

The Kite Runner



BACKGROUND INFO

AUTHOR BIO

Full Name: Khaled Hosseini

Date of Birth: March 4, 1965

Place of Birth: Kabul, Afghanistan

Date of Death: Still living

Brief Life Story: Khaled Hosseini was born in Afghanistan, where his father worked as a diplomat and his mother as a teacher. When Hosseini was eleven the family moved to France, and later they were unable to return to Afghanistan because of the Soviet War. Hosseini's family then applied for asylum in the United States, and they moved to California when Hosseini was fifteen. Hosseini went to medical school at the University of California and worked as a doctor for ten years, until the success of *The Kite Runner* allowed him to work full time as a writer. Much like Amir, Hosseini did not return to Afghanistan until he was 38 years old. *The Kite Runner* is his first and best-known novel, but his other works are *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed*. Hosseini lives in California with his wife and two children.

KEY FACTS

Full Title: *The Kite Runner*

Genre: Historical fiction, Drama

Setting: Kabul, Afghanistan, Pakistan (mostly Peshawar), and San Francisco Bay Area, California

Climax: Amir's fight with Assef

Protagonist: Amir

Antagonist: Assef

Point of View: First person limited, from Amir's point of view

HISTORICAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT

When Written: 2001-2003

Where Written: Mountain View, California

When Published: 2003

Literary Period: Contemporary literature

Related Literary Works: As a child, Hosseini was greatly influenced by ancient Persian poets like Rumi and Hafiz. *West of Kabul, East of New York* is another popular contemporary book (though non-fiction) about an experience emigrating from Afghanistan to America. *Sixteen Days in Afghanistan* is a documentary directed by Anwar Hajher that describes an Afghan man returning home after many years abroad to rediscover his country.

Related Historical Events: *The Kite Runner* progresses through much of the historical turmoil of contemporary Afghanistan, starting with King Zahir Shah, who was overthrown by his cousin Daoud Khan in 1973. The communist party then took power in 1978, which led to The Soviet War involving Russian forces and US-backed *mujahideen* guerillas. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the country became the Islamic State of Afghanistan, but violent infighting between parties continued. In 1996 the Taliban, an ultra-conservative Islamic group, took control of the country and began imposing a strict and violent religious rule. *The Kite Runner* ends soon after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center by al-Qaeda terrorists, the subsequent U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, and the fall of the Taliban.

EXTRA CREDIT

Kites. Hosseini was inspired to write a short story that would later become *The Kite Runner* when he heard that the Taliban had banned kites in

Afghanistan. This seemed especially cruel and personal to him, as Hosseini, like Amir, grew up flying kites in Kabul.

Sohrab. Like Amir and Hassan, the young Hosseini's favorite literary character was the tragic son Sohrab from the ancient Persian poem *Shahnameh*.



PLOT SUMMARY

The narrator, **Amir**, grows up in a luxurious home in Kabul, Afghanistan, with his father **Baba**. They have two Hazara (an ethnic minority) servants, **Ali** and his son **Hassan**, who is Amir's closest playmate. Amir feels he is a disappointing son to Baba, but he is close to Baba's friend **Rahim Khan**. Amir and Hassan fly **kites** and read stories together, though Hassan does chores while Amir goes to school. One day three boys named **Assef**, **Wali**, and **Kamal** threaten Amir, but Hassan scares them away with his slingshot.

In the winter there is a big kite-fighting tournament where boys try to cut each other's kites with glass-covered strings, and then "kite runners" chase after the fallen kites. Amir wins the tournament, and then Hassan goes to retrieve the losing kite. When Amir goes after Hassan he finds him in an alley, trapped by Assef, Wali, and Kamal. Amir watches as Kamal and Wali hold Hassan down and Assef rapes him. Amir runs away, and later both he and Hassan pretend nothing has happened.

Amir and Hassan soon drift apart. Amir is tormented by guilt, and he decides to make Hassan leave the house. He hides some money under Hassan's mattress and tells Baba that he stole it, and Hassan doesn't deny it. Baba forgives Hassan, but Ali and Hassan leave the household.

