

# The Buddha of Suburbia



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF HANIF KUREISHI

*The Buddha of Suburbia* is semi-autobiographical: Kureishi was born in Kent to a Pakistani father and an English mother, and his father was from a wealthy family. Kureishi attended several colleges and finally completed a philosophy degree at King's College London. His writing career began when he started writing pornography, and he soon moved on to writing for theatre. Kureishi began experiencing major success in 1985 with his screenplay *My Beautiful Laundrette*. The film was directed by Stephen Frears, and it won both an Academy Award and the New York Film Critics Best Screenplay Award. *The Buddha of Suburbia* was wildly successful: it won several awards and was made into a television series, complete with a soundtrack by David Bowie. Despite his success, Kureishi has garnered criticism in regards to his personal life. His family has accused him of exploiting them, and they state that many of the "semi-autobiographical" elements of his work are entirely fictional. His sister in particular has been vocal about this, saying that their family was never working class, their mother didn't work in a shoe factory, and that their father didn't speak to Kureishi for a year after *Buddha's* publication because of how Kureishi portrayed him. Similarly, his 1998 novel *Intimacy* created controversy because it portrays a man leaving his wife and young children. Many assumed it was autobiographical as Kureishi had done the same not long before the novel was published. Kureishi has three children with the film producer Tracey Scoffeild and lives in West London.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The 1970s were a decade of change worldwide. Many former colonies of Britain had obtained independence in the 20 years previous, and the 1960s brought social change in the form of drugs, legalization of abortion in the UK in 1967, and the ideas of free love, peace, and sexual permissiveness as espoused by the hippies. These ideas of the 1960s permeate the beginning of the novel but soon give way to the economic recessions and social discontent that England experienced later in the decade. Amidst this backdrop and despite economic depression, the British middle class thrived during the 1970s. Though Karim is mostly involved with more liberal politics, the seventies also saw the rise of neo-Nazi political parties such as the National Front. The National Front expressed strong anti-immigrant sentiment and supported sending immigrants back to their countries of origin. After the so-called Winter of Discontent in 1978-79, England elected Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister. She represented a major swing towards conservatism

in British politics. Buddha often mentions the animosity between Pakistan and India, which is a result of the partition of British India in 1947. British India included modern-day India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka and was split into two self-governing countries, Pakistan and India, in 1947. This created a massive refugee crisis as individuals from different religions crossed the India-Pakistan border, and it resulted in intense violence.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Many of the books and plays that Karim encounters throughout the novel relate thematically to the novel itself: Jack Kerouac's [On the Road](#) follows a similar vein of a physical journey and features heavy drug use; Jamila reads Simone Beauvoir's book *The Second Sex*, which is widely considered to be the starting point of second wave feminism; and Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* is innately imperialist, racist, and reflective of England's questionable views on India and Indian people. Many of Hanif Kureishi's other novels explore similar themes of immigration, youth culture, and coming of age, most notably his second novel, *The Black Album*. *Buddha* also shares broad similarities with novels such as Zadie Smith's [White Teeth](#) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Americanah*, as they portray the immigrant experience of coming from previously colonized countries to England, just as Haroon does.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Buddha of Suburbia
- **When Written:** Late 1980s
- **Where Written:** London, England
- **When Published:** 1990
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary; Postcolonial
- **Genre:** Bildungsroman; Family Drama
- **Setting:** The suburbs and city of London throughout the 1970s, ending in 1979
- **Climax:** When Karim realizes he's outgrown his love and admiration for Charlie
- **Antagonist:** There's no real singular antagonist; Karim primarily tackles systematic racism and classism, as well as the widespread discontent of 1970s England.
- **Point of View:** First Person

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Pseudonyms.** When Kureishi wrote pornography, one of the names he wrote under was Karim.



## PLOT SUMMARY

Karim is seventeen years old and ready for anything when Dad invites him to accompany him to an "appearance" at Eva Kay's house. There, Karim watches Dad lead affluent Londoners in guided meditation and yoga. Karim watches Dad and Eva have sex in the garden and then has sex himself with Eva's son and his idol, Charlie. Though Mum is very unhappy when Dad and Karim return home, it doesn't stop Dad from inviting Karim along to the next appearance. However, as Dad is about to begin, Mum's sister, Jean, and her husband, Ted, come through the door. Karim reasons that Jean, who's nasty and nosy, is surely here to investigate Dad. Karim meets a girl named Helen but thinks only of Charlie.

At Jean's insistence, Karim goes to visit her and Ted. He stops to visit Helen on his way but her father, whom Karim calls Hairy Back, sets his **Great Dane** after Karim. The dog mounts Karim and ejaculates on his jacket, and Karim is in no mood to listen to Jean when he arrives at her house. Jean insists that the Buddhist nonsense must stop. A few days later, Ted arrives at Karim's house. He barges in on Dad and begins to relay Jean's message himself, but Dad grabs Ted and insists to Ted that he works too hard. Ted starts crying, and Dad declares that he "released" Ted. Karim consults his best friend, Jamila, about his family's drama. He finds that Jamila is embroiled in drama of her own: her father, Anwar, is refusing to eat until Jamila agrees to an arranged marriage, something that Jamila doesn't want to do. They call a meeting after school one day and Helen invites herself along. Helen insists they consult Dad about the matter, but Dad only tells Jamila to follow her heart.

Jamila chooses the arranged marriage, and Karim and Helen accompany her and Jeeta to pick up Changez from the airport. It takes Anwar a while to realize that Changez will be a useless son-in-law: he only has one working arm and doesn't seem to know how to work. Karim finds Changez endearing. After Changez's welcome party, Dad takes Karim to Eva's house to inform him that he's leaving Mum for Eva. Karim, distraught, calls Jean. When Karim arrives home, Ted and Jean show up and pack up Mum and Karim's little brother, Allie. Dad and Karim return to Eva's house.

Eva signs Karim up for college classes with Charlie, but Karim doesn't attend most of them. He spends much of his time with Changez and Jamila, where he introduces Changez to sexy novels. Jamila refuses to sleep with Changez and continues her solitary studies in her bedroom, while Changez is purposefully bad at helping Anwar out in his grocery store. Changez becomes more and more sexually frustrated until he finally confronts Karim and asks his opinion on the matter. Karim insists that Jamila will never sleep with him, and Changez makes Karim take him to a prostitute named Shinko. Several weeks later, Changez asks Karim to cover for him while he visits Shinko. Karim and Jamila have sex while Changez is gone,

but Karim wakes to find Changez at home. Karim feels ashamed and as though he's let everyone down. He subsequently fails all his exams by not showing up for them, much to Dad's disgust.

Eva begins employing Ted to help her renovate her house, and Karim helps with the hard labor. When the house is finished, Eva decides she wants to move to London proper. She tasks Karim and Dad with packing up Charlie's room, and Karim wonders how Charlie manages to be so charming. Soon, Karim wrangles a job ferrying Charlie's equipment to and from gigs. Charlie is cruel and treats Karim horribly, and Karim takes his opportunity to tell Charlie that he's talentless. Eva soon purchases a rundown flat in what she believes is an up and coming neighborhood. Karim spends his time exploring the city. One night, he goes out to a bar with Charlie. Charlie gets extremely drunk, but the band goes on before Karim can get Charlie out of the bar. The band is a punk band, and Karim and Charlie are dismayed at the anger and violence of the band and the fans. However, Charlie is intrigued. He runs away from Karim, runs into traffic outside, and gets in a car with some other punks.

Before Eva begins renovating her new flat, she throws a flat-warming party. Her guest list is composed mostly of aspiring actors and directors, specifically a director named Shadwell. Karim makes up with Changez at the party before Eva forces him to speak with Shadwell. Shadwell offers Karim an audition, much to Karim's surprise. Eva helps him prepare for weeks. Though the audition goes well, Karim is concerned when Shadwell tries to speak to him in Punjabi and Urdu, languages he never learned despite Dad being Indian. Shadwell is putting on *The Jungle Book* and wants someone authentic to play Mowgli, though he's skeptical when he learns that Karim has never been to India. Rehearsals initially go smoothly, and Karim makes friends with a Welsh Trotskyite named Terry. Things sour, however, when Karim gets his costume: a loincloth and dark body paint. Shadwell then bullies Karim into speaking with an exaggerated Indian accent. Karim is hurt when none of the other actors, including Terry, stand up for him.

Mum, Ted, and Jean attend opening night of *The Jungle Book*. They're proud of Karim's performance and go out dancing afterwards. Dad, Eva, Changez, and Jamila attend the next night and are much less impressed: Dad insists that Kipling is racist and Jamila is disappointed that Karim played into racist stereotypes. The critics, however, love the production and it attracts a great deal of attention. One night, the cast learns that the famous theatre director Matthew Pyke will be in the audience. Terry explains that Pyke has taught all over the western world and is the extremely important. After the show, Karim and Terry join the other actors at a bar. Pyke brushes off others but invites Karim to have a drink with him. He offers Karim a role in his next play, which makes Terry extremely angry. When Karim tells Shadwell about the role a few days later, Shadwell warns Karim that Pyke will destroy him.

Karim is immediately attracted to Eleanor, a beautiful redhead in Pyke's play. Pyke leads his actors in games and improvisations, though some of his games bother Karim. Karim becomes suspicious when Pyke tells the cast that he's going to make predictions about who in the cast will sleep with whom. After a few weeks, Pyke sends the actors out to come up with characters based on real people, which his writer will then write a play about. Karim goes to research Anwar, but finds him in a sorry state. Anwar has never fully recovered from his hunger strike, has become extremely devout, and taunts white boys in the street. Karim begins spending his evenings keeping Eleanor company. She refuses to have sex with Karim, which Karim finds endlessly frustrating.

When Karim presents his Anwar character to the cast, Pyke insists that Karim must start again. He wants Karim to portray a black character, but not play too heavily into stereotypes. Karim goes to Changez. Though Changez initially agrees to allow Karim to study him, he soon changes his tune and becomes distraught talking about the fact that Jamila still refuses to sleep with him. Karim is distraught at the realization that Pyke will fire him for not being able to portray an appropriate character and bikes to Eleanor's flat immediately. He finds Eleanor ironing shirts and crying, and puts her to bed. When he tries to leave, Eleanor invites him to have sex and their relationship begins. Karim presents his Changez character to the cast not long after, and Pyke thinks it's perfect.

One afternoon when Karim's bike chain snaps, Pyke offers him a ride home. Pyke talks in the car about his experiences at orgies with his wife, Marlene. Not long after, he offers Karim a gift: Marlene wants to have sex with Karim. Karim isn't flattered but doesn't feel he can refuse Pyke's invitation to bring Eleanor to dinner. On Saturday, Karim and Eleanor dress up and head to Pyke's house. Dinner itself is boring, but afterwards, Marlene explains why Eleanor is so depressed: her last boyfriend, Gene, was black and committed suicide because he couldn't handle the daily racism. Karim struggles having sex with Marlene and discovers that Eleanor has wanted to have sex with Pyke for some time. Pyke puts his penis in Karim's mouth, but Karim bites him. Karim and Eleanor never talk about their evening with the Pykes.

During a rehearsal break Karim spends time with Jeeta and Jamila. Anwar is even worse and ends up in the hospital after trying to attack Changez in the street. He dies a week later. Jamila informs Changez that she wants to move to a commune, and they decide that Changez will go with her. Karim helps them move in and discovers he likes the commune. Jamila soon becomes pregnant by Simon, a man living at the commune.

Pyke's play is a success, but Karim's happiness is marred when Jamila calls to tell him that the National Front attacked Changez. She invites him to accompany them to a protest. Karim agrees but instead he spends the day of the march following Eleanor to Pyke's home. He confronts her on the train

on the way home, and she insists she'll continue sleeping with Pyke. A week later, when Jamila, Simon, and Changez attend the play, Jamila is incensed that Karim didn't come to the march. Terry is also there that night and tells Karim that the Party wants money from Pyke and Eleanor. Karim agrees and Pyke is fully willing to write Karim a check.

At a lavish party after the New York opening, Pyke reveals that he orchestrated Karim's entire relationship with Eleanor. Karim drunkenly tries to punch Pyke. Charlie, who lives in New York, rescues Karim and invites Karim to live with him. Karim enjoys living with Charlie so much that he decides to stay in New York, but after six months, he realizes that he's outgrowing Charlie. Charlie begins to chafe under the constant public scrutiny that comes with fame, and he hires a dominatrix to humiliate him. Karim watches the dominatrix work and realizes he doesn't care about Charlie anymore. When Karim returns to London, he auditions for a role in a major soap opera and gets it.

Karim visits Dad and Eva to share his news, but Dad makes Karim feel like a child. Karim then goes to Mum's house, where he learns from Allie that Mum has a much younger boyfriend. Allie suddenly seems interesting, and Karim brings up their parents' divorce. Allie is angry at Dad, but deflates when Karim insists that he doesn't understand. Later that night, Karim goes to the commune. Changez lets Karim in and explains that Jamila is still angry that Karim didn't show up to the march. Karim falls asleep behind their sofa, but wakes up when he hears Changez and Jamila talking. Changez is still very upset that Jamila won't sleep with him. The next day, Karim goes to visit Dad again. He tells Dad about Mum's boyfriend and notices that Dad finally seems to understand that his divorce with Mum is final. Later that night, Karim takes everyone out to celebrate his new job. Eva and Dad announce they're getting married.



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Karim** – Karim is a half-Indian teenager coming of age in the 1970s. At the beginning of the novel, he is interested in following fashion trends, trying drugs, and having as much sex as he can. He also wants desperately to escape the suburbs and move to London, as he believes that the suburbs are a place of misery and racism, while London will be the place where he can pursue his interests without inhibition. Despite identifying this dream, Karim is directionless, so he finds his father's lover Eva and her son Charlie fascinating in part because both of them have definite directions for their lives. Karim's coming of age over the course of the novel has two major thrusts: he develops an adult life (his career as an actor blossoms and he moves to America), and he begins to see people he once idolized as fully human with all the complexity that entails. For example, as Dad begins his relationship with Eva, Karim is forced to see his

father as not just a boring suburbanite like he always thought, but rather as a full person with desires and contradictions that were invisible when Karim simply saw him as a parent. Over the course of the novel, Karim also develops a more complicated relationship to race. While he once identified almost fully with the white, English side of his identity, he comes to embrace his Indian side more, partially through genuine appreciation for his family and partially through realizing that allowing white people to exoticize him can be professionally and socially rewarding. In most of his relationships, Karim is flakey and selfish. Though he's interested in other people in an abstract sense, his true interest is in figuring out how he fits into the lives of others. Because of this, he finally comes of age when he realizes he's outgrown his love and admiration for Charlie and he can see himself on his own terms, rather than through the lens of others.

**Haroon (Dad)** – Dad is a middle-aged Indian man. He's exceptionally proud of his wide and hairy chest, though he's very short. He came to England in the 50s with his best friend, Anwar. Though he technically came to study law, Dad spent most of his time in the bars drinking and eventually dropped out of school to become a civil service clerk. After he married Mum, Dad became extremely interested in Eastern philosophy. Dad grew up in a wealthy family and doesn't know how to do anything for himself, which frustrates both Mum and Karim to no end. Dad finally gets to truly live out his Eastern philosophical ideas when he meets Eva and begins a relationship with her. She facilitates "appearances" for him, where he guides white upper-middle class people in yoga and meditation. Karim is fascinated by all of this and starts to call his father God when he sees the kind of power Dad has over people. Karim begins to hate Dad when he decides to leave Mum for Eva. Karim blames Dad for ruining his family and hurting Mum, and he believes Dad's happiness with Eva comes at the expense of Mum's happiness. Dad isn't thrilled with Karim's desire to be an actor and is especially upset when he sees Karim perform in *The Jungle Book*. Near the end of the novel, Karim finally begins to see Dad as a real person, not just a father figure. Dad quits his job as a clerk and begins counseling unhappy young people in Eastern philosophy and seems to finally come into himself. When Karim takes his family out to a fancy restaurant to celebrate getting a job on a TV show, Dad announces that he and Eva are getting married.

**Eva** – Eva is, at first, an upper-middle class social climber. She is very interested in what Karim reads and she wears colorful clothing. Mum finds Eva distasteful and Karim can't quite tell if he agrees with Mum or not, but he thinks that Eva is the only person over 30 he can talk to. Eva and Dad begin a relationship when Eva hosts Dad's "appearances" at her home. Eventually, Dad moves in with Eva, and he and Mum divorce. Karim does his best to stay in Eva's good graces. Once Eva and Dad live together, it becomes obvious that Eva has particular ideas

about money and how it should be spent. She spends money on things she wants without considering if she can afford them, which bothers Karim. Eva continues to host lavish parties with other social climbers. To move up the social ladder, Eva begins renovating houses, starting with her own, and she employs Ted to help her. She and Ted begin renovating other people's flats as Eva gradually climbs up the social ladder and makes connections with directors, actors, and designers. As Karim also rises up the social ranks, he learns that the kind of class that Eva craves isn't something she'll ever be able to manufacture, as it's something the upper classes are born with. Eva remains jealous of Mum and becomes very angry with Dad whenever she notices that he seems regretful that he left Mum. Throughout her climb, Eva remains devoted to her son, Charlie. When he begins stealing from her to pay for drugs and food, she pretends to not notice. She attends many of his shows and some of her social success comes from being his mother--many magazines want to interview her about Charlie. At the end of the novel, she and Dad announce that they're getting married after almost a decade together.

**Charlie** – Charlie is Eva's son and Karim's crush and idol as a teen. Charlie is a year older than Karim and is described as being exceptionally handsome. However, Karim soon learns that despite Charlie's charm and good looks, he's cruel. He never returns Karim's affections, even after their sexual experience together, and he throws Karim into his drum set and makes him bleed. As Dad and Eva's relationship strengthens, Charlie drops out of school. Karim begins to realize that Charlie is charming but not necessarily a good musician. As Charlie spirals from his lack of success, he steals from Eva and from Karim. Eva ignores his thefts, but Karim resents Charlie for stealing all of his shirts. When Charlie and Karim go to a pub and see a punk band perform, Charlie has an epiphany. Though he and Karim mock the punks at first, Charlie wholeheartedly embraces the aesthetic and sentiment of the punks and very quickly becomes famous. His first album is very successful, and Karim even hears Matthew Pyke's son playing it five years after its release. The press often asks Eva for interviews about Charlie. Near the end of the novel, Charlie moves to New York. He finds New York refreshing and thinks that London is dirty and stagnated. In New York, Charlie also comes to the realization that he's not a great musician. He realizes he's good, but he doesn't have the innovation necessary to be truly great. Despite this, Charlie lives a wealthy life in New York and employs Karim for a while. Karim realizes he doesn't love or care about Charlie anymore when Charlie hires a dominatrix to humiliate him and invites Karim to participate. Karim watches with interest, but returns to London days later and doesn't look back.

**Jamila** – Jamila is Anwar and Jeeta's daughter. She's a few years older than Karim and infinitely more mature. She and Karim have sex fairly regularly as teens, though Karim notes

that it was never a truly romantic relationship. As a teen, a white librarian named Miss Cutmore took Jamila on and introduced her to French novels. After Miss Cutmore moved away, Jamila took it upon herself to continue her education, while accusing Miss Cutmore of "colonizing" her. Karim notes that Jamila is far too strong-willed to be colonized by anyone. Jamila's interests are varied, and she immerses herself in the writings of Angela Davis, Simone de Beauvoir, and black writers from America. When Anwar goes on a hunger strike to bully Jamila into entering an arranged marriage, Jamila eventually gives in. Karim reasons that Jamila does so in order to rebel against rebellion itself. When Changez, her new husband, arrives from India, Jamila quickly puts him in his place. She refuses to have sex or share a bed with him, and makes him sleep on a camp bed in their living room while she sleeps and continues her studies in the bedroom. She becomes very politically active and attends anti-fascist rallies. As Karim climbs the social ladder through his theatre involvement, Jamila cautions him against allowing the rich to infiltrate his mind. When she decides to move to a communal house, Changez insists on following her. There, she has a baby with Simon. Changez parents the baby as though she's his own, and Karim notices that Jamila and Changez seem to truly respect each other at this point in their lives.

**Changez** – Changez is Jamila's husband. Though he came highly recommended by one of Anwar's cousins in Bombay, Changez defies all expectations. While Anwar wanted a strapping young man capable of working in his grocery store and providing him grandchildren, Changez is fat, has only one working arm, doesn't care to work, and Jamila refuses to have sex with him. Despite all of this, Changez is generally cheerful. He spends his days reading and walking around London with Karim. He and Karim soon become good friends, as Karim finds Changez easy to bully. Karim marvels at watching Changez fall in love with Jamila. Changez respects her wishes to not consummate their marriage and sleeps separately from her for the duration of the novel. He admires her openly and desperately wants to have children with her, and becomes extremely frustrated when it becomes apparent that that won't happen. To deal with his frustration, Changez hires a Japanese sex worker, Shinko. He initially tries to keep this a secret, but Shinko and Jamila eventually become friends, much to Changez's embarrassment. As the novel progresses, Karim watches Changez and Jamila's marriage slowly become more respectful. Changez's unwavering love for Jamila means he's perfectly happy to follow her into a communal living situation. When Jamila has a baby with Simon, one of the men in the house, Changez cares for the baby as though she's his own.

**Anwar** – Anwar came to London in the 1950s from India with his best friend Haroon to attend college. After marrying Jeeta he opened a toy store, which she soon convinced him to turn into a grocery store. The grocery became extremely successful.

Anwar is a shrewd man who loves sitting on a stool and watching for shoplifters. He loves his daughter, Jamila, though he mostly ignores her interest in black theory, feminist theory, and the like. Though Karim notes that Anwar never expressed any interest in returning to India or even conducting his life in an overtly Muslim way, he makes a sudden shift towards conservatism when he decides it's time for Jamila to enter into an arranged marriage. He goes on a hunger strike, which lasts for weeks, until she agrees. After Jamila's marriage, Anwar is extremely disappointed in her husband, Changez, who came highly recommended from a cousin in Bombay: Changez is fat, has only one working arm, and has no interest in running his father-in-law's store. Anwar is also incensed when it becomes apparent that Changez and Jamila won't provide him with a grandson. After his hunger strike, Anwar never fully recovers. He uses a cane and remains very thin and weak. He also becomes extremely conservative and begins talking about returning to India, though he never goes. Anwar dies in the hospital of a heart attack, though he ends up in the hospital after Changez hits him over the head with a dildo defending himself from one of Anwar's attacks.

**Matthew Pyke** – Matthew Pyke is one of the most prestigious theatre directors in London. He works in a freeform style in which he asks his actors to develop characters, and then employs a writer to write a play using the created characters. The process takes months. He expresses an interest in Karim after seeing his performance in Shadwell's *The Jungle Book*, and casts him in his next play. Though Shadwell warns Karim that Pyke is intense, unpredictable, and will destroy Karim, Karim takes the part anyway. Karim does discover that Shadwell wasn't wrong about Pyke: Pyke plays mind games with the actors, including making secret predictions at the beginning of the production about who will have sex with whom, and then revealing his (correct) predictions at a party in New York. When he reveals that he was responsible for orchestrating Eleanor's interest and relationship with Karim, Karim is extremely hurt and angry. Pyke and his wife, Marlene, are also interested in group sex, and he's very open with his actors about this and his sexual interests in general. When he and Marlene invite Karim and Eleanor to have sex with them at their house, Pyke tries to force Karim to give him oral sex. This, coupled with Pyke's interest in having sex with Eleanor, begins to sour Karim's admiration for Pyke. Despite this, Pyke does teach Karim what a polished theatre production looks like.

**Mum** – Mum is Karim's mother. She's a plump and generally miserable Englishwoman, though she went to art school and enjoys drawing. She works in a shoe shop. Mum is devastated when her husband, Haroon, leaves her for Eva. She spends months living with her sister, Jean, during which time she mostly lies in bed and does nothing. Karim doesn't visit her much during this time. Later in the novel, Mum moves back into the house she once shared with Haroon. She makes it her own

and Karim notes that she suddenly seems to enjoy cleaning. She also diets and makes over her wardrobe. Allie confides in Karim at the end of the novel that Mum has a boyfriend, Jimmy. He's much younger than Mum, and Mum doesn't want him knowing about Allie or Karim so she doesn't have to admit how old she is. Regardless, Karim thinks that Mum seems very happy with him.

**Princess Jeeta** – Jeeta is Anwar's wife. She was a princess in India who joined Anwar in London after their lavish wedding. Jeeta helps Anwar with the grocery store and cooks Karim all his favorite foods when he comes to visit. After Anwar's hunger strike, Jeeta's relationship to her husband changes. Though she continues to feed and care for Anwar, she stops cooking his favorite foods and becomes cruel and distant. She even remodels the store without telling Anwar. Karim believes that Jamila's feminist theory introduced Jeeta to the fact that she could enjoy power in her marriage.

**Shadwell** – Shadwell is a regular guest at Eva's parties from the beginning; Karim meets him at his first party and refers to him as the man in corduroy. Karim finds Shadwell boring beyond all belief, though Eva disagrees. She's attracted to him because he's successful, and she conducts a sexual relationship with him for at least part of the novel. Eva bullies Karim into auditioning for Shadwell's production of *The Jungle Book*, and Shadwell casts Karim as Mowgli. Though Karim is thrilled to get the part, he's less thrilled when Shadwell reveals how racist he is: he insists that Karim wear dark makeup all over his body and speak in an exaggerated Indian accent. Though the cast outwardly respects him, they consistently refer to him as "Shitwell" and other rude nicknames. When Matthew Pyke takes an interest in Karim, Shadwell warns Karim that Pyke will destroy him.

**Terry** – Terry is a Welshman who plays the snake Kaa in Shadwell's production of *The Jungle Book*. He's about 40, an ardent Trotskyite, and possibly attracted to men. Karim attempts to seduce him throughout the novel, though Terry resists. Terry's Trotskyism insists that the upper classes will be taken down through constant revolution, which would be incited by the working classes. Karim finds this ridiculous, as his experience with the working class suggests that they really only hate those lower on the social ladder, not those higher up. Terry also struggles to support his theories when Karim asks questions about Trotskyism, which is one of the reasons why Karim never truly joins the Party. Despite their political differences, Terry is generally kind to Karim and guides him through his first few acting jobs. Terry is incensed when Matthew Pyke casts Karim instead of him, and later forces Karim to ask Pyke for money for the Party. Karim teases Terry mercilessly about his acting job in a TV show on which he plays a policeman named Sergeant Monty, as the character represents the exact opposite of Terry's political beliefs.

**Eleanor** – Eleanor is a beautiful but troubled actress that Karim

meets through Pyke. She's in the same production as Karim, and Karim decides to pursue her when he learns that she worked with a performance artist who stored poems in her vagina. Eleanor is extremely depressed, and Karim finds out months after they begin their relationship why: Eleanor's last boyfriend, Gene, committed suicide. Karim does his best to care for Eleanor and make her happy, which he finds is a difficult job as Eleanor hates herself and requires constant praise and compliments. However, she's very adventurous sexually and she and Karim have sex whenever Eleanor wants to. Karim also understands fairly quickly that though Eleanor pretends to be middle class, she's actually not. Eleanor's parents are wealthy and famous, and Eleanor grew up going to prep schools and Italy. She has what Karim deems a particular combination of class, money, and status, and doesn't even know it. Karim decides that this is truly what makes the upper class the way they are, as they don't understand their privilege. Karim's relationship with Eleanor ends when she informs Karim that she intends to continue having sex with Pyke, to whom she is extremely attracted. Karim is distraught as he truly loves Eleanor, and is even more hurt when he discovers that Pyke orchestrated their relationship.

