

# **And the Mountains Echoed Study Guide**

**And the Mountains Echoed by Khaled Hosseini**

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# Plot Summary

Abdullah and his sister, Pari, are traveling to the neighboring town of Kabul with their father, Saboor. He tells them the story of a monster who demands that a family give up one of their children. If the family refuses, the monster will take all the children. The father draws names to decide which child will be sacrificed and the monster takes that child. The father, driven by grief, goes to the monster's lair to fight the beast. There, he discovers the child is happy and healthy but he has to decide whether to retrieve the child, pulling him back into a life of hardship, or leave him to live his happy life apart from his family. The father chooses to leave the child, believing that's the best thing for the child though the father is heartbroken.

The family arrives in Kabul and the reader learns the purpose behind Saboor's story. Saboor is unable to buy the necessities for his family and one child has already died because of the brutal winter without adequate heat in the house. Saboor has agreed to sell Pari to Nila and Suleiman Wahdati, a wealthy couple who are unable to have children of their own. The adoption is coordinated by the brother of Pari's stepmother. His name is Nabi and he works for the Wahdatis. Abdullah and Pari are very close and they are heartbroken at the separation.

Pari eventually comes to believe the Wahdatis are her biological parents. When Suleiman has a devastating stroke, Pari and Nila move to Paris and Pari is told her father has died. Actually, he lives for many years and Nabi cares for him. When Suleiman dies, Nabi inherits the house and property from Suleiman but the wealth is more than he needs. He lends the house to several people who volunteer in various capacities, helping the people of Kabul. One of them is a surgeon named Markos.

Markos is from Greece and he grew up with his mother, a school teacher who felt strongly that people should be treated fairly. When his mother's friend shows up with her daughter, Markos is excited to meet her. Then he discovers that the daughter, Thalia, has been brutally deformed by a dog attack. A large section of her lower face is literally missing. They are uneasy with each other at first but come to be best friends. Talian encourages his love of photography and Markos eventually becomes a surgeon.

Markos works in a hospital where a young girl named Roshi is in need of plastic surgeries. Two young men who grew up in the neighborhood return to Kabul in an effort to reclaim their family's property. They are cousins named Timur and Idris. Idris, caught up in the moment, promises to help get the girl's surgeries but fails to follow up. Timur eventually steps in and helps. He has loaned money and provided support for many people, including lending Abdullah the money to open a restaurant in the United States. He marries a woman named Sultana and they have one daughter, named Pari in memory of Abdullah's lost sister.

Back in Abdullah's home town of Shadbagh, a war lord has taken over control. He has built schools and helped the town grow and prosper, but he is brutal. Abdullah's half-brother, Iqbal, returns to Shadbagh to reclaim his family's home only to find the war lord



has built a gaudy mansion on the property. Iqbal's son, Gholam, meets the war lord's son, Adel. The two seem on the way to forging a friendship until Gholam announces the true reason his family is in the area. Adel doesn't initially believe it but realizes Gholam is telling the truth after Iqbal makes a public demand for justice. Adel's father apparently kills Iqbal and the rest of the family leaves.

As Nabi nears the end of his life, he writes a letter to Markos, who is living in Nabi's house. Nabi tells Markos about Pari's adoption and asks that he find her after Nabi's death. Markos does track Pari down and she learns the truth about her biological family. By then, Sultana has died and Abdullah's mind has withered to the point that he doesn't remember her. Pari makes the trip to America anyway and reconnects with her niece, also named Pari. As the book comes to a close, Abdullah's daughter and sister meet in Paris where the young Pari prepares to meet her cousins for the first time.



# Chapter 1, Fall 1952

## Summary

Chapter One, Fall 1952, opens with Saboor agreeing to tell his children a story. The two children are Abdullah and his younger sister, Pari. Saboor warns from the beginning that he will only tell one story because Saboor and Pari will be going on a trip the following day.

Saboor tells the story of a time when “divs and jinns” roamed the land. There was a farmer named Baba Ayub who had to work hard to provide for his family. The land is inhospitable and the people have difficult lives. Baba Ayub has several children but he loves his three-year-old son, Qais, above the rest. One day, a div arrives and demands that Baba Ayub hand over one of his children. Baba Ayub knows the monster will take all his children if he doesn't give up one of them. He randomly chooses a name and, though heartbroken, puts Qais outside for the div to take. The Div takes the child and leaves. Life becomes better for the people of the land but Baba Ayub can't stop thinking about his son. He finally travels to the land of the Div, though he knows he will likely die.

Once he reaches the Div's castle, he discovers that the children taken from homes all over the land are living happy, healthy lives. Baba Ayub is then forced to choose between leaving Qais in this happy life or taking him back home. He decides to leave his son behind. The Div gives Baba Ayub a magic potion to help him forget his heartache over his loss, but sometimes Baba Ayub can still almost remember that there's someone missing from his life.

## Analysis

There is a great deal of imagery and some important details in the story of Baba Ayub. Saboor tells the story to his own two children, and it's obvious that he loves them both very much though he is not a demonstrative person. Saboor is known for telling his stories and he often makes them up on the spot. It seems this might be the case with this story because Saboor is apparently dreading the trip to Kabul and the fact that he's about to leave one of his children behind.

In the story, Baba Ayub works very hard. The life is difficult for all the people but Baba Ayub is not afraid of working as he struggles to take care of his children. This is also true in Saboor's own life. He travels around the region, taking manual labor jobs, in an effort to provide for his family. Despite his efforts, his infant son died during the winter, one of the typical casualties of the bad weather. Saboor can't afford to buy a stove to keep his family warm during the winter months. There's little doubt that he feels he has failed to care for his family and that he is struggling to figure out a way to change that.

Also in the story, Baba Ayub has a favorite child. Saboor will father only four children and his interaction with the others is never revealed. He seems hurt that his infant son



died but the reader doesn't see the depth of this hurt. It does seem, however, that Pari is a beloved daughter and that Saboor likely feels more protective of her than of Abdullah, his son. Baba Ayub travels to the dangerous land ruled by the Div in an effort to get his son back, but is faced with a serious decision. He has to decide whether to take the child back to his life of poverty and hardship or allow him to live in a happy, healthy place. Baba Ayub leaves his son and this seems to point to the fact that Saboor is trying to do what's best for all his family, including Pari. He believes that she will live a happier life with all the perks of wealth, and that does turn out to be the case.

Baba Ayub believes he should have fought the Div rather than giving up his son. The Div says that's a foolish notion, because then Baba Ayub would have lost all his children rather than just one. The Div says that a weak man would have refused to choose, and that a brave man sees that giving up one child to save the others is the right thing to do. Saboor is obviously trying to come to terms with his decision to sell Pari in order to make enough money to support the rest of his family.

The final important point of the story told by Saboor is that Baba Ayub earns a magic potion from the Div for choosing to leave his son behind. Once he drinks that potion, his heartache disappears though he sometimes feels an ache for something that seems to be missing from his life. Saboor tells Abdullah that the magic potion was a reward for making the right choice. However, neither Abdullah nor Saboor will have a magic potion that will help them forget Pari was part of their family. The depth of their devotion and heartache is seen in later chapters. Abdullah keeps Pari's prized possession – a tin box filled with feathers – for decades. Saboor chops down a mighty oak tree that Pari played on and that apparently reminds Saboor of his lost daughter.

## Discussion Question 1

Describe the story of Baba Ayub.

## Discussion Question 2

List at least three comparisons between the story of Baba Ayub and the events taking place in Saboor's life.

## Discussion Question 3

What is life like for Baba Ayub and his family?

## Vocabulary

meager, consumed, desolate, eke, repute, patriarch, stringent, aversion, quest, palaver, benevolence, dervish



## Chapter 2, Fall 1952

### Summary

In Chapter Two, Fall 1952, Saboor sets out for Kabul the following morning with Pari. Abdullah refuses to be left behind. Saboor hits Abdullah and throws rocks at him, but Pari cries out for her brother and Abdullah continues to follow. Saboor finally gives in and allows Abdullah to go along. During the early part of the trip, Abdullah finds feathers and gives them to Pari. She has a tea tin box at their home in Shadbagh where she keeps the feathers she finds.

Abdullah lives with his father and Parwana, his stepmother. His mother died giving birth to Pari. His half-brother, Omar, was one of three babies who died two winters earlier. He now has another half-brother, Iqbar. Abdullah knows Saboor blames himself for Omar's death, believing he needs to earn more money in order to provide for his family. Abdullah's perception of his father is of a "closed off man" who sometimes opens up to tell stories, including tales passed down by his grandmother.

Abdullah believes they are traveling to Kabul because his father has a construction job there, arranged by Parwana's brother, Nabi. Nabi works as chauffeur and cook for a wealthy couple named Nila and Suleiman Wahdati. As they travel, Abdullah asks if he will be allowed to help with the work. Saboor agrees and says that Pari will be in charge of making sure they have plenty of water to drink. The trip lasts more than a day and they have to spend the night in the desert. Abdullah wakes to find Saboor gone from the camp and he is afraid until Saboor returns. Abdullah begs Saboor to promise he won't leave Abdullah and Pari. Saboor hushes Abdullah but doesn't make the promise.

They arrive in Kabul and Saboor buys food for the children. Nabi arrives in the car and gives them a ride to the Wahdati's home. The house is huge with a landscaped garden and many fruit trees. They go inside and Abdullah is immediately aware that he's very dirty, especially when he's seated on the fancy furniture. Nila Wahdati does most of the talking, giving the children cookies. Abdullah recalls a time when Nila visited his house with Nabi, and that she seemed out of place though she tried to be nice. Parwana is silent and obviously embarrassed during the visit. It's during this visit that Nila holds Pari for a few minutes.

In Kabul, Nila recites a piece of poetry and says it must have been written for Pari. Nabi says Nila is "an accomplished poet." Then Nila says she wants to take Pari and Abdullah to the bazaar while Suleiman shows Saboor the place where he'll be doing some work behind the house. Abdullah has a flash of fear and wishes they could leave. Saboor tells them to go with Nila. Nabi drives them and Nila asks many questions about their lives.

At the bazaar, Nila buys new sneakers for Pari and offers to buy Abdullah a pair as well. Abdullah has realized that Nila intends to keep Pari. He doesn't voice that thought, but



begs Nila to change her mind. Nila says she understands Abdullah's concern but says he will someday see this is the best course of action.

Back in Shadbagh, Abdullah has winter clothes, including a coat and boots, and there is a stove in the family's house. Abdullah recalls his father forbidding him from crying and Abdullah is surprised when no one in the village asks about Pari. Pari's dog, Shuja, whines as he searches for Pari until one day he simply vanishes. One day, Parwana says that "it had to be her" and that she's sorry for Abdullah's grief. Abdullah remembers Pari's screams as Nabi took her from the room and wishes for a magic potion to erase Pari from his memories. He knows that there is nothing left for him in Shadbagh and he will soon leave the village as well.

## Analysis

Parwana is sometimes kind to Abdullah and Pari but Abdullah knows that she is more devoted to her own biological children than to her stepchildren. He also believes any acts of kindness on Parwana's part is because she feels a sense of duty rather than love for Abdullah and Pari. He says that he and Pari are "another woman's leftovers" and that the situation was beyond anyone's control. It seems that he doesn't resent Parwana for her attitude and that he simply accepts that this is an irrefutable fact of life. This becomes a theme seen in the book as Parwana struggles to be a stepmother to Abdullah and Pari but can never quite make the connection seen in a biological relationship. A similar relationship is seen between Pari and Nila, the woman who adopts Pari and raises her as her own.

Abdullah's devotion to Pari stretches beyond seeing to her physical needs. He is also concerned about her emotional well-being and her happiness. Pari loves feathers and she has a tea tin at home that holds her collection of feathers. One day, Abdullah learns that there is a family with peacocks in a neighboring town. He walks there and, after some haggling, trades his shoes for a peacock feather. His feet are ragged by the time he reaches home and he knows he's going to be in trouble because the shoes were his only pair, other than some sandals, and the family has no money to buy new ones. Still, he counts it worth the cost because he sees Pari's excitement over the new feather.

There is an oversized dog named Shuja that has become entirely devoted to Pari. The dog remains in their village when Saboor and the children travel to Kabul. On the way to Kabul, Pari asks Abdullah if Shuja will be alright while she's gone. He reassures her. She then asks if she will live with Abdullah when they are grown. He predicts she will want a house of her own and she concedes that point, but says they will have to live next door to each other. This conversation is evidence of Pari's bond with Abdullah. She doesn't turn to her father for reassurance about the dog nor does she say she'll always live near her parents.