In 1981, Baba and Amir flee Kabul, which has been invaded by the Soviets. They eventually make it to Pakistan, and months later move to Fremont, California. Baba works at a gas station and Amir finishes high school and then studies writing at college. Baba and Amir sell things at a flea market, where Amir starts noticing **Soraya**, the daughter of Baba's friend **General Taheri**. After much delaying, Amir starts courting her. Soon afterward Baba is diagnosed with lung cancer. Amir asks Baba if he will ask General Taheri to let him marry Soraya. General Taheri accepts, and Amir and Soraya get married soon after. Baba is pleased with Amir's marriage, and he dies a month later. Amir gets his first book published and he and Soraya start trying, unsuccessfully, to conceive. Meanwhile, the Soviets are driven out of Afghanistan.

One day Amir gets a call from Rahim Khan, who is dying and asks Amir to come to Pakistan. Once Amir arrives, Rahim Khan tells him about the horrors of the Taliban regime and war-torn Kabul. Rahim Khan says he had been watching Baba's house for a while, but then found Hassan and convinced him and his wife **Farzana** to come back to Kabul. Later Farzana had a boy, **Sohrab**. After Rahim Khan went to Pakistan he learned that Hassan and Farzana were executed by the Taliban, and Sohrab was sent to an orphanage.

Rahim Khan asks Amir to go to Kabul and find Sohrab, saying this is Amir's chance to "be good again." He also reveals that Baba was Hassan's true father. Amir agrees to go, and he finds the orphanage where Sohrab was supposed to be, but learns that a Taliban official took him away a month earlier. Amir (and his companion **Farid**) go to a soccer game, where at halftime the official they are looking for executes a man and woman.

Amir meets the official and the man calls in Sohrab, who has clearly been sexually abused. The official then reveals himself as Assef, and he beats Amir with his brass knuckles until Sohrab shoots him in the eye with his slingshot. Amir and Sohrab escape and Amir recovers in Pakistan. Amir then asks Sohrab to come back to the U.S. with him, and Sohrab hesitantly accepts.

Amir discovers it will be almost impossible for him to adopt Sohrab, and he tells him he might have to go back to an orphanage. Soraya figures out how to get Sohrab an American visa, but then Amir finds Sohrab has tried to kill himself. Sohrab survives, but stops speaking altogether. Amir brings Sohrab to California, but he remains silent and withdrawn. One day they are at a park

and some Afghans are flying kites. Amir buys one, and he and Sohrab fight another kite and cut it. Sohrab smiles, and Amir goes to run the kite for him.



CHARACTERS

Amir – The protagonist and narrator of the novel, a wealthy boy who grows up in Kabul, Afghanistan along with his father, **Baba**. Amir abuses his privileges over his servant and loyal friend, **Hassan**, and then fails to come to his aid when Hassan is being raped by local bullies after a kite-fighting tournament. The rest of the novel deals with Amir's guilt, his growing maturity (as he and Baba move to the U.S.), and his quest for redemption.

Baba – Amir's father, a larger-than-life figure with wild hair and a loud voice, who works hard and succeeds at all of his endeavors, but stands by his strict moral principles. Baba's great sin is committing adultery with **Ali's** wife, and he is **Hassan's** real father. Baba's many works of charity and the orphanage he builds are part of his attempts to redeem himself.

Hassan – Amir's childhood playmate and companion, a Hazara boy with a **cleft lip**. Hassan is an excellent kite runner, and is naturally intelligent, but illiterate because of his social class. He is always loyal to Amir, even when Amir betrays him. Hassan eventually marries **Farzana**, and has a son named **Sohrab**.

Sohrab – Hassan's son, a boy who is sent to an orphanage when Hassan and **Farzana** are killed. He is then taken from the orphanage and sexually abused by **Assef**, until **Amir** comes for him and brings him back to America. Sohrab is a symbol of all the terrible things that have happened to both the characters and the country of Afghanistan, but he also offers a chance for hope and redemption.

Ali – Hassan's father, a Hazara who was orphaned as a boy and then taken in by **Baba's** father and raised as Baba's playmate and servant. The lower half of Ali's face is paralyzed, and he was crippled in one leg by polio, but Ali remains cheerful and kind.

Assef – The antagonist of the novel, a blue-eyed, sadistic boy who idolizes Hitler, torments children with his brass knuckles, and later rapes **Hassan**. As an adult Assef joins the Taliban, where he is given free reign to exercise his violent and pedophilic nature.