**Uncle Ted** – Uncle Ted is Jean's husband. At the beginning of the novel he owns a central heating business, which is questionably successful. Regardless, he and Jean can afford to live in the upscale neighborhood of Chiselhurst. Ted and Dad like each other a lot and Ted often fixes things around Dad's house in exchange for Dad's wise counsel. When Ted and Jean become aware of Dad's relationship with Eva, Jean forces Ted to step in and try to stop it. Dad, however, "frees" Ted by insisting he works too hard. After this experience, Ted quits his job, embraces Dad's Eastern philosophy, and insists he must enjoy life. He begins working again for Eva, which makes Jean furious. However, the work pays well and Ted is happy to get to see Dad and Eva. Despite Ted's outwardly kind demeanor, Karim recounts an experience that suggests Ted is secretly racist: on a train coming home from a football match several years before the start of the novel, Ted smashed windows, lights, and cut train seats as they passed through a black neighborhood. He told Karim to throw a bulb out the window. Karim uses this experience, which Ted kept secret, to blackmail Ted into taking his side when Jean tries to butt into Dad's relationship with Eva.

**Allie** – Allie is Karim's little brother. His real name is Amar, but he goes by Allie to avoid "racial trouble." He's four years younger and when they're young, Karim mostly ignores Allie. When Mum and Dad divorce, Allie moves with Mum to Ted and Jean's house. At the end of the novel when Allie and Karim spend time together, Karim finds that Allie is actually an interesting and passionate adult.

**Auntie Jean** – Auntie Jean is Mum's sister and Ted's husband. She and Ted live in a rich suburb and Karim loathes both Jean

herself and having to visit her. Jean feels as though it's her responsibility to steer Haroon away from his relationship with Eva and Ted away from his involvement in Eva's renovation business, though she's unsuccessful in doing either. She takes in Mum and Allie after Haroon and Mum divorce.

**Shinko** – Shinko is a Japanese sex worker that Changez employs when it becomes clear that Jamila will never go to bed with him. Their relationship persists for the entirety of the novel and though Changez continues to pay Shinko for her services, they do seem to feel genuine respect and affection for each other. Jamila supports Changez's decision to employ Shinko.

**Marlene** – Marlene is Matthew Pyke's wife. She and Pyke are very open and adventurous sexually, and they regularly participate in group sex events all over the world. When she expresses interest in having sex with Karim, Pyke invites Karim and Eleanor to their home. Though Karim does have sex with Marlene, he finds her brash, annoying, and unattractive and he sees that Pyke feels the same way about his wife.

**Heater** – Heater is Eleanor's "main guardian" and Karim's rival for her affection. He's extremely fat and ugly and though he's a road sweeper, he gets tickets to most of the London productions. Heater represents the hardworking proletariat to most of the higher-class individuals offering tickets. Because of this, Karim notes that it's important to pretend to appreciate Heater's opinion to avoid looking like an elitist.

**Tracey** – Tracey is a young black actress in Pyke's production. Karim observes that Tracey spends a lot of time worrying about what it means to be a black woman, and she objects to Karim's portrayal of his Anwar character. She insists it does people of color worldwide a disservice to portray a person so absurdly traditional.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Gene** – Gene was Eleanor's boyfriend before Karim and Heater. He was a talented West Indian actor who committed suicide because he became overwhelmed by the overt racism he experienced. Eleanor's depression stems partially from Gene's death, though she won't talk about him.

**Helen** – Helen is one of Karim's early girlfriends, though he insists when they meet that he's not particularly attracted to her. She's very interested in speaking with Mum and helps Jamila decide to marry Changez. She also attends the luncheon when Changez arrives, though she appears uncomfortable the entire time.

**Simon** – Simon is a radical lawyer who lives in the communal house to which Jamila and Changez move. Jamila begins a relationship with Simon and the two have a baby girl together.

**Hairy Back** – Hairy Back is Helen's father. He's a large and hairy man, and is also horrendously racist. He sets his **Great**

**Dane** on Karim when Karim tries to visit Helen.

**Fish** – Fish is Charlie's agent.

**Carl and Marianne** – Carl and Marianne are married friends of Eva's. They host one of Haroon's "appearances" at their home in Chiselhurst. They've recently been backpacking in India and they fully embrace Haroon's teachings as a result. During the day, they work at a TV rental firm.

**Miss Cutmore** – Miss Cutmore is the white librarian who introduces Jamila to French novels and Simone de Beauvoir. Jamila resents Miss Cutmore when she leaves London, insisting that Miss Cutmore colonized her.

**Louise** – Louise is the writer for Pyke's production. She writes down everything the actors say as source material, and Karim notes that she's especially keen to write down things that sound stupid.

**Dr. Bob** – Dr. Bob owns the New York theatre that runs Pyke's play. He's an "ethnic arts" enthusiast.

**Joanna** – Joanna is Jamila's girlfriend at the end of the novel.

**Frankie** – Frankie is the dominatrix that Charlie hires in New York.



## THEMES

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



### COMING OF AGE

*The Buddha of Suburbia* is a bildungsroman, or a coming of age novel. It follows 17-year-old Karim Amir as he grows up and comes of age, beginning in the early 1970s and ending on the eve of the 1979 election in which Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister. Over those ten years, Karim watches his parents divorce, Dad enter into a passionate relationship with Eva (a sexy social climber), and her son, Charlie, become a successful musician living in New York. As the novel progresses and Karim comes of age, he conceptualizes his coming of age mostly in terms of those around him. This suggests that coming of age isn't simply something that happens to a person internally; rather, growing up and coming of age happens for Karim as he learns to humanize his parents, idols, and finally, himself.

Karim's coming of age begins suddenly one night when Dad invites Karim to accompany him to a party at Eva's house, where Dad will lead a discussion of Eastern philosophy. During this first party, Karim witnesses and experiences several things that cause him to question his world and his place in it, thereby

beginning his process of coming of age. First, Karim watches his father have sex with Eva. Though Karim knew already that his parents weren't necessarily happily married, witnessing this transgression causes him for the first time to question who his father actually is as a person. Second, Karim has a sexual experience with Charlie, Eva's son. Though Karim idolizes Charlie and desperately wants to be him, this experience teaches him that Charlie is cruel and selfish (although this doesn't necessarily cool Karim's idolization). Essentially, Karim's experiences at the party show him the humanity of both his father and Charlie. In turn, this begins to turn them into three-dimensional people in Karim's mind, with foibles and problems of their own.

Though Karim continues to develop in other ways in the years following that party, it's not until several years later when he becomes involved in theatre that Karim has more opportunities to think of his parents specifically as people, not just as parent figures. In the lobby after one of his performances, Karim watches his parents speak to each other for the first time since the divorce. As he watches, he notices that his parents are getting old. Karim also realizes that his parents are just people trying to get by in the world—just like he is. In this way, Karim begins to see that he and his parents are not so very different. His parents might be older, but they're not navigating their lives with any less difficulty than Karim is.

Karim's final plunge into adulthood happens with Charlie in New York City after Karim's second theatre production tours in the city. Charlie employs Karim for ten months doing various odd jobs and tasks for him, and Karim finds that, as adults, he and Charlie get along well, and Charlie is a reasonably interesting and smart person. This illusion is shattered, however, when Charlie hires a dominatrix to come for an evening and invites Karim to participate. As Karim watches Frankie hurt and humiliate a hooded and restrained Charlie, he realizes he doesn't care about Charlie anymore, and certainly doesn't care for him romantically like he once did as a teenager. With this, Karim comes to the conclusion that he no longer wants to be Charlie, suggesting that Karim learns at this point to define himself and Charlie as wholly separate entities, and not think of Charlie as an idol.

The final chapter of the novel shows Karim discovering the humanity and personhood of all his family members: his little brother Allie, who is absent for much of the novel, suddenly arises as an interesting and thoughtful character, while it's revealed that Mum has begun seeing a much younger man. Similarly, Dad and Eva announce that they're getting married, while Karim also ascertains that Dad still regrets his decision to leave Mum nearly a decade ago. In this way, Karim's entry into adulthood is marked by recognizing growth, independence, and humanity in himself as much as in those around him.



## FAMILY, LOVE, AND LOYALTY

At its heart, *The Buddha of Suburbia* is a classic family drama. As Karim grows up and comes of age, he watches his parents divorce and his best childhood friend enter into a sexless marriage. Throughout the novel, Karim questions constantly what family truly means and how loyalty functions within a family unit. Though his conclusions at the end are somewhat tenuous, Karim comes to understand that loyalty doesn't always mean the same thing throughout an entire marriage, and he discovers that loyalty and respect are at the heart of love.

At the beginning of the novel, Karim positions his parents as bored and unhappy with their marriage, though they're generally loyal to each other. He suggests at that point that his parents will never betray their unwavering yet unhappy loyalty because they've bought fully into the suburban mindset: according to Karim, this is a mindset predicated on the prioritization of boring stability over happiness. When Karim realizes that Dad is in love with Eva, an ambitious and sexy social climber, he's simultaneously curious and terrified for the future of his family. Because this is the first time Karim sees that his father desires someone other than Mum, it's an understandably shocking experience—Karim hadn't considered at that point that it was even possible for Dad to have *ever* desired someone other than Mum. Further, Karim quickly begins to hate and feel betrayed by Dad for leaving Mum. This reaction suggests that, at least when it comes to relationships that directly impact him, Karim values loyalty and stability over love and passion.

On the other end of the spectrum, Karim watches his best childhood friend, Jamila, enter into an arranged marriage when her father, Anwar, blackmails her by going on a hunger strike. Karim has mixed feelings about this. He first reasons that Jamila would never give into such patriarchal bullying, but later he conceptualizes the marriage as a choice that would allow her to rebel from within a system she'd ultimately like to dismantle. Regardless, Karim recognizes that Jamila chooses to accept Anwar's terms out of a sense of loyalty and love for her family. Despite the fact that her decision to marry seems out of character for her, Jamila makes her marriage work for her. Her husband, Changez, is immediately and completely loyal to and in love with Jamila, which means he's perfectly willing to accept her terms that he sleep on a camp cot and let her live alone in their bedroom and continue her studies. Though Changez desperately wants to have sex with his wife, Jamila remains firm that their marriage will exist on her terms. Over the years, the sexlessness doesn't change between Changez and Jamila, but Karim watches a sense of respect develop between them, particularly after Jamila has a baby with Simon in their communal home. In this way, Karim watches a seemingly backwards marriage grow and change over the course of a decade to become, in many respects, a strong, respectful, and

mutually fulfilling one, suggesting again that loyalty is one of the most important elements of strong, fulfilling relationships. As Karim's understanding of Changez and Jamila's marriage deepens near the end of the novel, he also continues to consider where he stands in relation to his own parents. Karim eventually realizes that he's guilty of abandoning Mum when she needed him the most after the divorce, and he similarly makes sure to never allow Dad to forget that he abandoned Mum. However, as Karim sees his parents both become relatively happy people with their respective partners, he realizes that definitions of love and loyalty change over the course of a relationship, just as they did for Jamila and Changez. At the end of the day, however, Karim comes to understand that a sense of loyalty is what makes a family.



### HIERARCHY AND CLASS

As Karim comes of age, he becomes interested in the English class system, noticing and ruminating on the class signifiers that differentiate London proper from his childhood home in the south London suburbs. Though Karim begins the novel with a simplified view of class (in which one is either suburban and lower class, or urban and upper class), he develops a more nuanced view of class as he learns that Londoners come from all classes, and that upper-class people aren't all the same.

As a teen, Karim's primary goal is to move to London. He believes that in London, he'll be able to lead an exciting lifestyle filled with drugs, sex, and all manner of fun and frivolity. He idealizes the city in part because he considers it to be the exact opposite of the suburbs. Karim's view of the suburbs, though, is nearly as simplistic as his view of the city. He sees the suburbs as embarrassingly provincial and incompatible with happiness, since he believes—based on the lives of his immediate and extended family—that the class of people who live in the suburbs cannot even recognize that the pursuit of happiness is possible. This all impresses upon Karim that remaining in the suburbs is absolutely not an option for him, and that he must work to relocate to London as fast as possible in order to be happy.

Karim gets the opportunity to move to London and begin climbing the social ladder when Dad leaves Mum for Eva and they decide to move to London. Karim recognizes that Eva is a social climber with lofty goals, and he characterizes her move to the city as her "assault" on London. Over the course of the novel, Karim watches the guest lists of Eva's regular parties shift to include more and more upper-class individuals. At the same time, Eva begins working with Uncle Ted, a former laborer, to renovate and redesign houses. She begins with her own flats, but soon moves onto the homes of high-profile Londoners. This shows that both Karim and Eva see association with upper class individuals as a key aspect of social mobility. However, Karim also recognizes that associating with the

upper echelons of society isn't the same as being a part of the upper class, something that becomes very clear as Karim embarks on a relationship with Eleanor, a beautiful but troubled actress.

With Eleanor, Karim finally gets an intimate look at the upper class and how they move through life. Though Eleanor is quite wealthy, she attempts to act as though she's working class, something that Karim notices and realizes quickly is an act. As Karim begins attending parties with Eleanor where the guests are of the same upper class as she is, he encounters what he describes as "unforced bohemia": an immersion in culture, money, and education, combined with a sense of indifference to all three. Karim recognizes that this unforced bohemia is exactly what Eva tries to cultivate through her parties, though seeing the real thing firsthand makes it abundantly clear to Karim that Eva won't be able to achieve it: it's an attitude that Eleanor and her crowd are born with, not something that one can cultivate. As Karim makes these connections, he finally realizes that though Eva is extremely successful by the end of the novel, she'll never be able to achieve what Eleanor has. He realizes, essentially, that much as Eva tries, the traces of suburbia don't necessarily wash off once a person has transcended her class.

Taken all together, Karim's observations about social ascent bring his interrogation of class and social standing to the forefront of the novel. The final scene of the novel shows Karim, suddenly successful as an actor, offering to pay for a grand evening out for his family and friends—by all accounts, a marker of success. However, his sense of discomfort with the whole situation suggests that though he discovers that it's totally possible for someone like himself or Eva to attain financial success, actually embodying an upper class mindset isn't available to him. Instead, the suburbia he worked so hard to leave behind as a teenager will follow him forever.



### RACISM, SUCCESS, AND IDENTITY

Karim begins his narration by introducing himself as, "an Englishman born and bred, almost." His "almost" refers to the fact that his father, Haroon, emigrated from India twenty years earlier and married an Englishwoman. Because of his Indian heritage, Karim often finds that he's unable to fully embrace his English identity while he's simultaneously forced to confront uncomfortable aspects of Indian culture—or what others believe to be Indian culture. Karim characterizes where his family lives in the suburbs as a locale that's inarguably English, despite the ethnicity of its inhabitants. To this point, he mentions that Dad spent the last twenty years trying to be as English as possible, and he has no interest in ever returning to India. Because of this, at the start of the novel, Karim thinks of himself as English more than anything else. Furthermore, despite the fact that Dad embraced his new home, Karim finds his father embarrassingly

Indian. Dad still struggles to locate himself in the city, despite having lived there for so long, and constantly asks for directions. Karim deems these qualities those of a recent immigrant, and to counteract his embarrassment from his father, Karim mostly rejects the idea of being Indian.

When Karim accompanies Dad to Eva's house, where Dad gives a talk on Eastern philosophy and leads a yoga and meditation workshop, he learns that his father's Indian identity is exceptionally appealing to the white, affluent individuals assembled there. Karim finds this especially interesting because Dad is Muslim, and much of what he's speaking about is either Buddhist or Taoist. This is indicative of the widespread ignorance and flat out racism of the white Londoners in regards to Asia as a whole—they come to Eva's for Eastern philosophy, never mind that not all Eastern philosophy is the same. However, Dad uses their misconceptions to his advantage: these "appearances" facilitate his early romantic relationship with Eva and later provide him the means to leave Mum for Eva. This impresses upon Karim early on that though being Indian can lead to success, it's also an identity subject to a variety of outside thoughts and opinions, not necessarily one that Karim will get to control all the time.

When Karim stumbles into acting, he comes face to face with the more malevolently racist side of England. Eva introduces Karim to Shadwell, a boring but up-and-coming theatre director who is putting on a production of *The Jungle Book*. Karim, as a half-Indian young man, is perfect for the role of Mowgli. Though Karim is thrilled when he lands his role (Mowgli is a leading role with a reasonable production company, both of which appeal to Karim's vanity and pride), he becomes disenchanted quickly with the way that Shadwell wants to use Karim's Indian heritage to tell a very specific story. Shadwell first insists that Karim cover his entire body in dark makeup, and then asks Karim to speak in an exaggerated Indian accent. The accent in particular angers Karim: because he was born and raised in the southern suburbs of London, he speaks with the corresponding southern London accent. Essentially, Shadwell obscures or erases every English aspect of Karim's identity to create a caricature of an Indian person, something that Karim finds humiliating. The play is successful and leads to Karim's later involvement with the prestigious director Matthew Pyke, which shows Karim that embracing his Indian identity (or what white directors think that identity is) can lead to success. It's worth noting, however, that both Dad and Jamila bristle at Karim's portrayal of Mowgli. Dad insists that Rudyard Kipling is horrible and racist, and Jamila sadly tells Karim that he's playing into white stereotypes.

The end of the novel suggests that, although Karim believes Jamila on an emotional level, there's a certain allure to the financial and social success he experiences when he does portray Indian characters or caricatures on stage or on television. His portrayal of a Changez-like character in Pyke's

play leads to an audition for a television show, in which Karim will play an Indian character. Karim recognizes that the production will be a shoddy one and the character is, again, a caricature, though he decides to take the part anyway. In this way, the novel suggests that, though the racism Karim and the others experience ranges in severity from horrific to simply demeaning, the subsequent financial gains that come about from that racism cannot be ignored—even though accepting those financial gains means, for Karim, denying his identity as an Englishman and burying his humanity in favor of success.



## SOCIAL AND POLITICAL DISCONTENT

The 1970s were a decade of intense social and political change in England. Over the course of the decade, the liberalism that characterized the 1960s experienced in a sharp swing towards conservatism with the 1979 election of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister. As Karim comes of age over the course of the novel, he remains interested and involved in the political movements that sprung up in response to the British government's continued failures to serve its people. Karim also makes constant observations about the fear that comes about as a result of alarmingly racist attitudes. Taken together, the strangeness of the political scene and the terrifying racism of the era infuse the novel with a sense of fear and uncertainty, and ultimately suggests that the 1970s as a whole represent a dramatic end of an idyllic era.

Over the course of the seventies, England experienced several economic recessions, growing unemployment rates, and a general distrust in the government's ability to fix the nation's problems. The difficulties reached a peak during the so-called Winter of Discontent of 1978-79, during which many union workers went on strike to protest caps on their pay. Despite this, Karim recognizes in his narration that much of the middle class actually did very well over the course of the decade: Jeeta and Anwar's grocery store is generally successful, and Eva is able to build her home decorating and renovation business. Eva's business endeavors in particular suggest that the middle class has money to throw around, as the kind of renovations she orchestrates are a prime example of conspicuous consumption. However, Karim is also aware that though he's on an upwardly mobile path financially, others aren't. As he and Changez wander through various London neighborhoods, Karim notes that some are exceptionally rough and appear to have high unemployment rates. This suggests that even if the middle class, as represented by Karim, is doing well, not everyone is—which leads Karim to become involved with some of the political movements of the time.

Karim gets a taste of radical politics through Terry, an older Trotskyite. Trotskyism promotes the idea of constant class struggle and revolution, with the end goal of eliminating the class system. Though Karim finds Trotskyism's championing of equality charming, he finds its details ridiculous, as the

responsibility to incite the revolution falls to the middle class. In Karim's experience, the middle class doesn't actually hate the upper classes like Terry and Trotskyism insists they should. Instead, they hate the lower classes, a fact that Terry is never able to fully explain. In this way, Karim becomes aware that the more liberal politics of the seventies don't necessarily have the answers to fix the economic difficulties of the lower class.

As the novel progresses, Karim becomes acutely aware of the atmosphere of fear that results from the country's swing towards conservatism, a swing that Karim connects to racism. He conceptualizes the racism that his Indian family and friends experience as stemming from Britain's division of its colony of British India into the independent countries of Pakistan and India nearly 25 years earlier. This resulted in major religious rifts throughout the region—as young people in India during that time, Dad and Anwar experienced their Hindu neighbors chanting anti-Muslim slogans outside their homes. Karim watches this animosity intensify in the present. He mentions that Jeeta and Anwar keep buckets of water on hand in case of firebombs. Karim's family and friends are particularly scared of threats from the National Front, a neo-Nazi political party that expressed a strong anti-immigrant sentiment. They're presumably responsible for throwing a pig's head through Anwar's shop window, and they attack and seriously injure Changez because they believed him to be Pakistani. Though Changez is a victim of this racialized violence, it doesn't stop him from being racist himself: he's vocal throughout the novel about his hatred of Pakistani people. This suggests that though the most intense racial violence was certainly carried out by white Englishmen, the racism of the era both permeated and targeted every racial group. In turn, this continues to make it exceptionally clear that the English population isn't singular, and coming up with a solution to fix the economic and racial issues isn't going to be easy.

Ultimately, the novel culminates on the eve of Margaret Thatcher's election as Prime Minister. Though Thatcher herself was a product of 1960s liberal movements as Britain's first female Prime Minister, she also ended a number of social welfare and public programs. She insisted on promoting self-sufficiency and personal responsibility. Most surprisingly, Karim hears Eva espouse these very ideas in an interview with a home furnishings magazine, though Eva credits Dad with introducing her to these ideas. This is especially ironic given that Dad is Indian and therefore very much at risk of violence, racism, and prejudice at the hands of these individualistic policies. In this way, the novel finally suggests that the changing politics of the era aren't something ambiguous and purely theoretical. Rather, the changes of the seventies happen to, around, and because of the people close to Karim.



## SYMBOLS

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



### THE GREAT DANE

When Karim attempts to visit Helen, her father, Hairy Back, sends his Great Dane out into the yard after Karim. Rather than attack and bite Karim, the Great Dane corners Karim, mounts him, and ejaculates on Karim's jacket. Karim thinks of this as the ultimate indignity, and indicative of the rampant racism he experiences in the suburbs. He thinks of the Great Dane as representing white London and the way that those people want to exploit Karim for their own gain. Karim often refers to the Great Dane in relation to Hairy Back. Combined, these two figures represent two sides of the racism Karim experiences: Hairy Back is the violent National Front that wants to see him dead, while the Great Dane wants to see Karim alive, but only in a way that serves the Dane. In this respect, both Shadwell and Pyke are iterations of the Great Dane as they want to use Karim's Indian heritage to add marketable flavor to their theatre productions.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *The Buddha of Suburbia* published in 1991.

### Part 1, Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ But divorce wasn't something that would occur to them. In the suburbs people rarely dreamed of striking out for happiness. It was all familiarity and endurance: security and safety were the reward of dullness.

**Related Characters:** Karim (speaker), Mum, Haroon (Dad)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 8

#### Explanation and Analysis

When Dad confides in Karim that he's not happy in his marriage and Mum isn't putting any effort in, Karim suggests divorce. Dad insists he doesn't want to make anyone unhappy. Importantly, this is where Karim first begins to characterize the suburbs as dull, safe, and in direct opposition to happiness. Because of this, Karim develops a binary system for thinking about location in which the suburbs occupy this boring space, while London is thought

of as being exciting and the key to happiness. The existence of such a binary system is indicative of how youthful and naïve Karim is at the beginning of the novel.

The fact that Karim also doesn't consider the fact that his parents might choose divorce shows that he thinks of them only in terms of being parents, and in terms of where they live. Karim thinks of Mum and Dad as loyal to each other above all things, even if they're wholly unhappy with each other. This, in turn, leads Karim to ignore the fact that his parents are people and are struggling to make it through the world, just like he is. Essentially, he dehumanizes his parents and thinks of them only as parent figures, not as people with their own distinct hopes, desires, and dreams for the future.

●● I put my ear against the white paintwork of the door. Yes, God was talking to himself, but not intimately. He was speaking slowly, in a deeper voice than usual, as if he were addressing a crowd. He was hissing his s's and exaggerating his Indian accent. He'd spent years trying to be more of an Englishman, to be less risibly conspicuous, and now he was putting it back in spadeloads. Why?

**Related Characters:** Karim (speaker), Eva, Haroon (Dad)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 21

### Explanation and Analysis

The week after Dad's first appearance, Karim notices that Dad begins practicing exaggerating his Indian accent. Dad does this because, unlike Karim, he's learned that he can sell the fact that he's Indian to white suburbanites who are interested in Orientalism and Eastern philosophy. Though the reason he can do this is rooted in racism and white English people's misunderstanding that not all individuals from Asia are the same, the effect is that Dad is able to move up the social ladder by selling Indianness to people in a way that he can't by just being himself. The only way for Dad to infiltrate the ranks of the upper class, white suburbanites is by using their racism to sell himself to them as an object of wisdom and curiosity. Though it takes several years, Karim comes to the same conclusions while working in theater (although he's far less happy embodying his Indian heritage than Dad is). This shows that while pandering to racial stereotypes is an undeniably effective strategy in some regards, it's also dehumanizing and difficult, particularly for someone like Karim who very much identifies with his English side.

## Part 1, Chapter 2 Quotes

●● If Mum was irritated by Dad's aristocratic uselessness, she was also proud of his family. "They're higher than the Churchills," she said to people...This ensured there would be no confusion between Dad and the swarms of Indian peasants who came to Britain in the 1950s and 1960s, and of whom it was said they were not familiar with cutlery and certainly not with toilets...

**Related Characters:** Mum, Karim (speaker), Haroon (Dad)

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 24

### Explanation and Analysis

Karim explains to the reader that Dad grew up wealthy in India, and Mum is proud of that fact. Mum feels the need to differentiate between Indian people like Dad and the "swarms of Indian peasants" because of the rampant racism of the era—a time in which there was a swell in immigration. The racism in Mum's words shows up in the fact that by insisting that Dad is from a wealthy family, she implies that Dad is from a family that is more English or more colonized. However, growing up wealthy has its downsides when faced with real life in England. Unlike Englishmen, Dad has no practical skills at all and even asks Karim to make him toast years after this incident. This shows that, despite his wealthy roots, Dad is still very much adrift and despised in England, but for different reasons.

●● "The whites will never promote us," Dad said. "Not an Indian while there is a white man left on the earth. You don't have to deal with them—they still think they have an Empire when they don't have two pennies to rub together."

**Related Characters:** Haroon (Dad) (speaker), Karim, Anwar

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 27

### Explanation and Analysis

Karim recounts Anwar telling Dad that he's just lazy, and Dad's rebuttal that the English won't promote Indian men. Dad alludes here to the anxieties in England during the seventies about the country's changing status in the world. Many of England's colonies throughout the world had gained independence in the years prior to the start of the novel, while people from those countries immigrated to

England in substantial numbers. This, coupled with the economic recession of the time, is part of the reason that the seventies saw a major upswing in anti-immigrant and nationalistic sentiment. This specifically is what Dad refers to when he mentions that the English empire doesn't even have two pennies.

## Part 1, Chapter 4 Quotes

☞ Yeah, sometimes we were French, Jammie and I, and other times we went black American. The thing was, we were supposed to be English, but to the English we were always wogs and nigs and Pakis and the rest of it.