There is a large oak tree in Shadbagh and Pari loves the swing. She often begs her father to push her on the swing, even though he's usually too exhausted after his work day to comply. When Saboor and Abdullah return home, Saboor chops down the tree,





apparently because of the memories induced by the tree. Pari swings on the tree, as had Saboor as a youngster. This is also the tree from which Parwanan pushed her sister, causing permanent paralysis. As a youngster, Saboor called the tree magic and said that anyone who made a wish at the base of the tree would be granted the wish if the tree dropped ten leaves into the hands of the person wishing. Much later in the book, a young boy named Adel lives on the property with his father and they discuss the fact that the tree was very old when it was chopped down, and they wonder why anyone would destroy it.

In the Wahdati household, the family dynamics seem to include Nabi, though he is technically a hired servant. Nila says she sent Nabi to a special bakery for the cookies she offers the children. She indicates that it would be a shame for his efforts to go to waste, encouraging the children to eat more than one each. Nabi blushes when she refers to him, which seems to indicate that he's very sensitive to Nila. In fact, Nabi is attracted to Nila and relishes her attention, though he doesn't seem to expect anything more, including a physical relationship. Meanwhile, Suleiman is quiet and seems to barely participate in the conversation while Abdullah and Saboor are present. In fact, Nabi will later learn that Suleiman is attracted to Nabi and that's why Nabi has the job.

Nila talks a great deal while Saboor and Abdulla are at her house. She is a naturally outgoing person though she isn't very bright about the true ways of the world. She talks about the "refreshing humility" and "hospitality" of the people who live in the country as opposed to the "pomposity" of the people in the town. She's referring to her wealthy family and friends, and it seems that she is over-simplifying the lives of both groups. She resents aspects of the wealthy around her, especially her father. At the same time, she has no clue about the true poverty of the people in the country, including Saboor's family. She seems to believe that their "dignity" makes up for the fact that children die in the winter, simply because they don't have enough protection from the brutal weather, or that Saboor is literally working himself to death in an effort to provide the basic necessities. Suleiman seems to have a better grasp of the truth and he's embarrassed about Nila's speech on the subject. He quietly tells her to stop talking. She's quiet for a few minutes but soon picks up the conversation again.

It's not clear how Abdullah comes to realize that Nila and Suleiman are paying money for Pari, but he does realize it well before they are actually separated. Nila makes a comment about the pleasure of having "a child around the house," but at that point she could have been referring to the fact that Pari and Abdullah would be staying with them while Saboor does some work. When Abdullah pleads with Nila, she says that the plan is for the best and that he'll eventually realize this. The situation is difficult for Pari and for her family. Saboor works hard but simply isn't able to make a living. He dies in the middle of a work day, having literally worked himself to death. He likely fears that his infant son, Iqbal, will die in the coming winter. It's very much like the story and Saboor is undoubtedly telling himself that Pari will have a better life with the Wahdatis. She will have anything money can buy and the money the Wahdatis are paying Saboor will ensure the survival of his remaining family throughout the coming winter.



## Discussion Question 1

Describe the relationship between Abdullah and Pari.

## Discussion Question 2

What is Nila's attitude about the people of the country versus the people of the city? What might have shaped this attitude and what's wrong with her information?

## Discussion Question 3

Why do you believe Saboor agrees to sell Pari to the Wahdatis? Do you believe he was right to make this decision?

## Vocabulary

guileless, staccato, contraption, obliterated, malevolent, pomposity, pungent, melancholy, diminished



## Chapter 3, Spring 1949

### Summary

In Chapter Three, Spring 1949, Parwana wakes to the scene of feces in the bed, smeared all over her sister, Masooma. Masooma apologizes. Parwana wants to scream in anger, but refrains. She heats water and washes Masooma, knowing that she then has to wash all the bed linens. Masooma cries silently.

Parwana and Masooma are twins and Nabi is their brother. Their parents have been dead four years and Nabi works in the city, leaving Parwana to care for Masooma. Saboor's wife has recently died and Parwana watches him struggle to raise his two children, one just an infant. She has heard that he is looking for a wife but refuses to let her thoughts go any farther.

The story then goes back to the day Parwana and Masooma are born. Masooma is first and Parwana is a surprise. From the beginning, Parwana is a difficult child, while Masooma is the happy youngster everyone loves. As they age, Parwana notices Saboor, who grows up alongside the twins. Saboor is constantly telling stories, to the delight of the other youngsters. One day, Parwana sees a beautiful notebook at a bazaar but doesn't have enough money to buy it. She steals it and plans to give it to Saboor so that he can write down his stories. She tries to find the right time to give it to him, but can't seem to find the courage. Months later, Parwana watches as Masooma gives Saboor the notebook. Masooma says she'd found the notebook and thought it perfect for Saboor. She asks if it belonged to Parwana and promises to pay her back for it. Parwana says she isn't angry but, at age eleven, is heartsick as she watches a relationship developing between Saboor and Masooma. She is soon very jealous of her pretty, popular twin.

The story reverts back to the time Parwana and Masooma are adults. Nabi stops in for a visit. He comes regularly and sends money to help his sisters, but he doesn't lend any support with the daily care of Masooma. Nabi tells Parwana that he's talked to Saboor, and that Saboor is looking for a wife. Parwana doesn't know why Nabi would tell her this because she hasn't got a spare minute in her day to help care for Saboor and his children.

Parwana creates a mixture of opium and tobacco into a hookah, a regular event for Masooma. Masooma, now totally relaxed, asks Parwana to take her to Kabul. She says she has already asked to borrow a mule from a man in the village. She then says she's is bored and begs Parwana to agree.

The story reverts back to a day when the twins were seventeen. They are seated on a limb in the giant oak tree in the village, the tree that has a swing that will be used by Pari many years later. On this day, Masooma says she knows that Saboor is going to propose. She says she has proof and Parwana is hit by a fierce wave of jealousy. While



Masooma is looking in her pocket, Parwana shoves her. She tries to grab onto Parwana but Masooma falls through the limbs, landing on the ground below. Masooma's hand is in a fist and someone pries it open. Inside are ten little leaves.

The story returns to the time when Parwana is an adult. She and Masooma have been traveling nearly two days in the direction of Kabul. Masooma tells Parwana that she has to return home, leaving Masooma in the desert. Masooma says she is tired of her existence, which has no real purpose, and that she's giving Parwana a chance to live a life that isn't tied to an invalid sister. Masooma asks if Parwana can become a mother to Pari and Abdullah. She says she can try but argues that Saboor loved Masooma. Masooma says Saboor will come to love Parwana in time.

Parwana makes Masooma a hookah filled with tobacco and opium, this time with more than the usual amount of opium. Masooma then orders Parwana to leave, saying they shouldn't have the pain of drawn-out goodbyes. Parwana gets up and begins her journey. She almost turns around but imagines she can hear Masooma saying she is doing the right thing, and continues. She knows she won't tell anyone about leaving Masooma in the desert and wonders if she can live with the secret. As she walks toward home, she feels that she is being reborn.

## Analysis

Parwana is born a few minutes after Masooma and the umbilical cord is wrapped around Parwana's neck as she is born. Parwana knows the story of her difficult birth and, as an adult, thinks that the cord "knew which was the better half." She is a difficult child, impossible to please and constantly upset. While Parwana knows that she's making life harder for those around her, she seems incapable of trying to do anything different.

Masooma and Parwana are biological twins but they seem to lack that connection that typically exists between twins. Their relationship seems somewhat one-sided on the surface. Masooma is able to appear as though she is a loving sister but her actions seem to paint a different story. For example, Masooma finds the notebook Parwana stole for Saboor. The family is poor and there would have been few extra possessions in the house. There's no doubt that Masooma would have known this nice notebook belongs to someone in the family and she probably knows that it's Parwana's. Still, she takes it without asking and gives it to Saboor, pretending it's a gift only from Masooma.

Another time, a boy writes a note and wraps it around a rock, then throws it at the twins. The note includes a poem and indicates that the writer wants to marry "you," but doesn't indicate which twin. It then makes a rude reference to "your sister." The twins read the note together and Masooma just assumes that the note is intended for her and that the "sister" refers to Parwana. Parwana is hurt by the assumption and it seems Masooma is indifferent to her sister's feelings.



Saboor tells lots of stories as a youngster and he is very popular because of it. He sometimes makes things up on the spur of the moment. One of the stories he tells involves the giant oak tree in the village. He says it's a magic tree. A person who stands at the tree and makes a wish might have that wish come true. The sign that the wish is to be granted is ten leaves, falling from the tree to the person making the wish. The story contributes to Masooma's fall. Masooma tells Parwana that Saboor is going to propose and that she has proof. The "proof" is actually ten leaves, and Masooma seems to have wished for Saboor to propose and takes the ten leaves as a sign that it's going to come true. There's no indication that Saboor really does plan to propose but Parwana shoves Masooma before she discovers that the "proof" is just a fairy tale. While Masooma doesn't die, it's a tragic end to her life. In this time and place, she has no options for a productive life and is completely dependent on Parwana for every need.

When Parwana is about to leave Masooma in the desert, she considers telling the truth about her role in Masooma's injury. She wants to relieve her own conscience but knows the confession will provide a tremendous amount of pain to Masooma. In the end, she keeps the information to herself.

The keeping of secrets becomes an underlying theme in the book as several of the characters are impacted by their own secrets or the secrets of others. Parwana is one example of that and it's unclear what effect the secrets will have on her in the long term. She basically kills her sister, causing the injury that ends Masooma's productive life and then leaving her to die in the desert. Even though Masooma begs to be left, it's ultimately Parwana's call and she could have insisted on returning home with her sister and continuing to care for her. Later in the time line, Parwana seems quiet and withdrawn, which may be an indication that she does have trouble dealing with the weight of these secrets.

## Discussion Question 1

Describe the relationship between Parwana and Masooma, from childhood to adulthood.

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Parwana take care of Masooma after Masooma's injury? List all the reasons that contribute to this situation.

## Discussion Question 3

What is the story Saboor tells about the "magic tree" and how does it indirectly lead to Masooma's injury?

## Vocabulary

flaccid, avert, pall, histrionics, supplications, innocuous, demeanor, precocious, lascivious, cretins, imbeciles, eradicate



# Chapter 4

## Summary

Chapter Four opens with a letter from Nabi to a Greek surgeon named Markos Varvaris. Nabi refers to other friends and says he will be asking Markos to pass the letter on to another person. He later explains that person is his stepniece, Pari. Nabi says he isn't certain of his own age, but estimates it to be in the mid-eighties, based on the political events he recalls from his childhood.

Nabi says he first meets Nila Wahdati in 1949 when she marries Suleiman. He has been working for Suleiman for two years at that point, working as chauffeur and cook. He says he took a job in Kabul to help provide for his sisters, Masooma and Parwana, but also to escape the situation that their home life has become. He outlines the duties during those early years, including that Suleiman wants Nabi to go with him for his daily walk, though they barely talk during these walks.

Nabi says he is attracted to Nila from the beginning. When the other servants talk about her, Nabi tells them they shouldn't be gossiping about their employers. The talk continues and Nabi says he is sometimes revolted and sometimes fascinated by the conversations.

Each month, Suleiman allows Nabi to use his car to visit his family in Shadbagh where Nabi spends time with Parwana, Saboor, and the children. In Kabul, Suleiman spends most of his time drawing while Nila spends her time writing. Nabi sometimes drives Nila on errands and he always tries to look his best on those occasions. One day, she asks about Shadbagh. He amuses her during their drive and Nila begins having talks with him most mornings. It's obvious that Suleiman and Nila are not happy together. They often argue in Nabi's presence and it's obvious Suleiman's mother doesn't approve of the match.

In 1959, Nila tells Nabi that she wants to visit his family. Nabi knows she has no idea of the poverty she'll see but she insists. On the way, the talk turns to the harsh lives. Nabi says that the winters are brutal and sometimes children just die. Saboor tries to be hospitable but Parwana simply huddles in a corner, Nila asks about Saboor's daughter and Abdullah tries to put her off, saying Pari is asleep. Saboor tells Abdullah to get her and Abdullah complies. Nila gushes over Pari, saying she's perfectly beautiful. On the way home, Nila begins to cry, saying she wants a child of her own. Nabi tries to comfort her but Nila says she is unable to conceive.

Back at home, she retreats to her room and stays there for days, a common occurrence. When she finally emerges, she orders Nabi to prepare for a party. During the event, she recites one of her poems. It's about parents who live in a poor village and are mourning the loss of their child. Everyone loves the poem but Nabi is upset, saying it feels wrong to use Parwana's grief as entertainment.