Soraya – The daughter of **General Taheri**. As a young woman **Soraya** ran away with an Afghan man, "dishonoring" herself. **Amir** falls in love with her and they get married, and Soraya later becomes a teacher.

Rahim Khan – **Baba's** close friend and business associate, a kind man who often seems to understand the young **Amir** better than Baba does. Rahim Khan encourages Amir's writing, and as an old man he summons Amir back to Afghanistan for a chance to redeem himself by rescuing **Sohrab** from Afghanistan.

General Taheri – **Soraya's** father and **Baba's** friend, a former general in the old pre-soviet regime of Afghanistan, he is a conservative, traditional Afghan man who in the United States collects welfare and refuses to labor beneath his station in America.

Farid – A man who drives **Amir** back to Afghanistan from Pakistan. At first Farid is bitter and sarcastic towards Amir, but when he learns about **Sohrab** Farid becomes a loyal friend and helps Amir on his journey.

Sanaubar – **Hassan's** mother and **Ali's** wife, Sanaubar had a "dishonourable" reputation as a young woman. She despises Ali and leaves after Hassan is born, but then returns as an older woman to take care of **Sohrab**.

Jamila Taheri – **Soraya's** mother and **General Taheri's** wife, a woman who can sing beautifully and likes to complain about her health. She adores **Amir** after he marries Soraya (whom she had feared would never marry).

Wahid – **Farid's** brother, a man who is very poor and whose children are starving, and who's hospitality is such that he nonetheless feeds Amir before his own children.

Sofia Akrami – Amir's mother and **Baba's** wife, a college professor of royal blood who dies giving birth to Amir. Amir always believes that his father secretly hates him, at least a bit, for his role in his mother's death.

Kamal – One of **Assef's** cronies, a boy who is later raped by four men and then dies on the journey to Pakistan.

Wali – **Assef's** other bullying sidekick, **Wali** thinks raping **Hassan** is sinful, but he still helps hold him down.

Sakina – The woman who nursed both **Amir** and **Hassan**.

Karim – The man who drives **Amir** and **Baba** from Kabul to Pakistan.

Farzana – **Hassan's** wife, who has a stillborn baby and then gives birth to **Sohrab**.

Thomas and Betty Caldwell – An American couple who **Rahim Khan** says could take care of **Sohrab** in Peshawar, but who might not actually exist.

Zaman – The director of the makeshift orphanage in Kabul, who occasionally sells a child to **Assef** because he has no other choice and because the money he makes from the sales helps him to feed the other children.

Dr. Faruqi – Amir's doctor in Peshawar, who Amir thinks of as "Armand."

Raymond Andrews – An adoption official in the American embassy in Pakistan, who discourages **Amir** from trying to adopt **Sohrab**.

Omar Faisal – An immigration lawyer who tries to help **Amir** adopt **Sohrab**.

Dr. Kumar – The doctor who **Baba** pays to fix **Hassan's** cleft lip.

Daoud Khan – The cousin of **King Nadir Shah**, who overthrows the Afghan monarchy in a bloodless coup in 1973.

Zahir Shah – The last king of Afghanistan, who rules for 40 years.

Mullah Fatiulla Khan – Amir's religious teacher, who says that drinking alcohol is punishable by damnation.

Hamid Karzai – The new president of Afghanistan after the Americans and their allies drive out the Taliban.



THEMES

BETRAYAL

The betrayal of a loyal friend by a wealthier, more corrupt "master" is a recurring motif in *The Kite Runner*, and **Amir** and **Baba's** feelings of guilt for their betrayals drive much of the novel's action. The central betrayal comes when Amir watches and does nothing as **Hassan**, who has always stood up for Amir in the past, gets raped by **Assef**. Amir then worsens the betrayal by driving **Ali** and Hassan from the household. Later in the book, Amir learns that **Baba** also betrayed his own best friend and servant – **Ali**, Hassan's father – by fathering a child (Hassan) with **Ali's** wife **Sanaubar**. This knowledge comes as another kind of betrayal for Amir, who had always hero-worshipped **Baba** and is shocked to learn of his father's flaws.

