

forefinger. Unlike the watch on his wrist, the pocket watch, he had explained  
190 to me, was set to the local time in Dacca, eleven hours ahead. For the duration  
of the meal the watch rested on his folded napkin on the coffee table. He never  
seemed to consult it.

Now that I had learned Mr. Pirzada was not an Indian, I began to study him  
with extra care, to try to figure out what made him different. I decided that the  
pocket watch was one of those things. When I saw it that night, as he wound it  
and arranged it on the coffee table, an uneasiness possessed me; life, I realized,  
was being lived in Dacca first. I imagined Mr. Pirzada's daughters rising from  
sleep, tying ribbons in their hair, anticipating breakfast, preparing for school.  
Our meals, our actions, were only a shadow of what had already happened  
200 there, a lagging ghost of where Mr. Pirzada really belonged. **H**

At six-thirty, which was when the national news began, my father raised the  
volume and adjusted the antennas. Usually I occupied myself with a book, but  
that night my father insisted that I pay attention. On the screen I saw tanks  
rolling through dusty streets, and fallen buildings, and forests of unfamiliar  
trees into which East Pakistani refugees had fled, seeking safety over the Indian  
border. I saw boats with fan-shaped sails floating on wide coffee-colored rivers,  
a barricaded university, newspaper offices burnt to the ground. I turned to  
look at Mr. Pirzada; the images flashed in miniature across his eyes. As he  
watched he had an immovable expression on his face, composed but alert, as  
210 if someone were giving him directions to an unknown destination.

During the commercial my mother went to the kitchen to get more rice,  
and my father and Mr. Pirzada deplored the policies of a general named  
Yahyah Khan. They discussed intrigues I did not know, a catastrophe I could  
not comprehend. "See, children your age, what they do to survive," my father  
said as he served me another piece of fish. But I could no longer eat. I could  
only steal glances at Mr. Pirzada, sitting beside me in his olive green jacket,  
calmly creating a well in his rice to make room for a second helping of lentils.  
He was not my notion of a man burdened by such grave concerns. I wondered  
if the reason he was always so smartly dressed was in preparation to endure  
220 with dignity whatever news **assailed** him, perhaps even to attend a funeral at  
a moment's notice. I wondered, too, what would happen if suddenly his seven  
daughters were to appear on television, smiling and waving and blowing kisses  
to Mr. Pirzada from a balcony. I imagined how relieved he would be. But this  
never happened.

That night when I placed the plastic egg filled with cinnamon hearts in the  
box beside my bed, I did not feel the ceremonious satisfaction I normally did.  
I tried not to think about Mr. Pirzada, in his lime-scented overcoat, connected  
to the unruly, sweltering world we had viewed a few hours ago in our bright,  
carpeted living room. And yet for several moments that was all I could  
230 think about. My stomach tightened as I worried whether his wife and seven  
daughters were now members of the drifting, clamoring crowd that had flashed  
at intervals on the screen. In an effort to banish the image I looked around my

#### **H** THEME AND CHARACTER

Reread lines 186–200.  
What insight about Mr. Pirzada does Lilia gain from seeing him tend to his pocket watch?

**assail** (ə-sāil') v. to attack or deliver a blow