his own story, he tells the Stranger, just as the United States does — nevertheless, his story is more or less true.

One evening, Jim suggests that Changez come to his apartment. Changez notices the large number of photographs of male nudes on the walls, and learns that Jim has no wife or children. Jim asks Changez what’s on his mind, and if it has anything to do with Pakistan. Changez denies this, because he doesn’t want to make Jim think that he’s not loyal to **Underwood Samson**. Jim tells him that he knows what it’s like to be an outsider, and that they can talk anytime.

Changez soon starts to worry that he could lose his job at **Underwood Samson** because he’s Pakistani. Wainwright tells him about businesses that discriminate against Muslim employees, and warns him that Underwood Samson may be firing some employees soon. Still, when he has his performance review, he learns that he is still ranked number one, and is even given a large bonus.

Changez’s happiness about his bonus is limited when he learns that Pakistan might soon go to war with India soon. In December, despite warnings from his mother and father, he flies to Pakistan to visit them, while his Underwood Samson peers celebrate Christmas in America. On the plane, a Muslim man tells Changez that it’s God’s will whether or not the world will experience nuclear annihilation.

*Even with Erica and New York turning away from him, Changez hasn’t yet given up on the United States altogether — he focuses instead on his career, and continues to excel.*



*Changez’s encounter with the two strangers suggests the growing hostility of America to foreigners — previously, Changez thought such racism would never be directed at him. The Stranger seems skeptical that Changez is telling the truth; Changez suggests that the American media distort the facts to confirm myths of American patriotism. Yet Changez also confirms that he is an unreliable narrator — that his experiences have been so powerful that they may have affected his memory of what actually happened, made his memory exaggerate what happened. In this way, the novel grapples with the way that someone’s experiences can cause them to reinterpret their past to make it better fit with their current ideas or beliefs without even realizing. Changez’s offhand comment that the US does the same thing also is meant to provoke the reader to think about the truth of that statement and the implications of it should it be true.*



*It’s possible that Jim is a homosexual, and interested in Changez romantically. While he’s more concerned with Changez, asking him questions instead of simply talking at him, Changez doesn’t respond to his concern, since he’s too committed to Underwood Samson. Jim’s insistence that he understands Changez becomes more implausible, even if he’s sharp enough to know that something is wrong.*



*For the time being, Changez isn’t a victim of racism or discrimination. Still, in this environment—in which he himself has been harassed—Changez can no longer dismiss rumors of racism by thinking that they don’t apply to the wealthy or the educated.*



*Changez finds it difficult to enjoy his work because of the danger his country and his family face. His decision to fly back during Christmas—a traditional American vacation centered on a Christian tradition—reinforces his alienation from his peers. The Muslim’s comments seem to indicate the rise of Muslim extremism in response to the War on Terror.*



The Stranger and Changez's food arrives, and Changez warns the Stranger not to try the yogurt since it is uncooked. Pointing out the Stranger's reluctance, he eats some of each of the Stranger's dishes to reassure him.

*Changez's warning not to eat the yogurt seems calculated to make the Stranger anxious again. He may be teasing the Stranger, or he may be feeling more hostile to him.*



## CHAPTER 9

The Stranger asks for a fork, but Changez suggests that he use his hands, since he and Changez have spent hours together and are comfortable with each other. The Stranger complies and eats his food with his hands.

*Changez justifies dispensing with the fork because he and the Stranger have spent time with each other. That the Stranger agrees to use his hands suggests that he feels trust and connection with Changez, despite some reservations.*



On his trip back to Pakistan, Changez returns to Lahore and initially thinks that the city looks run-down. Then, he realizes that he is the one who has changed, not Lahore: he has become a stereotypical entitled American. He walks around the house he grew up in and notices its beautiful design and rich history, and is ashamed for thinking that Lahore is run-down. He realizes how easily he's influenced by other people.