These low points in the two men's lives create a sense of tension and guilt throughout the novel, but the betrayals of Amir and **Baba** also lead to quests for redemption that bring about some good in the end – as **Baba** leads a principled, charitable life, and Amir rescues **Sohrab** from **Assef**.

REDEMPTION

The quest for redemption makes up much of the novel's plot, and expands as a theme to include both the personal and the political. Throughout his childhood, **Amir's** greatest struggle was to redeem himself to **Baba** for "killing" his mother during childbirth, and for growing up a disappointing son who was unlike **Baba** himself. After **Hassan's** rape, Amir spends the rest of his life trying to redeem himself for his betrayal of his loyal friend. This ultimately culminates in Amir's return to Afghanistan and his attempts to save and adopt Hassan's son **Sohrab**.

After Amir learns of **Baba's** betrayal of **Ali**, Amir realizes that **Baba** was probably trying to redeem his adultery through his many charitable activities and strong principles in later life. Amir is also able to find a kind of redemption in his bloody fight with **Assef** (Hassan's rapist), and his adoption of **Sohrab**. **Hosseini** subtly connects these personal quests for redemption to Afghanistan itself. Despite its violent and corrupted past, **Hosseini** hopes for a redemption for his country someday.

FATHERS AND CHILDREN

The most important relationships in *The Kite Runner* involve fathers and their children, usually sons. The central relationship is between **Baba** and **Amir**, as Amir struggles to win his father's affections and Baba tries to love a son who is nothing like him. When Amir learns that Baba is **Hassan's** father as well, he realizes that Baba also had to hide his natural affection for Hassan – an illegitimate son who was also a servant, but was in many ways more like Baba than Amir was. Later in the book the relationship between **Soraya** and her father **General Taheri** becomes important as well. As a girl the independent Soraya had rebelled against her strict, traditional father.

Sohrab becomes the “son” figure of the latter part of the novel. We never see Sohrab and Hassan together, but it is explained that Hassan was a good father before his death. The father/son relationship then becomes a principal part of Amir's redemption and growth, as he tries to become a father to Sohrab by rescuing him from **Assef** and adopting him. The novel ends without a neat conclusion, but it does imply that Sohrab will begin to open up to Amir, and that Amir will continue to find redemption in fatherhood.

VIOLENCE AND RAPE

Rape occurs several times in *The Kite Runner* as the ultimate act of violence and violation (short of murder) that drastically changes the lives of both the characters and the country. The central act of the novel is **Amir** watching **Hassan's** rape by **Assef**. There are more peripheral instances of rape as well – it is implied that **Kamal**, one of Hassan's tormentors, was raped by soldiers, and **Baba** saves a woman from being raped by a Russian soldier. Both these examples link the theme with the “rape” of Afghanistan by violence and war, beginning with the external Russian oppressors, then the bloody infighting of different Afghan groups, and then the brutal Taliban regime.

The rape of **Sohrab** is never shown, but it reflects Hassan's horror and his role as a “sacrificial lamb” – but with Sohrab, unlike Hassan, Amir is finally able to stand up to Assef and prevent more violence. As Baba told the young Amir, the only real crime is theft, and rape is a theft of safety and selfhood, the ultimate violence and violation, and in *The Kite Runner* this brutality is inflicted upon both individual characters and the country of Afghanistan.

MEMORY AND THE PAST

Throughout *The Kite Runner*, many characters are haunted by memories of the past. **Amir** is constantly troubled by his memory of **Hassan's** rape and his own cowardice, and it is this memory that leads Amir to his final quest for redemption. **Baba** is also haunted by his past sins of adultery with **Ali's** wife **Sanaubar**, and his memories cause him to be both strict with Amir and charitable and selfless with his work and money. **Sohrab** then becomes another character tortured by past traumas – his abuse at **Assef's** hands – as he flinches when Amir tries to touch him, and attempts suicide when he thinks Amir is going to abandon him.

There is also another kind of memory in the novel, which is nostalgia for good things. Amir remembers his good times with Hassan as a child, and the old, beautiful Kabul before it was destroyed by war. These good memories bring sadness for what was lost, but also hope for what could be.