**Related Characters:** Karim (speaker), Jamila

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 53

### Explanation and Analysis

Depending on what scholarship Jamila is reading at any given time, she and Karim experiment with taking on aspects of different identities of color from around the world. Notably, what Jamila reads is overwhelmingly empowering for people of color, while the world they live in in England is decidedly not empowering or even safe. This, coupled with the emotional tenor of this passage, shows that though Karim and Jamila absolutely want to identify as English and conduct their lives as English people, they're unable to do so because of the racism they experience. The white English purposefully keep people of color from feeling truly at home in England or at home in their English identities, which plays into Karim's quest for identity as the novel progresses.

☞ "Families aren't sacred, especially to Indian men, who talk about nothing else and act otherwise."

**Related Characters:** Jamila (speaker), Anwar, Haroon (Dad), Karim

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 55

### Explanation and Analysis

When Karim tells Jamila about Dad's affair with Eva, she laughs and insists that Dad should be able to pursue love

with Eva if it's what makes him happy. Though Jamila's words seem fairly self-explanatory when applied to Karim's story about Dad's transgressions, they become more complicated in the context of Anwar's desire for her to enter an arranged marriage. Karim alludes at various points throughout the novel that Anwar and Jamila had a good relationship while Jamila was a child, which suggests that family was indeed important to her. However, by forcing Jamila to enter into an arranged marriage, Anwar violates Jamila's sense of loyalty by forcing her to adhere to an entirely different definition of familial loyalty—obeying orders, rather than mutually respecting one another and providing an environment where loved ones can be personally fulfilled.

☞ The lives of Anwar and Jeeta and Jamila were pervaded by fear of violence...Jeeta kept buckets of water around her bed in case the shop was firebombed in the night. Many of Jamila's attitudes were inspired by the possibility that a white group might kill one of us one day.

**Related Characters:** Karim (speaker), Princess Jeeta, Anwar, Jamila

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 56

### Explanation and Analysis

Karim explains why Jamila felt the need to learn martial arts and says that it was for practical purposes, not just for fun. By setting Anwar's grocery store against a backdrop of fear, Karim gets at the idea that the success of Anwar's business is constantly threatened by racist violence. This shows that the success of immigrants in England in general is tenuous and contingent on simply not being a target for the perpetrators of violence.

When compared to the success of Dad or Karim, Anwar certainly experiences more financial success, while Dad and Karim live safer and happier lives. However, Dad and Karim must put up with the consistent mischaracterization of their Indian heritage, though it's that mischaracterization that allows them to experience their success in the first place. This, finally, suggests that there's no way to truly win in the current climate: either one takes Anwar's route of financial success with constant fear, or one has their culture consistently ridiculed and altered, but doesn't live in the danger that Anwar does.

## Part 1, Chapter 5 Quotes

☝ I wonder if Charlie really knew this, felt this, or whether his life as he lived it from day to day was as fucked-up and perplexed as everyone else's.

**Related Characters:** Karim (speaker), Charlie

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 76

### Explanation and Analysis

As Karim, Jamila, and Helen wait for Dad to meditate on Jamila's marriage situation, Helen gushes at length about Charlie and his success. When Karim wonders if Charlie is also confused about life in general, it shows that Karim is beginning to think of Charlie as a real person with thoughts and feelings all his own, not just a perfect idol. From here, Karim has room to figure out who exactly Charlie is, instead of projecting what he wants Charlie to be onto Charlie.

Karim has these revelations about Charlie's personhood before having them about his parents in part because Charlie is much closer in age to Karim than to the other characters whom Karim eventually recognizes are human. Because both Karim and Charlie are barely past adolescence, it's easier for Karim to recognize that Charlie is changing, growing, and finding his place in the world, just like he is. From here, Karim can go on to humanize others. His parents, for example, are just parents in his eyes before he makes this connection. Afterwards, however, he sees them as fully rounded and flawed individuals.

## Part 1, Chapter 7 Quotes

☝ "That bastard, what does he think I am, his servant? I'm not a shopkeeper. Business isn't my best side, yaar, not my best. I'm the intellectual type, not one of those uneducated immigrant types who come here to slave all day and night and look dirty."

**Related Characters:** Changez (speaker), Anwar, Karim

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 107

### Explanation and Analysis

To torment Changez, Karim tells him that Anwar is going to write to Changez's relatives and tell them he's fat and useless because Changez is wholly unhelpful in Anwar's store. Changez's response reveals that it's not just white Englishmen who are racist and prejudiced. Changez implies

that there's a hierarchy of Indian people as well, with those who are mostly interested in working at the bottom of that hierarchy. This introduces another layer for Karim's consideration as he continues to pick at the social structure around him. Notice, too, that Changez insists that it's the uneducated immigrants that are indeed immigrants; he never uses the word "immigrant" to describe himself. This suggests that he sees being an immigrant as being an undesirable thing, but feels as though he can mitigate the damage of being an immigrant through being "the intellectual type." Later in the novel, Karim learns that Changez isn't necessarily wrong in this line of thinking. When he begins to understand that Eleanor's education is much of the reason she's upper class, he realizes he had the power to throw off some of his suburban identity through embracing education, although he chose not to. Though Changez is arguably unsuccessful in distancing himself from the immigrant stereotype, this thought process is very similar and suggests that education is one of the primary ways that class divides out.

## Part 1, Chapter 8 Quotes

☝ Watching this, I was developing my own angry theories of love. Surely love had to be something more generous than this high-spirited egotism-à-deux? In their hands love seemed a narrow-eyed, exclusive, selfish bastard, to enjoy itself at the expense of a woman who now lay in bed in Auntie Jean's house, her life unconsidered. Mum's wretchedness was the price Dad had chosen to pay for his happiness. How could he have done it?

**Related Characters:** Karim (speaker), Eva, Mum, Haroon (Dad)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 116

### Explanation and Analysis

As Karim watches the sickening romance between Dad and Eva, his anger at Dad for leaving Mum grows and festers. This shows that Karim is still intent on upholding standards of loyalty between his parents. In turn, this also continues to poke holes in and add nuance to Karim's binary construction of the unhappy suburban mindset versus that of the city, which he thinks of as being open, intense, and focused on happiness above all else. Karim struggles primarily because he thought of Dad specifically as having bought into the suburban mindset—it never occurred to Karim that Dad would actually want to pursue happiness, especially when it

comes at the expense of Mum's happiness.

Despite the fact that Karim is struggling to dismantle his binary and immature construction, his hope that love is more generous than this suggests that there is room for him to grow, develop, and become less self-centered as the novel goes on.

## Part 2, Chapter 9 Quotes

☝️ ...I saw she wanted to scour that suburban stigma right off her body. She didn't realize it was in the blood and not on the skin; she didn't see that there could be nothing more suburban than suburbanites repudiating themselves.

**Related Characters:** Karim (speaker), Eva

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 134

### Explanation and Analysis

At Eva's flat-warming party, Karim notices that Eva is trying very hard to cultivate her urban and upscale persona, something he believes is indicative only of the fact that she's suburban to the core. This observation shows that Karim believes that there are parts of people's identities that will never change even when outside circumstances do, suburban roots being one of them. Though it provides Karim with an interesting phenomenon to observe in Eva, it takes a long time for Karim to realize that the same is true for himself as well. Notably, this happens as Karim finally begins to feel as though he's too old for the pub and music scenes in London, particularly when he first encounters punks. This also casts Karim's own project of coming of age in a particularly futile light. Karim desperately wants to escape suburbia, but this implies that he'll never be able to truly do so.

☝️ "What a breed of people two hundred years of imperialism has given birth to. If the pioneers from the East India Company could see you. What puzzlement there'd be. Everyone looks at you, I'm sure, and thinks: an Indian boy, how exotic, how interesting, what stories of aunties and elephants we'll hear now from him. And you're from Orpington."

**Related Characters:** Shadwell (speaker), Karim

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 141

### Explanation and Analysis

When Karim admits to Shadwell after his audition that he doesn't speak Punjabi or Urdu and has never been to India, Shadwell is indignant. Shadwell shows here that he believes there's only one way to be an Indian immigrant, and Karim is evidently not doing it correctly. By implying that Indian-English people must actually be from India and have ties of language, culture, and family to India, Shadwell suggests that people like Karim are freaks of nature and are incomprehensible. In doing so, he also denies Karim his identity as an Englishman, offering up the shaky logic that because Karim's father is Indian, Karim is not actually an Englishman. By situating all of this in terms of the legacy of imperialism and colonialism, Shadwell also makes it very clear that he believes in the project of imperialism as it once was, though his derision for Karim's roots in Orpington suggests that he never expected that era of imperialism to end. Shadwell ultimately implies that imperialism should never have ended and therefore aligns himself in many ways with the far right conservative politics of the era.

## Part 2, Chapter 10 Quotes

☝️ I wanted to tell him that the proletariat of the suburbs did have strong class feeling. It was virulent and hate-filled and directed entirely at the people beneath them.

**Related Characters:** Karim (speaker), Shadwell, Terry

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 149

### Explanation and Analysis

Karim describes speaking to Terry, an ardent Trotskyite, and feeling as though Terry is extremely out of touch with reality. Trotskyism holds that the middle class will be responsible for inciting revolutions by overthrowing the upper classes and dismantling the class system. In Karim's experience as an actual middle class person, this is laughably idealistic. This gets at the sense that those who are promoting systems like Trotskyism in the hope of remedying some of England's issues aren't just out of touch—their ideas are fundamentally flawed and won't be effective in practice. In turn, this alludes to the growing sense that England's problems aren't easily fixable by the more progressive political parties, which by this time, have failed several times to fix anything.

●● It was a wonderful trick and disguise. The one flaw, I giggled to myself, was his milky and healthy white teeth, which, to me, betrayed everything else.

**Related Characters:** Karim (speaker), Eva, Charlie

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 149

### Explanation and Analysis

At Charlie's punk show, Karim marvels at Charlie's act but laughs at the fact that Charlie's teeth betray his middle-class roots. This shows that even though Karim feels too old to identify with the punks, he does have a sense of what makes the movement, the kind of sentiments that fuel it, and the kind of people it truly speaks to. Charlie and others like him, who have never faced unemployment or financial hardship, are only acting at being punks because they don't have the lived experience that makes the movement make sense.

This also begins to develop teeth and dental work as a signifier of class. Charlie has evidently had access to a dentist and has been encouraged to go, unlike many lower-class individuals. Later, Karim sees a dentist for tooth pain, but he does so because he's high enough in the social hierarchy to understand that doing so is a necessary thing to do. Though the reader is then ready to recognize the fact that Karim sees a dentist in the first place as evidence of his status, the dentist doesn't see it that way and instead concentrates on Karim's possible lack of English language skills. The dentist doesn't recognize as easily that dental health is an indicator of wealth, status, and education.

## Part 2, Chapter 11 Quotes

●● But as the days passed I watched Jeeta's progress. She certainly didn't want to go home. It was as if Jamila had educated her in possibility, the child being an example to the parent.

**Related Characters:** Karim (speaker), Jamila, Anwar, Princess Jeeta

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 172

### Explanation and Analysis

As Karim spends time with Anwar and Jeeta, studying Anwar so he can turn him into a convincing character for

Pyke's play, Karim also watches Jeeta as she finally discovers power in her marriage. Jeeta's transformation over the course of the novel suggests that culture marches on regardless of what tradition (as represented by Anwar) says—his rampant conservatism isn't enough to take on the new scholarship that Jamila reads about and then speaks to her mother about. In this way, Karim begins to humanize Jeeta and see her as embarking upon her own journey of coming of age in which she recognizes her own individuality, not just her relationship to her husband.

●● Eleanor's set, with their combination of class, culture and money, and their indifference to all three, was exactly the cocktail that intoxicated Eva's soul, but she could never get near it. This was unforced bohemia; this was what she sought; this was the apogee.

**Related Characters:** Karim (speaker), Eva, Eleanor

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 174

### Explanation and Analysis

Karim describes his experiences spending time with Eleanor and her friends. From observing them up close, he learns that what truly makes a person upper class is certainly their wealth, but more importantly, the fact that they're indifferent to their own wealth and in some cases don't even realize they have it in the first place. Eva will never be able to achieve this "unforced bohemia" because of the fact that she comes from the suburbs and can take neither wealth nor urban culture for granted. Even if she achieves financial success, culture, and a sense of class, she'll always be aware that there are people in the world who do indeed have less. This will, following Karim's logic, render her unable to truly enjoy the fruits of her labor and reach the upper echelons of the London upper class.

●● For Eleanor's crowd hard words and sophisticated ideas were in the air they breathed from birth, and this language was the currency that bought you the best of what the world could offer. But for us it could only ever be a second language, consciously acquired.

**Related Characters:** Karim (speaker), Eleanor

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 178

### Explanation and Analysis

Karim pinpoints that education is one of the primary things that differentiates social classes. While Eleanor grew up entrenched in a culture that valued education, Karim didn't—the lower classes valued the ability to get to work early and saw education as silly and a luxury. Though this shows one way in which Karim could in theory work to better himself, it also shows in a more overarching way in which the class structure is entrenched in culture. It's the different cultures of the lower and upper classes that continue to keep them separate.

For Karim, this realization that infiltrating the upper class requires the same kind of thought process as learning a language suggests that it is possible for him to break into the upper class, but only in terms of appearance. Mentally, like Eva, Karim will always have a more rounded view of the world, just by virtue of having lived in more of it. This roundedness and understanding of how class works means that even if he becomes a member of the upper class outwardly, mentally he still inhabits the suburbs of his youth.

shows that he understands that he does have the power to influence how other individuals move through the world or think about the world. This is another step for Karim in understanding that other people are just as complicated and interesting as he is. Further, the fact that this has to do with Changez shows that Karim's sense of loyalty is deepening as well. Going against Changez's wishes would seriously damage their relationship, which suggests that Karim learned after Changez caught him sleeping with Jamila that treating one's friends and family with so little regard is a poor way to build strong, lasting relationships.

☛☛ With their poking into life's odd corners, Pyke and Marlene seemed to me to be more like intrepid journalists than swimmers in the sensual. Their desire to snuggle up to real life betrayed a basic separation from it. And their obsession with how the world worked just seemed another form of self-obsession.

**Related Characters:** Karim (speaker), Marlene, Matthew Pyke

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 191

### Explanation and Analysis

When Karim's bike chain breaks, Pyke begins giving Karim rides home from rehearsal and talks at length about his sexual exploits while they drive. First, it's worth noting that the particulars of Pyke and Marlene's sex life are made possible by the progressive changes and cultural shifts that happened in the sixties and continued into the seventies; they're very much a product of their time. Despite this and however entrenched in the social mores of the time they might be, their wealth keeps them somewhat separated from the realities of life. Pyke's interest in having sex with such a variety of people betrays the fact that he consistently thinks of his sex partners as being "other," and of being caricatures for him to explore through his relationships with them. By conducting his relationships like this, he and Marlene elevate themselves. Through thinking about sex as though it's research into the different strata of social hierarchy, Pyke only gets to confirm his biases and his own self importance rather than recognizing that his partners are people, just as he is.

## Part 2, Chapter 12 Quotes

☛☛ As I sat there I began to recognize that this was one of the first times in my life I'd been aware of having a moral dilemma. Before, I'd done exactly what I wanted; desire was my guide and I was inhibited by nothing but fear. But now, at the beginning of my twenties, something was growing in me. Just as my body had changed at puberty, now I was developing a sense of guilt, a sense not only of how I appeared to others, but of how I appeared to myself...

**Related Characters:** Karim (speaker), Matthew Pyke, Eleanor, Changez

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 186

### Explanation and Analysis

Karim has just asked Changez for permission to study him and create a character based off of him for Pyke's play, but Changez angrily refused. As Karim realizes that this problem is a moral dilemma, it announces, loud and clear, that Karim is coming of age. By recognizing that going against Changez's word has real consequences, Karim

## Part 2, Chapter 14 Quotes

☝☝ But I did feel, looking at these strange creatures now—the Indians—that in some way these were my people, and that I'd spent my life denying or avoiding that fact. I felt ashamed and incomplete at the same time, as if half of me were missing, and as if I'd been colluding with my enemies, those whites who wanted Indians to be like them.

**Related Characters:** Karim (speaker), Haroon (Dad), Anwar

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 212

### Explanation and Analysis

At Anwar's funeral, Karim watches several Indian men argue over the direction of Anwar's burial site, as apparently it wasn't dug facing Mecca. Through this experience, Karim has the epiphany that he is indeed Indian, even if he's spent much of the novel trying to deny it. This shows Karim developing a more rounded conception of self, while also beginning to understand the mechanism through which he's experienced racism. By suggesting that he's been working with his white "enemies" to keep him down, he shows that he understands that those white people are caught between wanting their Indian neighbors to be like them, as Eleanor does, and wanting them to be inarguably Indian, like Shadwell did. In this way, Karim realizes that in order to come fully into himself and come of age, he has to accept that his Indian heritage is something that he must protect and champion.

## Part 2, Chapter 15 Quotes

☝☝ And we pursued English roses as we pursued England; by possessing these prizes, this kindness and beauty, we stared defiantly into the eye of the Empire and all its self-regard—into the eye of Hairy Back, into the eye of the Great Fucking Dane. We became part of England and yet proudly stood outside it.

**Related Characters:** Karim (speaker), Hairy Back, Matthew Pyke, Eleanor, Gene

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 227

### Explanation and Analysis

When Karim discovers that Eleanor plans to continue seeing Pyke and decides to break up with her, he thinks of Gene and how the racism of the English affects immigrants of color. Karim recognizes that plenty of English people, like Eleanor, are full of kindness and beauty. This makes pursuing relationships with them alluring, but their kindness also doesn't negate the overt racism of England and those like Hairy Back who still live there and have power. As immigrants assimilate into English culture, Karim notes that they do become part of England, but by insisting that they will forever stand apart, he suggests that true assimilation isn't possible or even desirable. When Karim brings up the Great Dane, he recognizes again that a large swath of the English population wants Karim and other people like him to disappear. However, by proverbially staring into the Great Dane's eyes, Karim asserts that he won't disappear, and that his culture, person, and life matters.

☝☝ You go all your life thinking of your parents as these crushing protective monsters with infinite power over you, and then there's a day when you turn round, catch them unexpectedly, and they're just weak, nervous people trying to get by with each other.

**Related Characters:** Karim (speaker), Mum, Haroon (Dad)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 228

### Explanation and Analysis

After the opening night of Pyke's play, Karim catches Mum and Dad speaking to each other for the first time since the divorce. This observation begins to bring Karim's coming of age to a close, as it shows him realizing that his parents are people like any other. They, like him, are trying to navigate through the world with as little fuss as possible.

As Karim makes this connection, he also begins to forgive his parents for divorcing. By recognizing their humanity and their agency outside of their marriage, Karim understands that Dad wasn't so very out of line in pursuing Eva in the first place. Though Karim never changes his mind that it was a horrible thing for Dad to do to Mum, he also begins to recognize that Dad is deserving of happiness and should be able to seek it, even if it means compromising many years of familial loyalty.

## Part 2, Chapter 17 Quotes

☝☝ "Well then, can't you stop standing there and looking so English?"

"What d'you mean, English?"

"So shocked, so self-righteous and moral, so loveless and incapable of dancing. They are narrow, the English. It is a Kingdom of Prejudice over there. Don't be like it!"

**Related Characters:** Karim, Charlie (speaker), Frankie

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 254

**Explanation and Analysis**

When Charlie insists that Karim watch his session with the dominatrix, Karim awkwardly tries to get out of it. When Charlie accuses Karim of being "so English," it shows that Karim's initial identification as being an Englishman was true, possibly even more so than he thought. To Charlie, this represents an undesirable characteristic, while to Karim and other immigrants who wish to be fully English, this kind of an accusation represents success. This continues to develop Charlie as someone who doesn't fully understand those whose lives are different than his, particular when they come from a lower class standing, as Karim does.

Though Eva says that this isn't something that conservatism can give people, this sentiment is very much in line with Margaret Thatcher's ideas, many of which were considered shockingly conservative at the time. By insisting on getting people off of government assistance and promoting self-empowerment, Eva implies that people are entirely responsible for their own standing in the social hierarchy. Over the course of the novel, however, Karim has learned that this is absolutely not true—there are larger and insidious systems at work that keep people from advancing, and depriving those people of assistance that keeps them afloat will do absolutely no good. With this, Eva also shows how privileged she herself is. She feels that because she was able to move up the social hierarchy, others should be able to do the same. Though this is true to a degree, it shows that she doesn't recognize that she had money and other types of capital that allowed her to rise, luxuries that many other people don't have.

☝☝ There was no vacillation in his love; it was true, it was absolute, he knew what he felt. And Jamila seemed content to be loved in this way. She could do what she wanted and Changez would always put her first; he loved her more than he loved himself.

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 275

**Explanation and Analysis**

As Karim listens to Jamila and Changez talk about their daughter, he marvels at how their relationship has developed. While both Jamila and Karim considered this marriage to be oppressive, unwanted, and disrespectful of Jamila's autonomy, Changez's loyalty and Jamila's willingness to stick it out has turned their relationship into one of the most positive, respectful relationships of the novel. This reinforces the importance of loyalty in relationships, while also insisting that relationships don't have to adhere to a traditional form in order to be fulfilling and positive. Jamila and Changez's relationship works because each recognizes the autonomy and personhood of the other, and they encourage each other to pursue things that make them happy and keep them fulfilled.

## Part 2, Chapter 18 Quotes

☝☝ "We have to empower ourselves. Look at those people who live on sordid housing estates. They expect others—the Government—to do everything for them. They are only half human, because only half active. We have to find a way to enable them to grow. Individual human flourishing isn't something that either socialism or conservatism caters for."

**Related Characters:** Eva (speaker), Karim, Haroon (Dad)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 263

**Explanation and Analysis**

When Karim visits Dad and Eva, Eva is in the middle of giving an interview for a magazine. When asked about her life philosophy, she insists on not relying on the government.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

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

## PART 1, CHAPTER 1

Karim introduces himself as "an Englishman born and bred, almost" from the south London suburbs. He describes himself as restless, easily bored, and looking for trouble. One day when he's seventeen, his father, Haroon, comes home from work in a good mood—an unusual event. Dad greets Mum, Karim, and Karim's little brother, Allie. Then, instead of watching television, Dad strips to his underwear and commands Karim to bring him the pink towel.

When Karim hands Dad the towel, Dad falls to his knees, kicks up into a headstand, and explains that he must practice. When Karim asks what for, Dad snappily replies that he's been called for the yoga Olympics. Karim watches his father and notices signs that he's aging, such as his drooping belly, but Karim admires that his father's chest is still broad and covered in hair.

Mum comes upstairs and immediately looks suspicious, as Dad hasn't practiced yoga for months: she knows something is up. Karim describes Mum as a plump and generally timid person, but aggressive when exasperated. Mum snaps at Karim to close the curtains so the neighbors won't see Dad upside down with his stomach hanging out. As Karim obeys Mum, he feels the tension in the room rise substantially.

Dad asks Karim to fetch a yoga book and read from it out loud. Karim fetches the book, *Yoga for Women*, and reads in a grand voice. When Dad is satisfied, he stands, gets dressed, and declares that he can feel himself getting old. He asks Mum if she'd join him at Mrs. Kay's party that night, but Mum refuses. She insists that she's not Indian enough for Eva Kay, and Dad jokes that she could wear a sari. Mum doesn't laugh. Dad continues that tonight is a special occasion, as he's been asked to speak about Oriental philosophy. He looks very proud as he says this.

Karim offers to go with Dad to Eva's, trying his best to sound like he'd be doing Dad a favor. Dad thinks for a moment and agrees, and then asks Mum to come. Karim races upstairs, hopes that Mum won't agree to come, and puts on a Bob Dylan record. He emerges at 7pm dressed in flowery, colorful clothing and sees Dad waiting, dressed conservatively.

*From the start, Karim thinks of his identity in terms of potential change, which positions him to come of age over the course of the novel. When he makes note of being "almost" an Englishman, he refers to his Indian heritage. This suggests that even if he does identify as English, he's unable to forget that others see his Indian side first.*



*The way Karim notes signs of aging in Dad shows that even this early in the novel, he's beginning to see that Dad is a person, not just a father figure. However, Karim still admires his father, indicating that he still views him in an overwhelmingly positive light.*



*The fact that Mum apparently doesn't share Karim's admiration for Dad suggests that there are problems within their marriage and this family unit in general. Further, Mum's suspicion of yoga in particular suggests that it's Dad's Indian identity that is partially responsible for these problems.*



*It will come to light later that Dad is Muslim, a fact that makes his interest in yoga and Eastern philosophy in general somewhat complicated. Though yoga is accepted to various degrees in some Islamic sects, it's primarily a Buddhist and Hindu practice. Further, the book Dad asks for appears to divorce yoga from even its Buddhist roots. This creates the sense that Dad's racial and spiritual identity is muddy and varied.*



*Dad's desire to include Mum in his outings shows that he is loyal to her and wants to build a strong relationship with her. Karim implies throughout the novel that Mum is far more interested in stability, which explains her unwillingness to try new and foreign things.*



Karim guides Dad the four miles on the bus to Eva's house and explains to the reader that Dad acts like a new immigrant to London, not someone who's been there for twenty years. He also explains that Dad's naïveté attracts women. Dad taught Karim to flirt with everyone and to value charm over courtesy or decency, and Karim notes that he suspected that Dad hadn't used his charm on anyone but Mum.

Karim persuades Dad to stop off at a pub for a beer on the way and leads him to the back room. The beer makes Dad sad and moody, and he tells Karim that Mum isn't making effort in their relationship. When Karim suggests they get a divorce, Dad says that Karim wouldn't like that. Karim thinks that his parents will never divorce because, in the suburbs, people don't think about pursuing happiness.

Dad confides in Karim that he's scared for his speaking engagement. When they arrive at Eva's, Karim notes that Eva is better off than his family: she has a car and central heating in her house. When she opens the door, she's wearing a caftan and dark, smudged eyeliner. Eva hugs Dad and kisses him. Karim tries to decide if Eva is sophisticated or pretentious when she grabs Karim and kisses him too. She holds Karim at arm's length and deems him exotic and original.

Karim feels he's being watched and looks up the stairs to see Charlie, Eva's son, sitting at the top. He explains that both men and women find Charlie overwhelmingly attractive, and says that he never thought Charlie would be at home. Charlie comes down the stairs, greets Dad by his first name, and accompanies the group into the living room.

Karim explains that Mum finds Eva horrible, but that he thinks she's the only adult he can talk to. He says that she's always good-tempered and does outrageous things like bring Charlie and his girlfriend breakfast in bed. She picks Dad up regularly for their writer's group and when she does, she makes sure to ask Karim what he's reading. She despises Kerouac and lends Karim French novels instead. She also confides in Karim about her marriage, which is sexless and abusive. Karim tells the reader that Eva both scares and excites him, and that she disturbed the Amir house from the moment she entered it.

