A siren went off in the distance. Somewhere glass shattered and someone shouted. I heard people on the street, jolted from sleep and probably still in their pajamas, with ruffled hair and puffy eyes. Hassan was crying. Ali pulled him close, clutched him with tenderness. Later, I would tell myself I hadn't felt envious of Hassan. Not at all.

We stayed huddled that way until the early hours of the morning. The shootings and explosions had lasted less than an hour, but they had frightened us badly, because none of us had ever heard gunshots in the streets. They were foreign sounds to us then. The generation of Afghan children whose ears would know nothing but the sounds of bombs and gunfire was not yet born. Huddled together in the dining room and waiting for the sun to rise, none of us had any notion that a way of life had ended. Our way of life. If not quite yet, then at least it was the beginning of the end. The end, the official end, would come first in April 1978 with the communist coup d'etat, and then in December 1979, when Russian tanks would roll into the very same streets where Hassan and I played, bringing the death of the Afghanistan I knew and marking the start of a still ongoing era of bloodletting.

sounds—The sounds that are now reverberating through Kabul are foreign to them at this point in the city’s history. The terrifying sounds are confusing, but they are recognizable as sounds to fear. Gunfire, sirens, explosions, and shouting are scaring the boys, but Ali and Baba are afraid as well. The fact that this is frightening to all of them tells that this is the first time Afghanistan is experiencing difficulty. When something of this magnitude hits, it becomes evident that this is not a temporary situation, although Amir says that at this moment, they didn’t realize what the far-reaching repercussions would be. In reflection, he now knows this was the morning his world would change forever, and likely the sounds of that morning are still heard not only in Kabul, but also in Amir’s ears.

time—The fact that the attacks took place in the early hours, even before daybreak, suggests the enemy decided to attack when the “victims” were at their most defenseless and vulnerable. Darkness symbolizes the inability to see what’s coming and therefore makes people most afraid. The most evil time of day is thought to be after sunset—a time when people are afraid to be alone, sounds are magnified, and fears intensified. The events being relayed here are the actual events of the invasion, and knowing this happened in the early hours while most people slept adds an intensity to the situation that would not be so pronounced if these attacks had happened at noon.

location—

seriousness of the situation—

emotional support—

the beginning of the end—

visuals—