*Kite Runner* Chapter 17 Close Reading

“Why me? Why can’t you pay someone here to go? I’ll pay for it if it’s a matter of money.”

“It isn’t about money, Amir!” Rahim Khan roared. “I’m a dying man and I will not be insulted! It has never been about money with me, you know that. And why you? I think we both know why it has to be you, don’t we?” (#1)

I didn’t want to understand that comment, but I did. I understood it all too well. “I have a wife in America, a home, a career, and a family. Kabul is a dangerous place, you know that, and you’d have me risk everything for...“ I stopped.

“You know,” Rahim Khan said, “one time, when you weren’t around, your father and I were talking. And you know how he always worried about you in those days. I remember he said to me, ‘Rahim, a boy who won’t stand up for himself becomes a man who can’t stand up to anything.’ I wonder, is that what you’ve become?” (#2)

I dropped my eyes.

“What I’m asking from you is to grant an old man his dying wish,” he said gravely.

He had gambled with that comment. Played his best card. (#3) Or so I thought then. His words hung in limbo between us, but at least he’d known what to say. I was still searching for the right words, and I was the writer in the room. Finally, I settled for this: “Maybe Baba was right.”

“I’m sorry you think that, Amir.”

I couldn’t look at him. “And you don’t?”

“If I did, I would not have asked you to come here.”

I toyed with my wedding ring. “You’ve always thought too highly of me, Rahim Khan.”

“And you’ve always been far too hard on yourself.” He hesitated. “But there’s something else. Something you don’t know.”

“Please, Rahim Khan--”

“Sanaubar wasn’t Ali’s first wife.”

Now I looked up.

“He was married once before, to a Hazara woman from the Jaghori area. This was long before you were born. They were married for three years.”

“What does this have to do with anything?”

“She left him childless after three years and married a man in Khost. She bore him three daughters. That’s what I am trying to tell you.”

I began to see where he was going. But I didn’t want to hear the rest of it. I had a good life in California, pretty Victorian home with a peaked roof, a good marriage, a promising writing career, in-laws who loved me. I didn’t need any of this shit. (#4)

“Ali was sterile,” Rahim Khan said.

“No he wasn’t. He and Sanaubar had Hassan, didn’t they? They had Hassan--”

“No they didn’t,” Rahim Khan said.

“Yes they did!”

“No they didn’t, Amir.”

“Then who--”

“I think you know who.”

I felt like a man sliding down a steep cliff, clutching at shrubs and tangles of brambles and coming up empty-handed. The room was swooping up and down, swaying side to side. “Did Hassan know?” I said through lips that didn’t feel like my own. Rahim Khan closed his eyes. Shook his head.

“You bastards,” I muttered. Stood up. “You goddamn bastards!” I screamed. “All of you, you bunch of lying goddamn bastards!”

“Please sit down,” Rahim Khan said.

“How could you hide this from me? From him?” I bellowed.

“Please think, Amir Jan. It was a shameful situation. People would talk. All that a man had back then, all that he was, was his honor, his name, and if people talked... We couldn’t tell anyone, surely you can see that.” He reached for me, but I shed his hand. Headed for the door. (#5)

“Amir jan, please don’t leave.” I opened the door and turned to him. “Why? What can you possibly say to me? I’m thirty-eight years old and I’ve Just found out my whole life is one big fucking lie! What can you possibly say to make things better? Nothing. Not a goddamn thing!” (#6)

And with that, I stormed out of the apartment.

1. What does this comment reveal about Rahim Khan?

2. How does this quote from Baba advance our understanding of the topic of redemption?

3. What does Amir mean about Rahim Khan playing his best card?

4. What’s the purpose of the details Amir chose in this paragraph—the Victorian home with a peaked roof, etc.?

5. How does this paragraph reinforce the ideas of reputation and honor that are so prevalent in Afghani culture?

6. What effect is Hosseini trying to achieve through his use of cursing in this passage?