*Karim sets himself up to seek out relationships not predicated on loyalty or love. This in turn positions discovering the true meanings of loyalty and love as two of Karim's primary endeavors of the novel. His insistence that Dad hasn't charmed anyone but Mum shows Karim's youth and naïveté.*



*Here, Karim positions stability and misery as qualities inherent to a suburban lifestyle, while implying that the pursuit of happiness can only happen when one leaves the suburbs. This binary view is, again, indicative of his youth, while his insistence that Dad won't break out of the suburban mindset shows he doesn't see Dad as a whole person capable of being anything but a parent.*



*Eva offers the first clue as to how others see Karim and Dad when she deems Karim exotic. This suggests again that Karim cannot escape the fact that other white characters consistently choose to think of him in terms of his Indian heritage and ignore the fact that he thinks of himself as English first and foremost.*



*Charlie's looks and success with women open the novel up to explore how Charlie and Karim experience success differently because of their identities. Charlie won't experience the intense racism that Karim experiences, simply by being white and conventionally handsome.*



*Here, the way that Karim describes Eva positions her as a product of the wild and free 1960s: she's a proponent of free sex and love and not shy about it, which is indicative of the social changes regarding sex that happened in the sixties. By confiding in Karim she treats him like an adult, which suggests that Eva might treat Karim like he's more mature than he actually is. This is supported by his claim that he's scared of her; he's not necessarily ready to have these kinds of conversations.*



Back in Eva's living room, Karim takes in the scene: the floor is clear and on it sit four middle-aged couples drinking wine. One man in a corduroy suit (Shadwell) sits against the wall, nervously smoking. Charlie suggests to Karim that they go upstairs and listen to something other than the Bach playing in the living room. When Karim asks, Charlie explains that his dad is in a therapy center with a nervous breakdown. Karim thinks that nervous breakdowns are terribly exotic.

Karim watches as Dad sits with the couples on the floor. He thinks that the couples seem to be showing off and that usually Dad would laugh at this sort of thing, but Karim notices that Dad seems to be having the time of his life. Karim wonders why Dad is sullen at home if he can be this gregarious with others. Two of the men start whispering to each other that Dad came on a magic carpet. When Karim kicks one of the men, Charlie leads him upstairs. As they head out of the room, Eva dims the lights, bows to Dad, and tells the group that Dad will show them "The Way."

Karim curses, but Charlie tells Karim to watch. Dad leads the group in a few yoga poses and then asks them to lie down so he can lead them in a guided meditation. Charlie is fascinated, but finally leads Karim to his attic bedroom. When Charlie asks Karim what music he's been listening to, Karim launches into a story about his experience playing the new Rolling Stones album at the music society. However, Karim soon realizes he sounds like a child and stops.

As Charlie rolls a joint, he asks Karim if he meditates every morning with chanting. Karim lies and says he does meditate, but doesn't chant. He thinks of the crazy mornings at his house where there's no time for meditation as Charlie hands him the joint. Karim sprinkles ash down his shirt, burns a hole in it, and gets up quickly to go to the bathroom. As he sits in the bathroom, he thinks that this is how he wants to live his life: intensely, steeped in mysticism, sex, drugs, and alcohol. Karim also admits to the reader that he admires Charlie in that he wants to be him.

Karim creeps down the stairs. He watches the group meditating for a moment before stepping out the open back door. Karim gets on his knees and crawls across the patio until he can see Eva on a garden bench, pulling off her caftan. Karim can see that Eva only has one breast, and that Dad is underneath her wailing with pleasure. Dad laughs and Karim thinks that he doesn't know this version of Dad at all. After he sneaks back into the kitchen, Karim pours himself a glass of Scotch. The man in the corduroy suit is in the kitchen and introduces himself as Shadwell, but Karim avoids him and returns to Charlie upstairs.

*The scene in the living room appears suburban in the extreme, though the fact that these suburbanites are here to see Dad speak complicates Karim's insistence that the suburban lifestyle means not pursuing happiness: these people are here to see Dad speak about how to pursue happiness through embracing Eastern philosophy, not through suburban drudgery.*



*Remember Mum's suspicion and apparent discomfort with Dad's yoga practice. Here, these couples' interest in Dad's ideas is in direct contrast to how Mum feels about it all, which suggests that Dad feels stifled by Mum's lack of interest. Despite this interest, however, Dad isn't immune to rude racial comments. His identity as an Indian man turns him into a curiosity and someone to make fun of.*



*Karim's feeling of childishness when he talks about the Rolling Stones shows that he believes Charlie is more mature than he is and that he wants to impress Charlie. This shows how much Karim idolizes Charlie, as it never seems to occur to him that Charlie isn't that much older and certainly feels just as lost, even if that's not apparent to Karim.*



*When Karim lies, it shows him experimenting with using his Indian heritage and others' misconceptions about it to his advantage—he hopes that pretending he's more Indian than he actually is will make Charlie like him more. Karim also implies that this kind of Indian-ness is wholly incompatible with his suburban life, again showing that he identifies more fully with being English.*



*Remember that Karim believed that Dad had never seduced anyone but Mum. Now that it's apparent that he was mistaken about that, Karim will have to come to terms with the fact that Dad is a person, not just a father figure or a devoted and unsatisfied husband to Mum. Karim also never really acknowledges that Eva is also cheating on her husband. Dad's transgressions are what matter to him, which shows how naive, young, and self-centered he is at this point.*



Charlie is lying on his back and invites Karim to lie next to him. Karim complies and Charlie tells Karim he needs to "wear less:" he suggests Levi's jeans and a solid shirt. Karim thinks he'll never wear anything else for the rest of his life. Slowly, Karim puts his hand on Charlie's thigh. Charlie ignores him, but Karim feels Charlie's erection. When Charlie doesn't object, Karim unzips Charlie's fly. He tries to kiss Charlie, who turns away. Charlie doesn't stop Karim's hands, however, and he ejaculates. Karim feels triumphant and thinks about where to buy a solid pink shirt.

Suddenly, Karim hears something and turns around to see Dad's head poking through the trapdoor. Charlie zips his pants back up as both Dad and Eva enter the attic. Eva reprimands them for smoking and says it's time to go home. At Karim's house he bids Eva goodbye and then watches her try to kiss Dad. When Dad gets inside he angrily and loudly accuses Karim of being gay, but Karim isn't as inebriated as Dad. When Dad tries to slap Karim, Karim grabs his hand to stop him. Karim tells Dad to be quiet and mentions that he saw Dad having sex with Eva. Dad tries to deny it, but he hurries to the bathroom and vomits.

Mum appears in the bathroom doorway looking tired and disappointed. She asks Karim to make her a bed on the couch so that she doesn't have to sleep with Dad. Karim feels bad for Mum but wonders why she can't just fight back and be stronger. Karim resolves that he'll be stronger than Mum, and he sits up the entire night thinking about his future.

For the next week, Dad refuses to speak. He mimes and points to things, and Mum cries in frustration. Karim explains that both Mum and Dad work, Dad as a civil servant and Mum in a shoe shop. Mum does all the housework and the cooking as well, and she shops and cooks on her lunch breaks. At night she watches TV, and it's the unspoken rule that she gets to decide what they watch. She also likes to draw, as she's a trained artist. She often draws her "three selfish men" on one page.

One day during what Karim terms "the Great Sulk," he opens up Mum's sketchpad. He finds a drawing of Dad and Eva, naked. Eva is drawn slightly larger than Dad, and Karim wonders how Mum knows what happened. He paws through Dad's briefcase as well and finds books by prominent Buddhist and Taoist philosophers.

*Charlie's reaction to Karim's advances suggests that he likely has some complicated thoughts about his identity, just as Karim does. This begins to show the reader that Charlie is coming of age and grappling with his identity just like Karim is—though notably, Karim continues to position Charlie as an idol and not as just another teen boy for much of the novel. In this way, it also shows another facet of Karim's youth.*



*Dad's anger that Karim is gay (although it's later explained he's bisexual) suggests that there are two systems of morality at play here: Dad's older, conservative morality system that allows for infidelity but not homosexuality, and Karim's, which is a product of the social progressiveness of the 1960s. Dad's reaction also shows him returning to his role as a parent, while Karim's threats show him insisting that he's seen Dad be more than a parent.*



*When Karim doesn't define what "fight back" or "be stronger" means for Mum, it shows again how naïve and youthful he is by suggesting that he believes simply that Mum can just behave differently and fix the situation.*



*Mum's life at this point in the novel is portrayed as one of service to her "three selfish men—" even her escape, drawing, is dedicated to thinking about the men she cares for. This reinforces how traditional Karim's nuclear family structure is, even though the fact that Mum has a job outside the home is suggestive of the fruits of progressive movements.*



*This drawing, and particularly the fact that Eva is drawn larger than Dad, foreshadows the amount of power Eva has in her relationship with Dad. Further, like Mum's three selfish men, Mum can't necessarily do anything about the situation except draw it—she's powerless.*



Karim thinks that it would be interesting if Eva called the house, as it would test Dad's silence. When the phone rings, Karim makes sure to get there first. Eva interrogates Karim about what he's reading until Karim can get Dad. Karim goes to his room and thinks about what's happening. He begins to call Dad "God" and catches Dad talking to himself slowly in his room, exaggerating his Indian accent. Karim wonders why Dad is doing this when he's spent the last twenty years trying to be as un-Indian as possible.

A few weeks later, Dad calls Karim to his room and invites Karim to attend his "appearance" that night. Dad asks Karim to not tell Mum and says that they're both growing up together. Karim wonders if there's anything true in what Dad is doing, since Dad was able to convince Charlie he's the real thing. Karim thinks that Dad is now God, but he still has reservations: Karim needs to know if Dad is actually a guru, or just "another suburban eccentric."

## PART 1, CHAPTER 2

Karim backs up and explains how Dad came to be in England. Dad grew up in Bombay next door to his best friend, Anwar. They played cricket and had servants, and their Hindu neighbors chanted obscenities outside their houses. Dad speaks as though he and Anwar had an idyllic childhood, and Karim wonders why Dad decided to come to a dreary London suburb.

Dad didn't realize how complicated life is: he'd never cooked or cleaned before coming to England. Mum was both irritated by Dad's lack of skills and proud of him, as his family was so well off. Dad came to England for school with the intention to return to India, but he never did. Once in England, Dad was amazed to see poor Englishmen who couldn't read.

While Anwar studied aeronautical engineering, Dad purchased bowties and waistcoats and spent his time in the pub instead of studying law. Anwar and Dad went to dances on Saturdays, where Dad met Mum. Though Anwar kissed women, he was already married to Jeeta, a princess. Not long after Jeeta arrived in England Anwar won money betting. He tried to open a toy shop, but turned it into a grocery at Jeeta's suggestion. They were successful after that.

*Referring to Dad as God shows that Karim is aware that Dad has come upon a great deal of power with these appearances. However, Karim hasn't put together that Dad's power comes from the fact that in the eyes of the white suburbanites, he is Indian and exotic. In contrast, his job as a civil servant required him to be non-Indian in order to be successful.*



*Dad's comment that he's growing up signals that Karim isn't the only character coming of age. It suggests that the reader should think of Dad as a child also finding his way in the world. In turn, this positions the suburbs themselves and the boring life inherent to the suburbs as a developmental stage for Dad and Karim.*



*The fact that Dad considers his childhood idyllic in spite of the overt religious animosity shows that the religious threats of violence are normalized in his mind. This begins to create the sense that even in India where Dad isn't considered an "other," violence and threats are normal and expected.*



*Mum's pride shows how important class is to her—the fact that Dad has no practical skills pales when put beside his family's wealth. This shows that success can be tied to wealth alone, not necessarily to anything else, and begins to suggest that it's somewhat arbitrary because of that.*



*Because Anwar never actually got a job in what he studied, it suggests that those fields were closed to him, presumably because of his race. When the grocery becomes successful because of Jeeta, it shows early on that she has business sense and an idea of how to create success with what she's given.*



Dad's monthly allowance from India was cut off after his family realized he was drinking instead of studying. He took a job with the Civil Service and ended up in the misery of the south London suburbs. When Karim was about ten, Dad discovered Eastern philosophy and fell in love with it. When Karim's family visited Jeeta and Anwar on Sundays, Anwar teased Dad mercilessly about it. Both Anwar and Mum treated Dad as though he was making a great mistake in caring more for Eastern philosophy than for making money.

Anwar would tell Dad to get a promotion, but Dad insisted that the white Londoners would never promote an Indian man while white men still exist. Anwar insisted that Dad was just lazy. Karim explains that Dad was very lonely and needed to talk about his "China-things," so he'd accompany Dad to the bus in the morning. Karim thinks that Eva was the first person that Dad was able to truly share his love of Eastern philosophy with.

In the present, Karim leads Dad off the bus and around a wealthy neighborhood called Chiselhurst. Finally, Dad snaps that he's cold and they're lost, but Karim insists it's Dad's fault he's cold: Dad is wearing sandals, a long silk shirt, and an ugly, hairy jacket. As they walk through the neighborhood, Karim thinks of a time when Mum looked at Dad as if to ask why he couldn't give her a house like one of these with sprinklers in the lawn.

Finally, Karim and Dad reach their destination. Dad explains that the house belongs to Carl and Marianne, who have recently been trekking in India. They bow to Dad at the door, and Karim finds this absurd given that they work at a TV rental firm. Eva descends upon Dad and Karim and presses books into Karim's hands. As Dad begins to walk through the room, Eva confides to Karim that she wants to introduce Haroon to "more responsive people" in London and then move there herself.

Karim settles on a sofa and admires the books and objects d'art in the living room. He hears Carl talk about India offensively and moves away. He joins Marianne's daughter and another girl, Helen, behind the bar. Helen moves into Karim's space and mentions that Dad looks like a magician. Karim feels aroused by Helen's presence and ponders whether Dad is actually a magician or not. He watches Eva touch Dad and feels confused. Karim turns back to Helen and thinks that she must desire him, because he feels wholly uninterested in her.

*In general, Eastern philosophy defines success very differently than Anwar, Mum, and western society as a whole do, particularly in terms of money. This suggests that, though Dad does spend his time trying to be un-Indian and more English in order to make money, he doesn't find either identity particularly fulfilling. By embracing Eastern philosophy, he can escape some of the racism he experiences in his very English job.*



*Anwar implies that hard work will always be rewarded, while Dad appears to be more aware that there are larger systems of prejudice and racism at work that will inhibit his success regardless of how hard he works. This shows that though Karim thinks of Dad as naïve and childish in a lot of ways, Dad has a very firm grasp of how he fits into English class and race system.*



*Karim's recollection suggests that Mum adheres more fully to Anwar's line of thinking regarding success. However, the fact that Mum hasn't left Dad for someone more successful recalls Karim's assertion that the suburbs and the suburban mindset encompass an inherently miserable attitude that promotes settling over happiness.*



*Because Carl and Marianne are white and presumably not Muslim or Hindu, they can escape or ignore India's religious violence and choose to see and think about the parts of India that they find particularly interesting. Eva begins to hint at her power, and particularly that it comes from exploiting Dad to attract the attention and, presumably, the money of people like Carl and Marianne.*



*For Karim, these appearances seem to be the first time that Dad's Indian heritage is thought of as anything other than a simple fact of life. Because of this, Karim is faced with a number of new and different ideas that challenge the way he's always seen the world: Dad is violating the suburban code by cheating on Mum, and being Indian is suddenly a positive thing.*



Karim remembers once when he asked Dad to tell him "the facts of life." Rather than say anything important, Dad had said that women's ears get hot when they're ready for sex. Karim reaches out and pinches one of Helen's ears (which is warmish), but thinks of Charlie instead. Karim realizes he came tonight hoping to see Charlie, even though Charlie hasn't shown any interest since the last time they saw each other. Eva begins to organize the room, and Karim thinks Dad looks confident. Unexpectedly, Uncle Ted and Auntie Jean walk in.

## PART 1, CHAPTER 3

Karim describes Ted and Jean as normal, unhappy alcoholics. They own a central heating business and call Dad Harry instead of Haroon. Dad calls them "Gin and Tonic" in retaliation. While Jean looks angry at what she sees in Carl and Marianne's living room, Ted just looks confused. He spots Karim, and Karim explains that he and Ted are good friends. Ted knows about things that Dad doesn't, like air rifles and fishing.

Karim tries to work out why Ted and Jean are here tonight. He reasons that when Mum heard that Dad was appearing again, she called her sister Jean. Jean would've been angry and flown into action to stop Dad from appearing, and she probably knows Carl and Marianne because Ted likely installed their radiators. Karim thinks that this is the only way they'd know people like Carl and Marianne, as Ted and Jean only think of people in terms of power and money and are certainly not interested in India. Eva snaps irritably at Ted and Jean to sit down and join the group. They slowly comply. Karim knows that he and Dad will be in trouble later, though Dad doesn't seem bothered to see his in-laws sitting with the group.

Karim explains that Dad and Ted actually like each other. Ted often confides in Dad about Jean's drinking or her affairs with younger men, and while Dad wisely counsels Ted, he puts Ted to work fixing things around the house.

Dad surveys the room in silence. Karim watches and wonders if Dad is just going to be silent the entire time, but he finally begins hissing and speaking. Ted is engrossed while Jean looks angrily on, and Karim smiles and wanders away. He wanders through the house, feeling as though his mind is empty, until he hears a male voice reciting poetry. Karim follows the voice until he finds a silver-haired boy sitting with a girl on a swing seat, reading to her from a small book. The girl seems bored to death. She notices Karim and Karim finally realizes the boy is Charlie.

*The strangeness and ineffectiveness of Dad's sex talk mirrors his incompetence at other practical tasks—he simply doesn't have the skills to move through the world unassisted, despite the fact that he's an adult. This reinforces the idea that this is a coming of age novel for Dad, as well as for Karim.*



*When Ted and Jean call Dad by an Anglicized name, they make it exceptionally clear that they don't value Dad's Indian heritage and would like to erase or ignore it altogether. This racist act shows that they believe success and propriety come from embodying whiteness and Englishness.*



*The novel positions Ted and Jean as culture police of sorts. For these first chapters, they punish Dad and Karim for embracing their Indian heritage and for moving away from what's considered acceptable, middle class, suburban activities. Karim also suggests the idea that power and money exist in direct opposition to Indian-ness, and valuing one means devaluing the other. This is reinforced by Dad's lack of interest in money and subsequent interest in performing his Indian identity for others.*



*Karim suggests here that Ted isn't happy with his suburban lifestyle either, and seeks Dad's Indian identity to help him deal with it. This shows that Dad's guru business goes back a while, even if it wasn't paid or named.*



*Thus far, the novel hasn't offered any suburban married couples who are happy. This reinforces Karim's assessment that suburbanites are inherently unhappy people, though it also calls Dad and Eva's relationship into question. Both of them are inherently suburban yet not married to each other, which leaves it open for speculation whether their suburban roots will doom their non-suburban relationship.*



Charlie notices Karim and greets him. Karim is fascinated as Charlie talks about his future success. Karim forces himself to return to the living room and watches the end of Dad's appearance. Jean greets Karim curtly, and together they watch Dad and Eva talk to attendees. Karim and Helen exchange phone numbers, and Karim watches Charlie try to pressure his date into going home with him. He wonders why Charlie is being so rude, and wonders if Dad and Eva are actually in love with each other. He remembers how Dad kissed Eva in front of Ted and Jean and wonders what's wrong with Dad.

When Karim and Dad get home, Mum is waiting for them in the hall. She's on the phone, presumably with Jean. Before Karim can escape to his room, Mum shoves the phone at him. Jean instructs Karim to come visit her the next day.

The next day, Karim rides his bike in the direction of Ted and Jean's house. He decides to stop and see Helen first, as she lives nearby. He rings the bell at Helen's house but hears no reply. Karim hears Helen anxiously calling him from an upstairs window and asks her why she isn't coming down. Suddenly, Helen jerks back into the house. Karim hears yelling from inside and the front door opens. Helen's father, a hairy, towering man whom Karim decides to call Hairy Back, lets a **Great Dane** go. He tells Karim that Helen doesn't date boys, especially boys of color. Hairy Back threatens to smash Karim's hands if he comes near Helen and slams the front door.

Karim turns away and decides to urinate on Hairy Back's car tires. He notices the **Great Dane** and hopes that Helen will call the dog back inside. As he tries to tiptoe away Karim murmurs Helen's name, which seems to affect the dog—it comes up behind Karim, jumps up so its paws are on Karim's shoulders, and thrusts at Karim's back. Karim runs and feels the dog shudder before he manages to escape over the fence. He throws a few stones at the dog and realizes the dog ejaculated on his jacket.

When Karim finally arrives at Ted and Jean's house, he's in a horrible mood. Jean leads Karim into the living room and pushes him down onto the sofa. Karim gets up to look out the window at the yard, where Ted and Jean used to host lavish parties during the summer. Karim and Allie always loved the parties, while Mum and Dad always looked out of place. This was partially because of their low status, but also because Dad often tried to discuss Eastern philosophy with other guests. Jean had been invincible in those days, but that ended after she had an affair with a much younger politician. The parties stopped and Jean never stopped mourning the loss of her lover.

*Though Karim positions Charlie as an idol, it's important to remember that he's as young and naïve as Karim is; he just happens to be white and have a plan for his future as a musician. This shows that Karim considers having a plan to achieve success a marker of adulthood. Charlie's role as an idol comes into question when he pressures his date, though Karim already mentioned he cares more for charm than kindness. This sets him up to fall for Charlie's charm, despite the warning signs.*



*The fact that Jean wants to speak to Karim instead of Dad directly is an indicator of the dysfunctional extended family dynamics at play here.*



*Hairy Back's racism begins to show that in England, the variety of casual racism exhibited by Carl and Marianne isn't the only kind of racism individuals like Karim experience—men like Hairy Back are vocal and dangerous about their ideas. In this situation, Karim's identity as a half-Indian man will possibly ruin his chances of success with Helen, which again suggests that the identity of a person in question will have a direct effect on their success in the world.*



*As a symbol, the Great Dane represents the greater white cultural forces that put Karim in an inferior place because of his racial identity through humiliation and exploitation. Further, these experiences with Great Dane-esque figures leave visible marks on Karim: he now has to face Jean with dog ejaculate on his jacket, a reminder that humiliation like this can happen at any time.*



*Mentioning Jean's lover begins to create the sense that even though she's a generally unlikeable character, she is human and suffered the consequences for attempting to pursue happiness outside of the prescribed suburban formula. This in turn suggests that she has more at stake emotionally in Dad's affair with Eva than previously thought, since she's still reeling from her own failed affair. Further, its failure does affect her entire family, as the parties that Karim's family attended no longer happen.*



Jean walks Ted into the room. As Jean begins to try to start the conversation, Karim cuts in and asks Ted about football. It takes a moment, but Ted finally sits down. Karim knows that Ted is on his side now and explains why: once, Ted took Karim to a football match in London. On the train to London, Ted had pointed out the slums where poor black Londoners lived. On the way home, Ted and Karim had been chanting the team name with the other passengers when all of a sudden, Karim turned around and saw a knife in Ted's hand. Ted smashed light bulbs in the train car, stabbed at the seats, and handed Karim an unbroken bulb to throw out an open window. Karim did as he was told, and the bulb hit a wall next to where an old Indian man was sitting.

Jean fixes her stare on Karim and begins to say that she and Ted never had a problem with Mum marrying a "colored" man. She goes on and mentions how disfigured and crazy Eva is, and says that she assumes that "this madness" is going to stop. Karim tries to tell Jean that Dad can do what he wants, but Jean insists that her livelihood will be affected if Dad continues with this nonsense. Karim stands to leave and Jean asks what's on the back of his coat. Karim hears nothing from Ted or Jean for weeks. One night, Mum answers the phone and hangs up immediately. When Dad asks who it was, she defiantly says it was nobody.

## PART 1, CHAPTER 4

Karim realizes that Eva is in his life to stay. He feels as though she's there while Mum and Dad watch TV at night, and he puzzles over whether Dad is meeting Eva during lunchtime. He even finds a book of Chinese sex positions in Dad's briefcase one day. One Sunday, Karim hears a knock at the door and opens it to find Ted. Ted mumbles something about checking on the roses in the backyard, strides inside, and asks about Dad. Karim asks Ted if he's following up and suggests they go to another football match by train.

Ted ignores Karim and takes Mum out to the garden, presumably to talk about Dad. When they're done talking Ted goes to the bedroom and barges in. Karim follows. Dad is sitting and polishing his shoes like he does every Sunday. He seems surprised but not unhappy that Ted is here, and asks him to look at his broken record player. Ted looks panicked for a moment but agrees. Karim fetches Ted's screwdriver for him and sits on the bed, watching.

*By revealing that Ted harbors closeted racist sentiments, the novel continues to expose the suburbs as dangerous for people of color. However, the fact that Karim can blackmail Ted with this shows that it's not socially acceptable to be outwardly racist, even in front of someone like Jean who ignores that Karim and Dad are Indian. When Ted roped Karim into the event on the bus, he asked Karim to identify as English and as a perpetrator of racialized violence. This continues to complicate Karim's identification with either being English or Indian.*



*Jean's insistence that she'll suffer as a result of Dad's transgressions refers to the existence of the gossip and rumor mill, and the suburban desire to keep up appearances. However, there's no indication that Mum and Dad suffered at all when Jean's affair failed, suggesting that Jean is grasping for power more than actually possessing it. When Mum hangs up on Eva, it shows her trying to focus her attention on preserving her marriage and remaining loyal to Dad.*



*Even before anything has changed officially, Karim recognizes that Dad's lapse in fidelity has permanently altered his family structure. In recognizing this, Karim begins to prioritize loyalty over anything else when it comes to family, as evidenced by his growing unease with the situation. He blames Dad's lack of loyalty for his own discomfort.*



*For now, Dad doesn't seem at all concerned with any of this, which creates the sense that he thinks of himself as being outside the reach of suburban policing. The broken record player is a very literal metaphor for the other characters' urgings that Dad step back into line.*



Ted and Dad good-naturedly insult Karim's uselessness. Ted admits that Jean sent him to check on the Buddhism thing. Karim mentions to the reader that Ted said "Buddhist" in a disapproving tone. Dad seems unconcerned and questions why the Buddhism is a bad thing, and Ted simply says that it all has to stop. Dad tells Ted to simply tell Jean, "Harry's nothing." Ted deflates.

Dad suddenly changes the subject and asks Ted about work. Dad gets up and pulls Ted's face into his own chest, and then says that there's too much work in the world. Ted starts crying and says he can't stop working. He and Dad go back and forth about why Ted thinks he has to keep working. Ted truly breaks down when Dad points out that the heating business is in shambles and Jean isn't happy in their marriage. Ted walks out of the bedroom with the record player, sobbing, much to Mum's surprise. Dad explains that he released Ted.

After that incident, Karim begins to fear that Mum and Dad will murder each other. The following Saturday, he bikes to Anwar and Jeeta's shop to escape. Karim peers through the window and doesn't see Anwar, which is unusual. Karim looks into the shop and sees Jamila, Anwar and Jeeta's daughter, stocking shelves. He and Jamila grew up together, and they began having sex when Jamila discovered Simone de Beauvoir. Karim listened to Jamila talk about Miss Cutmore, a white librarian who got her started reading French novels. He says that depending on what Jamila was reading, he and Jamila pretended they were French or Black American since the English punished them for being Indian.

Karim finally enters the shop and greets Jeeta. Jeeta asks him to take Jamila on a walk and won't answer his questions about Anwar's whereabouts. Karim tells Jamila all about Dad and Eva, but he purposefully doesn't mention his experience with the **Great Dane**. When Karim asks Jamila what he should do, she laughs. Karim finally realizes how unhappy Dad's affair is making him, and Jamila tries to convince him that families aren't sacred and Dad should be able to pursue love.