POLITICS AND SOCIETY

The movements of history are constantly interfering with the private lives of characters in *The Kite Runner*. The Soviet War in Afghanistan interrupts **Amir's** peaceful, privileged life and forces him and **Baba** to flee to America. After the fall of the USSR, Afghanistan continues to be ravaged by violence, and when Amir does finally return to find **Sohrab**, the Taliban regime rules the country with violent religious laws. It is the Taliban that give **Assef** an outlet for his sadistic tendencies, and it is this political state that facilitates Amir's final meeting with Assef and his redemptive beating.

Hosseini also critiques the sexism and racism of Afghan society throughout the book. **Ali** and **Hassan** are Hazaras, an ethnic group that most Afghans (who are Pashtun) consider inferior, though Hosseini makes it clear that Hassan is Amir's equal and in many ways morally and intellectually superior. When Amir starts courting **Soraya**, both Hosseini and Soraya comment on the double standard that Afghan society holds for women and men. Men are forgiven for

being promiscuous or flirting, but women will be shamed and gossiped about for life.



SYMBOLS

THE CLEFT LIP

Hassan's cleft lip is one of his most defining physical features, and a symbol of the economic and social disparity between Hassan and **Amir**, as **Ali** doesn't have money to pay for the surgery to fix the lip. It is **Baba** who ends up paying for the surgery, where the cleft lip then becomes a symbol of Baba's secret parental love for Hassan. At the novel's climax, **Assef** splits Amir's lip in two with his brass knuckles, giving Amir a deformity much like Hassan's. This symbolizes that Amir has become something like Hassan at last – brave and willing to stand up for someone else – and so Amir can find some redemption in the injury.

KITES

Kites are obviously an important image in *The Kite Runner*, and for **Amir** they act as symbols of both his childhood happiness and his betrayal of Hassan. When he tries to remember something happy in the fuel truck, Amir immediately thinks of his carefree days flying kites with **Hassan**. After Hassan's rape, however, kites become a reminder of Amir's betrayal and guilt. In the novel's political theme, kites represent Afghanistan's “glory days” of the monarchy, as kite-flying is later banned by the Taliban. At the end of the book Amir flies a kite with **Sohrab**, symbolizing hope for redemption for both Amir's sins and Afghanistan's.

THE MONSTER IN THE LAKE

On the morning of the big kite-fighting tournament, **Hassan** tells **Amir** about a dream he had about the two of them at Lake Ghargha. In the dream there is a huge crowd of people who are all afraid to swim because there is supposedly a monster in the lake. Then Amir and Hassan jump into the lake and swim across, proving that there is no monster after all, and the people cheer and rename the lake “Lake of Amir and Hassan, Sultans of Kabul.” Amir wonders if Hassan invented the dream to cheer him up because of his nervousness, as Hassan later tells him “There's no monster, just a beautiful day.” The tragedy of this is that later that same day Hassan gets raped by Assef. There was a monster after all, but the novel allows for several interpretations of just what the monster in the lake could be – **Assef**, Amir's jealousy and desire for **Baba's** approval, or Amir himself.



QUOTES

CHAPTER 1

That was a long time ago, but it's wrong what they say about the past, I've learned, about how you can bury it. Because the past claws its way out. Looking back now, I realize I have been peeking into that deserted alley for the last twenty-six years.

–Amir



CHAPTER 3

Because the truth of it was, I always felt like Baba hated me a little. And why not? After all, I *had* killed his beloved wife, his beautiful princess, hadn't I? The least I could have done was to have had the decency to have turned out a little more like him. But I hadn't turned out like him.

–Amir



“And where is he headed?” Baba said. “A boy who won't stand up for himself becomes a man who can't stand up to anything.”

–Baba



CHAPTER 4

The curious thing was, I never thought of Hassan and me as friends either... Never mind that we spent entire winters flying kites, running kites. Never mind that to me, the face of Afghanistan is that of a boy with a thin-boned frame... a boy with Chinese doll face perpetually lit by a harellipped smile. Never mind any of these things. Because history isn't easy to overcome. Neither is religion. In the end, I was a Pashtun and he was a Hazara, I was Sunni and he was Shi'a, and nothing was ever going to change that.

–Amir



CHAPTER 6

I was going to win, and I was going to run that last kite. Then I'd bring it home and show it to Baba. Show him once and for all that his son was worthy.