Eventually, Nabi comes up with the idea that the Wahdati's might buy Pari from Saboor. Nabi says he had offered to give Saboor money but Saboor always refuses. Knowing that Saboor desperately needs money, Nabi proposes the idea. He says if Saboor had declined, he would have dropped it. But Saboor agrees and Nabi is pleased that he will be able to give Nila something that no other man is able to give her – a child of her own. Nabi recalls the day he carries Pari away from Abdullah. She screams for her brother and Nabi says that memory still bothers him.

Nabi's relationship with Pari begins to change immediately. She's instructed not to call Nabi “uncle” and she eventually forgets that they are related. Suleiman connects with Pari and often takes her for walks. He paints giraffes and monkeys on Pari's armoire. Suleiman and Nila become a family due to Pari's presence, and Nabi finds that neither has time for him. One day, Saboor tells Nabi that he shouldn't continue his visits and he never sees any of them again.

In 1955, Suleiman has a severe stroke that leave him partially paralyzed. At first, dozens of relatives and friends visit, filling the house at all hours. Then the visits stop and Nila discovers she doesn't want to deal with caring for Suleiman's needs. She takes Pari and moves to Paris. As she is leaving, she tells Nabi that “it was always you,” but he doesn't understand until much later. He begins to learn to understand Suleiman's slurred speech.

He forces Suleiman to accept a wheelchair and they stroll around the neighborhood. They become familiar with some of the neighbors, including two brothers named Bashiri and their two sons.

Eventually, Nabi lets all the household staff go and tends to all the duties himself. One day, he's cleaning out a closet and finds Suleiman's sketchbooks. Each page has a drawing of Nabi and he realizes what Nila meant as she was leaving. With the information that Suleiman is physically attracted to him, Nabi decides to leave. He begins looking for a replacement but can't find anyone he trusts to take on all the duties of the house, and gives up. In 1968, Suleiman reveals that his attraction to Nabi had been the reason he was hired. Suleiman says he knew he could never act on the attraction and believed having Nabi close would be the next best thing. He now urges Nabi to leave, find a wife, and have a family of his own. Nabi knows that he's settled into his life and has no interest in changing anything.

The country is torn by war over the coming years. One day, Suleiman experiences another illness. He calls on Nabi to keep a promise made years earlier. Nabi lies on the bed with Suleiman and holds a pillow over his face, killing him. Suleiman leaves everything to Nabi, but Nabi moves back into the little shack on the back of the property. In 2002, Markos shows up with an interpreter. He's a doctor and wants to rent the house. Nabi says that anyone who is trying to help his country is welcome to stay in the house at no cost. A nurse, Miss Amra, is soon living there as well and it's through them that Nabi learns Nila committed suicide in 1974. Nabi ends his letter to Markos by asking for a specific place as a burial spot. He also asks that Markos find Pari and share the letter with her so that Pari will know the truth about her birth.





## Analysis

Chapter Four differs from the other chapters in that it is titled by number only, without a reference to the date.

Nabi talks about his early impressions of Suleiman Wahdati, including the fact that Suleiman seems to have no purpose. He initially believes that Suleiman is just drifting through life but says he later learns that he is wrong. It's never really clear why Nabi thinks that Suleiman has a purpose other than learning that Suleiman is physically attracted to Nabi. Even with that knowledge, it seems Suleiman doesn't have any real goals or aspirations in life, other than keeping Nabi near. It's left to the reader to decide what Nabi means by this statement.

In the early days as a servant for Suleiman and Nila, Nabi always wears a suit that is a hand-me-down from Suleiman. As Nabi admits to his attraction to Nila, he says he remembers hoping that she didn't know that the suit once belonged to Suleiman. Nabi believes Suleiman probably told Nila. He says Suleiman can't appreciate how that "trivial" fact would cause shame to Nabi. This indicates that Nabi believes he is important to Suleiman, so much so that Suleiman might have discussed Nabi's wardrobe with his wife. In fact, Suleiman is very preoccupied with Nabi but not in the way Nabi seems to believe, and this detail is not revealed until many years after this scene. Suleiman seems to be trying to improve Nabi and sometimes corrects his speech in a way Nabi sees as arrogant. Nabi realizes there is a great deal of difference between his place in the social system and the place held by the Wahdatis. This becomes a theme in the story, especially considering the impact of Pari's adoption on many of the characters.

Nabi talks about his infatuation for Nila and admits that he's ashamed of it. He never acts on it and it seems that he really wants to be free of it, but he keeps finding himself pulled toward her. An important scene happens soon after Nila recites the poem about Parwana's grief over losing her son. Nila asks Nabi to drive her on a shopping trip. She first directs him to stop at a house and leaves Nabi waiting for a long time. When she returns, it's obvious to Nabi that Nila has spent time with another man and he's distressed with the knowledge. Nabi obviously feels some sense of loyalty to Suleiman and it seems he might be angry over the situation, especially when Nila tells him to lie about where they were for the entire afternoon. Between this and Nabi's feeling that he has betrayed Parwana because of Nila's poem, it seems that he might be losing his attraction for Nila. He seems to hope that's going to be the case but says he is just as attracted the next day.

When Suleiman tells Nabi that he should leave to start a family of his own, Nabi refuses. He says that he had remained for years because Suleiman was totally dependent on Nabi, but that has changed. The reader has to remember that Nabi's sisters are Parwana and Masooma. Nabi had spent some time with Masooma but wasn't willing to give up his life at that time to care for his invalid sister. He seems to be making up for



that, at least to some degree, by remaining to care for Suleiman. He remains with Suleiman and works for him for a total of more than fifty years.

## Discussion Question 1

What are Nabi's motivations for arranging to have the Wahdatis buy Pari from her father?

## Discussion Question 2

Describe the relationship between Nabi and Suleiman.

## Discussion Question 3

Compare Nabi's care of Suleiman to Parwana's care of Masooma.

## Vocabulary

pragmatic, truncated, lamentable, absolves, quirks, peeves, attest, affluent, wafted, lurid, culminated, myriad, blasphemy, unscrupulous, cuckolded, tenuous, soliloquy, enigma



## Chapter 5, Spring 2003

### Summary

In Chapter Five, Spring 2003, a nurse named Amra Ademovic is talking with two men visiting the Wazir Akbar Khan Hospital in Kabul. They are Idris and Timur, the sons of the Bashiri brothers who lived near the Wahdati's before the war. Idris is a surgeon and Timur owns a real estate agency. Amra is about to let the cousins meet a young patient named Roshi, but she warns them that she won't tolerate a negative reaction to the girl's appearance. Roshi literally has brain matter outside her skull.

Timur says he and Idris live in California but are visiting Kabul to “reconnect” with their ethnicity and learn about the country. He says they plan to raise money and awareness once they return to the United States. They are actually in Kabul to try to reclaim their family's property because property values are quickly rising, but they don't tell Amra that detail.

Amra invites them for a gathering at the house where she's staying, the Wahdati house now owned by Nabi. They arrive and Timur remembers Nabi. Timur tells Nabi that he could be making a great deal of money by renting out his house instead of lending it for no rent. Nabi says it isn't right to profit from the people who are working to help their country recover.

During the gathering, Amra tells Idris about Roshi's injury. Roshi's father and uncle had been embroiled in an argument over family property. Roshi's uncle said he wanted to end the argument but attacked the family with an ax. Roshi, the sole survivor of the family, was struck in the head by her uncle's ax. Idris is horrified by the story and notes that it's even more awful because it has nothing to do with the political upheaval or wars that constantly threaten the people.

Timur travels to a nearby village the following day but Idris goes to the hospital instead. He takes a small television set and VCR player as a gift to Roshi. An uncle (not the one who killed her family) is visiting. Outside the hospital, Roshi's uncle accosts Idris. He says he has a large family and is now saddled with the problem of caring for Roshi. Idris gives him two hundred dollars and he disappears.

Idris continues to visit Roshi daily, often watching one of the movies he bought for her. Timur warns that they are leaving in a week and that Idris shouldn't let Roshi become attached. Idris toys with the idea of taking Roshi home with him and wonders how she would get along with his two sons, Zabi and Lemar. Just before he is to leave, Idris tells Amra that he will ensure Roshi gets her surgery. He pledges to secure the funding, arrange it through his group of doctors, or pay for it himself.

Timur and Idris return home with the knowledge that Timur will likely have to return a few times to ensure their property is returned. As soon as he reunites with his family,



Idris is upset with his sons. He says they act like tyrants and are indifferent to the details of his trip. The family stops in at Abe's Kabob House, owned by Abdullah and his wife, Sultana. The couple married in Pakistan in the 1970s and were granted asylum in the United States in 1982. They have one daughter, named Pari.

Idris questions their lifestyle and Nahil says they have worked for it. She suggests he might make some changes but urges that he not get too caught up in his "survivor's guilt." He soon gets emails from Roshi and Amra and answers that he'll be talking to the other doctors in his practice soon to begin making arrangements. He's already regretting his promise to help and his intense memories of the trip are fading. When he gets time to talk to the head of the practice, Joan Schaeffer, she says the logistics of performing the surgery are beyond their abilities. Idris is secretly relieved that the situation is out of his control. Over the coming weeks, he deletes emails from Kabul without reading them.

Six years later, Idris is in a book store. Roshi has written a book about her ordeal. She's healed, having had the surgery years earlier. Idris is nervous about meeting her again, knowing he let her down. The book is dedicated to Amra and Timur, who ultimately stepped in and helped arrange the surgery. Idris wants to talk to Roshi when he makes it to the head of the line, but can't decide what to say. He's ushered out by a clerk and it's only when he's outside that he sees the words Roshi inscribed in the book. It reads, "Don't worry. You're not in it." He knows it was kindness that kept his broken promise out of his book.

## Analysis

Timur and Idris are close because they are biological cousins who were raised together, but they are very different. Their attitudes toward each other are conflicted and convoluted. Timur helps Idris when he and his wife, Nahil, are starting out but makes sure that everyone knows that he's helped. He presents them with a new car during their wedding reception and makes it known that he cosigns with them for a condo. This upsets Idris who believes Timur tends to do things only in order to get himself into the limelight. While this is true to a degree, at least Timur is taking action. Idris promises to help arrange the surgeries Roshi needs but he doesn't follow through. He's a wealthy surgeon with extensive resources and connections, but he can't be bothered to keep his promise. Timur is the one who helps Roshi and he gets a public show of appreciation for his effort. The chapter is written from Idris's perspective and it's left to the reader to determine Timur's motivations, or if his reasons for taking action are even important.

The chapters are all tied together but some of the connections are subtle. Markos is mentioned in Chapter Four, which is really a letter from Nabi to Markos. Little is known about him as this chapter opens but the author makes subtle references that lead the reader to other characters in other chapters. For example, someone notices a photograph hanging on the wall in Nabi's house. It's a picture of a dark-haired girl by the ocean and it appears that a corner of the photo has been burned. The significance is



not revealed until the chapter that's devoted to Markos. These details lend a level of continuity that would otherwise make the chapters seem unconnected.

Idris and Timur are in Kabul because they hope to recover their family's property. The fighting and political upheaval has created many similar situations. These property disputes become a minor theme in the story as several of the characters are affected by the problem. Roshi is another example, though her family's argument has nothing to do with the war or politics. Another case of property disputes will occur in the chapter devoted to Adel. His father has claimed property that really belongs to Abdullah's family. Abdullah's half-brother, Iqbal, is killed trying to recover the property. Idris and Timur are aware that they'll likely have to pay some bribes to make the courts rule in their favor and they're willing to do that. In the case of Adel, the courts are being bribed by Adel's father, meaning justice won't be served.

As soon as Idris arrives at his home, he learns that the contractor in charge of their new home theater will be arriving the following day to take measurements, and that he's already purchased several pieces of equipment. The theater is bound to be expensive and there seems to be a comparison here between the amount of money being spent on the home theater and the TV and VCR Idris gives to Roshi. Roshi is thrilled with the gift but she is in desperate need of the surgery. While Idris and his family can afford the cost, he can't help but notice the difference between his life and the lives of most people in Kabul. He feels guilty about it briefly but his wife reminds him that they have worked hard to create this life for themselves, and that they aren't doing anything wrong by enjoying the fruits of their labor. Idris has thought about the fact that his children aren't growing up the way he'd hoped, and it seems the lifestyle is to blame for that. It seems this would be the perfect opportunity to enact some changes in his life, if he really wants to. However, he quickly falls back into his routine and regrets having become involved with Roshi's case at all.

The details of how Roshi gets the surgery are not revealed, but Roshi dedicates her book to Timur and Amra, crediting them for their dedication to her situation. It seems that Timur must have paid the cost or arranged for it to be paid.