Jamila pulls Karim into a public toilet, and he thinks that, though he doesn't believe in monogamy, his mind is fully on Charlie. Karim admits to the reader that he likes having sex with both boys and girls, but he doesn't think too much about it in case something's wrong with him. To distract Jamila, Karim asks her if she has any news.

*Ted's inability to support his argument suggests he doesn't truly believe in what Jean has asked him to do—his loyalty to the cause is nonexistent, and therefore, it shows that he'll be an ineffective way to pull Dad back to an acceptable image of suburbia.*



*This experience shows Karim that Dad isn't a fake, as Ted experiences a true emotional and spiritual transformation as a result of Dad's Eastern philosophy. Then, when Ted clings to the broken record player, it shows that he's been clinging to ideas that no longer are useful to him. Though the novel never says if he fixes it, he does go on to fix the way he relates to these ideas.*



*Karim positions Jamila as being at the forefront of the new scholarship on social issues, including feminism, queer theory, and civil rights. When he mentions that they adopt these personas from other countries because the English wouldn't let them be Indian, he makes it very clear that even if Dad experiences fame from being Indian, it's also a very dangerous identity given the current political climate.*



*Jamila's counsel shows that she prioritizes romantic love over loyalty, respect, or stability. Karim's realization, on the other hand, shows that he selfishly prioritizes his stability over his parents' happiness when Dad's quest for happiness outside marriage changes Karim's life. This shows too that Karim is more conservative than he'd like to think.*



*Because Karim's sexual orientation is fluid, it reinforces the idea that he's in a state of change in his life. Though some of the flux will certainly even out as he comes of age, his multifaceted sexual orientation suggests that things will continue to change even into adulthood.*



Jamila becomes serious as she begins her story. She'd begun learning martial arts, which isn't out of character—her neighborhood is brimming with violent neo-fascist groups, and Jeeta keeps buckets of water in case the shop is firebombed at night. Anwar didn't like Jamila attending classes and secretly decided it was time Jamila get married. He fixed it up with a brother in Bombay for a boy to come to London to marry Jamila. The boy, however, was 30 and demanded a very strange dowry consisting of a winter overcoat, a color television, and the complete works of Arthur Conan Doyle.

Anwar consulted Dad about the strange dowry, and Dad insisted that Anwar investigate the boy. Anwar ignored Dad and informed Jamila of his decision, and Jamila, unsurprisingly, refused. She explains to Karim that she would've left right then if Anwar didn't hit Jeeta, and she leads Karim back to the shop. She makes Karim a kebab and then takes him upstairs despite Jeeta's protests. Karim thinks he's had enough of family dramas and just wants to go home.

Karim smells something horrible as he climbs the stairs. When he finally enters the flat, he sees Anwar sitting on a bed in the living room, looking thin and very ill. A pot of urine sits next to the bed. Karim tries to eat his kebab quickly and thinks that Anwar looks like he's dying. He tries to talk to Anwar, but Jamila cuts in. She asks Anwar to stop and offers him Karim's kebab. Desperately, Jamila turns to Karim and says that Anwar hasn't eaten in eight days, and he'll die if he doesn't eat.

Karim affirms Jamila's assessment, but Anwar angrily says that he can get his family to obey him by not eating, the same way that Gandhi got the English to leave India. Anwar insists that Jamila must marry the boy, and Karim tries to explain that people don't go for arranged marriages anymore. Karim can't believe the things he's seeing people do all of their own accords—Ted's breakdown, Dad's relationship with Eva, and now Anwar's hunger strike—things that had nothing to do with outside circumstances. Karim feels unsettled at Anwar's irrationality.

Karim kicks the pot of urine and turns to leave with Jamila, but thinks of Anwar possibly touching that bit of the sheet that the urine splashed on. Karim gets a wet cloth and cleans the corner of the sheet before running down to his bike. Jamila joins him, and when she starts to cry, Karim holds her.

*Karim is likely referring to groups like the National Front, a political party that promoted racial purity and expressed strong anti-immigrant sentiment. This begins to build the sense that immigrant families live in a constant state of fear. The particulars of the boy's dowry requests suggest that he's very interested in English culture, though asking for Sherlock Holmes novels indicates that he has a very specific idea of what English culture is.*



*Though it's somewhat unclear if Karim knew about the domestic violence between Anwar and Jeeta before this, this revelation shows that families are far more complicated than Karim realized. These discoveries about Anwar's buried conservatism and traditionalism turn him into a more rounded and human character.*



*Anwar's actions turn him into a foil for Dad in how they embrace their Indian heritage: while Dad behaves in a more western way through his affair with Eva, Anwar becomes more Indian than ever in support of an old tradition. In doing this, Anwar insists that Jamila give up her western pursuits and accept her own Indian heritage, which in turn suggests an uneasiness with western culture as a whole.*



*Karim's assessment (and subsequent shock) that Dad, Ted, and Anwar are doing these things of their own volition begins to show that Karim doesn't necessarily think of himself as being in control of his own life. This is indicative of his youth, and shows that until he learns otherwise, he'll float through life like he's not in control of any of it.*



*His guilt at splashing urine shows that Karim is exceptionally loyal to those he considers family, even when they're being irrational. This feeds into Karim's assertion that he doesn't need people to be nice to him to like them.*



## PART 1, CHAPTER 5

Karim cycles madly through London, thinking he's ready to retire. He thinks about school and how the teachers believe the students can't deal with books. Karim regularly comes home covered in spit or with another boy's urine on his shoes, and he feels fed up with everything. Karim thinks of what Jamila might do. He thinks that Eva is the only objective person he could talk to about this, but he reasons that he's supposed to hate her for ruining his family.

Karim wonders why Anwar is literally staking his life on Muslim beliefs, when he's never seemed very Muslim. Karim wonders if Dad's move towards Buddhism is at all similar, and he thinks that both men seem to be returning internally to India. Suddenly, Karim thinks he sees Dad trying to make a phone call from a public phone. When Dad hangs up, he notices Karim approaching. Karim asks after Eva, and Dad affirms he was talking to her. Karim asks if Dad is in love with Eva. Dad tries to sidestep the question, but looks distraught when Karim asks if he's going to leave his family for Eva. Dad only says that he's feeling things he's never felt before, and feels as though he misses Eva whenever they're not together.

Dad confides that Eva is seeing other men, specifically Shadwell, whom she believes is going to be a wildly successful theatre director. Karim insists that Eva is blackmailing Dad by telling him she's seeing other men, but asks if Dad has told Mum everything. Dad admits that he can't tell Mum because she'll suffer, and he'd rather suffer himself than make Mum, Allie, and Karim suffer. Suddenly, Dad grabs Karim and starts to kiss his face. Karim pulls away and starts to run as Dad, bewildered, asks if he's at the right bus stop.

Karim and Jamila talk daily and eventually call a meeting to decide what to do about her situation. On the day of the meeting, Karim leaves school to find Helen waiting for him. She kisses him. Charlie is hanging around, and he and Helen somehow know each other. Karim interrupts their flirtations by asking about Charlie's dad, but Charlie says that there will be space at his house for Haroon. Karim is floored and thinks that he and Charlie will have committed incest.

*What Karim says about his school brings questions of class into the picture: everything he says about his school suggests that there's a general uninterest in education in general, which he'll later learn is indicative of being lower-middle class. His discomfort sets him up to break out of the class he's currently in and try to better himself.*



*When Dad confides in Karim, he does so in a way that treats Karim more like an adult than like a child. This shows that Dad is ready for Karim to begin growing up, while Karim's questions in return situate him firmly in his role as Dad's child. This shows that within the realm of his family, Karim is not at all ready to take the step towards seeing his parents as people with their own thoughts and desires, which within the logic of the novel is an indicator of adulthood and maturity.*



*Though Dad's self-sacrificing logic is very adult and mature at first glance, it also ignores the fact that Mum is already suffering. Dad gives her the silent treatment and continues to make her unhappy by speaking about Eastern philosophy—actions that, within Karim's logic and beliefs about family, are extremely selfish and immature.*



*Charlie shows here that he's not particularly loyal to his nuclear family like Karim is to his. This continues to develop Charlie as a callous and somewhat cruel person, and offers more evidence for the reader that Charlie isn't worth Karim's time or loyalty.*



Suddenly, a car turns onto the street blasting music extremely loudly. The Fish, Charlie's band manager, is driving. Charlie offers Helen a ride, but she refuses. After Charlie leaves, Helen apologizes to Karim for the **Great Dane**, but he cuts her off and rudely asks why she's at his school. He's surprised to hear that she came to see him, and they walk off together. Helen talks about wanting to join the youth liberation movements in California, and Karim feels as though everyone has plans but him.

Karim looks up and sees Jamila hurrying towards them. Karim fills Helen in on what's going on with Anwar. Jamila adds that nothing is getting better. The three sit in a bus stop and brainstorm what Jamila should do, and Helen suggests that they talk to Haroon. Jamila agrees, though when they arrive at Karim's house, she stares off as though she doesn't care about her father. Helen attempts to engage Mum in conversation about Buddhism, and Karim finds the whole conversation absurd.

Dad is lying on his bed listening to the radio when Karim, Jamila, and Helen enter the bedroom. Dad confirms Karim's theory that old Indian men return to "an imagined India" and sends the teenagers away for 95 minutes so he can meditate on the matter. They walk around the neighborhood before finally stopping in at a bar. Jamila drinks silently, but Helen rambles on about Charlie and his new record deal. Karim wonders if Charlie's life is as perplexing as his own.

Later, when Karim, Jamila, and Helen knock on Dad's door again, they can hear Dad snoring. Helen suggests Dad's still meditating, but Jamila bangs on the door until Dad opens it. Dad tells Jamila that she must follow her true feelings, and that she should try to be aware of what's happening. Karim and Helen walk Jamila home, and Jamila is subdued as she says goodbye. Helen thinks that Jamila will marry the boy, but Karim disagrees. They have sex in a nearby park, and Karim wonders if they're both thinking of Charlie.

## PART 1, CHAPTER 6

Karim and Helen accompany Jeeta and Jamila to the airport to pick up Jamila's new husband. His name is Changez, and he's a very short and fat man. Helen drives them to Anwar's store in Hairy Back's car. When they arrive, a weak and pale Anwar pinches his new son-in-law's cheeks. Karim explains that Anwar is over the moon about his victory over Jamila and Jeeta. Anwar has been pulling Karim into the shop storeroom for weeks now and talking about how excited he is to have grandchildren and be able to spoil "his woman" now that there's another man around to work.

*Karim's sense of being adrift comes from his belief that his trajectory is at the mercy of outside forces, not something he can control. This is, again, indicative of his lack of maturity. While Helen's apology is nice, it's also worth noting that she didn't stand up for Karim in the moment. This sets a precedent for people "supporting" Karim in theory, but not in practice when it counts.*



*When Helen tries to engage Mum, it shows that she believes that Mum is surely on board with Dad's Buddhism. This implies that Helen shares similarities with Karim in how she thinks about familial loyalty. Helen's suggestion to consult Dad in the first place provides more evidence that Dad is the real thing, and not just faking.*



*Dad alludes to the idea that Anwar is idealizing India and Muslim customs with his insistence that Jamila marry. This links Anwar's "return" to the overt and violent racism that Anwar experiences every day here in England, as it's far more terrifying in the moment than the memory of his chanting Hindu neighbors from when he was a young man.*



*The fact that Dad slept instead of meditating starts to poke holes in his guru role and suggests that parts of it are just an act. This also calls into question who exactly Dad is performing his role as guru for—Karim and Jamila aren't convinced, though Helen is. This breakdown shows that Dad's act is intended for white people, not Indian people.*



*Anwar's insistence on this arranged marriage is an attempt to force Jamila into Anwar's idea of a familial ideal—the validity of which is instantly called into question given the tone of Karim's narration as he describes Changez. This begins to suggest that the characters must learn that they can only control the particulars of their familial relationships so much.*



Changez's welcome party is awkward. Jamila and Changez don't look at each other, and even Helen is unusually subdued. Karim thinks that Anwar doesn't know anything about his own daughter. The party picks up when some of Anwar's relatives arrive with gifts. Slowly, Anwar seems to realize that Changez isn't a strapping young man, and he points with concern at Changez's left arm, which is withered and has only a tiny fist on the end. Karim thinks that even if Changez had had *several* working arms, Changez doesn't seem like a man who knows how to work.

Jamila seems wholly resigned to her marriage. She'd called Karim the day after her decision, and Karim had thought it typical of her to make this choice. He'd reasoned that it would be a rebellion against rebellion to marry him. When it's time to eat, Helen looks ready to vomit as she watches Changez eat with his one hand, not with silverware. Karim, however, feels bad for Changez. They talk about books for a few minutes and Karim finds Changez kind and innocently enthusiastic. Jamila reprimands Karim for this when Anwar takes Changez to talk about the shop.

Dad arrives at the party, dressed colorfully and looking exceptionally young next to Anwar. Helen asks Karim if they can leave and soon, she, Karim, and Dad leave. Helen explains that one of Anwar's relatives had been rude to her, and she's mad at Jamila for marrying Changez. Karim tells Helen to go to San Francisco. As they pass through Anwar's shop, Changez runs after Karim and asks him to use his nickname, Bubble, and asks if they can go to a bookshop soon. Karim agrees.

Outside, Dad tells Karim to get into Eva's car. Karim tries to refuse, but Dad insists. Karim says goodbye to Helen and gets into Eva's car. Karim watches Dad and Eva touch each other in the front seat and thinks they're in love. Karim thinks about how the foundations of his family are eroding, and he thinks that poor Allie has it the worst because he doesn't know anything.

When they get to Eva's house, Eva sends Karim upstairs to see Charlie. Karim is annoyed, but he sees Eva and Dad groping at each other as they fall back into a bedroom. He peeks his head into Charlie's attic and notices that it appears as though Charlie is giving up on being a hippie—he's throwing flowered shirts out his skylight. The Fish sits in a chair and laughs as Charlie talks about how jobs should be assigned to people randomly, though some are undeserving of jobs. Charlie offhandedly tells Karim that he'll be down in a minute. When Karim looks hurt, Charlie invites him into the attic.

*Karim confirms that Anwar's attempts to create an ideal family for Jamila were misguided as he describes all the ways in which Changez himself isn't ideal. Further, when he realizes that Anwar never truly knew Jamila, he grasps that regardless of how happy he was being a part of Anwar's family, that family is also not perfect. This shows Karim that all people and families are flawed.*



*As interested as Helen might be in Karim, Hairy Back's racism hasn't left her untouched: though she's the only white person in a room full of Indian people at an Indian celebration, she still "others" Changez when she's horrified by him eating in a way that's considered rude in England.*



*For now, the budding friendship between Karim and Changez is evidence that Karim is growing up, as he's willing to overlook his prejudices to be Changez's friend. Karim also reinforces his connections to his Indian heritage when he snaps at Helen, which shows that he's beginning to develop a more nuanced and rounded view of himself.*



*As Karim worries about his family's future, he shows again that when it comes to his family, he values loyalty and stability above all else. When he mentions Allie here, however, it again suggests that he's growing up and expanding his thoughts to include more people than just himself.*



*The tone of this passage suggests that Charlie's proclamations are chilling for Karim to hear. This is indicative of Karim's coming of age in relation to Charlie, as it's no longer so easy for Karim to idolize him when Charlie is so overtly cruel. What Charlie says is also reflective of the politics of the time; it vaguely ties in with Terry's Trotskyism later in the novel, though Charlie's version is infinitely crueler.*



Charlie embraces Karim, and Karim grabs Charlie's buttocks. When Charlie jumps, Karim grabs between his legs. Charlie throws Karim into his drum kit. Karim pretends like he's not hurt. Downstairs a few minutes later, Eva wipes Karim's forehead as Charlie and Dad sit on the couch. Dad begins to explain that he and Eva are in love. Karim interrupts and says that this is all boring. Dad pauses for a moment before saying that he's decided to be with Eva.

Karim asks what'll happen to *his* family, and asks what will happen to Mum. Dad gets up to go talk to her. Karim gets up too and walks outside. He wanders around for a while before using a payphone to call Auntie Jean. He tells her only that Dad has decided to live with Eva.

## PART 1, CHAPTER 7

When Karim gets home, Mum and Dad are in the bedroom and Allie is banging on their door. Ted and Jean arrive immediately. Jean packs for Mum and Karim packs for Allie, and then Ted and Jean take Mum and Allie out as Dad yells. After they're gone Dad starts throwing things in a plastic bag, but eventually decides to leave everything. Soon, Dad calls Eva, and she arrives to pick them up. Karim feels pressured into saying that he'll stay with Eva, but Eva doesn't seem to detect that.

Eva settles Karim in her spare bedroom. Late that night she comes in with a book and informs Karim that she's going to read to him. She reads him the short story [The Selfish Giant](#) by Oscar Wilde and afterwards she tells Karim to think about being an actor. When Karim thanks her, she says that beautiful people such as he should get what they want. When Karim asks about ugly people, Eva says that it's their fault they're ugly. Karim thinks that this is where Charlie gets his cruelty.

Karim lies in bed and thinks about the difference between interesting people and nice people. He thinks the interesting people, like Eva, make you see things differently. Nice people, like Mum, deserve love, but people like Eva end up with everything in the end.

Karim begins splitting his time between Eva's house, his parents' empty house, and Changez and Jamila's flat. He drops out of school when Charlie stops going, and Eva sets Karim up to go to college. Karim attends classes with women for the first time, and the college women laugh at him. Karim is lonely and doesn't really want to be in school, so he only attends some of his lectures.

*Here, Karim's physical injuries and physical pain show that he is indeed hurting inside as a result of Dad's decision, even if he feels he can't show it. When Eva acts motherly towards Karim by wiping his forehead, it shows that she's already expanding her web of familial loyalty to include him. This in turn suggests that the parameters of familial loyalty are subject to change.*



*Karim's loyalty also shifts when he decides to pull Jean into the mix. She becomes an unlikely ally in Karim's eyes, but she appeals to Karim's youthful hope that families will remain the same over the course of a lifetime.*



*Dad's decision to leave his physical belongings mirrors his decision to, in Karim's eyes, completely abandon his family. This reinforces the fact that Karim sees this whole shakeup as an overt betrayal of him and of his family; he doesn't just see it as Dad following his heart and his love.*



*Eva's assertions about ugly people here foreshadow her eventual shift to espousing conservative Thatcherite ideas. This particular assertion shows that she believes that people are wholly responsible for their own situations, even when a person's situation is dictated for the most part by uncontrollable outside forces like genetics.*



*When Karim casts Mum as a victim of Dad's decision, it shows that he's maturing in how he thinks about love—compared to his earlier statement that Mum should try harder, this is a much kinder and more empathetic viewpoint.*



*Despite his sympathy for Mum, Karim doesn't deign to live with her at Jean's house at all. He's still selfish and even if he thinks of Mum as a victim, he thinks of himself as the primary victim of all of this change. This is, again, indicative of his youth.*



Karim spends much of his time at Changez and Jamila's two-room flat. Jamila lives in the bedroom and spends all of her time reading and studying. Changez spends his days reading novels on his camp bed in the living room, where Jamila had insisted from the beginning that he sleep. Karim gives Changez books by Harold Robbins, which opens Changez's eyes to a world of sexual possibilities.

Before Changez's "sex trouble" truly begins, he starts having trouble with Anwar. Anwar had started Changez working the till at the grocery store, but Changez was purposefully bad at it. Then, Anwar had Changez sit on a stool and watch for shoplifters, but Changez turned out to be able to sleep sitting. Anwar's despair soon became obvious. Karim, like Jeeta and Jamila, laughs at Anwar, but nobody is willing to say it's his own fault for bringing Changez to London in the first place.

Karim and Changez become friends, as Karim finds Changez easy to bully. Karim enjoys that Changez finds him daring, and he shows Changez around South London to see how long it takes him to become "corrupt." They attend strip clubs and dance halls, and Karim makes Changez wear a hat to cover his face so nobody thinks he's Pakistani.

Soon, Jamila neither likes nor dislikes Changez. He tells her stories about India and asks her about her political beliefs, though he refuses to read any of her suggested books on politics. One day in a bookstore, Changez asks Karim if Jamila will ever sleep with him. Karim says that Changez is too ugly, and Changez replies that he wants to have children with his wife. When Karim insists that won't happen, Changez makes a mysterious phone call and asks Karim to take him to a big house. He makes Karim wait for twenty minutes and then reemerges, a middle-aged Japanese woman behind him. Changez happily explains that the woman, Shinko, isn't a prostitute, she's a friend, and he can love both her and Jamila.

Karim explains that having children is extremely important to Changez. Recently, Anwar had asked Changez if Jamila was expecting his grandson and when Changez was silent, Anwar insulted Changez's manhood. Changez had rushed at Anwar, but Jeeta put herself between the two men.

*Even if Anwar forced her into marriage, Jamila shows that she still has the power to dictate what her relationships look like. Further, Changez's willingness to go along with this suggests again that not all families or relationships look the same, and that a basic sense of respect is essential for any relationship.*



*The entire conflict between Anwar and Changez reflects the changing attitudes of the decade—Anwar's failure to impose Changez on Jamila in the way he hoped to is indicative of the fact that old ways of doing things are on the way out, while unconventional relationships are the new normal, even if they came about through old systems of doing things.*



*When Karim mentions making Changez wear a hat, it implies that Karim reads to others as merely "exotic" more than he reads as identifiably Indian. This supports Karim's identification with being English more than being Indian, while making Changez wear a hat shows the racism and fear of the period.*



*Just like Jamila does, Changez finds a way to make their marriage fulfilling for him. This adds more evidence for the growing sense that relationships are no longer defined by the same things they once were, both in terms of change over generations as well as change over the course of a single relationship. Similarly, Changez's interest in Jamila's thoughts and ideas also represents a progressive tone in their relationship, as this sort of thing is exactly what Anwar would never dream of doing.*



*Karim mentions later in the novel that Anwar's Muslim beliefs dictate that men are the heads of their households, so it's naturally a shock for Anwar to find that his daughter is running the show at home. This is also an insult to Anwar's masculinity, as he bullied Jamila into this marriage so that her husband could perpetuate this system of male power.*



Karim calls Mum every day and finally decides to visit her. As he walks to Jean and Ted's house, Karim sees Hairy Back and the **Great Dane**. Karim crosses the street and walks back to watch him, suddenly feeling nauseous, angry, and humiliated. He reasons that he needed to be reminded how much he hates the suburbs.

Mum has spent all her time in bed since she moved in with Jean, but Ted has completely changed after talking with Dad. While he once boasted that he had ten men working for him, Ted now smiles and doesn't get up until 11:00 in the morning. Jean is furious, but it has no effect on Ted. When Karim gets to the house, Ted snags him immediately and asks about Dad. Ted says he'd like to see Dad, but it's against Jean's rules. When Ted lets Karim go, Jean greets him curtly and mentions that Allie dresses up a lot and plucks his eyebrows, both unmanly things. Karim suggests she join the police force as he heads upstairs to Mum, Jean cursing about the "Buddhist bastards" as he goes.

Mum is curled up in a pink nightie and looks miserable. Karim is afraid her unhappiness might be infectious. He begins to tell her about the bizarre sight of watching Changez fall in love with Jamila, but Mum becomes bored. Karim then begs Mum to draw him. Finally Mum agrees, and when she takes a break to use the bathroom, Karim peeks at the sketch. When she returns, he informs her that she drew Dad, not him. Mum insists that fathers and sons look alike and says that Karim left her, just like Dad. She's sarcastic when Karim insists that he's not around much because he's in school.

Karim kisses Mum and tries to sneak out without saying goodbye to anyone, but Ted grabs Karim again. He asks Karim to tell Dad he's appreciated. Karim nearly runs back to Jamila's flat, where she's busy studying and Changez is occupied watching her study. Changez pulls Karim into the kitchen and whispers that he has to go out and see Shinko that afternoon. Karim insists that Jamila doesn't care where Changez goes. He mentions that Anwar is going to send a letter to Changez's relatives saying that he's fat and lazy, but he agrees to try to steal the letter as Changez leaves.

Karim and Jamila have sex, and he asks her if she cares for Changez at all. Jamila insists she never wanted him here and doesn't see why she should care about him. She says that he's nothing but a sexually frustrated parasite, and Karim tells her that Changez is off seeing a prostitute. Karim and Jamila have sex again, and Jamila asks Karim if he's sad and what he's going to do now that he's dropped out of college. Karim insists that he just doesn't go to lectures that often and he returns the subject to Jamila and what she's doing with her life.

*Karim's reasoning suggests that he views the suburbs specifically as racist, while naively believing that the city won't be nearly as racist. Again, this shows how youthful and idealistic Karim is.*



*It's important to realize that though Ted is unemployed, he and Jean aren't necessarily suffering too much financially—they're wealthy and privileged enough that it's not the end of the world if Ted doesn't work for a while. This begins to develop the idea that the middle class isn't all the same, as historically speaking, unemployment rates are skyrocketing at this point in time and it's not a good thing for a number of people.*



*Like the drawing of Dad and Eva at the beginning of the book, Mum's drawing contains a fair bit of truth. Just like Dad, Karim is embracing an identity that's not necessarily Indian (that of an Englishman), but it allows him to pursue what he wants in life more effectively than his Indian identity would. Both men did also leave Mum, and her fixation on this shows that like Karim, she places importance on loyalty.*



*Karim never supports his claim that Anwar is actually writing this unflattering letter, which suggests that he's only telling Changez about it to bully him and make him feel unsettled. Either way, however, it shows that Karim is beginning to borrow some of Charlie's cruelty and experiment with that kind of an identity.*



*Karim's actions here betray some of his own latent traditionalism—he doesn't recognize that he's doing to Jamila and Changez's relationship is akin to what Eva and Dad did to Dad's marriage. This is mostly because Karim doesn't think of Jamila and Changez's marriage as being quite as real or legitimate as that of his parents, and he also doesn't yet have a good sense of guilt.*



Jamila says that she's preparing for something, she just doesn't know what. She and Karim have sex again and then fall asleep. Karim wakes several hours later to see Changez lying awake on his camp bed, a vacant expression on his face. Karim dresses and slinks out of the flat, feeling like he's betrayed everyone.

*As cruel as Karim can be, he does care for Changez and the fact that he feels like he betrayed Changez supports this. This continues to show how important loyalty is to a relationship, both romantic relationships and platonic friendships.*



## PART 1, CHAPTER 8

Dad, yelling, asks Karim how he managed to fail all his exams. Karim insists it's easy when you don't show up, and tells Dad that he's too disturbed by the divorce to study. After their fight, Dad ignores Karim, though Karim remains at Dad and Eva's house so he can avoid Changez. He doesn't understand why Dad takes his failing so personally, and he thinks that Dad sees him as an extension of himself.

*Though Karim's failure is undeniably immature and foolish, his insight into how Dad thinks of their relationship is significantly more mature. It suggests that both Karim and Dad will have to learn to see others as individual people as they grow and mature over the rest of the novel.*



One day, Karim opens the door to Ted, tools in hand. Eva had heard from Dad that Ted was a builder, and made him an offer to remodel her house. Ted jumped at the opportunity to be close to Dad and Eva, though Jean is incensed about it. She agreed to let Ted work for Eva on the condition that Ted tells her everything at the end of the day. Karim is relieved to have hard labor to distract him, and he finds working with Eva and Ted refreshing. They often have to wait for Eva to meditate on the exact shape of a room, and they do yoga during lunch.