–Amir



CHAPTER 7

He stopped, turned. He cupped his hands around his mouth. "For you a thousand times over!" he said. Then he smiled his Hassan smile and disappeared around the corner. The next time I saw him smile unabashedly like that was twenty-six years later, in a faded Polaroid photograph.

–Amir, Hassan



"But before you sacrifice yourself for him, think about this: Would he do the same for you? Have you ever wondered why he never includes you in games when he has guests? Why he only plays with you when no one else is around? I'll tell you why, Hazara. Because to him, you're nothing but an ugly pet..." "Amir agha and I are friends," Hassan said.

–Assef, Hassan



In the end, I ran. I ran because I was a coward. I was afraid of Assef and what he would do to me... I actually *aspired* to cowardice, because the alternative, the real reason I was running, was that Assef was right: Nothing was free in this world. Maybe Hassan was the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay, to win Baba. Was it a fair price? The answer floated to my conscious mind before I could thwart it: He was just a Hazara, wasn't he?

–Amir



CHAPTER 8

I thought about Hassan's dream, the one about us swimming in the lake. *There is no monster*, he'd said, *just water*. Except he'd been wrong about that. There was a monster in the lake... I was that monster.

–Amir



CHAPTER 9

I flinched, like I'd been slapped... Then I understood: This was Hassan's final sacrifice for me... And that led to another understanding: Hassan knew. He knew I'd seen everything in that alley, that I'd stood there and done nothing.

He knew I had betrayed him and yet he was rescuing me once again, maybe for the last time.

–Amir



CHAPTER 10

In the morning, Jalaluddin... would probably think we'd gone out for a stroll or a drive. We hadn't told him. You couldn't trust anyone in Kabul anymore – for a fee or under threat, people told on each other, neighbor on neighbor, child on parent, brother on brother, servant on master, friend on friend.

–Amir



CHAPTER 11

Long before the *Roussi* army marched into Afghanistan, long before villages were burned and schools destroyed... Kabul had become a city of ghosts for me. A city of harellipped ghosts.

America was different. America was a river, roaring along, unmindful of the past. I could wade into this river, let my sins drown to the bottom, let the waters carry me someplace far. Someplace with no ghosts, no memories, and no sins.

–Amir



CHAPTER 12

I envied her. Her secret was out. Spoken. Dealt with. I opened my mouth and almost told her how I'd betrayed Hassan, lied, driven him out, and destroyed a forty-year relationship between Baba and Ali. But I didn't.

–Amir



CHAPTER 13

Listening to them, I realized how much of who I was, what I was, had been defined by Baba and the marks he had left on people's lives... Now he was gone. Baba couldn't show me the way anymore; I'd have to find it on my own.

–Amir



As I drove, I wondered why I was different. Maybe it was because I had been raised by men; I hadn't grown up around women and had never been exposed firsthand to the double standard with which Afghan society sometimes treated them... But I think a big part of the reason I didn't care about Soraya's past was that I had one of my own. I knew all about regret.

–Amir



CHAPTER 14

My suspicions had been right all those years. He knew about Assef, the kite, the money, the watch with the lightning bolt hands. He had always known. *Come. There is a way to be good again*, Rahim Khan had said on the phone just before hanging up.

–Amir



CHAPTER 16

"The war is over, Hassan," I said. "There's going to be peace. *Inshallah*, and happiness and calm. No more rockets, no more killing, no more funerals!" But he just turned off the radio and asked if he could get me anything before he went to bed.

A few weeks later, the Taliban banned kite fighting. And two years later, in 1998, they massacred the Hazaras in Mazar-i-Sharif.

—Rahim Khan



CHAPTER 17

"You know, Rahim Khan said, "one time, when you weren't around, your father and I were talking... 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?"

—Rahim Khan



CHAPTER 18

As it turned out, Baba and I were more alike than I'd ever known. We had both betrayed the people who would have given their lives for us. And with that came this realization: that Rahim Khan had summoned me here to atone not just for my sins but for Baba's too.

—Amir



CHAPTER 19

He pointed to an old man dressed in ragged clothes trudging down a dirt path, a large burlap sack filled with scrub grass tied to his back. "That's the real Afghanistan, Agha sahib. That's the Afghanistan I know. You? You've *always* been a tourist here, you just didn't know it."