*American culture and propaganda are so successful that they transform Changez into an entitled American in less than a year. Changez begins to realize that he is an immature man, who lacks the courage to make his own choices. This is the first step in his becoming a more mature person.*



Changez is happy to reunite with his brother, his mother, and his father. Changez doesn't mention Erica to any of them. His brother tells him that he has friends who are fortifying their houses, and his parents seem frightened at the possibility of war with India, though they refuse to discuss it. Even so, at a banquet, Changez's family agrees that India will use a recent attack on its parliament as an excuse to attack Pakistan, and that America will give aid to India, despite Pakistan's aid to America. Changez's relatives are all preparing themselves to face what they believe will be the coming violence.

*After spending time in the United States, Changez is surprised and shocked to see the state of things in his country. His family's description of America's alliance with India begins to convince Changez that, in a sense, he is fighting against Pakistan by working for Underwood Samson.*



Changez feels powerless to protect his family and his country, and ashamed to be returning to America so soon. He asks to stay longer, but his parents insist that he return, and suggest that he shave the beard he has grown in Pakistan. On the flight back to the United States, he notices how many other young men are leaving their home just as he is, and how odd it is for them to be leaving a nation at war instead of staying to defend it.

*Changez wants to stay in Pakistan, but he doesn't protest when his parents tell him to return — he still enjoys his job. His parents seem wiser and more perceptive about racism than he is, telling him to shave his beard, perhaps to avoid discrimination. That Changez grew the beard, though, suggests his sense of re-connection with Pakistan. Changez also begins to think about America in broader terms, noting the harm that the departure of so many young men, himself included, for America does to his own country, and how American soft power lures people from foreign countries to join it even when those people are negatively affected by American military strategy or action.*



Changez asks the Stranger if he's familiar with the military; the Stranger seems to assent, and Changez exclaims that the Stranger has been in the military, as he suspected.

*The Stranger seems almost comfortable with Changez; he seems to divulge that he has been involved in the military, where before he was unwilling to answer any of the Stranger's questions.*



Back at **Underwood Samson**, Changez notices that his colleagues are uneasy around him, since he has not shaved his beard, wanting to stand out from his colleagues. Wainwright warns him that he should keep his cultural difference outside the office, and that Underwood Samson only pretends to be friendly. Nonetheless, Changez refuses to shave, and marvels that America can seem so complacent when it's at war with another country.

*Changez begins to experience racism in America first-hand. At the same time, he starts to lose his best friend in the office, Wainwright. Though Wainwright is non-white, he encourages Changez to fit in at the American office, which Changez pointedly refuses to do. America's complacency at war is a sign of its power, but also the way it is lost in its own past.*



Changez emails Erica, telling her about his anger and guilt, and letting her know that he misses her. Erica replies that she is in an institution, and that he should visit her. At Erica's clinic, Changez meets a nurse, who tells him that Erica has described him as having long eyelashes. She warns Changez that Erica is in love with a dead person, and that Changez is the hardest person for her to see.

*Erica's treatment seems counter-productive. Where she needs to move on from Chris's death, the clinic seems to encourage her to stay the same. It also seems that Erica still thinks of Changez as an exotic foreigner, as evidenced by her description of him having long eyelashes.*



Changez meets Erica, who looks distant and "devout," as if she's been fasting. Erica says she's been thinking of him, and Changez asks her, ironically, if she's been thinking about sex with an exotic foreigner. He begs her to come back to New York, but she replies by telling him about Chris. Changez fights the temptation to tell Erica that Chris is dead, and they say goodbye.

*Erica's religious appearance seems to mirror America's turn toward Christian neo-conservatism during the War on Terror. Changez becomes angry with Erica where before he had been gentle and understanding. He also shows some awareness that, to Erica, he's an exotic novelty.*



Changez becomes increasingly unpopular at work. Jim calls him into his office, and assures him that he doesn't care about the beard, and understands Changez's reasons for growing it. He asks Changez if he'd like to come to Chile for a challenging project involving a book publisher. Changez agrees without any enthusiasm. When Jim asks him for enthusiasm, Changez tries to sound sincere, but Jim looks puzzled.