## Discussion Question 1

Describe the relationship between Timur and Idris. What does Idris think of Timur?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Idris regret getting caught up in the situation with Roshi after he returns home, and what does he do about his promise?

## Discussion Question 3

Describe Idris's family, their lives, and Idris's opinion of their lives.

## Vocabulary

beguiling, idiosyncrasies, infamous, euphemism, ponderous, savvy, quintessential, thwart, euphoric, grotesque, infidelity, insipid, disparity



## Chapter 6, February 1974

### Summary

Chapter Six, February 1974, opens with an excerpt from a story in the magazine "Parallaxe." The article features Nila Wahdati, a well-known poet.

The story then switches to Pari, Abdullah's sister. (EDITOR'S NOTE: Pari in this chapter refers to Abdullah's sister, who is now attending college.) Pari and her boyfriend, Julien, are about to go out to dinner when the phone rings. Pari knows it's probably her mother. Julien thinks she should ignore it but she goes back inside and learns that her mother is in the emergency room, having suffered a fall. Pari goes to the hospital to accompany her mother home.

The story reverts to the magazine article. Nila says her mother was French and her father was from Afghanistan. The writer says Nila offers wine though it's not yet noon. She is also "flirtatious" and beautiful at age forty-four. Nila answers questions about her ideas on the politics of Afghanistan and says she moved to Paris to save her daughter from the life they would have led in Afghanistan.

Back in the hospital, Pari is surprised to learn that Julien goes to dinner without her. She remembers meeting him some ten years earlier when he was dating Nila. Pari recalls the affair between Julien and Nila, and the fact that there was always an attraction between Julien and Pari. Nila and Julien are lovers for about six months and don't hide the relationship from Pari at all. Julien invites Pari to go out with them often, including trips to the cinema, but Pari soon begins to decline the invitations. Pari isn't surprised when Julien and Nila break up.

Pari believes Suleiman, the only man she remembers as being her father, died in 1955 when she and Nila left Afghanistan. She feels there's a hole in her life and Nila dismisses it, saying it's because Pari feels the absence of her father.

The story reverts to the magazine article. Nila reveals that Pari is studying mathematics and says she doesn't understand anything about Pari's choice. Nila says Pari has been granted every freedom imaginable. She compares Pari's life to her own youth when she rebelled by taking lovers, drinking, and smoking. Nila talks about her father, saying he was overly-strict and spent very little time with Nila. She says her father called her "Fawn" and it wasn't until later that she thought about the fact that her father was a deer hunter.

The story moves back to the hours following Nila's release from the hospital. The house is a wreck and Pari agrees to spend the night. She cleans while Nila goes to bed. Pari reconnected with Julien a year earlier in a chance encounter. When they begin a sexual relationship, Pari dreads telling Nila. When she finally does tell her, Nila says Pari's friend already told her. Nila says she doesn't see any of herself in Pari, and that she



shouldn't be surprised. She says she doesn't know Pari at all, and that they are basically strangers, then hangs up before Pari can question her.

Back in the magazine article, Nila talks about her life as a child. Her father didn't approve of her "cavorting" as a young woman. She says her father wasn't accustomed to having anyone talk back to him, especially a female, making their relationship even rockier. Her mother died "when the Nazis came to Paris," ending Nila's dream of going to live with her mother.

The interviewer turns the conversation to Nila's poetry. She says the creative process for her means "vandalizing the lives of other people" because she uses their lives as a basis for her poems. She says she steals from them, making them "unwilling participants." But she has such a drive to write that she can't ignore it. While she has become somewhat popular in Paris, the people of Kabul have always looked at her poetry as vulgar.

The interviewer says he can understand that Nila's father, the patriarch of the family, would have seen Nila as a "one-woman revolution" for women's rights in Afghanistan. Nila says she was angry.

Nila says she was very ill in 1948 and went to Delhi "for treatment." Her father remained with her for six weeks and that her father hoped the brush with death would change Nila. She then talks briefly about her marriage to Suleiman. She says she believes one can tell within a couple of week whether a marriage is actually going to work out. She says she didn't need even that long because Suleiman was "too serious, aloof, and uninteresting." She then nonchalantly adds that he was "in love with the chauffeur." Nila also says that Pari has no idea the life she would have led without Nila. When the interviewer asks if Pari is a disappointment, Nila says Pari is her punishment.

A year later, in 1975, Pari is roommates with a young nursing student. She and Julien broke up some nine months earlier. Pari arrives home one day to find a package from Julien. It's a copy of the magazine, "Parrallaxe," which includes the interview about Nila. Julien says Pari should update her forwarding address and warns that the article isn't complimentary to either Julien or Pari. Pari remembers her mother's funeral. Julien declines to attend, saying he finds memorial services "depressing." Pari tells him she doesn't care but she is thinking that his failure to attend won't absolve him of guilt in the matter. She knows that she won't be absolved of her role by attending. Pari ends that call knowing that her affair with Julien had been the final event that pushed Nila into suicide. She also knows that she'll live with that guilt for the rest of her life.

Pari takes some time but eventually sits down to read the article multiple times. She sees details about their lives that Nila never revealed to Pari but she also feels that some of it was untrue. She focuses on Nila's father. Pari doesn't believe he's the villain Nila presented. She wonders if Nila's true intent in the article was to strike out at Pari, making her even less certain of herself. While she's thinking about this, Pari sees an old woman walking her dog. The scene brings up an imagine of another dog and Pari can't





be certain whether it's a memory or an allusion. She decides to get in touch with her old friend Colette to see if she wants to take a trip to Afghanistan.

Pari and Colette agree to meet and Colette brings along a friend, Eric Lacombe. He's a drama teacher and seems much kinder than Julien. Pari and Eric marry in 1977. Eric agrees to go to Afghanistan with Pari to search for the truth about her birth. Before they can make the arrangements, Pari becomes pregnant. They have a daughter, Isabelle. They continue to postpone the trip and their family grows. Alain is born a few years later and Thierry after that. They settle into a four-bedroom house in Guyancourt, some twenty kilometers from downtown Paris. The children thrive though Thierry is troublesome, brooding, and defiant.

Pari develops rheumatoid but it's controlled. They go on vacation in 1994 to Majorca. A week after returning to Paris, Eric suffers a heart attack and dies.

In 2010, Pari has settled into an apartment. She has trouble navigating and is retired, but still functions. Isabelle and Alain are settled into their own lives. Thierry seldom contacts anyone in the family and is in Africa. Isabelle often stops in to check on her mother.

On a particular day, Pari rushes Isabelle out after only a brief visit, promising to fill her in on the details later. At 9:30 that morning, Markos Varvaris calls. He explains that he has a letter from Nabi concerning Pari. Markos reads Nabi's letter and Pari realizes the hole that has always existed in her life is because she has a brother.

## Analysis

This chapter, like many others, spans decades in time but it opens in 1974. The reader already knows by this point that Nila commits suicide in this year, which lends a clue about the events that are going to take place.

In this chapter, the relationship between Pari and Nila is defined. The reader learns that they never really seem to have connected and it seems possible that the lack of a biological connection is to blame. This is something of a theme in the book, beginning with Abdullah's stepmother, Parwana. Pari recalls a day when she arrived home to discover that Nila has gone away for a few days with a boyfriend, leaving ten-year-old Pari a note and some money.

Pari watches as the relationship between Julien and Nila develops. This is an example of a coming-of-age theme that is an underlying theme in several other characters as well. Pari realizes that her mother is a person in her own right and that Pari doesn't know everything about Nila, such as the fact that Nila love jazz music. She questions the scar on Nila's stomach. Nila says it's from the Caesarian birth when Pari was born but Pari knows the scar runs the wrong direction. In many cases, Pari's questions about her mother create problems for the developing teen and she spends the rest of her life dealing with the conflicting emotions.



The situation with Julien, Nila, and Pari is complicated and may have been the final straw in Nila's decision to commit suicide. Pari and Julien believe that to be the case. Nila is self-centered and believes herself to be beautiful. She is accustomed to attracting the attention of everyone she encounters and of being the center of attention. She is bound to hate that Pari is embarking on a life of her own. She often makes references to her own beauty and makes it evident that she believes she is more beautiful than Pari. For example, she says Pari will never have to “work as hard for men to take you seriously,” indicating that men don't take Nila seriously because she's so beautiful. While Pari is not surprised that Julien and Nila break up, she wonders if it's because Nila sees Julien paying too much attention to Pari. If that's the case, Pari knows without a doubt that Nila doesn't break up with Julien out of any sense of duty to protect Pari, who is just a teenager at the time. Knowing Nila's character, it seems somewhat doubtful that Nila would even consider that her lover could find Pari attractive.

During the magazine interview, Nila makes veiled references to a hysterectomy she had in 1948 in India. She mentioned this to Nabi when she told him that she couldn't have children. During the interview, Nila says she had been taken to India because of a serious illness, but doesn't expand on that. She does say that she felt she “had left something vital of myself behind.” This indicates her inability to have a child impacts Nila more than might be expected, considering her self-centered attitudes about life in general.

Nila talks about Pari several times during the interview. She says Pari can be “breathhtakingly thoughtless” and says that Pari has no idea how much Nila has done for her. She then says that Pari would have had a much different life if not for Nila. The person who accepts that Pari is Nila's biological daughter might assume this means that Nila might have remained in Afghanistan, raising Pari there. Knowing that Pari is adopted, the reader gets a much different interpretation. Pari has doubts about her parentage and this is bound to add to those doubts. This is also another example of Nila's attitudes toward Pari. She doesn't have a biological connection to Pari and she doesn't seem to love Pari as a mother should love a child. Instead, Nila expects Pari to be grateful to Nila.

Nila gives away a great many details of her life during the magazine interview. It seems she is almost leaving a record of details about her life, some that she has kept secret. With this in mind, it can be assumed that she has already planned her suicide at the time of the interview. There's no reason that she should have said that Suleiman was “in love with the chauffeur” unless she is ready for Pari to know that detail about her father. It seems that Nila would know this would hurt Pari, who has very few memories of Suleiman but loves him because she believes he is her father. Nila may be so deeply depressed at this point that she doesn't care who is hurt by her statement.

Pari has to go on a trip when her oldest child, Isabelle, is just a toddler. Isabelle becomes ill. Eric and Pari talk about the symptoms and worry that it might be the first signs of leukemia. It turns out that it's not, but the few hours of worry makes Pari think



that having children sets a parent up for immeasurable pain. She is exhibiting the level of devotion to her children that was missing between Nila and Pari.

## Discussion Question 1

Describe the relationship between Nila and Pari.

## Discussion Question 2

What kind of person is Nila, and why do you believe she commits suicide?

## Discussion Question 3

What are some of the clues that Pari has to indicate she is not Nila's biological child?

## Vocabulary

parlance, insouciance, genially, zealots, loathe, perfunctory, boisterous, subversive, utilitarian, proverbial, narcissist, formidable, trite, ravishing, esoteric, clandestine, cavorting



# Chapter 7, Summer 2009

## Summary

Chapter Seven, Summer 2009, opens with Adel attending a ribbon cutting with his father, Commander Sahib. They are in New Shadbagh, located at the site of the village where Abdullah grew up. The town has expanded and the community is gathered at the town's new school, built by the generosity of Commander Sahib. When the time comes to cut the ribbon, Commander Sahib calls on Adel to perform the honor. Adel is thrilled to be at his father's side. As they stand beside their car, preparing to go home, a group of people approach Commander Sahib, asking for favors. Adel knows that there are many signs of his father's generosity around the town, including a medical clinic staffed with doctors and nurses paid for by Commander Sahib. He has arranged for many wells to be dug in the area, providing fresh water for the residents, and for electricity.

As they are preparing to leave the ribbon cutting at the school, one of the body guards intercepts a man trying to gain access to Commander Sahib. The man is later identified as Iqbal, Abdullah's half-brother. Adel and his father get in the car. The body guard, Kabir, places his gun on the passenger's seat and drives Adel and Commander Sahib home. Their home is a mansion surrounded by gates and walls. A guard at the main gate waves them through. Adel knows that when he and his father play hide-and-seek in the house, he sometimes has to wander around for hours before he locates his dad.

Adel and his father remain in the car for a few minutes. Commander Sahib is leaving for Helmand the following day. Adel believes his father has a cotton factory there and will meet with the workers. He will later learn this isn't true. Commander Sahib says he knows Adel misses his life and friends in Kabul but says Adel is the most important person in his life. He says he will do anything to protect Adel. Adel is overcome with emotion.

