

of the chalkboard, charting the route of the *Mayflower*, or showing us the location of the Liberty Bell. Each week two members of the class gave a report on a particular aspect of the Revolution, and so one day I was sent to the school library with my friend Dora to learn about the surrender at Yorktown. Mrs. Kenyon handed us a slip of paper with the names of three books to look
260 up in the card catalogue. We found them right away, and sat down at a low round table to read and take notes. But I could not concentrate. I returned to the blond-wood shelves, to a section I had noticed labeled “Asia.” I saw books about China, India, Indonesia, Korea. Eventually I found a book titled *Pakistan: A Land and Its People*. I sat on a footstool and opened the book. The laminated jacket crackled in my grip. I began turning the pages, filled with photos of rivers and rice fields and men in military uniforms. There was a chapter about Dacca, and I began to read about its rainfall, and its jute¹⁴ production. I was studying a population chart when Dora appeared in the aisle.

“What are you doing back here? Mrs. Kenyon’s in the library. She came to
270 check up on us.”

I slammed the book shut, too loudly. Mrs. Kenyon emerged, the aroma of her perfume filling up the tiny aisle, and lifted the book by the tip of its spine as if it were a hair clinging to my sweater. She glanced at the cover, then at me.

“Is this book a part of your report, Lilia?”

“No, Mrs. Kenyon.”

“Then I see no reason to consult it,” she said, replacing it in the slim gap on the shelf. “Do you?” **J**

J DRAW CONCLUSIONS

How has the conflict in Pakistan affected the lives of Lilia’s classmates and her history teacher, Mrs. Kenyon? Explain.

As weeks passed it grew more and more rare to see any footage from Dacca on the news. The report came after the first set of commercials,
280 sometimes the second. The press had been censored, removed, restricted, rerouted. Some days, many days, only a death toll was announced, prefaced by a reiteration of the general situation. . . . More villages set ablaze. In spite of it all, night after night, my parents and Mr. Pirzada enjoyed long, leisurely meals. After the television was shut off, and the dishes washed and dried, they joked, and told stories, and dipped biscuits in their tea. When they tired of discussing political matters they discussed, instead, the progress of Mr. Pirzada’s book about the deciduous trees¹⁵ of New England, and my father’s nomination for tenure, and the peculiar eating habits of my mother’s American coworkers at the bank. Eventually I was sent upstairs to do my homework,
290 but through the carpet I heard them as they drank more tea, and listened to cassettes of Kishore Kumar, and played Scrabble on the coffee table, laughing and arguing long into the night about the spellings of English words. I wanted to join them, wanted, above all, to console Mr. Pirzada somehow. But apart from eating a piece of candy for the sake of his family and praying for their safety, there was nothing I could do. They played Scrabble until the eleven

14. **jute**: the fiber from an Asian plant, used for sacking and cording.

15. **deciduous** (də-sĭj’ōō-əs) **trees**: trees that shed or lose leaves at the end of the growing season.