*Jim becomes Changez's "last hope." Changez is separated from his family, Wainwright, and Erica; only Jim, the representation of pure meritocracy and capitalist success, claims to understand what he's going through. Whether he does or not is unclear, but already, Changez now shows few signs of genuine interest in the sort of success Underwood Samson offers.*



Changez observes that the Stranger has stopped eating. He suggests that they order some desert to accompany the tragic information coming ahead in Changez's story.

*Changez no longer has to find elaborate links between Pakistan and New York as an excuse to continue his story; the Stranger seems willing to listen to it.*



## CHAPTER 10

Changez points out that the Stranger has a bulge under his suit, in the same place where undercover agents conceal their guns. The Stranger readjusts his position, and Changez assures him that he is sure the Stranger is carrying a travel wallet there.

Flying to the city of Valparaiso, Chile, Changez cannot stop thinking about Erica, but he is unable to determine why she can't get over her love for Chris. In Chile, he meets Juan-Batista, the president of the publishing agency **Underwood Samson** is valuing. Changez likes Juan-Batista immediately, and compares him to a grandfather. Juan-Batista, who technically doesn't own his publishing company and dislikes Underwood Samson, asks Jim and Changez what they know of books. Jim responds that he has valued media companies for two decades; Changez says that his father's uncle was a poet, and he loves books. Juan-Batista dismisses Jim's answer, but takes notice of Changez.

Jim returns to America, leaving Changez to work in Chile with another Underwood Samson vice president. Yet while Changez should be working for **Underwood Samson**, he instead watches news about Pakistan. He tells the Stranger that America, though it could have told India not to attack Pakistan, an American ally, pursued a policy of neutrality that allowed India to devastate Pakistan. Changez is also distracted by the city of Valparaiso, which reminds him of Lahore.

Changez begins to fall behind on his work. His supervisor angrily tells him to improve his work, and Changez replies that he will. Nevertheless, Changez finds it impossible to concentrate on work when there are so many emotional and political distractions.

One day as he meets with Juan-Batista, Juan-Batista asks Changez about his father's uncle, the poet. He notices that Changez seems unlike his colleagues, and, when Changez tells him that he likes the city of Valparaiso, suggests that Changez visit the house of Pablo Neruda, the famous poet.

The waiter brings a bowl of dessert, which the Stranger finds too sweet. Changez observes that the Stranger must have traveled far in order to acquire a taste for less sweet foods.

*If one takes Changez at his word, then he thinks the Stranger is only an innocent traveler. However, Changez could also be speaking sarcastically, and be sure that the Stranger is carrying a weapon.*



*Changez immediately likes Juan-Batista, prefiguring his role as a mentor figure to Changez. Juan-Batista also judges Changez and Jim for non-business reasons: instead of "focusing on the fundamentals," he wants to know personal information about his colleagues. Juan-Batista seems to feel a connection with Changez, through humanist or artistic interests that the American capitalist Jim can't fathom.*



*Changez criticizes American foreign policy, and seems to hold the Stranger accountable for some of Pakistan's losses during its conflict with India. In Chile, Changez sense of connection to Valparaiso occurs even as he feels less connected to New York. The things Changez values seem to overlap less and less with what American values or represents.*



*After being instructed to focus on the fundamentals, Changez finally begins to fight against his training and pay attention to his emotions. Hamid implies that America has succeeded by encouraging its citizens to ignore their emotions, especially guilt.*



*Juan-Batista acts the part of a mentor, encouraging Changez to make a journey, to connect with art. It's also noteworthy that Neruda was a leftist political activist as well as an internationally renowned poet.*



*Changez seems to have accumulated much information about the Stranger, even though the Stranger has refused to answer his questions directly.*



Changez visits Pablo Neruda's house, which again reminds him of Lahore. While he walks around, he thinks of Erica, and realizes that he may have failed to make her love him because he lacks a "core," since he has split his attention between Pakistan and New York. He realizes that he was willing to pretend to be Chris because he pretends to be many different things in America. He emails her these thoughts, but receives no response.