*Jean's fear and anger is ironic given that between her and Ted, she's the one who has cheated. Her negative interest in Dad's affair continues to paint her as self-centered and intent on upholding some semblance of the status quo, particularly given that her desire to hear everything at the end of the day is another way of demanding Ted's loyalty. Like Karim, she still values loyalty above all else.*



Finally, Ted finishes the house. Karim often wonders what Ted tells Jean at the end of each night, and wonders how Ted talks about all the fun they have and the romance between Dad and Eva. He says that they often don't get to see too much of the romance as Dad and Eva tend to go out at night to see plays. Shadwell, Eva's old friend, is beginning to make it big, and he invites Eva and Dad to dinner parties. When they go out, Karim wanders around the house, sometimes lying in Charlie's attic wondering what he's up to. When Dad and Eva return, Karim listens to them recount gossip and discuss the play.

*As a whole, the houses that Eva and Ted remodel tend to symbolize class mobility and the way that access and privilege influence whether class mobility is even possible. Though Ted and Eva work hard to remodel these houses, they also have capital and standing to begin with, which they seldom acknowledge. In this way, the novel pokes holes in the Thatcherite beliefs in personal responsibility and hard work, as Eva and Ted's success is made possible by their privilege at the start.*



Karim says that Ted must've talked about money, a subject that bothers even him. Eva buys things with little regard for whether or not she can afford them. She tells Karim that she'll draw money to her when they need it, though Karim thinks they're in dire need of it now. Dad agrees with Eva but begins doing "guru gigs" again, which Eva now charges people to attend. She arranges for Dad to have an interview with a paper that once got Charlie on the front page, and Dad revels in his newfound fame.

*When Eva thinks of money as though it's inconsequential and almost unnecessary, she's trying to act more upper class than she actually is. Having this kind of mindset in regards to money is something that Karim attributes to those of the actual upper classes. Here then, Eva's flirtation with the mindset shows just how hard she's trying to climb the social ladder.*



Karim watches the romance between Dad and Eva grow. When he watches them speak, he realizes the words themselves don't matter; they're just verbal caresses. He begins developing his own theories on love, namely that their love seems selfish as it came at the expense of Mum. Karim can't fathom how Dad was able to do it, but takes heart that Dad seems to regret his choice. Once Dad tells Eva he feels like a criminal, and Eva flies into a wounded rage.

Eva decides to sell her house and move to London, and Karim suspects she wants to try to distract Dad from his misery about Mum. It's a futile attempt; Karim recounts being in the car with them one day and watching Dad burst into tears because he thought he saw Mum go into a shop alone, and he doesn't want her to be alone. Karim also realizes that Eva wants to be close to Charlie, who only rarely visits. He lives a transient life and occasionally appears in the kitchen in the morning. Dad and Eva go to all his gigs.

As Dad and Karim pack Charlie's attic, they discuss that Charlie's problem is that his band doesn't have an original sound. Though Eva insists that Charlie is pure talent, Karim believes that Charlie only has potential—his music is horrible—and can charm people into appreciating him for his potential. Karim wonders how this magical charm even works, as Charlie can get people to agree to things without even asking. He begins to understand that Charlie does this by making people marvel at themselves, and Karim takes notes.

Karim harbors a desire to play rhythm guitar with Charlie's band, Mustn't Grumble. When he brings it up to Charlie, Charlie laughs but gives Karim a job ferrying equipment to and from gigs. One night, as Karim loads the van, Charlie walks past with a girl, insults Karim, and instructs him to bring acid to his dressing room. Karim turns on Charlie and asks what the hurry is, since Charlie isn't going anywhere with his band or as an individual. Charlie is disconcerted, and Karim continues to tell Charlie that he's not talented, just pretty. Charlie thinks for a moment and then admits he's breaking up the band, and what Karim said isn't relevant.

At night, Karim fantasizes about London and thinks about the particular sound of London. He realizes he wants to attend the parties, do all the drugs on offer, and have sex as much as he can. Karim tells the reader he's twenty and ready for anything.

*Karim's belief that love has a responsibility to other people plays into his ideas of loyalty while also dismantling Dad's God persona in Karim's mind. By not allowing Dad to mourn or regret his decision, Eva maintains her power over Dad and ensures that he remains loyal to her.*



*Through these passages, Karim implies that Dad's God persona is well and truly gone, as he's fully at the mercy of Eva's power and control. His emotions, regret, and loyalty mean little next to Eva's desire to draw everyone close to her and demand their loyalty, which is what she's also trying to do with Charlie.*



*Karim's thoughts on Charlie's charm come about in part because Karim never suggests that Charlie ever really turned that charm on him—Karim has watched the charm from the sidelines, he hasn't experienced it firsthand. This continues to show how wholly uninterested in Karim Charlie is, which in turn makes it clear that Karim will never truly get what he wants from Charlie.*



*Just as Eva uses Dad and his guru gigs to finance the move to London, Charlie uses Karim to make his band function. He doesn't show Karim any kindness or loyalty, like giving him a place to play rhythm guitar would symbolize. This shows that the new family unit that Dad and Eva are creating isn't nearly as loyal as Karim would like it to be. However, it's also worth noting that Karim isn't necessarily helping this—insulting Charlie, whether Karim is correct or not, is denying Charlie familial loyalty.*



*Karim's fantasies show that he idealizes both coming of age and London itself. This in turn sets him up to have these illusions shattered, a necessary aspect of growing up and coming of age.*



## PART 2, CHAPTER 9

Eva purchases a flat in West Kensington. It has three rooms and high ceilings, but it's filthy and sad. The walls are covered in paintings that mysteriously disappear, and Eva finally admits that Charlie is stealing them. Karim sleeps on the couch and Charlie sleeps on the floor when he visits. Dad is disgusted by his new home, but Eva is thrilled.

Karim still feels directionless, but he begins to explore the city. He thinks of London as a house with thousands of rooms. West Kensington is an uninteresting neighborhood where people stay for a while before they move up to expensive Kensington proper. Eva finds West Kensington exciting and believes it's headed for greatness.

One night, Charlie invites Karim out to the bar with him. Charlie doesn't seem to really want to go, and Karim believes that Charlie knows he won't get anywhere in London. Charlie soon becomes drunk. As Karim prepares to tell Charlie how depressed he's been since the move to London, Charlie admits he's suicidal. A famous football player nearby overhears Charlie, and he and Charlie talk about the pressures of fame. Suddenly, Charlie leans forward and vomits in the player's lap. The player kicks Charlie a few times before Karim can get Charlie away.

Karim leans Charlie against a wall to steady him and looks around the room. Karim looks around and studies the crowd waiting for a band to go on, suddenly feeling provincial as he studies their strange dress. Their hair is spikey and their clothes are ripped and then safety pinned. Karim suddenly understands that London is an entirely different animal, and he feels small. Charlie dismissively scans the crowd and says it's making him feel sick because it's too weird.

As Karim starts to move Charlie out of the bar, the band takes the stage. Karim watches as the crowd screams and spits at the band, and the band does the same back at the audience. Karim is transfixed and thinks that the singer is trying to be an anti-star. He and Charlie agree that the singer is an idiot and the band looks unprofessional. When the band starts to play, the music is harsh and angry, and the singer curses at the audience between songs. When Karim finally looks at Charlie as the band finishes, Charlie is surprisingly alert. Karim leads Charlie out of the bar, but Charlie stops and insists he needs to go talk to the band. Karim talks him out of this.

*Already London isn't as fantastic as Karim thought it would be. This particular aspect shows that not all of London is rich, as this neighborhood isn't at all the wealthy, bustling metropolis Karim assumed all of London would be.*



*When Karim conceptualizes London as being a giant house, he continues to play into the metaphor of houses as representing mobility. By exploring London with this mindset, Karim can begin to decipher how exactly class mobility in the city works.*



*Though Karim is mentally and emotionally extremely disloyal to Charlie on this outing, he's also very loyal in his actions. This continues to complicate Karim's idea of familial loyalty, as it begins to show that loyalty can take many different forms and attitudes. Karim's depression and loneliness suggests that he feels very individual in a negative way, which is a part of his coming of age.*



*Karim and Charlie are at an early punk show. In the UK especially, punk was a movement by and for young people that came about because of the high unemployment rates among young people. Charlie and Karim's dismissiveness betrays their middle-class suburban upbringings, as well as their age.*



*Again, Charlie and Karim seem almost stodgy as they badmouth the band. This shows that they're getting older and that though they're still only twenty, they're not young enough at this point to be truly entrenched in these youth movements. This develops the sense that the seventies are a time of constant and fast change, where young people come of age and then become obsolete with shocking rapidity.*



Charlie is excited as he and Karim walk. He insists that the sixties are over now, and the band they saw is the future. Karim is casual and insists they can't follow those kids and wear safety pins, but Charlie is insistent. Karim tries to say that he and Charlie didn't grow up the same way those kids did and therefore they don't understand the kids' hatred, but Charlie angrily turns on Karim. Charlie spits that Karim is going nowhere. Charlie rushes away into traffic and into a car filled with angry kids. Karim walks home alone.

Several days later, Eva announces that it's time to start work on the flat, but she needs to throw a flat-warming party first. Eva is secretive about the guest list and only allows Dad to invite two people from his meditation group. She invites Shadwell and all of his contacts, and the whole thing bothers Karim. At the party, Dad and Karim don't know anyone. Karim realizes that Eva is treating this party like her launch into London judging by her guest list, and he sees that she's trying to rid herself of her suburban roots. Karim thinks that suburbia is in the blood, and there's nothing more suburban than suburbanites trying to escape the identity.

Karim is relieved to see Jamila, Changez, and Shinko getting out of a cab. He explains to the reader that he's spoken to Jamila often on the phone, and after Changez caught him with Jamila, Changez had gone crazy. He'd accused Jamila of all manner of things, and Jamila, true to form, informed Changez that she can do what she wants with her body. Changez had tried to hit her, but she'd hit him instead.

Changez and Karim shake hands. Karim insists that Jamila is her own person, not his or Changez's. Changez just looks sad. Karim and Changez open beers and sit down. Changez explains that Jamila and Shinko have become friends, and the two embarrass Changez by talking about sex in front of him. Changez says that Anwar is also going mad. When Karim seems surprised, Changez wisely says that Karim doesn't visit Anwar because it makes him sad, but he counsels Karim to not forget his people.

Eva butts into Karim's conversation, yanks him off the sofa, and steers him towards Shadwell. Karim tries to resist, but he can't escape. Shadwell drones on about theatre as Karim watches Changez watch Jamila and Shinko dance. When Shadwell finally accepts that Karim wants to get away, he asks Karim to come audition for him. Karim agrees. The next day, Karim tries to discuss how boring Shadwell is with Eva, but she brushes him off and offers to help him prepare for his audition.

*Charlie's insistence that the band is the future is somewhat ironic given that one of the most famous punk slogans is The Sex Pistols' "no future." In this passage, Charlie shows that he's emotionally much younger than Karim. He's more than willing to go backwards in his coming of age in order to achieve musical success, while Karim understands that he must go forward and age.*



*When Karim makes this observation that a person cannot truly escape their roots, it foreshadows his own later realization that he can't escape his Indian heritage. It also suggests that Karim will be unable to truly throw off his own suburban roots. Eva demonstrates her power again by being so controlling about the guest list, which creates a power imbalance between her and Dad. In turn, this enables her to demand loyalty without offering Dad much in return.*



*As Jamila persists in shaping her marriage to serve her and her desires, Changez must decide whether his loyalties lie with Jamila herself or the institution of marriage as he'd like it to be. This mirrors the novel's overarching interrogation of the relationship between tradition and the new ideas of the future.*



*Even if Karim hasn't entirely accepted it yet, Changez thinks of him as being Indian before he thinks of him as being English. This shows that the novel is building up to the point at which Karim will truly realize this himself and subsequently develop a more nuanced view of himself and where he sits in the world.*



*Interestingly, Eva recognizes that Karim will need help breaking into the theatre scene and then offers him that help—which, in theory, signals recognition that people do need help to get ahead in the world. This suggests that Eva's sense of responsibility to other people extends only as far as to those she considers family.*



Karim prepares a monologue over the next few weeks with Eva's help. On the day of his audition, he performs brilliantly, but Shadwell doesn't seem particularly impressed. Shadwell asks Karim to perform it again, but to act as though a wasp is chasing him. Karim has no choice but to agree, though he feels stupid waving at nothing.

After the audition, Shadwell takes Karim for coffee and offers him "the part." It comes to light that Eva never told Karim to read *The Jungle Book*, which Shadwell had asked her to do. Shadwell begins talking to Karim in Punjabi or Urdu, and seems shocked when Karim doesn't respond in the same language. Shadwell is even more shocked to learn that Karim has never been to India and he insists that Karim must go sometime. Shadwell laughs at the strangeness of Karim being an "exotic" Indian boy from Orpington.

Shadwell asks Karim if being "a half-caste in England" is difficult. Karim is beyond embarrassed and can barely listen as Shadwell asks Karim how Eva and Dad's relationship is going. Karim tries to steer the conversation back to *The Jungle Book*. Shadwell studies Karim and says that he's just right to play Mowgli. Karim is amazed he got a job.

## PART 2, CHAPTER 10

Rehearsals for *The Jungle Book* don't start until fall, so Karim moves back in with Mum until then. He watches her slowly transform herself and the house into her own space, not her family's space. Ted comes over and tends to the garden, and Karim has nightmares nearly every night.

When rehearsals begin, Karim moves back in with Dad and Eva. He loves the hard work of acting, and explains that Shadwell wants a very physical, mime-heavy version of *The Jungle Book*. Karim becomes friends with Terry, a handsome Welshman who plays Kaa, the snake. Karim decides to seduce Terry.

Karim and Shadwell begin arguing during the second week when Karim has his costume fitting. His costume turns out to be a tiny loincloth and dark brown makeup over his entire body. When Karim brings it up, Shadwell snaps that Karim will survive. Several weeks later, Shadwell asks Karim to do an "authentic" accent. Karim tries to refuse, but Shadwell insists that he cast Karim for "authenticity and not for experience." Karim is horrified and over the next few days he tries to avoid the subject of the accent.

*As a new actor, this experience makes Karim feel like a child all over again, particularly in the sense that Karim has no power to object. Though it's humiliating, it also shows Karim that he has to try new things and open himself up to feeling silly to get ahead.*



*Shadwell has all the power in this interaction and because of that, he's able to get away with behaving in a very racist way. He shows Karim that he has a very specific idea of what it means to be Indian or half-Indian, and reveals as well that he doesn't acknowledge Karim's desire to construct his identity more around his English heritage than his Indian side.*



*When Shadwell casts Karim, Karim learns that being Indian has its perks despite the uncomfortable racism. He experiences success because he is able to play these very specific parts, which in turn reminds Karim that his Indian part of his identity isn't something he can ignore.*



*As Mum develops her sense of independence, she experiences her own kind of coming of age. Again, she does so through her interaction with her home. By making it what she wants it to be, she makes herself into a happier person.*



*The movement and mime in the play mirror the kind of class mobility that Karim experiences: though it's true he's moving up, it's also very much an act.*



*Even if Karim was cast because he's half Indian, Shadwell's decisions make it clear to Karim that he's not Indian enough. Though this is a humiliating experience for Karim, it also suggests that Karim wasn't too far off in identifying more with his English side than his Indian side.*



Shadwell brings the accent up again in front of the entire cast, and Karim pleads that it's a political thing for him. None of the other actors stand up for Karim, even Terry who's an active Trotskyite. Shadwell reprimands Karim for holding back the cast, and Karim agrees to the accent but feels he never should've left South London. At the pub that night Karim sits alone. When Terry joins him, Terry insists that everything is "crap for actors." Karim questions Terry about the fate of directors like Shadwell after the revolution, but Terry isn't able to support his idea that men like Shadwell will work in factories after the revolution like everyone else.

Karim explains that he likes Terry, but finds his views on the working class ridiculous. Terry doesn't understand that the working class people Karim know hate only the people below them on the social ladder. Despite this, Terry remains convinced that the working class will take down those higher up during the revolution to come. Terry also wants Karim to join the Party, which Karim agrees to do if Terry kisses him. Terry refuses. Though Terry's arguments of equality appeal to Karim, Karim realizes he wants to stand apart from others, not be just like everyone else. For this reason alone, Karim loves being Mowgli. He begins to make ridiculous demands of Shadwell to test his power.

Karim doesn't spend much time at home, but he notices that Eva isn't as interested in Indian culture as she once was. Rather, Eva is launching her "assault on London" and attending every dinner party she possibly can while cultivating an artistic persona. Karim observes that Eva is successful in climbing higher and higher, while Dad seems oblivious to it all. This leads to fights, as Eva insists that Dad needs to lay off on the mysticism.

One night, Karim comes home to find Charlie in Eva and Dad's bedroom, dressed in black and safety pins. He has a swastika painted on his shirt. Eva is crying and pleading with Charlie to take off the swastika, but Charlie won't budge. As Charlie leaves, Eva screams that she won't support him anymore. Regardless, Karim takes Eva to Charlie's gig later that night. Charlie had become successful overnight by bullying his band into becoming a punk band and changing his name to Charlie Hero. Newspapers regularly interview Eva, and Charlie's first album is guaranteed to be an offensive success.

Though Charlie's set is perfectly angry, Karim giggles when he notices Charlie's perfect teeth—an indicator that the entire look is manufactured. When the club descends into a riot, The Fish gets Karim and Eva out. Karim and Eva walk through the streets, and Karim realizes that he can control his trajectory by working hard, which makes him feel strong and determined.

*This is one of the first experiences Karim has in London that shows him that London isn't necessarily the place of his dreams; he's still subject to racism and prejudice. When Terry insists that this is just another "crap for actors" incident, he minimizes Karim's experience and implies that Shadwell's racism is no different than any other unsavory request a director might make of actors.*



*As Karim picks apart the ways that Trotskyism doesn't actually work in practice, it shows that there's a major difference between the realities people faced in the seventies and the theories that people came up with to try to fix those realities. In Terry's case, this is indicative of his upper-middle class origins and shows that he's out of touch with the people he should be trying to engage with.*



*Eva no longer needs to lean on Dad's Indian identity to climb the social ladder; she's now well known enough by herself and sees that for her, as a white Englishwoman, sticking with that identity is going to be the most profitable in the long run. Dad's obliviousness shows how little cares about the social climbing; he sets himself outside of that system.*



*One of the hallmarks of the punk movement was purposefully offensive symbols and imagery like Charlie's swastika. It's meant to provoke reactions from older people like Eva. This scene reinforces how Charlie uses these youth movements to remain youthful and simultaneously make his mother look exceptionally old.*



*Again, British punk arose out of the high unemployment, something that the privileged Charlie hasn't really had to deal with. In this way, his teeth expose that he's not a true punk; he's just using the movement for his own gain.*



Karim invites Mum, Ted, and Jean to a preview of *The Jungle Book*, and Mum weeps with pride. They go dancing afterwards and Karim is thrilled at Mum's happiness. Karim invites Dad, Eva, Jamila, and Changez to the opening night, and nobody looks happy afterwards. Dad informs Karim that Mr. Kipling was horribly racist, and Jamila tells Karim that it was awful how he "pandered to prejudices."

Despite the mixed reactions from family, *The Jungle Book* does well in the eyes of the masses. Shadwell offers Karim a part in his next play, and Terry encourages Karim to accept. Terry cryptically tells Karim that he has work lined up too, but he's waiting for a call.

One night, the box office manager rings backstage to tell the actors that the director Matthew Pyke had booked a ticket. Within moments, the room reaches a fever pitch. Karim has no idea who Pyke is and asks Terry to explain. Terry says that Pyke has taught and directed all over the western world, and attracts very important people to his shows.

*The Jungle Book* is the best ever that night, and the actors rush off to the pub afterwards. Terry impatiently waits for Karim to wash his makeup off, and Karim tries to convince Terry to hang out backstage and kiss instead of going to the pub. Terry insists that this is his call and they must go. At the pub, Karim watches several actors approach Pyke and be unceremoniously brushed off.

Terry tells Karim that critics call Pyke's work puritanical because he likes bare stages and no props, but his personal life isn't so austere. Terry refuses to elaborate and Pyke approaches Terry and Karim's table. He coolly greets Terry and then invites Karim to have a drink at the bar. Terry looks distraught. Pyke asks Karim to talk about himself, and Karim begins to ramble about his parents' divorce. The other actors watch from Terry's table. As he rambles Karim realizes he neglected Mum by leaving her at Jean's, and Pyke offers Karim a part in his next production. Pyke cannot answer any questions about what kind of show or part it'll be.

When Karim suggests that he might not want to work in such a vague way, Pyke declares that the play will be about class, the only available subject. Pyke and Karim part ways, and Karim hurries out of the pub. Terry chases Karim into the parking lot and interrogates him about his conversation with Pyke. Terry is incensed that Karim got a job and he didn't.

The *Jungle Book's* logic assumes that Mowgli is naturally superior to the animals because he's human, which mirrors how the English viewed themselves in relation to colonized Indians. However, Karim's success as Mowgli comes from his Indian heritage, which shows that his heritage is something he can use to his advantage.



The play's success is indicative of ingrained racism in white Londoners. As Karim continues to see success as a result of being a part of this play, he sees that putting up with the racism is profitable.



Pyke is characterized as a leader and a builder of culture; he's part of the same experimental desire to move forward and discover new ways of doing things that Charlie discovers in the punk music scene.



Though Karim is certainly trying to annoy Terry, his suggestion to not meet Pyke at all is indicative of his youth. It suggests he hasn't fully grasped that he needs to actually try and put himself out there to experience success in the London theatre scene.



Again, Karim's racially charged role as Mowgli is getting him places. This impresses upon Karim yet again that his Indian identity is something he can use to his advantage, assuming he's willing to put up with the injustice of the brown body paint and being forced to speak with an exaggerated, offensive accent. When Karim realizes he did abandon Mum, it shows his views on loyalty are changing and he's realizing that he, too, has to be loyal to his parents.



Pyke's desire to interrogate class relations in England is, again, reflective of the very fraught politics of the time period and situates him as a powerful voice in the conversation. His power suggests that he will be able to dictate how Karim portrays class in a way that might not be good.



Karim waits several days to tell Shadwell about the job. Finally, right before one of the final performances of *The Jungle Book* begins, Karim tells Shadwell about the job. Shadwell is initially gentle, but soon raises his voice and bellows that Karim isn't experienced enough to deal with Pyke. He's loud enough the audience can hear. Shadwell insists that Pyke is elitist, paranoid, and frightened.

*Shadwell betrays here that he was banking on Karim's immaturity and lack of experience to keep him employed by his production company, which shows that Karim's immaturity and youth is absolutely apparent. His willingness to make such a fuss shows, however, that he's also immature and selfish.*



## PART 2, CHAPTER 11

Rehearsals for Pyke's play begin in the spring. Karim is one of three men and three women in the cast. The other two men are solid, cynical actors; there's one black woman, Tracey; and a beautiful redheaded actress named Eleanor. Louise, the writer, also attends rehearsals. Karim notes that he's never been more enthusiastic about anything in his life. Pyke begins every morning with breakfast and shockingly cruel gossip. After lunch, the cast plays games where they touch each other, and Karim feels that Eleanor stays in his embrace longer than necessary.

*The tenor of Pyke's gossip suggests he's not a figure that Karim should trust, though in this setting the cruelty is an overt demonstration of Pyke's power. Within this dynamic, Pyke sets Karim to come of age during this production with very little kind or vaguely parental guidance. However, these types of theatre games foster a sense of closeness and trust, which lulls Karim into believing that he can trust everyone.*



On the fourth day, Pyke plays a game that Karim finds disturbing. Pyke tells the group he's going to make predictions about who will sleep with whom, and then read his predictions on the last night of the show. The following week, Pyke has the actors sit and tell the rest of the cast their life story. When Karim hears that Eleanor worked with a performance artist who stored poems in her vagina, he decides to pursue her. He calls Jamila every few days to talk about rehearsals, but she isn't impressed. She suggests that bad things are happening at Anwar's store, but insists that Karim is too self-absorbed to care.

*The performance artist that Eleanor worked with is likely Carolee Schneemann, and the piece in question is called Interior Scroll. This situates Eleanor as being a part of the second wave feminist movement of the seventies, which focused a great deal of attention on the female body—though in an attempt to subvert and question male attention like Karim is now paying Eleanor.*



After a few weeks, Pyke sends the actors out to begin researching characters, which Louise will then need to somehow write into a play. Pyke dissuades Karim from choosing to portray Charlie, insisting that the play needs somebody black. Karim decides to portray Anwar and bikes to the shop to see him. The store looks grubby and sad, and Jeeta no longer bothers to wash off the racist graffiti. When Karim arrives, Jeeta hugs him and tells him that if he's going to spend time with Anwar, he has to stop Anwar from going out with his walking stick. She explains that some thugs threw a pig's head through the shop window, the police won't do anything, and now Anwar roams the streets taunting white boys to beat him.

*Just as Eva's suburbanites at the beginning of the novel weren't particularly interested in thinking about an Asia that encompasses many different identities, Pyke shows here that he's interested in portraying "blackness" without any recognition that people of color around the world all have very different experiences. This also ignores the fact, yet again, that Karim identifies as English before he identifies as Indian. Jeeta's decision to stop washing off the graffiti shows that tensions are rising and the flood of racism is unstoppable.*



Karim goes up to Anwar in the flat and finds him in pajamas watching TV. Anwar looks emaciated. Over the next few weeks, Karim occasionally attends mosque with Anwar and listens to him complain that Allah has abandoned him. He also complains that Jeeta won't return to India with him. Karim watches Jeeta and sees that she appears to have taken Jamila's example to heart: she wants to sell liquor and newspapers, and certainly doesn't want to return to India. When Karim asks Anwar why he doesn't take Jeeta's suggestions, Anwar fatalistically says that everything is already perfect and nothing will ever get better.

Karim is cheered by his progress with Eleanor. She invites him over after rehearsal nearly daily. Karim recognizes that something in her needs comfort, and is thrilled to be going out with someone so mature and beautiful. However, Karim soon realizes that Eleanor only pretends she's not upper-middle class: her parents are wealthy and well known, her mother is friends with the Queen Mother, and she has no idea that she has more than most other people. Karim recognizes that Eleanor's friends possess a particular combination of class, culture, and money. He realizes that Eva wants to achieve this kind of class, but he believes she'll never get there.

Eleanor cries every few hours and holds Karim, but she refuses to have sex with him. Karim realizes that his rival is a man named Heater, a Scot whose purpose in life appears to be to try to ensure Eleanor's happiness. It's a difficult job, as Karim learns quickly that Eleanor hates herself and requires a great deal of praise. Karim consults Jamila about it, but Jamila insists that Eleanor is vain and self-obsessed. However, Eleanor also cares deeply for others: she feeds Heater and buys Karim gifts, and refuses to prioritize herself when Karim suggests she should.

One night when Heater is out, Karim and Eleanor watch TV and gossip. Karim is distracted and not listening, and Eleanor asks Karim for a kiss. Karim notes that it was supposed to be the kiss of a lifetime, but he paid little attention to it because he was soon overwhelmed by angry thoughts. His proximity to Eleanor and her crowd has made Karim aware that he knew nothing about anything. He thinks that in the suburbs, boys aspire to go to work young, not go to college. Seeing Eleanor, he realizes that Eleanor's education and class is valuable beyond belief. He realizes that he was an idiot for walking out of college and thinks that while Eleanor has been breathing sophistication from birth, for Karim it will only be a second language.