Later that day, Adel hears Kabir tell Iqbal that Commander Sahib is already gone. When Adel asks, Kabir is vague about what Iqbal wants. Kabir says that part of his job is to protect Commander Sahib from "the buzzards" who are constantly looking for favors.

Adel's mother is Aria. She is very beautiful and married Commander Sahib when she was fourteen. Commander Sahib has another wife who is older. She and her children are in another location and Adel sees them about once a month. Adel is very bored with his existence inside the compound. He has no friends and little contact with anyone outside the gates, other than his daily tutor. He spends hours playing video games, playing cards with Kabir, or watching television. Aria and Adel try to help each other fill the time when Commander Sahib is away.

One day during his father's absence, Adel manages to slip out of the house to the orchard nearby. It's part of their property and there is a huge stump that Commander Sahib and Adel have studied. By the rings, the tree was ancient when it was chopped



down and they believe the person who cut it down was “a fool.” As Adel is looking around the orchard, he sees a boy. He recognizes the boy as having been with Iqbal. The boy is later identified as Iqbal's son, Gholam.

Gholam and Adel are immediately at odds. Adel wants to act superior but Gholam simply refuses to show the respect displayed by most people of the village to Adel and his family. Gholam prepares to leave but Adel challenges him to a soccer contest. Adel easily wins the first game but they play again with Adel promising to give Gholam his jersey if Gholam wins. Gholam does and Adel reluctantly gives up the jersey.

Gholam reveals that his family has lived in the Jalozai Refugee Camp in Pakistan for many years. Gholam had lived there with his father, Iqbal, and his grandmother, Parwana, and were surviving because of the money sent to them each month by Gholam's uncle, Abdullah, who lives in the United States. Gholam reveals that his family is now living in a nearby field. Adel continues to ask questions. Gholam says his family might contact his grandmother's brother, Nabi, in Kabul, but that they aren't certain he is even still alive. He says his father wants to make a life for the family in Shadbagh.

As Gholam leaves, Adel asks if they can meet to play again. Gholam says he'll have to think about it. For the next several days, Gholam doesn't show up. When he finally returns, he says he and his father found work for a few days. Gholam hands over Adel's jersey, admitting that he'd sold it to a kid in the village then stole it back. Gholam shows off a pair of sneakers he purchased with the money. Adel feels bad about the entire situation, saying that if the other kid purchased the jersey, he should have been allowed to keep it. They are soon playing together almost every day. Adel doesn't press issues when he disagrees with Gholam for fear Gholam will stop coming. Adel knows that his life is very different from Gholam's life though they live very near each other.

One day, Gholam tells Adel the story of the “magic” oak tree and the ten leaves, as told by Saboor decades earlier. Adel asks if Saboor, Gholam's grandfather, was the one who cut down “our” tree. Gholam responds that the tree doesn't belong to Adel's family and that the land actually belongs to Gholam's family. He says Commander Sahib claimed the land and built his mansion while Gholam's family was in Pakistan. Gholam challenges Adel to think about how he felt when Gholam won the jersey. He says Adel should then consider how Gholam's family felt when they arrived in Shadbagh to find that their land had been stolen. Adel is furious and believes Gholam is a liar. As they part, Gholam challenges Adel to find out what his father is really doing in Helmand and says there isn't a cotton operation there.

That night, Adel thinks about his conversation with Gholam. His father has said that sometimes poor hate the rich because they are disappointed with their own situations. Adel believes this is the case with Gholam and believes that he had been too rough in his response to Gholam. Adel does, however, ask his mother about the operation at Helmand. Aria says she's never been there because it's not a safe place.

For the next few days, Adel goes daily to the orchard. When Gholam finally shows up, Adel offers him a jacket. Gholam says his family has gone back to see the judge that



will rule on their property dispute. The paperwork submitted by Iqbal has mysteriously been destroyed and the judge is wearing a new watch. Adel feels that the jacket is no longer the gift he'd intended, but a bribe to keep Gholam quiet. Gholam turns and walks away without the coat.

When Commander Sahib returns, the family hosts a party. During the event, Iqbal throws a rock through a window. Commander Sahib sends Aria and Adel upstairs, apparently so they wouldn't be in danger. Adel asks Aria what his father intends to do and Aria says he'll talk to Iqbal. Adel doesn't believe her. A few days later, Adel uses a computer though he isn't supposed to, and reads an article about the attack. Adel has a new understanding of his father and he is conflicted about this new understanding. He knows that someday soon, he will walk over to the field where Gholam and his family had camped, and that he'll likely find they are no longer there. He knows that on that day, he will pull out the broken spectacles that he'd found in the orchard, the same spectacles he'd seen Iqbal wearing, and that he'll toss them into a ditch near the field.

## Analysis

Adel's father is a former member of the jihad. Adel knows this because there are photos of his father's military career around the house. Adel notes that everyone still calls his father "Commander Sahib" in reference to his military title, even though he is no longer part of the organized military. In truth, Commander Sahib is a war lord and a ruthless criminal, though Adel doesn't discover these truths until later.

Adel asks his mother how she came to marry Commander Sahib. Aria says he had asked to marry her older sister but the sister was already engaged. He agreed to marry Aria instead. Adel asks Aria if she has come to like his father and if she regrets the marriage. Aria seems to try to reassure Adel that she doesn't regret marrying. She tells him to "look around" at their elaborate home. They have a Wii, several televisions, and apparently every luxury they want. She points out these things as evidence that she has a good life but it seems that she is also aware of her husband's nefarious actions. She may also be afraid of him, having probably seen the cruel side of his nature. Her motivations are never revealed and it's left to the reader to decide.

The story about Adel opens with a connection to the other characters through the setting. Adel and his parents live in "New Shadbagh," which is a renovated version of Shadbagh, where Abdullah and Pari were born. Adel notes that there is a stump near his house and it's evident that this is the giant oak tree that Saboor chopped down after leaving Pari in Kabul. Adel and his father think the person who chopped the tree down was "a fool." They don't know the story behind Saboor's grief. It seems that Commander Sahib is equally devoted to Adel and might do more than chop down a tree if he lost his beloved child.

The location of Adel's house in relation to the tree is the first clue that their home sits on the property owned by Abdullah's family. These property disputes are common because of the number of people who have fled the country during the war.



Adel is extremely lonely and relishes the time he spends with Gholam because of his desperation for companionship other than his mother and his bodyguards. It's this desperation that leads Adel to talk more about himself than he otherwise might. He seems to want Gholam to know about his life. The details revealed during this conversation include Adel telling the story of how the family came to live in Shadbagh. He says a motorcycle pulled up to their house in Kabul one day and shot into the house. Adel seems to believe the attack is one of many perpetrated against his father because of the Commander's good deeds. It's clear Adel has been told only about his father's efforts to do good and that he fully believes it at this point. Adel believes the people who attack his father want to pull his father into illegal schemes and that his father resists. Adel is, however, a smart boy and will soon discover that isn't true.

Adel apparently goes for a walk in the orchard one day after Iqbal forces a confrontation and finds the broken spectacles. Adel had seen Iqbal wearing the glasses and that makes him certain that Iqbal has been killed for the attack on Commander Sahib. It is clear from Gholam's conversations with Adel that everyone knows Commander Sahib's power. He is a former military commander and has nearly unlimited resources at hand. He also has the bodyguards who are heavily armed when the family is in public places. It seems likely that Iqbal is simply desperate to regain his family's property and is living the same kind of life as Saboor had been leading decades earlier.

Adel's realization that his father is responsible for Iqbal's death is the final push toward making Adel understand his father. Up to now, Adel has believed his father is a benevolent man who is attacked for no reason. Now he sees that his father is former jihad and is leading a life of crime. Adel also comes to realize that his mother, Aria, already knows about his father's life and that she accepts it. Aria's perspective is never revealed and it might be that she's afraid of her husband or that she simply enjoys the extravagant lifestyle that comes by being his wife. Adel initially has trouble hiding his feelings toward his father and finds himself pulling away from his father's presence. However, he knows that he will eventually come to accept it, as Aria has, and that he won't make any waves at home because of this new knowledge.

## Discussion Question 1

Considering the situation in the country at this time, do you believe Commander Sahib's actions cause more harm or good? Support your answers.

## Discussion Question 2

How does Adel come to know the truth about his father and what is his reaction?

## Discussion Question 3

Compare Adel's decision to give Gholam a coat to Commander Sahib's gift to the judge overseeing the property dispute.



## Vocabulary

protracted, conspiratorial, rife, spectacles, furrowed, charred, immunized, yielded, vanished, coils, gruff, granite, reprieve





## Chapter 8, Fall 2010

### Summary

Chapter Eight, Fall 2010, Markos Varvaris arrives home from his work at the medical clinic in Kabul. He finds there is a message from his childhood friend, Thalia, instructing him to call his mother. He does a little work but her message prompts him to finally make the call.

The story reverts to the summer of 1967. Markos lives in Greece with his mother, Odelia, who is a school teacher. His father died years earlier in a work-related accident. Odelia's friend Madeleine is planning to visit with her daughter, Thalia. Odelia warns Markos that Thalia has a horrible injury to her face and that he's to be considerate of her feelings.

Thalia and Madeleine arrive. Thalia wears a veil over the lower part of her face, covering her injury. Markos is both repelled and curious about her appearance. Odelia asks Markos to take a tray to the room Madeleine and Thalia will share. There, he sees Thalia's reflection in a mirror and is so horrified that he drops his tray and vomits. His first impression is that the dog had eaten Thalia's face.

The story reverts back to the present with Odelia asking Markos about events in his life. She knows about Nabi, who Markos considered a good friend prior to his death. She also knows about Pari's recent visit. Pari stays a week with Markos and is moved when she remembers Suleiman painting the animals on the armoire in her room. Markos ships the piece of furniture to her in Paris. Pari also takes Suleiman's sketchbooks and Nabi's letter. Markos turns the conversation to his mother's recent work on her house. She has been constantly working on projects since a recent medical diagnosis. He promises a visit home soon and they end the call.

The story reverts to Markos' childhood. Odelia pushes Markos to spend time with Thalia though neither child is happy about it. Often, they go their separate ways. One day, they meet up at a shop window in town where Markos is admiring a camera and dreaming about becoming a professional photographer. Thalia knows a lot about cameras and together they build a homemade camera. Markos convinces Thalia to pose for him beside the ocean and she agrees after demanding that she sit with her back to the camera.

For years, Markos travels the world, taking hundreds of photographs. Markos always carries the photo of Thalia by the ocean. He survives a bout of hepatitis but comes to feel that he's wasting time and eventually applies to medical school.

Madeleine announces that she has a new role in a movie and that Thalia will remain with Odelia. By now, Markos and Thalia are close friends and Markos is relieved that she's staying. At first, Odelia tutors Markos and Thalia at home. Later, they attend



school and Odelia announces to the students on the first day that she won't tolerate anyone tormenting Thalia. Thalia soon makes friends and lives a fairly normal life. Later that year, it's evident that Madeleine isn't going to return and that she isn't working on a movie. Years later, Markos learns about Madeleine's death in Athens.

Markos completes his medical training, specializing in plastic surgery. In 2002, Amra Ademovic notifies him that they are looking for a plastic surgeon to work primarily on children in Kabul.

Markos finally makes it home and is shocked to see how much his mother has “shrunk” with her illness. Markos finds a framed story about Markos and his work in Kabul. The picture with the story includes Markos, Nabi, and Amra with her adopted daughter, Roshi. Thalia reveals that Odelia checks daily for stories about Markos. Later, Odelia talks to Markos, saying she wants to be certain she isn't a burden to him during her final years of life and that she's proud of him.

## Analysis

The relationship between Markos and his mother is strained and that seems to have been the case for most of their lives. Markos talks about a photo of the two of them and says that he can see the tension between them. It seems likely that he can only “see” this tension because he felt it at the time of the photograph. He says that he was destined from childhood to be a disappointment to his mother. Their relationship seems fairly typical on the surface though it is clear that they don't really get along that well.

Madeleine is self-centered and self-assured. She has worked a little as an actress and hopes to get more work in that field though she is never overly-successful. She seems to love men and moves in and out of relationships on a regular basis. All of these things lead to her problems with Thalia. Madeleine is ill-equipped to handle the negative attention Thalia gets in public situations. Markos soon realizes that Thalia wears the veil to protect Madeleine more than to protect herself. This is why she leaves Thalia with Odelia for most of Thalia's childhood.

After Madeleine leaves, Thalia discards the veil most of the time. Markos doesn't realize until then that Thalia had worn the veil mainly as a way of protecting Madeleine from seeing her disfigured face.