*Changez's visit to Neruda's house helps him see himself more clearly: he has divided his loyalties between Pakistan and New York. He has never established himself as himself because he has always tried to be what others wanted or expected. He sees this failure, designed to make himself attractive to Erica (and America), as ultimately self-destructive and resulting in Erica (and America, perhaps) not ever being able to see him as an equal, worthy of the respect or love.*



Changez calls his parents, who tell him that their home is falling apart, and that India is attacking Pakistan, possibly with America's help. Changez's father refuses to accept any money from Changez, but Changez sends his brother his savings.

*Changez tries to help his family from a distance, but with mixed results. It's increasingly difficult for him to pretend that he is loyal to Pakistan while working for Underwood Samson, a company that strengthens America's economic power, and therefore poses an indirect threat to Pakistan.*



Changez continues to fall behind at work. To the Stranger, Changez wonders aloud why his supervisor didn't replace him, and concludes that it must be because he didn't want to.

*It's possible that Changez isn't replaced because, as Wainwright warns, Underwood Samson wants to fire Muslims, and needs a good excuse.*



Juan-Batista invites Changez to lunch. At lunch, he tells Changez that he reminds him of a janissary, the name given to Christians who were kidnapped by the Ottoman Empire during the Crusades and trained to fight other Christians. He notes that janissaries were the most loyal warriors: because they fought to destroy their own civilization, they had nothing left but their adopted culture. Changez realizes that Juan-Batista is correct: he is a modern-day janissary, forced to fight against his own civilization.

*Changez has an epiphany here: he sees him for what he is, in the most general terms. He's been "kidnapped" and taken to America, and then trained to strengthen America, the country that is now supporting India in its war with Pakistan.*



Changez says that the Stranger seems skeptical; he assures the Stranger that Juan-Batista was real, and so was their lunch. He points out that it's unreasonable to question Changez's honesty so late in his story.

*Changez's epiphany seems to come a little quickly, and it's possible that Changez is exaggerating it, or that his memory of it is exaggerated based on future experiences. Changez's point that it's too late to begin questioning his story of course does the opposite and makes the reader want to question every aspect of his story. Could much, or even all, of it have been made up? Does it matter, if the story captures something truthful about Changez's experience?*



Having realized that he is fighting against his own country, Changez tells his supervisor that he refuses to work. Jim calls Changez, and offers him a break, as long as he finishes his work first. Changez feels guilty for betraying Jim, and nervous that he will lose his job and his visa, and thus may never see Erica again. Nevertheless, he leaves Chile and flies back to New York.

*Changez experiences a “last gasp” of loyalty to the United States. He doesn’t want to lose Jim or Erica, but ultimately, he’s more committed to his Pakistani roots. In many ways, his decision to fly away from Chile is the first and hardest decision he makes in The Reluctant Fundamentalist, signaling his growing maturity or finding of his “core”.*



The waiter brings green **tea** to Changez and the Stranger. Changez notes that it is unusual for a waiter to be watching so closely to provide such thorough service, but comments that, then again, it’s late, and they’re now alone in the café.

*The sinister mood is increasing as Changez’s comments again seem to suggest the Stranger’s isolation and that the behavior of the waiter may not be normal.*



## CHAPTER 11

In Lahore, Changez observes that the market is nearly empty. He tells the Stranger that there seems to be an ominous mood in the air, perhaps because they are alone.