*Anwar's deterioration since his hunger strike suggests that staking one's life on old, conservative, or traditional ideas is not just ineffective but altogether harmful, especially since the hunger strike seems to be almost literally killing him years later. In contrast, Jeeta's empowerment comes because she's willing to embrace the culture shifts and make them work for her. In this way, Jeeta also comes of age, just like Jamila and Karim do.*



*What Karim learns from Eleanor is that what really differentiates upper class people from other social classes is that they are oblivious to their wealth and privilege, something that Eva will never be able to achieve because she'll know what the lower-class alternative is from firsthand experience. This suggests that while Eva's climb isn't a bad thing, it's also not going to give her exactly what she wants.*



*As Karim enters into his own sexless but loving relationship, he shows that he views sex as a facet of loyalty. Eleanor's other displays of loyalty also don't seem to mean much in the absence of sex, which reinforces how important sex is to Karim. Consulting Jamila on the matter is particularly ironic given that she herself is in a sexless but loyal relationship, the loyalty in which suggests that sex isn't actually necessary for loyalty.*



*Here, the way the kiss comes about suggests that Eleanor is playing with Karim, as she rewards his inattention. This keeps him off balance and invested in her, though she likely didn't bargain for his angry thoughts. Karim learns here that class differences are very much akin to differences in locale, with different pathways, priorities, and environments. This suggests that Karim and Eva will both be experiencing culture shock as they move up the social ladder, even though they only physically move a matter of miles.*



Karim also realizes that when he talks with Eleanor, her stories are far more important. He thinks about telling her about the **Great Dane**, but somehow feels his past isn't important enough. Eleanor once commented on Karim's "cute" accent, and Karim vowed then and there to lose his accent. After his kiss with Eleanor, Karim almost falls to the floor and tries to convince Eleanor to let him stay the night. Eleanor softly insists they can't sleep together, but won't tell Karim why.

Not long after, Pyke has the cast present their characters for the rest of the group. After Karim performs his Anwar character, he feels for the first time as though he's on par with the rest of the group. When they discuss the characters, Pyke asks Tracey for her opinion on Karim's character. Tracey declares that Karim is doing "black people" a disservice by playing into stereotypes that they're all fanatical, have weird habits, and no culture. She says she can't believe Anwar would wave his stick at white boys, and doesn't care to listen to Karim's insistence that this is the portrayal of one specific old Indian man. Karim insists that this is censorship, and Tracey insists they must protect their culture. Pyke tells Karim he must start again.

## PART 2, CHAPTER 12

Karim goes to visit Changez. Changez is busy dusting and wearing Jamila's pink robe as Karim says that he'd like to portray Changez in his next production. Changez is initially flattered and then suspicious, and makes Karim promise to not portray him in a bad light.

Karim changes the subject and asks about Shinko. Changez happily shares that he and Shinko continue to experiment with sex positions. Karim asks how Jamila feels about the prostitution thing, and Changez says that Jamila tried briefly to insist that Changez was exploiting Shinko, but after a few days, Jamila realized that Shinko was actually exploiting Changez. Changez looks into the distance before telling Karim, with emotion, that he'd give up every sex position he's ever tried if he could kiss Jamila.

Suddenly, Changez becomes angry. He cries out that he'll make Jamila like him or he'll kill himself. Karim offers to introduce Changez to actresses, but Changez insists that Karim has no morals. He continues that Karim cannot use his character for the play, and Karim is forced to agree.

*Eleanor's comment about Karim's accent shows that she's idealizing Karim's suburban upbringing, which means she (possibly unknowingly) is also idealizing the racist systems that enabled the Great Dane event to happen in the first place.*



*The fact that Karim in no way thinks of himself as black makes Tracy's criticism even more difficult to stomach, as it reinforces the fact that others will police Karim's identity whenever they can, regardless of the race of those doing the policing. When nobody stands up for Karim, it harkens back to when nobody supported Karim in regards to the exaggerated Indian accent in The Jungle Book and makes it clear that though this problem is something Karim has experienced lots of places, it's particularly insidious in the entertainment industry.*



*The fact that Karim asks Changez's permission to portray him shows how much Karim has matured. He's learning that respect is extremely important if he wishes to maintain these friendships and relationships.*



*Changez is chafing because of what he perceives as Jamila's lack of loyalty to him and to their marriage. Though this is an understandable emotion, it also shows how much stock Changez places in his idealized vision of marriage to Jamila. Though it's arguable that he has the option to do what Dad did and divorce Jamila to find happiness with Shinko, he's too bound up in tradition and loyalty.*



*Again, the simple fact that Karim agrees to Changez's terms suggests that he's coming of age and developing a more nuanced conception of loyalty.*



Karim bikes quickly to Eleanor's flat to discuss the end of his acting career; he knows no other "black" people and fears Pyke will fire him. Heater is coming out of Eleanor's door as Karim arrives and insists that Karim must leave, as Eleanor is too depressed today. Karim slips around Heater, locks the door, and insults him through the window. When Karim enters Eleanor's bedroom he finds her naked and ironing shirts, crying. She can't or won't speak and Karim thinks she's half crazy. He unplugs the iron, puts her to bed, and notices a photo of a black man on her nightstand.

Karim settles in to think about Changez. He realizes this is one of the first moral dilemmas he's ever faced, and notices that he's developing a sense of guilt as he gets older. When Karim can't figure out what to do he gets up to leave, but sees that Eleanor is awake and smiling. She asks him to get in bed with her and laughs when he gets in fully clothed. Eleanor asks him to undress and they have sex. Karim tells the reader he was stunned by sex with Eleanor, as she did whatever she wanted when she wanted it. They start having sex in the bathroom during rehearsal regularly, and often have sex in strange places.

Sometimes, Karim is afraid of how much he loves Eleanor. He tells the reader that his love soured quickly as he began to fear that Eleanor was in love with someone else. It also becomes extremely important to Karim that the other actors like his new character, and he rehearses his Changez character frequently. When Karim finally performs Changez, Tracey starts to object, but Pyke insists that the play will be perfect.

Karim keeps his distance from Pyke until one day his bike chain snaps, and Pyke begins driving Karim to and from rehearsal. As he drives, Pyke tells Karim about his favorite hobby: attending orgies and having sex with as many women as possible who hold as many different jobs as possible. He's especially interested in women in office and his wife, Marlene, joins him in these endeavors. Karim finds this very exciting, though he thinks Pyke's desire to experience sex like this shows that he's self-obsessed.

One day, Pyke generously tells Karim that he has a present for Karim: Marlene wants to have sex with him. Karim isn't flattered and doesn't want to seem ungrateful, but he knows he has to be careful given the extent of Pyke's fame and power. Karim finally says that he's dating Eleanor, and Pyke admits that he told Eleanor to date him. Pyke mentions that Eleanor's last boyfriend committed suicide in a horrible way. Karim pretends he knew, but he is shocked and devastated that nobody told him. As Karim gets out of the car, Pyke asks him to bring Eleanor to his house on Saturday for supper.

*When Karim puts his own desires aside to care for Eleanor, it's more evidence that he's becoming less self-centered and more loyal to those around him. Karim's fear that he knows no other black people is indicative of his identification with his English identity more than his Indian half, and shows that his community of Indian friends is limited to Anwar's family and Changez.*



*Karim's thought process as he sits with Eleanor shows him recognizing the individuality of both Eleanor and Changez, and their rights to conduct their lives as they see fit. When Eleanor rewards this behavior with sex, it impresses upon Karim that caring for others and being empathetic will get him what he wants more than simply taking from people.*



*Despite taking positive steps towards maturity, Karim shows he's still young and selfish when he chooses to portray Changez anyway. However, he positions this decision as being one that will hopefully curry favor with the other actors, a desire borne out of his guilt and sense of responsibility to others.*



*Pyke shows that he represents the kind of sexual freedom that Karim idolized and conflated with the city. Though this makes Pyke seem very attractive, it also reveals that Pyke doesn't necessarily recognize the individuality and humanity of his sex partners, which suggests he's not a character to be trusted.*



*It's important to notice and remember that Karim doesn't fixate on Pyke's admission that he orchestrated Karim's relationship with Eleanor, as this becomes a major sticking point later. Instead, Karim's fixation on Eleanor's boyfriend's death suggests that he's far more interested in Eleanor's transgressions in terms of loyalty than he is in Pyke's for now.*



When Karim gets home, Dad is busy writing. Karim realizes that he's beginning to see Dad as a separate person, not just as a father, and he finds it distressing. He finds it particularly distressing that he now notices how helpless Dad is—Dad doesn't even know how to make toast, because he's always had women to do it for him. Karim feels let down by him. When Dad starts telling Karim to insist on the lead in Pyke's play, Karim insults Dad and goes to the pub.

*As Karim starts to think of Dad as an entirely separate entity, it shows that Karim is entering independent adulthood whether he likes it or not. Now that Karim is becoming more independent, Dad's helplessness no longer signifies his wealthy upbringing. Instead, it represents an inability to assimilate in his chosen country.*



At the pub, Karim ruminates on Eleanor's boyfriend. He feels as though his life is getting extremely weird, and decides to consult others on his situation. Eva is thrilled to hear that Pyke invited Karim to supper, though Karim leaves out telling her about Pyke's offer. Jamila is concerned that the rich are taking over Karim's mind and she invites him over for spicy Indian food.

*For Eva, dinner with Pyke is nothing more than a way for her to continue her ascent up the social hierarchy of London society. However, this is true for her because she doesn't face the race barriers to advancement that Karim does.*



## PART 2, CHAPTER 13

On Saturday, Karim and Eleanor dress up and take the train to Pyke's house. Karim studies the house and thinks of what Terry had told him about Pyke. Terry recently landed a gig playing a policeman in a TV drama, an ideologically uncomfortable role given that he believes the police are fascist. Terry had asked Karim to publically ask Pyke's son what school he goes to, insisting that it'll be expensive, exclusive, and proof that Pyke is a class enemy.

*The fact that Terry took the job playing a policeman shows that he's unwilling or unable to practice what he preaches, which continues to undermine his ideologically charming ideas. Further, since Terry's apparent distaste for Pyke only surfaced after Pyke neglected to cast him, it suggests that Terry is far more self-centered than his beliefs would lead one to believe.*



A servant girl lets Karim and Eleanor in, seats them in the living room, and explains that Pyke and Marlene are "dressing." Eleanor wonders why Pyke invited them over and haughtily tells Karim that they shouldn't deny each other experiences. Karim feels nervous, as he has no idea what "experiences" Eleanor is referring to. He asks her why they don't talk about Gene, but she cries and runs to the bathroom after insisting that Karim is too self-centered to understand.

*Throughout this evening at Pyke's house, Karim has very little agency. Eleanor sets him off balance from the get go by denying him any display of loyalty or affection, and it's important to remember that though Karim admits he's curious about this experience, Pyke also coerced him into it.*



Karim pretends to be a "class detective" and looks around the living room. He thinks that Terry must have underestimated Pyke's wealth, as the furnishings are extremely expensive. Eleanor returns as Pyke and Marlene make their way down the stairs. Karim thinks that Marlene is undeniably sexual, but definitely not young. They all sit and eat turkey salad in the living room and barely make conversation. After dinner, Marlene brings out some marijuana.

*The lack of conversation during dinner suggests that Pyke and Marlene aren't interested in learning about others through any mundane interactions. This shows that they value excitement and sex over people's expressed thoughts and feelings, and reinforces that they don't think of their sex partners as full individuals.*



As they smoke, Pyke's sullen teenage son walks into the living room. Pyke nonchalantly mentions to his son that Karim is Charlie Hero's stepbrother, and the moody boy is suddenly excited and alert. Karim answers the boy's questions, and asks him what school he goes to. The boy, as Terry predicted, attends a very prestigious school. Karim notices that Marlene and Pyke look bored to death.

Suddenly, Pyke stands and opens the doors to the backyard. Eleanor stands and follows him out, leaving Marlene inside with Karim. Marlene gets herself another drink and comes to sit beside Karim. He pretends she's not touching him. As Karim begins to feel the marijuana, he asks Marlene to tell him what happened to Gene. Marlene sympathetically explains that Gene was a talented, sensitive black actor, but he never got the work he deserved. Instead, he played criminals and a nurse and was often picked up by the police for no reason. He overdosed one day after getting rejected by a big theatre company, and Eleanor came home to find him dead.

Karim and Marlene sit for a while, and then Marlene asks Karim for a kiss. He panics, but lets her kiss him. After, Marlene jumps up, pulls off her dress, and seems to celebrate. Karim is scared but finds he likes feeling that way. He and Marlene have sex and he allows his mind to carry him back to the night of Dad's first appearance. He thinks of Charlie and how Charlie is now famous, and how Karim himself is now a successful actor, but he fixates on Mum's pain and Gene's death.

When Karim sits up he has to think of where he is. Though he barely recognizes them, he watches Pyke and Eleanor touch each other across the room. Karim looks up later to see Pyke coming to him. Pyke puts his penis in Karim's mouth, and Karim thinks that he doesn't like it even though Pyke is famous. He bites Pyke just hard enough to make him stop, and Pyke returns his attention to Eleanor. Karim watches them kiss and listens to Eleanor tell Pyke that she's always wanted to have sex with him.

Marlene walks around Pyke and Eleanor, exclaiming about what a beautiful couple they are. Pyke snaps at her to stop. Dreamily, Eleanor removes Pyke's fingers from her vagina and puts them in Karim's mouth. Pyke moodily tells Karim and Marlene to touch each other. Marlene drunkenly falls onto the couch and cries that there's a full night of pleasure ahead of them.

*The revelation that Pyke's son attends a prestigious school casts Pyke alongside Eleanor in that he's interested in class (as evidenced by the subject matter of his play), but he doesn't truly understand it. Following Karim's logic, Pyke will never be able to fully understand the lower classes because he only knows his upper class lifestyle.*



*What happened to Gene shows that Pyke's desire to flatten "black" people into one homogenous group is flawed beyond belief. Even though Karim certainly experiences racism, he also experiences success through leading roles in the performing world because he's Indian, while Gene was driven to suicide because the performing world refused to recognize his talent because of his skin color.*



*Because this sexual experience is one in which Karim turns inward instead of towards Marlene, it reinforces that he's not here for the same reasons Marlene, Pyke, or Eleanor are. By conflating Mum's pain and Gene's death, Karim considers how racism hurts everyone--after all, it's the casual racism of the suburbanites that catapulted Dad to fame and enabled him to leave Mum.*



*When considered in terms of power, Pyke has it all in this situation. He's having sex with Karim's lover and has the power to sexually bully Karim. When Karim's attempt to take some of his power back by biting Pyke doesn't have much of an effect, it shows that Pyke is comfortable and secure with the power he has: Karim simply isn't a threat.*



*The way that Pyke treats Marlene suggests that though they both seem to be okay with the way their marriage is arranged, they're not necessarily particularly loyal to or in love with each other. This shows again that relationships can exist without love or loyalty, but it exposes the cracks that result.*



## PART 2, CHAPTER 14

During a break in rehearsal, Karim begins working for Eva, clearing the debris in her flat. Eleanor asks Karim if she can share the job. Karim explains that Eva has become crisper and better organized over the last few years, and regularly frightens plumbers with her directness. When he asks her about employing Eleanor she insults actors and then gets huffy when Karim points out he's an actor. Karim offers her an ultimatum, and Eva finally agrees to hire Eleanor. Eva splits her time between her own flat and one in a wealthier neighborhood. It's her first big outside job.

Karim and Eleanor work all day, shower at Eleanor's flat in the evenings, and dress in black to go out. They see plays at several theaters, and Eleanor loves the long plays about British class struggle. Karim says that those days were idyllic as he and Eleanor continued to have sex, though he felt as though terrible things were going to happen.

After Karim and Eleanor finish work for Eva, Karim goes to spend some time with Jeeta and Jamila. He finds Anwar in a sorry state: he smokes, drinks, and doesn't work. Neither Jeeta nor Jamila expresses any desire to help Anwar, as they still hold his hunger strike against him. Jeeta becomes cruel, not speaking much to Anwar and cooking him foods that make him constipated and give him horrendous diarrhea in turn. She still asks his opinions about the grocery store, but also remodels without consulting him. Jeeta also regularly taunts Anwar about what a horrible son-in-law Changez is.

One day, as Anwar returns from the mosque, he recognizes Changez walking with Shinko. Changez and Shinko had been shopping at a sex shop and are strolling home, talking about their respective homelands. Suddenly, Anwar yells and rushes at Changez in anger, waving his walking stick. Changez tries to evade Anwar, but when it becomes clear that Anwar means to do real harm, Changez hits him over the head with his new dildo. Shinko calls an ambulance, Changez is arrested for assault, and Anwar spends the next week in intensive care for heart failure.

*Eva's unwillingness to see Karim as an actor betrays that she also doesn't yet see him as an adult. However, Karim's negotiation for Eleanor's hire shows a similar crispness and directness to Eva, which shows the reader at least that Karim is indeed moving towards adulthood and maturity. Eva's first outside job shows that she's finally infiltrating the upper echelons of London society and is therefore coming of age herself.*



*For Eleanor, the plays about class struggle are fantasy and fiction because of her own upper class status. Like Terry, Eleanor is able to think of them in a theoretical sense rather than a practical sense because she doesn't have the lived experience of being lower middle class.*



*Anwar's choice to prioritize a very specific idea of family haunts him into his old age, driving home the idea that definitions of family and loyalty absolutely must change as the times and people change. Anwar's newfound drinking and smoking habits show that he's finally beginning to give up on the religion that got him into this situation in the first place. He's changing, but too little, too late.*



*When Changez puts his father in law in the hospital with a dildo, it's a symbolic representation of new sexual mores overpowering old, outdated traditions and belief systems. The fact that Anwar blames his fate on Changez shows that Anwar is one character who is not maturing. Rather than take responsibility for his own actions, he's punting the blame on to an easy target—an immature and self-centered thought process.*



Karim and Jamila spend every day with Anwar, but Dad refuses to go. He and Anwar had fallen out after he left Mum, though Karim explains that Dad and Mum had since begun speaking on the phone. Anwar dies at the end of the week, and there's a small argument when the Indian men burying him find that the hole for the coffin hadn't been dug facing Mecca. As Karim watches, he realizes these people are his people. He reasons that it took him so long to realize this because Dad has spent the last twenty years trying to be as English as possible.

When the men lower the coffin down, Jamila staggers. Changez catches her and seems ecstatic to be touching her at last. Later that night, Changez, Jamila, and Karim drink beer in Jeeta's flat. Karim considers Anwar and Jamila's relationship: she'd gone from a child to an uncooperative woman overnight, and they never learned to see each other as adults.

Slowly, Jamila informs Changez that she's leaving their flat. Changez looks terrified as Jamila explains that she wants to live in a communal house. She puts her hand over his as she says this. Karim asks what Changez will do, and Changez asks if he can come. Jamila gently suggests he go back to India, but Changez insists he's never going back. He declares that this is all too western and that capitalism deprives people of feelings, and that he'll try to make it alone.

Karim thinks that Jamila probably didn't think it through when she asks Changez if he'd like to come with her. Changez nods, Karim affirms that this is a good idea, and Jamila reminds Changez that they'll never be husband and wife like he wants them to be. Jamila says that Changez might have to work to pay his way. Changez looks anxious, but they continue talking it over. Karim thinks that Jamila has truly come into herself.

Karim helps Jamila and Changez move into the communal house, which is rundown and filled with hardworking vegetarians. Changez looks terrified and uncomfortable, and Karim rushes home to add to his Changez character. Karim explains that he's discovering what a creative lifestyle can be like, and he adores it. Further, he realizes that Pyke taught him this, and Karim therefore doesn't resent Pyke for what he did to him.

Karim goes back to the commune several weeks later. He finds that he likes being there, though he feels stupid listening to them talk about how to craft an egalitarian society. Karim especially likes Simon, a radical lawyer, and enjoys his jazz recommendations. Karim wishes he could stay at the commune, but the opening of Pyke's play is weeks away, and Karim is frightened.

*Karim's reasoning that Dad kept his Indian identity minimal throughout his childhood to help him shows that, unwittingly or not, Dad tried to protect Karim from the more overt racism that he would've experienced had he identified more openly as Indian. Dad and Mum's renewed contact suggests that their relationship will continue to evolve and change even after divorce.*



*Though Jamila herself came of age, Karim recognizes that she never did in Anwar's eyes. This shows that as a concept, coming of age is something that is in part made true when others recognize that it's happened.*



*Jamila's suggestion that Changez's return to England shows that she really only maintained her relationship with him to appease Anwar and her loyalty to Changez is tenuous at best. However, touching him suggests that she does care for him on some level, since physical contact with her is the one thing Changez wants.*



*As Jamila once again negotiates the terms of her marriage, she shows that familial loyalty can mean different things over the lifetime of a relationship. When Jamila becomes even more mature and adult in Karim's eyes, it shows again that coming of age is something that is recognized and supported by others.*



*Through his work on this Changez character, Karim develops and explores what he wants his life to look like. This shows him taking control of his growing maturity. The fact that the character is Indian suggests that Karim is thinking more about how to integrate his Indian heritage into his identity.*



*Communal living offers a sense of loyalty and egalitarianism that Karim hasn't experienced elsewhere, while the world that Karim currently inhabits is cutthroat and devoid of any true allies. This shows that Karim still values loyalty, but he's not sure where to seek it.*



## PART 2, CHAPTER 15

Karim begins to suspect that Pyke is messing with him after his experience at supper, and vows to investigate the matter. He notes Pyke is a good director for a number of reasons and goes over Karim's scenes with him again and again, and when the play premieres in northern England, Karim's character is a hit. His stereotypically Indian character gets the laughs, which incenses his romantic counterpart. After the third performance she calls Pyke to complain. Pyke had left for London to sleep with a barrister, but tells Karim's counterpart that Karim is the key to the play.

After a ten-city tour, Karim and the group return to London to prepare for their London run. It will run at an arts center, and the people who run the center make Pyke seem old-fashioned. Everyone seems concerned only with questioning whether or not the play will be successful.

Karim takes a break and goes to visit Changez. He barely recognizes him: Changez has had a haircut and seems exceptionally happy, now that the assault case against Anwar has been dropped. When Changez offers to run to the store, Karim asks Simon and another girl how Changez is doing. They both like him, and Karim reasons that Changez must've left out that his family owns racehorses and he loves to analyze the essential qualities of servants.

Later, Changez tells Karim that he loves the communal life, especially the nudity. When he begins to say that he can't stay in the commune Karim is shocked, but Changez admits that Jamila has begun having sex with Simon. Changez listens to them have sex every night, but refuses to change rooms because he likes to listen to Jamila move. Karim informs him that his love for her is stupid.

As they walk around south London, Karim realizes how derelict this neighborhood is. As Karim surveys the unhealthy people around them, Changez says what Karim is thinking: that this neighborhood makes him feel at home.

*When Pyke leaves his fledging production to sleep with someone, it betrays that he thinks far more highly of his own personal research than he does of any of the individuals involved in the play. Though Pyke stands up for Karim as a person, he also defends Karim's character—a character that's described as overtly stereotypical and racist. This once again proves Pyke's self-absorption and racism.*



*By placing Pyke in a comparison with these other theatre professionals, Karim shows again that maturity and success are relative. This recognizes the individuality of these people, which is indicative of Karim's maturity.*



*The fact that Changez either left out his wealthy youth or was able to make it palatable for his housemates shows that Changez is becoming more involved and interested in Jamila's studies. It shows, too, that he's very adept at figuring out how to curry loyalty.*



*When Karim talks disparagingly about Changez's love for Jamila, it mirrors him telling Eleanor to take better care of himself. This shows that Karim is still very selfish himself, and believes that having a bit of selfishness is essential to having a relationship with someone that's actually fulfilling.*



*Though Changez is talking about India, the fact that Karim agrees with him makes it clear that Karim will never be able to escape his suburban roots.*



Several days later, Jamila calls Karim to tell him that Changez had been attacked by a group of National Front members who thought he was Pakistani. She says that the police suggested Changez had laid down and hurt himself. Karim is angry, and Jamila invites him along to an anti-fascist march on Saturday. The week before the march, Karim notices that Eleanor doesn't seem happy. Karim begins staying in instead of going out with her, as he finds the parties with her friends boring. He invites Eleanor to the march with him. Karim is surprised, given what happened to Gene, that she's not fully on board.

On the morning of the march, Karim takes the tube towards Pyke's house, intending to meet up with Jamila and the others at the march later. Karim sits outside Pyke's house for hours and finally watches Eleanor knock on Pyke's door, and Pyke admit her. Karim knows the march is in full swing, but he decides to stay and wait for Eleanor and possibly ride with her to the march later.

Three hours later, Eleanor re-emerges from Pyke's house. Karim follows her onto the tube and asks her what she's doing with Pyke. Eleanor explains that Pyke is exciting and she'll continue sleeping with him. She puts her head on Karim's shoulder and tells him that she can't handle men telling her what to do, and she wants to continue sleeping with Pyke.

Karim darts out the closing train doors and vows to break up with Eleanor. He thinks that Gene died because the English told him that they hated him, and wonders why men like himself and Gene chase English women. He thinks that men like them stare daily into the eyes of men like Hairy Back and the **Great Dane**, but must free themselves of resentment--an impossible task given how the English treat them.

Karim spends a week feeling depressed. He's not even excited for the opening of the play and feels as though his lines are meaningless, but the critics love it. When Karim goes to the foyer after the show, he sees Mum and Dad talking. He thinks that they look old and, for the first time, like real people. Eva approaches Karim and praises the play, but she seems distraught that Dad is talking to Mum. Shadwell approaches Eva and Karim, but Karim leaves before Shadwell can speak.

Karim finds Terry at the bar. Terry is still incensed that he wasn't a part of Pyke's play. Karim tries to leave, but Terry chases after him. He says it's time: the Party needs Karim to get money from two people. Karim agrees and tries to leave Terry before Terry tells him who those two people are, and Karim is shocked to hear that Terry wants money from Pyke and Eleanor. Karim tries to refuse, but finally agrees.

*When Jamila says that the police didn't believe Changez's account, it shows that the systems of power that dehumanize non-white English people are extensive, and even the branches that are supposed to protect people cannot do so. This underscores the sense of fear that Jamila has felt all her life and suggests that politically, things are reaching a tipping point.*



*Though Karim misses the march for a selfish reason, he does so because he feels betrayed by Eleanor. This shows that even if he encourages Changez and Jamila in their unconventional relationship, he still desires the kind of loyalty he grew up watching for himself.*



*Notice that Eleanor's explanation very closely mirrors the way that Pyke thinks about sex: it's interesting and exciting, but it doesn't require him to consider anyone's feelings but his own. This shows that Eleanor and Pyke are very much linked by their class.*



*Though Eleanor proves unreliable, it's important to remember that Mum was a faithful and caring partner to Dad for many years, which may explain why Karim in particular wants to pursue English women.*



*In the years since the divorce, Karim has had the opportunity to get to know his parents as individuals and as people separate from their roles as parents. Now, what he's learned since the divorce stands in stark contrast to his childhood memories, which shows that he's still struggling to grow up.*



*When Karim tries to refuse, it suggests he's developing a better sense of loyalty—though to people who haven't shown him the same kind of loyalty, which recalls Karim's early assertion that he likes interesting people more than nice people.*



Karim unexpectedly finds Changez standing in front of him. Changez is congratulatory and seems happier than usual. He explains that Jamila is expecting a baby. Simon is the father, but the entire commune will share the baby. Before Karim can leave, Changez pulls Karim close and says that since Karim kept his character autobiographical and not a character sketch, he's not upset.