One day, Markos is in the garden with Madeleine, Odelia, and Thalia. Madeleine tells the story of coming to Odelia's house when things became too rough at her own home. Markos is caught up in the story and comes to realize that he has completely forgotten about Thalia's presence. He considers that Madeleine is simply so self-centered that she attracts the full attention of everyone in the room but allows himself a second, kinder thought. He considers that Madeleine might be keeping the attention on herself so that Thalia is not the center of attention for those few moments. In Markos' words, Madeleine's apparent narcissism might be a way of protecting her daughter.



Madeleine talks at length about her opinions, especially about politics and Markos believes that his mother quickly tires of hearing the tirades. He says Odelia is likely disappointed in Madeleine and that he isn't surprised this is the case. Markos says that everyone disappoints Odelia eventually, including her son. Odelia does seem self-confident and opinionated but she doesn't seem overly stringent in forcing her opinions on others. It's not clear whether some of this is Markos' own feelings of inadequacy or if he truly has a reason for these thoughts.

Markos travels using half the money from Thalia's inheritance, a gift she'd intended for him to use to get through college. He always orders two sets of prints, keeping one and sending the other set to Thalia who continues to live with Odelia. When he returns home near the end of the chapter, he finds that Thalia has organized all the photos and included them onto a digital photo frame for Odelia.

It's not until Markos and Thalia become close friends that Markos learns the details about Thalia's injury to her face. Her mother's boyfriend has a dog named Apollo. The dog is apparently big and very aggressive, and it attacks five-year-old Thalia when the boyfriend passes out and leaves the dog unchained. During another conversation, she tells Markos about the surgery which wasn't a success, the infection that resulted in more surgery, and her brush with death. With those complications, she refuses to deal with additional surgeries and decides to live with the disfigurement.

Markos has told Thalia that there have been advances in plastic surgery in the years since the dog attacked her, and that he could make a huge difference in her appearance. She initially refused additional surgeries because she was afraid after her brush with death, but she now seems to accept her appearance as an integral part of her being. She has never left Odelia's house and it seems likely that the people of the town have come to accept her without the constant staring. While this has limited her life greatly, she has also made a living by fixing things such as electronics, and she is apparently content. Markos, however, compares her acceptance to a prisoner who is incapable of living outside the prison walls. He compares Thalia's disfigured face to a prison and says she has spend a lifetime making it into her own identity.

As the chapter comes to a close, Markos has some time to talk honestly with his mother. She tells him that she's proud of him and he's obviously uncomfortable with the conversation. He suggests, though not aloud to his mother, that it would have been better for them to go on as they always had, but he does seem to come to some realizations about their relationship. He recalls being upset as a child that his mother didn't hold his hand as other mothers did, or comfort him in the traditional sense of the word. But Markos says now that he realizes she had given him an even greater gift by being a constant, stable base in his life. She had taken on that same role for Thalia, though she wasn't Thalia's biological parent.

Odelia says she doesn't want to become a burden in her final years of life. She is talking to Markos when she says it though Markos hasn't been the one to take care of Odelia's daily needs. Thalia has lived with Odelia all her life and has taken on the role of a daughter. Markos says his mother talks to him as if he's earned the right to be included



in her end-of-life plans. It's obvious that he hasn't been in touch as much as he should have and that his mother would have led a much different life without Thalia.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Compare the relationship between Markos and Odelia to the relationship between Thalia and Odelia.

## **Discussion Question 2**

What happens to Thalia's face and how does it affect the rest of her life?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Describe the relationship between Markos and Thalia.

## **Vocabulary**

intrigued, morbid, exuberance, anarchist, exalt, impugning, pious, aplomb, throes, obliterated, askance, paradoxical, augmenting, proxy, rhapsodizing, unassailable



## Chapter 9, Winter 2010

### Summary

In Chapter Nine, Winter 2010, Abdullah's daughter, Pari, remembers a childhood ritual with her father in which he would help her prepare for good dreams. She grows up as an only child and is often lonely, though she forges an imaginary relationship with her father's long-lost sister. (Editor's Note: The two characters named Pari both appear in this chapter. For clarity, they are referred to as "daughter" and "aunt.")

As an adult, the daughter Pari is on the way to the airport to pick up her Aunt Pari. They arrive home and the daughter Pari goes inside to prepare her father for the meeting. Abdullah has lost most of his memories and struggles with anger and depression. Pari has a job at home so that she can care for him. Aunt Pari asks if Abdullah will remember her. Pari the daughter, knowing how upset Abdullah can become, says it might be better if he doesn't.

Pari the daughter remembers things from her childhood. When the school has a field trip to an aquarium, Pari remains at home with her parents. That Sunday, Abdullah shuts down the restaurant for a day – an unusual occurrence – and the family visits the aquarium though it is impossible for Pari to stop comparing their visit to the fun her class had. When some of Pari's friends join the swim team, Abdullah says they can't make time from the restaurant to take her to practices and meets. Pari herself can't imagine wearing a swimsuit in public, and she doesn't try out.

Every week, Pari attends Farsi lessons and Koran lessons. She hates both but gives in to Abdullah's demands that she attend.

As a youngster, she is caught up in the excitement of the restaurant but hates it once she's old enough that she actually has duties there. She is accepted to an art program in Boston and plans to attend, though Abdullah is obviously upset over the distance that will separate them. Just before Pari is to visit the college campus prior to beginning classes, her mother discovers she has ovarian cancer.

The story reverts back to the arrival of the daughter Pari and Aunt Pari. Abdullah doesn't remember his sister. He claims he doesn't know why he chose Pari as a name for his daughter, but he becomes upset. Aunt Pari believes Abdullah is responding to her when they recite a poem they'd often recited as children, but the daughter Pari knows that's not the case. Pari the daughter likes to watch Abdullah sleep because it's impossible then to tell there's anything wrong with him.

Pari the daughter and Aunt Pari spend time together, talking about family history. Aunt Pari reveals a photo of the mansion built by Commander Sahib on the land that once belonged to Iqbal and says from the reaction of someone in the village, she believes something bad happened to Iqbal.



One day, Pari the daughter shows Aunt Pari a stack of postcards. Pari the daughter had written them as a child from all the places she visited with her parents. All were addressed to Aunt Pari, though the daughter Pari had no idea how to get them to her. They attest to the connection the daughter Pari feels with her aunt, long before they actually meet. The daughter Pari says she always felt a connection to her Aunt Pari. By contrast, Aunt Pari says she always felt the absence of her biological family.

Aunt Pari returns home to Paris. The daughter Pari eventually puts Abdullah in a nursing facility where he can get the care he needs. She visits him just before leaving for a visit with her Aunt Pari and family reunion where she'll meet her cousins for the first time.

In France, the daughter Pari presents Aunt Pari with a package she'd found in Abdullah's closet. Inside, there is a note written in Farsi and for the first time, the daughter Pari is grateful for the Farsi lessons. The note is written in 2007, just when Abdullah is diagnosed with the illness that will put an end to his memories. He writes that he hopes she will someday find the note and know that he is thinking of her as his active life comes to an end. Inside the package, Aunt Pari finds the tin tea box filled with feathers, including the peacock feather. Aunt Pari says she doesn't know exactly what it means, other than the fact that Abdullah was thinking of her. Later, as Aunt Pari sleeps, the daughter Pari finds a sense of happiness and hopefulness that she has been missing.

## Analysis

Pari, Abdullah's daughter, realizes as a child that her father is sad and believes it's because of the lost of his sister. Pari spends much of her childhood planning to save all her money to find her Aunt Pari to reunited her with Abdullah. The fact that Abdullah's daughter recognizes the missing aunt as the cause of Abdullah's sadness is evidence that Abdullah has never gotten over the loss and has spent his entire life grieving for his sister.

On the way home from the airport, Aunt Pari asks the daughter Pari about her life. The daughter briefly describes her work in the family restaurant. Aunt Pari says daughter Pari is fortunate to have memories of her background and to know about her family. She says she feels as if there is no beginning to her own life and that she's always been somewhat adrift because of it.

The daughter Pari is struggling with some problems of her own because of her upbringing. She gives up the idea of attending a prestigious art program because her mother is ill. She later takes a job at home so that she can take care of Abdullah. While Pari doesn't seem to have any plans to abandon what she sees as her duty, she does find that she resents her father and the effect his illness has on her life. She notes that she feels her "best years draining away" while she is stuck caring for him. This greatly resembles the life Parwana led, caring for Masooma all those decades earlier, and this duty is a theme in the book.



The daughter Pari recalls a conversation with her mother, not long before Sultana's death. Sultana reveals that Abdullah sends a thousand dollars to his half-brother, Iqbal, every three months. Pari has never heard of Iqbal and knows nothing of her family in Afghanistan, but Sultana knows that Pari will have to take over the financial aspects of the business once Sultana dies, and that she needs to know some of these details. When Aunt Pari first contacts the daughter Pari, Iqbal is confirmation that they are part of the same family. Aunt Pari knows about Iqbal from Nabi's letter and the daughter Pari knows because of Sultana's revelation.

Pari the daughter admits that she has always wanted freedom, but is afraid of having it. For example, she wants to join the swim team as a teenager but knows she wouldn't be able to bring herself to appear in public in a swim suit. She knows that she gave up too easily on her plans to attend art school. She also recalls a romance with a young man named Neal who had promised to convert to Islam and attend Farsi classes in order to live a fuller life with Pari. She says she had ultimately pushed him away in order to remain in the familiar life created by her parents.

## Discussion Question 1

Describe the daughter Pari's childhood, her relationship with her parents, and the problems her ethnicity creates in adulthood.

## Discussion Question 2

Describe the connection between the daughter Pari and Aunt Pari, even before they meet.

## Discussion Question 3

What do you see as the most important theme of this story?

## Vocabulary

sequestered, periphery, impervious, transcriptionist, impediment, stealthy, melancholy, instantaneously, euphoria, bogus, culinary, essence, quirks, epiphany





# Characters

## Nabi

Brother of Parwana, Nabi serves as chauffeur and cook for Suleiman Wahdati and stays on after Suleiman marries Nila. Nabi is something of a celebrity in his home village because of his life in Kabul, which seems rich compared to the lives of the villagers. Nabi is in love with Nila but keeps most of his feelings to himself. It's Nabi's idea for Nila to adopt Pari. He believes his role in this plan will make her happy and that she will feel grateful to him. In truth, she does feel gratitude but her time is so taken up with Pari that she stops spending time with Nabi and seldom even notices his presence. Nabi is hurt by that and is later upset to learn about Suleiman's physical attraction. Nabi takes over care of Suleiman after his stroke and eventually takes over management of the entire household as well as Suleiman's personal needs.

As Suleiman nears the end of his life, Nabi realizes that he has settled into a life that is as comfortable as a long-term marriage, and he is happy with that life. When Suleiman is in pain and his health is obviously failing, he pleads with Nabi to end his life. Having promised to do so, Nabi reluctantly smothers Suleiman to death. He then continues to live on the estate and eventually lends the house to foreigners who are lending humanitarian aid to the people of Kabul. Though he's told repeatedly that he could be earning a great deal of money by renting the house, he refuses, saying he can't profit from the people who are only trying to help Nabi's countrymen.

Nabi never gets over the guilt of his role in taking Pari from her family. He breaks ties with Saboor because the situation is simply too painful and awkward for them both. As his life nears its end, he seeks to right the wrong by leaving a detailed account of the adoption and instructions to contact Pari.

## Pari, Abdullah's Daughter

Abdullah's daughter, she is torn between her desire to embrace the culture of the United States and the fear of disappointing her father. Pari struggles with this her entire life and never comes to any real conclusions on the matter. She asks to join the swim team at her school but doesn't really want to. When Abdullah refuses, Pari admits to herself that she isn't certain she could bring herself to appear in public in a bathing suit.

As her father's mind deteriorates, Pari gives up her dreams of attending college to care for him. She devotes her entire existence to him, taking a job at home so that she can be with him all day, every day. Pari's sense of duty has a great deal to do with her love and devotion for her father, but is also because she doesn't feel ready to step out into a life of her own.

Pari grows up hearing the story of her father's sister who was taken away at a young age, and she feels a connection to her Aunt Pari, for whom she is named. She pretends





to talk to her aunt and even writes postcards from the family's vacation destinations. Pari remains devoted to her father as he loses his memories but finds a new level of happiness when she finally meets her Aunt Pari and looks forward to making a connection with that family. It seems likely that she is ready to move into a life of her own, seeking to fulfill at least some of her own dreams.

## Abdullah

Abdullah is a young boy as the story opens. He is entirely devoted to his sister, Pari, and is determined to go along when their father takes Pari on a trip to Kabul. He has no inkling of what is about to happen until they arrive in Kabul, but figures it out before the separation actually takes place. He is heartbroken when they return to the village without Pari.