*There has been an ominous mood in the air from the minute Changez approached the Stranger in the street. The Stranger may have grown desensitized to the danger as the evening goes on, or he may still be nervous around Changez.*



On his flight back to New York, Changez thinks that he has always disliked American foreign policy. America uses its vast power to manipulate the non-Western countries, and, Changez realizes, finance is one of its most important weapons.

*While Changez insists he has always hated American foreign policy, there is little to no evidence of this in the book up to this point. He seems to be misremembering his own past to agree with his current state of mind: guilt over playing a role, as a finance worker, in American imperialism. This again raises the question of whether one should trust Changez’s story.*



Changez resolves to use his financial training to study American society. When his plane lands, he notices that the airport looks like a military camp, with armed guards everywhere. He is detained at the airport for being of a “suspect race,” and when he returns to his apartment, he mentally thanks Juan-Batista for helping him see America for what it really is.

*Changez refuses to focus on the fundamentals any longer. He has become dangerous to the United States, since he has American training but not American loyalty. His description of the airport shows how militaristic and aggressive he now finds America to be.*



The next morning, Changez wonders how he will support himself without a job or a work visa. He is nervous about facing Jim, and wonders about his self-imposed loyalty to Erica. When he goes to **Underwood Samson** for the last time, he feels confused but determined.

*Although Changez has decided he cannot work at Underwood Samson, he continues to be unsure of his identity. Although he continues to have feelings for Erica, he recognizes that his loyalty to her is self-imposed, rather than part of a mutual love with her. At this stage, he seems unsure what he is but sure of what he is not.*



Security guards escort Changez through **Underwood Samson's** offices, ignoring the beautiful view of New York. He has a brief, tense meeting with his supervisors, who explain that he is fired. Afterwards, he speaks with Jim, who looks tired. Jim explains that he feels no guilt about firing Changez, but that he likes him, nonetheless. He adds that he can tell that Changez is going through hard times, and if he needs someone to talk to, Jim will buy him a beer. As Changez is marched out of the building, his old colleagues look at him uneasily. Wainwright shakes his hand and says goodbye.

As Changez leaves the building, he wipes his eyes. He feels as if his world has ended, and walks home, conscious of his appearance to New Yorkers. He drinks, and calls his brother to explain that he's been fired, no longer has a work visa, and will have to come home. Changez's brother encourages him to stay in America, but when Changez says that he has no choice, he assures him that their family will take care of him. Changez thinks about how *he* had wanted to take care of *them*.

Changez notices that the Stranger's glass has been empty for a while. He signals for the bill, and once again the waiter comes immediately. The Stranger seems to offer to pay half, and Changez insists that in Pakistan, people either pay for all or none of a meal.

Changez is unsure whether or not to see Erica once more before leaving for Pakistan. He tries to email her, but Erica's inbox is full. He goes to her clinic, where he learns that Erica mysteriously vanished shortly after he last saw her. A nurse tells Changez that, toward the end of her stay, Erica wanted to be alone. One day, the nurses found her clothing on high rocks over the Hudson river. The nurse says that Erica's remains haven't been found, but that she had been saying goodbye to everyone. Changez cannot imagine Erica killing herself.

*Changez ignores the views of New York that dazzled him on his first day at Underwood Samson: he is not as naïve and impressionable as he was only a year or so ago. He realizes how deeply he has alienated his colleagues at Underwood Samson: guards escort him at all times, much as guards detain him at the airport. In part, Changez is the victim of American prejudice and racism, and in part, he has deliberately encouraged hostility by growing his beard and refusing to do his work. While Jim is too good a businessman to hesitate in firing his former protégé, he reveals the extent of his connection with Changez, offering to listen to his problems. The fact that he offers to do so over a drink — a traditional mating ritual, after all — suggests, one final time, that his interest in Changez may have been at least partly romantic.*



*Changez has become disillusioned with the United States; where once he felt like a part of New York, he now feels out of place. Although Changez feels ashamed for not being able to support his family, his decision to return to Pakistan represents personal growth, since he is no longer acting on behalf of other people, whether Underwood Samson executives or his own family.*