Jamila approaches Karim and Changez. Simon is with her, his face bandaged, and Jamila looks angry. Karim tries to congratulate them on the baby, but Jamila demands to know why Karim wasn't at the demonstration. Karim tries to say that he was rehearsing, but Jamila won't have it. As Karim turns to leave, Mum approaches him and insists that he's not at all Indian; he's an Englishman through and through. Karim insists it's just a job as Mum goes on to insult Dad and Eva.

Karim surveys the foyer and sees that nobody seems to need to talk to him, so he walks out and towards the Thames. He realizes that a woman is following him. Karim tries to think about Eleanor, but finds he's too curious about his stalker. He yells at her, but she just compliments his performance. They walk together until she points out that Heater is also following Karim. When Heater threatens Karim, Karim rushes at him and head butts him. Karim and his follower run away and he discovers that his hands are bleeding—Heater sews razor blades into his lapels.

## PART 2, CHAPTER 16

The play is so successful that the cast does extra shows, and Karim begins getting up late in the afternoon so he can drink late after the show and doesn't have to spend the morning stressing about the show. He gets an agent and finally has money, and Pyke asks the cast if they'd like to tour in New York.

Karim asks Pyke if he can stop by over the weekend. Pyke agrees but when Karim arrives, he makes Karim wait while he takes a shower. Karim wanders through the room and tries to choose something to steal for Terry and the Party, but he doesn't know what anything is worth. Marlene comes in, dressed for painting, and unenthusiastically asks Karim for a kiss. She makes him kiss her deeply, but Pyke interrupts them by irritably demanding she tell him where his sandalwood body shampoo is. Pyke and Marlene argue and it comes to light that Karim and Eleanor are no longer together. Marlene is upset that Pyke broke them up.

*Changez's happiness with Jamila's pregnancy shows that he's decided he's more interested in having some semblance of family than he is in having a particular version of a family. This is a major step for Changez and represents his assimilation into Jamila's world.*



*Jamila sees Karim's absence as representing disloyalty to her as well as to the issue. When comparing Mum's critique here to her delight at The Jungle Book, it shows that even if Mum married an Indian man, she's unable to escape the imperialist thought patterns inherent to her own identity as a white woman.*



*Karim's acceptance of his follower here recalls the day that Helen met him after school. Both show that he likes attention, even if it comes, in this case, with questionable regard for boundaries. Heater's actions suggest that things might not be over between Karim and Eleanor, which opens up the possibility that Eleanor is being disloyal to both Heater and Karim.*



*Karim achieves success at last by accepting that his identity as an Indian man sells, though shifting his schedule suggests that his depression and anxiety are worsening: playing to stereotypes has its price.*



*Making Karim wait is another of Pyke's power plays. As such, it reinforces for Karim that no matter how successful he becomes, Pyke will always be more powerful because of his social standing. Similarly, when Marlene coerces Karim into kissing her she also asserts her dominance—though Pyke knocks her down by arguing with her about something as silly as shampoo.*



Karim asks Pyke if they can deal with his matter now, and Marlene insults Pyke as she leaves the room. Karim explains to Pyke that he's working for the Party and wants 300 pounds. Pyke kindly writes Karim a check for 500 pounds and cautions him to not let the Party use him. When Karim asks Eleanor for money at the theatre one night, she mostly ignores him. She refuses to give him money and tries to talk about Gene. She tells Karim that the Party doesn't serve black people.

On his day off, Karim goes to see Terry. Terry is living in the neighborhood where Ted destroyed the train car years ago, which is rough. All the kids have Mohawks. Karim finds Terry's flat, and Terry is inside lifting weights. Terry is thrilled and surprised that Karim actually got money from Pyke, but he isn't excited to hear that Karim is going to America to perform. He insists that America is awful and racist, while England is at a perfect point to experience real change politically.

Karim insists that all the socially liberal ideas come from America—the women's movement, gay militancy, and the black rebellion—and he calls Terry ignorant. Terry insists that he just finds it strange that Karim would go after what Pyke did to him, but he refuses to explain what the rumors are. Terry says that Karim doesn't care about anything.

Karim thinks that people who only understand things halfway, like Terry, drive him crazy. He thinks of one of Dad's meditation students who only spoke about things he had practical experience with. Terry invites Karim to move in with him, but Karim approaches Terry and puts his hand between Terry's legs. Terry tells Karim to stop, but Karim isn't gentle. Karim meets Terry's eyes and sees that Terry desperately wants to understand Karim, and trusts that Karim won't hurt him. Karim moves away, shakes Terry's hand, and leaves.

## PART 2, CHAPTER 17

The night after the play's New York opening, Karim and the cast attend a lavish party in a tall apartment building. Karim watches Eleanor and wonders what he'd been thinking during their relationship. Dr. Bob, the man who runs the theatre, is an expert in "ethnic arts." He pulls Tracey and Karim to seats at the front of the room, shushes the crowd, and suddenly, a troupe of Haitian dancers perform what Karim terms a mating dance. Karim feels like a colonizer watching natives perform.

*Pyke's nonchalance about the whole thing suggests that he has more in common with Terry than Terry would like to believe. He's more than willing to support the Party, though he's not going to go out of his way to do so, just like Karim observed that Terry is still well off despite espousing ideals of equality and taking down the wealthy.*



*At this point, the novel is about a year away from Margaret Thatcher's victory. Terry's assertion that America (and not England) is racist shows that he doesn't truly empathize with Karim or support his success. It's also worth keeping in mind that America is in a similar spot politically to England in the late seventies; Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980 in a similar conservative backlash.*



*Terry's idealism keeps him from recognizing that a lot of the western world is doing the exact same thing and experiencing a backlash against the progressive ideas and policies of the sixties and seventies.*



*When Karim thinks of Dad's meditation student, it shows that he recognizes that Terry's beliefs aren't based in practical experience at all. Terry's openness with Karim in the face of this kind of aggressiveness impresses Terry's humanity upon Karim. This in turn makes Terry another marker of Karim's growing maturity and understanding that other people are individuals.*



*Though Karim is given front row seats because of his ethnicity, the experience shows Karim what it feels like to be a member of the colonizing group. The fact that this is an uncomfortable experience suggests that Karim is questioning how much he identifies with his English identity, as the English were undeniably colonizers.*



Later that night as Karim sits with most of the cast in a bedroom, Pyke begins a game that sets Karim on edge. He asks the actors which one of the people in the apartment they'd have sex with if they could. Karim tries to ask Eleanor to leave with him, but Pyke makes Karim stay. Pyke reads out the predictions he'd made at the beginning of rehearsals about who would sleep with whom. He reads that he predicted that Karim is bisexual and would fall for Eleanor, but that Eleanor would only have sex with Karim out of pity.

Karim leaves the room and tries to call Charlie, who's living in New York, and he asks Eleanor to leave the party with him. Eleanor tries to explain to that she'll be going home with Pyke. Karim tries to punch Pyke as he comes out of the bedroom, but he's too drunk. Karim hears an American say that the English are animals.

Karim comes to in a cab with Charlie. Charlie had come to the party late and found Karim passed out under a piano. He settles Karim onto one of his sofas and Karim wakes there the next morning. He vomits several times before going upstairs with coffee and toast. Charlie kisses Karim and rambles about how great New York is. They spend the day walking around the city, and Karim learns how famous Charlie is in America.

Karim explains that even though Charlie is still angry on stage, the image isn't as effective outside of England: America doesn't have the unemployment and strikes that made Charlie's music compelling in England. Charlie knows this and knows his music is subpar, but he insists that he can do good things in America.

Charlie invites Karim to stay with him when Karim tells him about Eleanor. Karim is fascinated to see that Charlie is both embracing his English-ness and eager to learn whatever he can from his friends and girlfriends. Karim notes that in this way, fame and wealth agree with Charlie: he no longer has anyone to envy, and he can now concentrate on becoming human. One morning, Charlie tells Karim how he came to realize that money is his one true love, but Karim cautions him that money can make him self-centered.

*As Pyke confirms the clues that implied that Eleanor's interest in Karim wasn't genuine, it shows that both Eleanor and Pyke view people as objects to use and manipulate as they see fit—again, a product of their high class statuses. This also shuts down Karim's sense that the cast was a familial, safe, and trustworthy group.*



*The comment by the American suggests that Dad is right, and the English are no longer the leading force in the western world. This calls white English superiority into question, as it's white superiority that kept England so powerful for so long.*



*Charlie is certainly taking advantage of the American penchant for English musicians that the Beatles started with their "American invasion" nearly two decades earlier. This reinforces the cultural exchange between England and America that Karim mentioned to Terry earlier.*



*For Charlie, getting out of England and the social structures that defined him there brings about his coming of age. In America, he can more easily fashion an identity that works for him by pulling what he wants from English culture, just as Dad and Karim did with Indian culture.*



*When Karim cautions Charlie about the dangers of money, he sounds shockingly like Dad. This gives credence to Mum's drawing of Karim that resembled Dad and her assertion that Karim and Dad are more alike than they realize. It suggests that as Karim grows and develops, he will become more like his father the older he gets.*



The play only lasts a month before the cast goes their separate ways. Karim remains in New York and works for Charlie, but his depression worsens. Karim wonders why he doesn't hurt himself and thinks of Dad. He thinks that Dad had always felt superior to the British and taught Karim that he could never experience failure in front of them. Karim feels ashamed that he's at such a low point mentally when, by Dad's standards, life is very good for Karim.

After six months, Karim decides it's time to go home. Charlie resists, and Karim wonders if it's because Karim is the one person in America who truly knows how far Charlie has come. Further, Karim discovers that fame doesn't suit Charlie as well as he initially thought. Charlie begins to chafe under the public scrutiny, and becomes moody and angry.

One day, as Charlie and Karim walk home, a journalist runs up to Charlie and begs for an interview. Charlie ignores the man, but the journalist chases Charlie and grabs his arm. Charlie brutally beats the man. Another morning, Charlie confides to Karim that there are sexual things he wants to try, and invites Karim to join him. Later that night, a woman named Frankie appears at Charlie's door. Karim feels uptight as he asks Frankie what she does, and she explains she's interested in bondage and pain.

Karim tries to catch Charlie's eye, but Charlie is intent on Frankie. Frankie suggests that Karim and Charlie might like to have sex with each other, and Karim is shocked to see that Charlie is open and enthusiastic. He remembers Dad's first appearance when he and Charlie had sex, but Charlie had been closed then.

Upstairs, Charlie lights candles in the bedroom. Charlie undresses and he and Frankie kiss. Karim asks uncomfortably if they really want him there, and Charlie snaps at Karim to stop acting so self-righteous, moral, and English. Karim settles himself in the corner. Frankie ties Charlie to the bed and puts a hood over his head. She grabs a candle and begins to drip wax on his body, and then puts clamps on his nipples. Karim realizes that he doesn't love, care for, or care about Charlie. He feels as though he's moved beyond and discovered himself by rejecting Charlie.

*By following Dad's guidelines and not admitting how miserable he is, Karim shows that during their separation, he's becoming more loyal and understanding of Dad. However, realizing that they have these major differences indicates that Karim understands fundamentally that they're different people with different experiences.*



*Karim's suspicion about Charlie's reason for wanting Karim to stay reinforces the idea that coming of age happens in relation to other people. Though Charlie and Karim are both coming of age independently, they can reflect the other's coming of age for each other.*



*Charlie's negative reactions to fame suggest that reaching the true upper classes isn't all it's made out to be. It's isolating while also making him feel as though he's never alone. This suggests that Charlie is undergoing a similar thought process in regards to Eva as Karim is to Dad: both boys are experiencing success in their parents' eyes, but they struggle with the pressure.*



*Charlie's attitude change towards sex with Karim implies that he'd been afraid to admit his interest as teenagers. However, the identity crisis he suffers as a result of fame means that he's now willing to revisit this and consider thinking of how he can relate to Karim.*



*Though Karim is mortified at the point when Charlie snaps at him, Charlie's insistence that Karim is too English makes it clear in a very negative way that Karim's English identity is more obvious than his Indian roots. Further, the fact that this insult doesn't sit well with Karim shows that he understands he needs to recognize his Indian heritage.*



Karim moves around the bed to watch Frankie on top of Charlie. He later thinks that it was an excellent evening, but decides to fly home when his agent calls and says he has an important audition scheduled. Charlie tries to bribe Karim to stay and says that England is a horrible place for anyone who isn't rich, but he agrees to buy Karim's ticket anyway.

*Charlie refuses to recognize that Karim is still climbing the social ladder, and if the audition goes well, he will have money. Flying home for the audition also shows that Karim is developing a sense of responsibility, a marker of adulthood.*



## PART 2, CHAPTER 18

On his flight to London, Karim develops a toothache. When he enters the dentist's office, the South African dentist asks the nurse if Karim speaks English. Later, Karim meets Terry for a drink. All Terry can talk about is the upcoming election, which he says will either bring about revolution or the rise of the right.

*The dentist's question is ironic given that South Africa was also a British colony. This reinforces that the white Englishmen aren't the only ones who keep racism alive and well.*



Karim's audition goes well, though he can tell that the producers and directors are trashy and the show will be boring and awful. Karim returns to the Fish's flat, where he's staying temporarily, and wonders if he should move to New York. His agent calls and says that he got the part. It takes Karim several days to think through the offer, but he decides to take it. He'll play the son of an Indian shopkeeper in a soap opera.

*Like his other two roles, Karim's role in the soap is one that plays into English stereotypes of Indian people. For a final time, Karim must recognize that his Indian identity is marketable and will be the reason he makes money, even if accepting these roles is emotionally difficult to do.*



Karim visits Dad and Eva to share his news. He dresses in a cashmere sweater and corduroy pants, and he hopes his clothing choices will hide his depression. At Eva and Dad's house, a man and a woman are unloading photography equipment. The man yells and asks Karim if he's Charlie's manager.

*Karim's clothing choices also show how the times have changed and mirror the shift towards conservatism in politics (the Thatcher election is days away).*



Eva is confused when she finds Karim and the other two people on her doorstep at the same time. She ushers the other two into the living room and then comes to talk to Karim in the hallway. Their exchange is awkward and Karim recognizes that he feels different. Eva explains that the two people are here to interview her for a prestigious magazine piece.

*Karim feels different because he is different: he came of age in New York and must now figure out how to fit himself back into English culture. Eva's interview shows that like Karim and Charlie, she's found success and fame through her work.*



Eva and Karim enter the living room, and Dad gets up to embrace Karim. Dad is wearing a neck brace. Karim remembers how, when he was a kid, Dad would always win their races and wrestling matches, but now he can't move without pain. Karim feels as though he wants to fight Dad, but doesn't feel he can with Dad in this state. Eva, on the other hand, looks fresh and wholly non-suburban. She leads Karim with the other two on a tour of the flat.

*Though Karim notes that Eva doesn't look suburban, he doesn't offer any clues to whether or not this is a surface thing or whether she's actually been able to shed her suburban roots. This leaves it up in the air as to whether or not a person can truly forget where they came from, or if that remains a part of their identity.*



The photographer moves furniture around and photographs Eva in unnatural poses. The woman asks Eva about her philosophy on life. Eva looks to Dad, sits next to him, and begins to explain that before she met Dad, she was lost. With Dad's help, she says, she learned to believe in self-help and individual initiative. The photographer looks uncomfortable, but Eva keeps going. She says that people who live in housing estates expect the government to do everything for them, and they must be enabled to grow. The photographer whispers to the woman to ask about Charlie, but Eva insists she won't comment on him.

Karim remembers how Dad used to be pompous all the time and thinks he likes listening to Eva dominate the conversation. The woman asks Dad if he'd like to respond to Eva's thoughts on his philosophy. Dad slowly says that he once thought Englishmen superior, but he now sees they're missing something. He insists they've neglected the soul, and both the photographer and the woman look uncomfortable. The woman begins packing up her tapes and as she and the photographer are about to leave, Ted bursts in.

Ted insists he's not that late and admits that Jean fell down the stairs. He addresses the woman and insists that life goes downhill and he doesn't know why. He asks the photographer if he'd like to photograph himself and Eva, but the photographer and the woman leave quickly. Ted is glad to see Karim, and Karim notices that Ted no longer looks vaguely violent and like he'd fight anyone.

Ted enthusiastically tells Karim that he loves his work and that Eva saved him. Karim reminds Ted that Dad saved him, but Ted continues and asks Karim if he's living an untrue life. Eva insists to Ted they need to go to work, and they leave Karim alone with Dad. Dad asks Karim to make him cheese on toast and begins ranting that Eva doesn't take care of him anymore. He admits that sometimes he hates her. Karim tries to leave, but Dad tells Karim excitedly that he's leaving his job so he can counsel people in how to live their lives. Karim is supportive, but quickly disentangles himself from the conversation.

*Eva's sentiments are vaguely reminiscent of Margaret Thatcher's policies, which overwhelmingly cut social and welfare programs. Essentially, Eva and Thatcher both believe that people need to help themselves and not rely so heavily on the government. This is ironic considering that Eva got to this place by learning from Dad, and Thatcher, a conservative candidate, represents the kind of policies that won't help people like Dad get by and thrive.*



*Dad's thoughts on the matter show that even if Eva is twisting Dad's teachings, he still believes in seeking personal success, not climbing the social ladder like Eva did. Now that Dad has power thanks to his association with Eva, he can say things like this that make people uncomfortable without fear of retaliation. Essentially, despite his rejection of Eva's success, it still benefits him.*



*Ted appears to have completed his own coming of age process through embracing Dad's teachings, though, like Eva, his desire to be photographed and become famous through this article shows that he defines success very differently than his guru does.*



*For Dad, the success of leaving Mum for his lover doesn't seem nearly as sweet as others' success does. By showing that Dad isn't all that happy even after he got what he wanted, the novel questions the very definition of success, and whether or not success is even possible for anyone. Arguably, many of the characters have become successful, which ultimately suggests that success simply isn't as straightforward as a person getting what they want.*



At Mum's house, Karim finds Mum out and Allie getting dressed. Allie is extremely impressed that Karim landed the soap opera. When Karim questions his enthusiasm, Allie insists that Pyke's play was too idealistic. Allie obviously enjoys this topic and continues to say that he hates people who insist on making a big deal out of being black and self-pitying, saying instead that they need to get on with their lives. Finally, Allie insists that Indian people have no reason to be bitter, and cuts off Karim when he tries to recount his experience with the racist dentist. Karim thinks he likes Allie, even though his ideas are strange.

Allie congratulates Karim again on the soap opera, and then tells him that Mum has a boyfriend. His name is Jimmy and Mum doesn't want him to know that she has adult sons. Karim says that Mum deserves it.

Karim admits that everything went crazy after Mum and Dad broke up. Allie angrily says that he doesn't have time for people like Dad who abandon their wife and kids. He says it's horrible that now that Dad is quitting his job, they'll all become dependent on Eva. Karim tries to cut him off but Allie continues to rant about Dad. Karim finally tells Allie he's stupid and doesn't understand, and Allie deflates.

Mum arrives. She's reasonably pleased that Karim has a job and mentions she has a friend coming over soon. While she dresses, Allie and Karim vacuum and dust. When the doorbell rings, Mum shoos them out the back door so Jimmy won't see them. Karim and Allie look through Mum's window until she notices them, and then Allie takes Karim out to a bar. Karim notices that London has changed—the punks and hippies are gone, and everyone is well dressed. He decides to go see Changez and Jamila.

Karim steals a tablecloth from the Fish's apartment as a gift for Changez and Jamila. He picks up Indian takeout and passes Jeeta's shop in his taxi on the way to the commune. Changez answers the door with a baby in his arms and tells Karim that it's 1:30 in the morning. Karim is relieved to find that Changez seems the same, just as interested in food as he ever was. He even insists on throwing the tablecloth on top of the clutter on the table so he can eat sooner. He hands the baby to Karim and starts eating.

*Allie's sudden appearance as a reasonable, interesting figure shows that Karim's coming of age is allowing him to expand his horizons beyond his own selfishness and take more note of those around him. Allie's idealism suggests that he hasn't spent as much time as Karim running around in neighborhoods like Jamila's, where the racial violence against Indian people is undeniably real and dangerous.*



*Mum too arises as an interesting individual in her own right, though denying the fact that she has two adult sons shows her forgoing family loyalty for the first time.*



*Allie seems to operate under the assumption that Dad is happy and satisfied with his life, when in reality, success hasn't been as sweet for him. This suggests that Allie hasn't yet come of age himself, as he still holds a very limited understanding of his parents' divorce and relationship.*



*Even if her sons pester her, Mum's success seems far sweeter than anyone else's. She gets to live out her dream of performing suburbia while allowing her children and Dad to pursue the heights that never interested her. In this way, Mum becomes a study in what success means when it's not defined by moving up in the social hierarchy.*



*Karim's assertion that Changez is unchanged is questionable given that he's now a parent. Per the way the novel defines maturity, Changez should have undergone some change now that he has a baby to identify himself in. This suggests that Karim is unsettled and looking for something that's the same in order to make himself feel more comfortable with his own coming of age.*



Changez explains that Simon is away in America, and Jamila is still angry with Karim for not showing up at the demonstration. Karim boasts about his time in America, and finally asks Changez if he's made any progress in getting Jamila to go to bed with him. Changez says that everyone is progressing, and Jamila has a woman friend, Joanna. Karim can't believe that Changez is actually okay with this and questions Changez how he's coping with being married to a lesbian. Changez looks shocked at the suggestion.

Jamila walks into the room with Joanna and dances for the baby. She takes the baby and as she talks to Changez, Karim realizes their marriage has become strangely respectful. Joanna insists she recognizes Karim, and Jamila explains that he's an actor. Joanna explains that she's a filmmaker, and asks Changez for grapefruit and toast for breakfast in the morning. Jamila hands the baby back to Changez and leads Joanna upstairs.

Changez won't meet Karim's eyes and accuses him of making him think too much. He tells Karim to go upstairs to sleep, but Karim lies down behind the couch instead. He meditates for a while but soon starts thinking about how content Changez and Jamila finally seem in their marriage. When Karim wakes later, he hears Jamila and Changez talking. He drifts in and out of sleep.

Changez talks about how he's renovating Jeeta's store and asks Jamila for a kiss. Karim hears Jamila oblige unhappily and wonders if he should intervene. When Jamila asks if Changez has seen Shinko recently, Changez explains that Karim stirred him up by implying that Jamila is a lesbian. He says he told Karim that it was rubbish. Jamila sighs and explains that she's very passionate about Joanna. Changez shouts that he's the only normal person left in England and that something's wrong with Jamila if she's turning to "perversion" when her husband is right in front of her.

Jamila pleads with Changez to stop, but he asks how Jamila and the others in the house can talk about the horrors of prejudice against every type of person but ugly people. Jamila insists that Anwar forced her into marriage and says that Changez isn't ugly on the inside. Changez yells that he's going to start a campaign to stop prejudice against ugly people. He pulls down his pants and Jamila sarcastically tells him to figure himself out. She threatens to vote him out of the house and says she doesn't want Joanna seeing his penis. Karim begins to become uncomfortable as Changez laments that he never sees Jamila alone.

*Changez's shock betrays that he's still conservative and traditional at heart. Once again, this makes Karim responsible for bringing the loyalty between Changez and Jamila into question, which shows that their loyalty is still tenuous and contested.*



*Karim was incorrect and Changez has changed: even if he's shocked that Jamila might be a lesbian, the respect between them shows that their marriage has matured and now allows for true happiness for both of them, even if it's not perfect.*



*As Karim mulls over the new respectfulness between Changez and Jamila, he sees that respect and a willingness to work for one's family is one of the most important parts of family. Dad didn't do this when he cheated on Mum, which precipitated the end of their relationship.*



*When Changez mentions working in Jeeta's store, it suggests that Anwar's insistence on making Changez fit a specific mold is what kept Changez from being a contributing member of his extended family. Now that he's not experiencing Anwar's oppression, he can renegotiate how he fits into the family and create his job. Again, Changez's inability to accept that Jamila likes women betrays that he's conservative and traditional, his living situation aside.*



*Changez is trying to use Jamila's passion for politics to his advantage to try and demand her loyalty and fidelity. Karim's discomfort shows that he's learned to be more empathetic and truly feels for Changez, even if he questions both his motives and his methods. Jamila's comment about Joanna suggests that her loyalty lies with Joanna, not Changez. By making this clear, she tells Changez that her loyalty comes only on her terms.*



Suddenly, Jamila hears Karim behind the sofa. Karim announces himself and insists he didn't hear anything, but Changez is incensed. Jamila stops Changez from hurting Karim and early in the morning, Karim sneaks out of the house.

*Because it's continually denied to him, Changez desperately wants to perform traditional masculinity. Being humiliated in front of Karim denies him this once again and suggests that Changez will never be successful in this endeavor.*



When Karim goes to see Dad a few days later, Dad is in the middle of counseling a crying young man. Karim realizes that Dad will always have work as long as London continues to be full of lonely, sad people who need guidance. When Karim and Dad sit down together, Karim tries to wow him with the news of the soap opera and fails. Dad says that it's a good thing Karim is finally doing something visible, and Karim feels a flash of anger. He wonders if he'll always feel like a child in front of his parents.

*Dad's future of financial success shows again that capitalizing on Western racism is profitable, and throws into relief the fact that Karim doesn't enjoy playing to these stereotypes. It suggests that Dad is ultimately more successful than Karim, indicating as well that Dad has come of age fully while Karim is still in process.*



Dad asks about Mum and seems shocked to hear that Mum is doing well and seeing a man. Dad asks question after question, and Karim notices Eva standing behind Dad and listening. Karim describes Jimmy, and confirms when Dad asks if Mum and Jimmy are kissing each other. Dad is distraught and moans that nothing will be the same again. He turns away, sees Eva, and suddenly looks afraid. Eva angrily tells Dad that it's too late to regret anything. Karim wonders if Dad finally understands that leaving Mum isn't something he can magically undo.

*When Dad learns about Mum's relationship, it shatters the illusion Dad held that Mum was still pining after him. This in turn suggests that even in spite of all his Eastern philosophy, Dad is a cruel and self-centered man at heart, though he appears to be paying the price for his transgressions.*



That night, Karim takes Dad, Eva, Allie, and Allie's girlfriend out to dinner to celebrate his new job. He also invites Changez and Jamila. They go to an expensive restaurant, and Eva is thrilled to know several people there. Allie also knows people there, and soon there's a party at Karim's table. They talk about Karim's job and the new Prime Minister. Changez and Shinko arrive around midnight, and Changez talks at length about Jeeta's shop.

*The new Prime Minister is Margaret Thatcher. She represents a major swing to the right, showing that Terry's revolution isn't going to happen. This casts the novel as being one that explores the end of an era, while showing too that Karim's future roles will have even more weight given the rise of conservatism and racism.*



Karim finds he enjoys being able to be generous and please others with money. When everyone is drunk, Eva stands and asks for attention. Dad smiles at everyone, and Eva seems nervous to make her announcement. Finally, Dad announces for her that they're getting married in two months. Karim raises a toast to them and spends the rest of the night thinking about his past. He thinks that he's surrounded by people he loves, in the city he loves, and thinks that things won't always be a mess.

*Dad and Eva's announcement shows that they've finally decided to accept a marker of adulthood and become legalized family to each other. This leaves everyone in the novel as relatively mature adults. However, Karim's optimism shows that he's still in the process of growing up: coming of age doesn't have a true end point and like Dad, Karim will develop for years to come.*





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