Abdullah grows up in the village where he'd been born but leaves at the first opportunity, mostly to escape his memories of Pari. He eventually marries and moves to the United States where he opens a restaurant to support his wife and daughter, also named Pari. Abdullah is a proud man who is distraught as his memory begins to fail him, leaving him often confused and bitter. He reconnects with Pari, his sister, but his memory has already failed to the point that he never seems to realize the woman's true identity.

## Saboor

Father of Abdullah, Pari, and Iqbal, Saboor is a hard-working man who is devoted to his family. When his wife dies giving birth to Pari, he marries Parwana and they soon have a son of their own. The baby, Omar, dies during the first winter of his life and this seems to force Saboor to the decision to sell Pari. He believes that Pari will have a better life away from the poverty of her biological family and he is able to provide some essentials for his family with the money the Wahdatis give him in exchange for Pari. He dies while harvesting beets in the never-ending quest to make enough money to support his family.

## Suleiman Wahdati

Husband of Nila, Suleiman is a homosexual though he apparently never acts on those feelings. He is in love with Nabi, a fact that isn't revealed until after Suleiman's stroke which leaves him as a near-invalid for the rest of his life. Suleiman is wealthy and lives an easy life. Though he shows no real paternal instincts prior to Pari's adoption, he is soon completely devoted to her and is devastated when Pari sees him after his stroke. He lives out his life under Nabi's care and never leaves his home except for short outings to nearby destinations. He leaves his home and wealth to Nabi after his death.



## Parwana

Abdullah's stepmother and Nabi's brother, Parwana is introverted and quiet by the time she marries Saboor. She is a twin and is known as the less desirable of the two. She is more difficult as a child and resents that her sister is the favorite. Parwana shoves her sister out of a tree, breaking her back. Parwana spends the following years caring for her sister, mostly out of guilt.

## Sultana

Abdullah's wife, Sultana is a kind and hard-working woman. She has only a single daughter, named Pari after Abdullah's lost sister. She has a strong connection to her daughter and seems to understand the young Pari, making their relationship much different than the relationship between Abdullah and his daughter.

## Iqbal

The youngest son of Saboor and Parwana, Iqbal is apparently the last to leave the family home in Shadbagh. War drives him away with his family. When he returns, he finds that a war criminal has taken possession of his land. He tries to fight for his property but is apparently murdered for standing up for his family against the theft.

## Masooma

Parwana's twin sister, Masooma is the nicer, more attractive of the pair. Masooma tells Parwana that Saboor is going to ask her to marry and Parwana is driven to a fit of jealousy. She shoves Masooma from a limb high in the tree and Masooma breaks her back in the fall. She is an invalid for her entire life and depends on Parwana to care for her every need. Masooma eventually asks Parwana to leave her to die in the desert as a means of escaping the horrible life she is forced to live.

## Markos Varvaris

A plastic surgeon who lives in the Wahdati house and helps the people of Kabul, Markos is a caring man who grew up in Greece in a single-parent household. His mother, a school teacher, expected him to be tolerant and she stood up for those less fortunate, which seems to have shaped Markos' life. As a child, he is best friends with a young girl who is severely deformed with a gaping hole where her mouth should have been. That friendship likely shaped his desire to be a plastic surgeon rather than some other kind of doctor. Markos is a close friend of Nabi and it's Markos who finds Pari, Abdullah's sister, and reveals the truth about her adoption.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## A Homemade Camera

A homemade device created by Thalia and Markos to help Markos realize his dream of taking photographs. Markos first uses the camera to take a picture of Thalia beside the ocean and he carries that photo with him for years.

## The Tin Tea Box

This tea box belongs to Pari, Abdullah's sister, and is filled with feathers. Most are collected by Abdullah. Abdullah keeps the tin for decades after Pari's adoption. Abdullah's daughter, Pari, gives it back to Abdullah's sister, Pari, after Abdullah goes to live in a nursing home.

## The Broken Spectacles

This is a piece of a pair of glasses that Adel finds in a field near his house. He knows the broken glasses mean Adel's father killed Iqbal or at least had him killed.

## Jalozai Refugee Camp

This is where Gholam and his family lives after leaving their home in Shadbah. They return to Shadbagh after the camp is closed.

## Apollo

This dog owned, by the man dating Thalia's mother, attacks Thalia and leaves her with a seriously deformed face.

## The Div

The mythical monster that is part of the fairy tale Saboor tells during the trip to Kabul. The Div is thought to be a horrible beast that kills and eats the children it steals, but it's later revealed that the children are cared for and happy. The Div provides a magic potion for the father who loses a son so that the father no longer remembers the son.

## Baba Ayub

This is the father in the tale Saboor tells his children before taking them to Kabul, where he plans to leave his daughter, Pari, to an adopted family. In the tale, Baba Ayub loves



his children very much, but agrees to give one to the div so that all of his children may live.

## **The TV and VCR**

These are the gifts Idris gives to Roshi while she is in the hospital. Though she is thrilled with the gifts, she really needs someone who will help arrange the surgery she needs. By contrast, Idris and his family are building a home theater at their house in the United States.

## **Parrallaxe**

This is the name of the magazine that covers the interview with Nila a short time before her suicide.

## **The Giant Oak**

The tree in the village at Shadbagh, this is apparently the tree from which Parwana pushes her sister. The tree is said to be magical. A person should stand under the tree and make a wish. If the wish is to come true, the tree will send down ten leaves. After leaving Pari in Kabul, Saboor leads the men in chopping down the tree. Many years later, Adel and his family live on the land and he learns about Saboor cutting down the tree.



# Settings

## Shadbagh

Shadbagh is the town where Abdullah lives with his family during his early childhood. The town is merely a village during Abdullah's life there but is later renamed New Shadbagh and taken over by a wealthy war criminal. The new town has a school, medical clinic, and businesses that were unheard of during Abdullah's youth. There are a few families who live there in the early days but the town is much larger by the time Iqbal and his family returns to the village.

## Paris

Paris is where Nila lives with Pari, Abdullah's sister, until her death. Pari remains in the area and it's there that Abdullah's daughter, Pari, plans to meet her cousins for the first time. The city is real and there are only a few descriptions of specific places in the book. Most specific places are only mentioned in passing, such as the neighborhood where Pari, Abdullah's sister, lives with her boyfriend, the hospital where Nila is taken after a fall, and the apartment where Nila lives alone at the time of her death.

## The Wahdati's House

Home of Suleiman and Nila Wahdati, it is a mansion compared to the house where Abdullah and his his family live. Suleiman and Nila live there with Nabi and have an array of servants who take care of the grounds and household chores until Suleiman's stroke. The house is an important setting early in the story because it's here that Pari is separated from Abdullah when the Wahdati's buy her from Saboor. The house is large and Pari has her own room. The house falls into neglect after Suleiman's stroke and is later heavily damaged by shells and bombs. After Suleiman's death, the house becomes home to a group of people who are offering humanitarian aid to the people of Kabul.

## Kabul

Kabul is the city where most of the action of the story takes place. This is where the Wahdati house is located. It is not far from Shadbagh though it takes more than a day for Saboor to travel from Shadbagh to Kabul on foot. There are a few details about the city presented in the book, including a brief look at the bazaar where Nila goes to buy shoes for Abdullah and his sister, Pari. There is also a hospital here where Markos and others work while living in the Wahdati house.

## **Abe's Kabob Restaurant**

The eating establishment owned by Abdullah in the United States. Abdullah and his wife, Sultana, operate the business and their daughter, Pari, works there as soon as she is of an age to help. The restaurant represents a level of freedom for Abdullah because it means he can take care of his family without the labor-intensive life led by his father. But for Abdullah's daughter, Pari, the restaurant becomes something of a prison. When she wants to participate in extra-curricular activities such as swimming, Abdullah says they can't take time away from the restaurant to take her to practice. Abdullah borrows the money from Timur to open the restaurant and keeps it until his retirement. The restaurant is somewhat shabby with checkered tablecloths and laminated menus.



# Themes and Motifs

## The Relationship between Abdullah and Pari

Abdullah is still young when Pari is born, but he takes on all the duties of a caregiver. It's Abdullah who changes and feeds Pari but it's also Abdullah who nurtures and soothes her. This prompts a connection between them that would likely have not existed if their mother had survived. Abdullah is willing to risk anything for Pari and there's the story of him trading his only pair of shoes for a feather, just because he knew it would make Pari happy.

When Saboor decides to take Pari to Kabul where he plans to sell her to the Wahdatis, Abdullah is told to stay at home. Saboor strikes Abdullah and even throws rocks at him in an effort to make Abdullah go back, but he continues to follow them. Abdullah refuses to leave Pari and Pari cries for Abdullah. There's no doubt that Saboor is aware of their relationship and wants to leave Abdullah at home so that there won't be a scene when Pari is taken away. Abdullah refuses to let Pari go without him and he is there when the separation takes place. Both he and Pari are devastated by the situation and Abdullah mourns Pari's absence for the rest of his life.

Pari eventually loses her memories of her biological family but always feels that something is missing from her life. She isn't surprised to learn that she is adopted and that she had such a close connection to her brother. Tragically, Abdullah and Pari are not reunited until Abdullah's mind has been ravaged, leaving them with no way to communicate about their shared past.

## The Lack of Biological Connections

Abdullah's mother dies during childbirth, leaving Abdullah and his sister, Pari, without a mother. Abdullah misses that connection and seems to make up for it by becoming very close to Pari. Their father, Saboor, soon remarries and Parwana becomes the stepmother to Abdullah and Pari. She is sometimes kind to them and Abdullah notes that she doesn't take any pleasure from hitting them, but she also doesn't love them as much as she loves her biological sons. Abdullah explains it by saying that Parwana would choose to save her own child if the house was on fire and she had time to save only one child. He doesn't blame her for this attitude and notes that it's merely a fact of life.

This lack is also seen in the relationship between Pari and her adoptive mother, Nila. Nila seems to desperately want a child but she doesn't seem to fully bond with Pari. When Pari is very young, Nila leaves town with a boyfriend, leaving Pari a note with vague instructions for the few days she's away. While some biological mothers might also have no problem leaving their children alone, it seems that Nila wants Pari to be a friend rather than a daughter. By the time Pari is a teenager, she is taking care of Nila



more than Nila is caring for Pari. Pari talks about her mother's drama and her efforts to get Pari's attention. Pari begins to suspect that Nila is not her biological mother, probably at least partly because of she recognizes a lack of the traditional mother-daughter connection.

## Secrets

There are several secrets that characters hide, or try to hide, throughout the story. One of the most important secrets is that of Pari's adoption and the truth about her biological parents. Pari is young when Saboor sells her to Nila Wahdati, and Pari eventually forgets about her biological family. She spends her formative years thinking that Nila is her mother and it's not until she's an adult that she learns the truth. Another secret Nila keeps is the truth about Suleiman, who Pari believes to be her father. Nila tells Pari that Suleiman dies soon after his first stroke but he actually lives for many years under Nabi's care. This ends the relationship the two might have shared if Pari had known the truth.

Another important secret is kept by Parwana. Driven by a jealous rage, Parwana shoves her twin sister, Masooma, out of a tree. Masooma is paralyzed in the fall and lives the remainder of her life as an invalid. Parwana adds another secret to her life when she complies with Marsooma's request to die. Parwana leaves her sister alone in the desert and wonders if she'll be able to live with the knowledge of what she's done.

Suleiman is another character who holds an important secret close to his heart. Suleiman is attracted to Nabi at their first meeting and gives Nabi a job because of this attraction. Suleiman is an amateur artist and Nabi learns after Suleiman's stroke that he has sketch books filled with drawings of Nabi. While Nabi and Nila know Suleiman's secret, they don't share the information with anyone else.

Adel's father is yet another character that falls into this category. Adel believes his father is a benevolent man who is a beloved patron of New Shadbagh. In fact, he's a ruthless war lord who murders Iqbal for contesting property rights. When Adel discovers his father's secret, his attitude changes though he knows he will continue to love his father.

## The Duty of a Caregiver

Several of the characters feel a deep duty toward members of their family, and these emotions drive some scenes in the story. An early look at this theme is seen in the lives of Parwana and Marsooma. They are twins but Marsooma is the beloved of the two, even when they are very young. This drives Parwana to a jealous rage and she shoves Marsooma from a tree. Marsooma breaks her back in the fall and spends the rest of her life paralyzed. She is totally dependent on Parwana for her every need from that time until her death. Parwana hates the job of caring for Marsooma but accepts that she has no choice, especially since she caused Marsooma's injury. At one point, Parwana heats water to wash Marsooma's body. Marsooma points out that she can't feel it and that heating the water was unnecessary. Parwana says she can tell the water is warm,





indicating that she wants to do her best for Marsooma. When Marsooma asks to be left in the desert to die, Parwana struggles with it. She wants to be free of the burden of being a caregiver, but hates the idea of ending Marsooma's life. She does comply with Marsooma's request and ends up marrying Saboor.