*The Stranger's explanation of the etiquette of payment differs from the earlier explanation he gave about Wainwright's offer to pay for his food at the Punjab deli. This suggests that he distorts information to suit his story, or, alternately, that he is attempting to develop a close friendship with the Stranger, as the custom of paying for another's food supposedly represents. The waiter's attentiveness seems possibly sinister; he's watching Changez and the Stranger very closely.*



*The clinic explains Erica's disappearance almost casually — it's not clear why Erica was allowed to wander off by herself if she had serious mental problems, and had been saying goodbye to her friends. Hamid suggests that Western medicine and science aren't as effective as they're sometimes said to be, and that Western society isn't compassionate. Changez refuses to believe that Erica is dead, perhaps because he continues to love her.*



Changez drives to see Erica's mother, who wears no makeup. She tells him, quietly, that she hasn't heard anything from Erica. She adds that Erica found Changez dashing with his beard, and gives him a copy of Erica's manuscript.

*Erica's mother is kind to Changez, but not warm. It's as if she is partly to blame for encouraging Erica to bottle up her emotions. The fact that Erica found Changez "dashing" suggests once more that she's attracted to him in part because he's exotic.*



Changez spends the next week waiting for a call or message from Erica, and revisiting places they visited. Some of these places he's unable to find, and others seem to have changed. After a week of waiting, he reads Erica's manuscript, and is surprised to find that it is not autobiographical or tragic, but rather an optimistic story about a girl trying to survive on an island. Changez realizes that Erica has chosen not to be a part of his life because her own is too compelling. He resolves to return to Pakistan as soon as possible.

*Erica's manuscript had seemed to be a window into her inner turmoil, and a way for her to express her feelings. Surprisingly, reading her manuscript doesn't give Changez any new insight into her love for Chris or her loneliness: Erica remains a mystery to him. Although at first Changez refuses to accept that Erica is dead, he accepts that he and Erica will remain separate, and finally accepts his return to Pakistan.*



Changez spends his final days in New York angry and emotional. He notices racism and American imperialism everywhere. America's belief in its own superiority, he tells the Stranger, hurts the rest of world, including Pakistan, and hurts America itself.

*Changez sees New York, as if for the first time. In part, the city seems more overtly hostile to him because of the influence of 9/11; in part, it seems different because his state of mind has changed.*



Resolving to stop America as best he can, Changez boards a flight to Pakistan. He thinks of his time with Erica, and the cliff where she may have killed herself. He leaves his jacket on the ground at the airport as an "offering" to Erica, who he imagines must be very cold, wherever she is. As he flies away, he sees that his jacket has been mistaken for a security threat.

*Changez continues to treat Erica as a person, despite evidence that she might be dead. Nevertheless, the way he thinks of Erica seems different from the way Erica thinks about Chris: while Erica keeps Chris's shirt, Changez leaves his jacket. She hoards her memories as a kind of safety against the world and never leaves it; he gives up his protection against the cold as a gift to her even as he moves on. And, of course, American security forces interpret this gift he has given as a security threat.*



The Stranger seems to ask Changez what he did to stop America. Changez assures him that he will answer this question, but offers to escort the Stranger back to his hotel, the Pearl Continental. He assures the Stranger that Lahore has little petty crime, and adds that they are both powerfully built, meaning that they'll be safe on their walk through the streets.

*Changez admits that he tries to stop the United States, but whether he does so by peaceful or violent means remains unclear. His assurance that he and the Stranger are strong isn't completely reassuring: there's an implied threat, since he suggests both that they might need to be strong to ward off some threat, and that he's strong enough to fight the Stranger.*





## CHAPTER 12

Changez notes that the Stranger has noticed that the waiter is walking close behind them as they make their way to the Stranger's hotel. Changez urges the Stranger to concentrate instead on the architecture of Lahore. He points out the family-owned businesses as they walk, but he admits the Stranger is right that the gun store is not family owned. Changez criticizes the recent buildings, and compares the walk he and the Stranger are taking to Ihabod Crane's in [The Legend of Sleepy Hollow](#). He observes that the Stranger dislikes this comparison and seems nervous, so he changes the subject.

Changez arrives in Pakistan, and finds himself unable to stop thinking about Erica. He imagines what it would be like if she came to live in Pakistan while he taught classes. He also finds himself seeing objects in the way Erica would see them, noting the beauty in small, insignificant things. Changez pays to receive the Princeton alumni magazine in case they publish news about Erica's manuscript, and sends Erica letters that are always returned unopened. He realizes that Erica has changed him deeply, and points out that the Stranger is looking at him as if he's insane.

Changez's brother marries soon after Changez arrives in Pakistan, which leads his parents to wonder about his romantic prospects. His mother asks him if he is gay, but though he says he is not he doesn't tell her about Erica. He assures the Stranger that he doesn't really expect Erica to come back to life, but also that he doesn't feel any need to marry another person.

*The waiter may be following the Stranger, and so Changez's suggestion that the Stranger ignore him only makes him more anxious. The proximity of gun stores further builds the mood of danger. It's unclear how aware Changez is of the effect his words have on the Stranger. The reference to Ihabod Crane is interesting, as Ihabod believed he was being followed by a ghost meaning him harm, but in the story it is implied, without ever being said outright, that in fact the "Headless Horseman" was another man playing a prank. The same uncertainty about the nature of those following is at play here.*



*Changez may have given up on the United States, but he can't deny that his time in America has changed who he is. By the same token, he accepts that he and Erica will never be together, but he continues to love her, and recognizes the huge influence she's had on his personality. Changez tries to explain himself to the Stranger, but based on the Stranger's expression, he believes that he has failed.*



*That Changez's parents think he might be gay reinforces how much of an outsider he's become in his own society as well as in America. Changez's obsession with Erica mirrors Erica's obsession with Chris. In the past, Changez has criticized America for its nostalgia for a mythic past; here, he seems to be guilty of exactly this nostalgia, even if he denies it.*



Changez observes that the Stranger seems anxious, and assures him that the loud sound they've just heard is not a gunshot, but merely a motor starting. The Stranger seems to point out that there are people following them; Changez acknowledges that there are people behind him, and denies that he is signaling them; he adds that the people following them may be as frightened as the Stranger is. The Stranger sends a text message, and Changez points out that since they're near the hotel, he should finish his story quickly.

*So far, the Stranger has been unsettled by things he sees -- things which Changez explains away, often by citing Pakistani custom. Now that the Stranger hears an unsettling sound, Changez's explanation is even less convincing; there are many reasons why the waiter might seem angry with the Stranger, but only so many sounds that resemble a gunshot. Changez's insistence that he doesn't know the group walking behind them only suggests that he does know them. At the same time, he raises the possibility that the group is as afraid of the Stranger as he is of them; this implies that the group, and perhaps Changez, too, is no threat to the Stranger, or is following in order to protect Changez from the Stranger. It is irritating that Changez rushes the end of his story; The Reluctant Fundamentalist has been a novel about a young man who grows up, but Changez seems to be unconcerned with explaining what he has grown up to be in much depth. Perhaps, though, this is because he doesn't know yet. Perhaps, in fact, this encounter with the Stranger will help to determine who Changez becomes.*



The tensions between India and Pakistan increase, and international businesses begin to leave Pakistan. The war in Iraq is about to begin. Changez notes that the common thread of both conflicts is America's war against terrorists. Terrorists, he observes, are merely non-American allies.