Parwana's brother, Nabi, might have remained in Shadbagh to help care for Marsooma, but he doesn't. Instead, he works in Kabul and sends money to help his sisters survive. He can't bring himself to actually help care for Marsooma's physical needs but winds up performing those same duties for his employer, Suleiman Wahdati. Suleiman has a stroke that makes him into a near-invalid for many years and Nabi remains a devoted caregiver for all of Suleiman's life. Suleiman makes Nabi promise that he will help end Suleiman's life when Suleiman feels it's time. Nabi reluctantly follows through on that promise when Suleiman makes that decision after many years in Nabi's care.

Pari, Abdullah's sister, winds up being something of a caregiver to her adoptive mother, Nila. Nila is a needy person who exhibits a great deal of drama in order to keep Pari at her beck and call.

Another example of this theme is seen in Abdullah's life with his daughter, Pari, Sultana dies, leaving Abdullah and Pari living in the same house. Pari gives up her dream of college and finds a job she can do from home in order to take care of Abdullah as long as possible. She remains a devoted caregiver until Abdullah's mind deteriorates dramatically, then puts him in a nursing home.

## Social and Class Differences

The first example of this theme is seen in the lives of Abdullah's family as compared to the Wahdatis. Abdullah's family is struggling just to survive and the death of a child indicates that the situation for them is very serious. By comparison, the Wahdatis are so wealthy that they are able to buy anything they want, including a child. Nila thinks nothing of spending money. She mentions sending Nabi across town for some special cookies for Abdullah and Pari. Meanwhile, Abdullah doesn't have a winter coat until the Wahdatis give them money for Pari.

By extension, Nabi is from this same poor region and his situation is improved only by the fact that he works and lives at the Wahdati's house. He has more money and conveniences than most people in his village but luck plays an important part in his situation. Because he lives in the city and drives Suleiman's car to visit his family in Shadbagh, the people of his village consider him a class above them. This impression is driven largely by his appearance which is a stark contrast to the typical laborer of the village. This elevates Nabi's rank when he is visiting his family but he returns to the lower class in the social system of Kabul once he is back at work. He notes that he hopes Nila doesn't know that his suit is a hand-me-down and realizes that Suleiman wouldn't realize that Nabi would be ashamed for this information to be public knowledge.



Another example of this theme is seen in the chapter devoted to Adel and his encounter with Iqbal's family. Adel lives in a mansion with body guards and everything he could possibly want, other than companionship. He is separated by the people of the village by his rank. He feels some compassion for Gholam but also feels superior. He can't imagine that Gholam's claims have any real merit and believes that the boy is merely looking for a handout. Even when Adel learns the truth about his father – that he's a ruthless tyrant and a criminal – he knows that he will continue to love his father and live the life that's being bought for him.

# Styles

## Point of View

The book is written in third person from a somewhat limited omniscient perspective. The perspective is limited only by the character who is the focus at in that chapter. For example, Adel's family interacts with the family of Iqbal after Iqbal returns to Shadbagh to reclaim his property. Adel believes Iqbal's son is lying when he says Adel's father stole the land. When Iqbal throws rocks through the windows at Adel's house, he is taken away by Adel's father and his body guards. Adel never knows for certain what happens to Iqbal, but he surmises that his father killed Iqbal. These limitations are acceptable and the reader is left to decide whether the character's interpretations are correct.

In other cases, gaps in one person's knowledge are answered in the chapters focusing on another character. Pari and Nila leave Kabul after Suleiman's stroke. They never return and never contact Suleiman or Nabi. This seems somewhat heartless, especially considering that Pari had forged a real connection with her adoptive father. It's only later that the reader learns that Pari believes Suleiman died at the time of his stroke.

The majority of the characters seem reliable and honest. Nabi puts his guilt on paper when he writes a letter to Markos, outlining the details of Pari's adoption. He doesn't seem to hold back anything, including his attraction for Nila, his selfish reasons for putting the plan together, or his guilt over having ripped Pari from her family. Abdullah's daughter, who is also named Pari, admits that she has lived her life in her the shadow of her father's expectations and that she's clung to those as a reason to avoid living a life of her own. These examples of honesty make it easy to believe the characters' stories.

## Language and Meaning

The story is written in English but uses some words in the native language of Afghanistan. In some cases, the words are presented in such a way that the reader can infer at least a basic meaning for the word though deeper nuances may be lost. For example, Saboor tells Abdullah and Pari a story as he's taking them to Kabul. The story includes a "jinn" and it seems obvious that this is some sort of monster. The true definition is that the jinn is "an intelligent spirit of lower rank than the angels, able to appear in human form." While the full definition adds some detail to the story, the reader who knows only that it's a mythical monster will get the same basic meaning from the story. In other cases, the meaning of the word is at least inferred from the context. At one point, Parwana is "slapping slabs of dough against the sides of the mud tandoor." The "tandoor" is a clay oven, typical in this region.

As the story opens, Saboor is telling a story to his children. The story is about a monster who demands one child from a family and, in return for that sacrifice, allows the family



to keep the remaining children. If the family refuses to give up a child, the monster takes all the children. The story mimics what's happening to Saboor as he makes the trip to Kabul. He is planning to sell Pari to a wealthy family there in order to buy necessities for his remaining family. The parallels between Saboor's story and the reality is hidden until later in the chapter.

The book is divided into nine chapters and each focuses on a character or group of characters. In some cases, the language at the beginning of the chapter seems confusing. For example, one chapter focuses on Nabi. That chapter begins with a letter from Nabi to Markos. Nabi is not identified in the early paragraphs as the writer and this is the first time the reader has encountered Markos. The reader will sometimes have to go several paragraphs to discover the identities of the characters of that paragraph.

## Structure

The book is divided into nine lengthy chapters. The book opens with a quote from Jelaluddin Rumi, a Thirteenth Century poet. The quote reads, "Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I'll meet you there." The quote refers to the separation of Abdullah and his sister, Pari, and indicates that they might be reunited someday. They actually don't find each other until after Abdullah has lost his memory and doesn't realize Pari's identity. The idea of the "wrongdoing" and "rightdoing" seems to refer to the fact that Abdullah and Pari are literally torn apart when Pari is sold. Selling the child is morally wrong but the Saboor sells his daughter for what he believes are the right reasons.

The book is not presented in chronological order. The book opens in 1952, when Saboor takes his daughter to Kabul and sells her. The final chapter occurs in 2010, when Pari and Abdullah are reunited. The chapters in between occur at various times with various characters. For example, Chapter Three opens in the Spring of 1949 and ends a short time later. This entire chapter details the life of Parwana prior to her marriage to Saboor. Chapter Four covers the life of Nabi and covers a time prior to 1949, ending just before his death, decades later.

The fact that each chapter follows most of the life of a character rather than a time line may be confusing for some readers. For example, the chapter that outlines Nabi's life includes Markos, a surgeon from Greece who winds up living in the house Nabi owns. Markos' life is not detailed until Chapter Eight. In some cases, the back stories of characters are presented through memories. Other characters are presented as part of some other character's story and their own story is never told at all.



## Quotes

Do you understand, Abdullah, how this was an act of mercy? That potion that erased these memories?

-- Saboor (Chapter 1 paragraph 89)

**Importance:** Saboor is about to set out on a journey that will culminate with selling his daughter, Pari, to a wealthy couple. Saboor has no doubt that he will be heartbroken after this deed is done and that he will long for her. In his story about Baba Ayub, the Div provides a magic potion that erases Baba Ayub's memories of his lost son. Saboor knows he will have no such potion and that he will have to endure his heartbreak.

If one night their house caught fire, Abdullah knew without doubt which child Parwana would grab rushing out.

-- Abdullah (Chapter 2 paragraph 37)

**Importance:** Abdullah is talking about his relationship with his stepmother, Parwana. He says that she is capable of kindness toward Abdullah and Pari but that the biological connection is missing between them. Abdullah isn't angry at Parwana about the lack of love and accepts it as fact.

Her mind bounces from one fragmented thought to another and eventually swims to a picture she saw in an old magazine once of a pair of grim-faced brothers from Siam joined at the torso by a thick band of flesh. Two creatures inextricably bound, blood formed in the marrow of one running through the veins of the other, their union permanent.

-- Parwana (Chapter 3 paragraph 29)

**Importance:** Parwana is comparing her duty to Masooma to a set of conjoined twins. She sees no way out of the situation and believes she will be tied to Masooma for her entire life. Most of this duty she feels toward Masooma is because Parwana is responsible for the injury that caused Masooma's paralysis.

Chief among them this: that I would give Nila something no other man – not her husband, not the owner of that big pink house – could.

-- Nabi (Chapter 4 paragraph 154)

**Importance:** Nabi is talking about his motive for presenting the idea of having Nila raise Pari as her own. He has some other motivations, including a desire to help Saboor's family, but he admits that he is mostly interested in trying to make Nila happy and he believes a child of her own will accomplish that. Nabi incorrectly believes that Nila will show her gratitude to him for his role.

It was you, Nabi,' she said in my ear. 'It was always you.'

-- Nila (Chapter 4 paragraph 200)



**Importance:** These are Nila's final words to Nabi as she and Pari are leaving Kabul for Paris. It seems to indicate that Nila has always loved Nabi but it's later revealed that Suleiman is in love with Nabi.

Talking about Afghanistan – and he is astonished at how quickly and imperceptibly this has happened – suddenly feels like discussing a recently watched, emotionally drenching film whose effects are beginning to wane.

-- Idris (Chapter 5 paragraph 310)

**Importance:** Idris has made a promise to help Roshi get the surgeries she needs and has returned to America feeling that his life is excessive and unfulfilled. He initially finds fault with the attitudes of his children and seems to want to make changes in his own life, but it doesn't take long for him to simply return to his comfortable lifestyle without thinking very much about the conditions in Afghanistan.

Don't worry. You're not in it.

-- Roshi (Chapter 5 paragraph 348)

**Importance:** These are the words Roshi has written instead of signing her book for Idris. Idris had broken his promise to help her get the surgeries she needed and he knows that her decision to keep him out of the book is nothing more than kindness on her part.

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

-- Nila (Chapter 6 paragraph 63)

**Importance:** Nila is talking to a reporter for “Parrallaxe” magazine and turns the conversation several times to Pari. She has, at the time of this interview, recently learned that Pari is involved with Julien, who was Nila's lover for about six months years earlier. This statement sums up Nila's attitude toward Pari and the fact that they are never as close as a biological mother and daughter might have been.

Imagine how my family felt, coming all the way from Pakistan, only to get off the bus and find this thing on our land.

-- Gholam (Chapter 7 paragraph 245)

**Importance:** Gholam is talking to Adel about his feelings upon discovering that Adel's family has taken possession of the land owned by Iqbal's family. He points out that Adel had been angry a few days earlier when Gholam wins a jersey from Adel.

The alternate possibility, that the mask was perhaps designed to shield Thalia from us, eluded me.

-- Markos (Chapter 8 paragraph 32)

**Importance:** This is Markos' first meeting with Thalia and he has yet to see the devastation of the dog bite. He believes she wears a veil so that other people won't see



her injury but Markos later realizes that she also wears it so that she won't have to deal with other people's reactions to her injury.

But she spend the bulk of the time running down a long list, warning us against all the things we had to avoid at all cost as virtuous young Muslim girls lest we be corrupted by Western culture: boys – first and foremost, naturally – but also rap music, Madonna, Melrose Place, shorts, dancing, swimming in public, cheerleading, alcohol, bacon, pepperoni, non-halal burgers, and a slew of other things.

-- Pari, Abdullah's Daughter (Chapter 9 paragraph 125)

**Importance:** Pari is talking about her childhood and how it sets her apart from the non-Muslim children. She later talks about the fact that this life is familiar to her and that she simultaneously hates the life but clings to the familiarity.

For me, it was the contrary,' Pari says. 'You say you felt a presence, but I sensed only an absence.

-- Aunt Pari (Chapter 9 paragraph 382)

**Importance:** Pari the daughter has just explained that she felt a connection to her Aunt Pari from early childhood, based on the stories told by Abdullah. Aunt Pari, by contrast, had no one to share stories and felt only that something was missing.