*Changez paints a picture of the dividing line between America and the rest of the world; according to the United States, anyone who doesn't support their war on terror must be a terrorist. Since Changez criticizes America and its foreign policy, he falls under this definition of terrorist. The point Changez seems to be making is that it doesn't matter what he does; America has already made him a terrorist.*



Changez gets a job lecturing at a university. His training at Princeton and **Underwood Samson** makes him an excellent, popular teacher. He begins to lead protests against the United States, and his demonstrations get him thrown in jail and beaten up. His arrest makes him even more popular with political-minded students. He devotes long hours to mentoring these students.

*Changez acts the part of a double agent— he learns American business strategies, and then uses them to teach Pakistan to fight American imperialism. His devotion to opposing the United States is obvious, making it plausible that he uses violence to do so.*



Changez admits that not all of his students are perfect, but assures the Stranger that he does not condone or encourages violent behavior of any kind. He remembers a student of his who was arrested recently for plotting to assassinate an American official who was involved in sending aid to Pakistan's poor. Changez notes that the Stranger seems not to believe him, but he maintains that he is telling the truth.

*Changez's insistence that he doesn't use or encourage violence may or may not be true. It's impossible to know. At the same time, it's not clear what Changez's student accomplishes, and in fact, he may have hurt Pakistan by killing the welfare official. Changez may not support such pointless acts, though it's possible that he does. In either case, whatever connection has grown between Changez and the Stranger is disappearing rapidly; the Stranger refuses to believe Changez.*



Changez realizes that he may have turned to politics because he wanted to draw attention to himself in an irrational attempt to win Erica's attention. His friends and colleagues warn him that America might send someone to intimidate him or hurt him, and he muses to the Stranger that he has been expecting someone to come for him.

Changez notes that the Stranger appears not to be listening to his story. Instead, he is looking over his shoulder at the group of people, including the waiter, following them. Changez admits that the waiter looks grim, but assures the Stranger that no one means him harm. He adds that the Stranger shouldn't assume that all Pakistani people are terrorists, just as he, Changez, shouldn't assume that all Americans are spies. Changez says that he and the Stranger must say goodbye, and points out that the waiter is shouting to tell him to detain the Stranger. He notices that the Stranger has again buried his hand in his jacket. He remarks that he and the Stranger are intimate, and hopes that the Stranger is only reaching for his business cards.

*Changez reveals that in a sense, he's still in love with Erica, and implies that he may have turned to opposing America (either violently or peacefully) because of Erica. More generally, this suggests that America has created Changez the anti-American activist: it has used him, scapegoated him, made him feel lost in the world by separating him from his home country, then revoked his visa and sent him back to Pakistan. Changez reveals why he has seemed to know who the Stranger is and what his mission is all along — he has been expecting an American secret agent to come for him.*



*This final scene is highly open to interpretation, and captures the ways that the Stranger and Changez and the other Pakistani's in the group following might fall prey to misinterpretation of each other. Changez has told his life story to the Stranger; the Stranger, who may possibly be a spy, may or may not believe that story. Meanwhile, the people following Changez may be following in order to attack the Stranger, or to protect Changez from the Stranger. And the Stranger may himself be trying to decide whether he should attack Changez or not, while Changez may be trying to determine the same thing about what he should do to the Stranger. By creating this moment of interpretation and misinterpretation, in which it is impossible for the characters or the reader to know the truth, in which Changez has told a story that implicates the United States in creating its own enemies out of people who loved it, Hamid plunges the reader into an experience that is almost real-world in its complexity, and that merges the themes of human connection, racism and fundamentalism, coming of age, and American imperialism in a single defining moment. Changez and the Stranger each have their histories up this point, now in this moment they will act, and that act will define them, as friends, as a spy, as a terrorist. That the novel ends before this act of becoming takes place forces the reader to grapple with all of these complex strands, to recognize that the American vs. Terrorist dichotomy imagined by Americans is not so simple, that terrorists and friends are made in moments like this, and the balance between the two can be vanishingly slight.*





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