—Amir, Farid



CHAPTER 21

"How much more do you need to see? Let me save you the trouble: Nothing that you remember has survived. Best to forget."

"I don't want to forget anymore," I said.

—Farid, Amir



CHAPTER 22

What was the old saying about the bad penny? My past was like that, always turning up. His name rose from the deep and I didn't want to say it, as if uttering it might conjure him. But he was already here, in the flesh, sitting less than ten feet from me, after all these years. His name escaped my lips: "Assef."

—Amir



Another rib snapped, this time lower. What was so funny was that, for the first time since the winter of 1975, I felt at peace. I laughed because I saw that, in some hidden nook in the corner of my mind, I'd even been looking forward to this... My body was broken – just how badly I wouldn't find out until later – but I felt *healed*.

—Amir



CHAPTER 23

I loved him because he was my friend, but also because he was a good man, maybe even a great man. And this is what I want you to understand, that good, *real* good, was born out of your father's remorse. Sometimes, I think everything he did, feeding the poor on the streets, building the orphanage, giving money to friends in need, it was all his way of redeeming himself. And that, I believe, is what true redemption is, Amir jan, when guilt leads to good.

—Rahim Khan



Your father, like you, was a tortured soul, Rahim Khan had written. Maybe so. We had both sinned and betrayed. But Baba had found a way to create good out of his remorse. What had I done, other than take my guilt out on the very same people I had betrayed, and then try to forget it all?

—Amir



CHAPTER 25

"Sohrab, I can't give you your old life back, I wish to God I could. But I can take you with me. That was what I was coming in the bathroom to tell you. You have a visa to go to America, to live with me and my wife. It's true. I promise."

—Amir



If someone were to ask me today whether the story of Hassan, Sohrab, and me ends with happiness, I wouldn't know what to say. Does anybody's?

—Amir



I looked at Hassan, showing those two missing teeth, sunlight slanting on his face. Baba's other half. The unentitled, unprivileged half. The half who had inherited what had been pure and noble in Baba. The half that, maybe, in the most secret recesses of his heart, Baba had thought of as his true son... Then I realized something: That last thought had brought no sting with it... I wondered if that was how forgiveness budded, not with the fanfare of epiphany, but with pain gathering its things, packing up, and slipping away unannounced in the middle of the night.

—Amir



"Do you want me to run that kite for you?"

His Adam's apple rose and fell as he swallowed... I thought I saw him nod.

"For you, a thousand times over," I heard myself say.

Then I turned and ran.

It was only a smile, nothing more... A tiny thing... But I'll take it. With open arms. Because when spring comes, it melts the snow one flake at a time, and maybe I just witnessed the first flake melting.

—Amir





SUMMARY & ANALYSIS

CHAPTER 1

The book opens in 2001, with the narrator (**Amir**) remembering something that happened in 1975, an unnamed event in an alley that “made him who he is today.” The memory of this event has continued to haunt Amir for years despite his attempts to escape it. Amir explains that he received a call the summer before from an old friend in Pakistan named **Rahim Khan**. Amir thinks of Rahim Khan’s voice as symbolic of Amir’s own past “unatoned sins.” Rahim Khan asks Amir to come to see him in Pakistan, and tells Amir “there is a way to be good again.”

Amir grew up in Kabul, Afghanistan, but he lives in San Francisco now. He walks around Golden Gate Park and watches two **kites** flying overhead. The kites make Amir think of his past in Afghanistan, and especially a boy named **Hassan**, a “kite runner” with a **cleft lip**.

Hosseini opens with the themes of memory, guilt for betrayal, and hope for redemption. Amir is an adult living in America and looking back on his youth in Afghanistan – opening with this scene shows how important memory and history will be in the novel. The details are still vague, but it is clear that some past event in Afghanistan still haunts Amir, and that he is looking to “be good again” – to redeem himself somehow.



Kites are introduced here as both reminders of Amir’s past guilt and symbols of hope. The story will then jump back in time, and be told as Amir’s memory – memory is very important, as it haunts Amir and informs the rest of life.



CHAPTER 2

As children in Afghanistan, **Amir** and **Hassan** would climb trees and reflect sunlight into their neighbors’ homes to annoy them, or else shoot walnuts at a neighbor’s dog with a slingshot. Hassan never wanted to do these things, but he would not deny Amir if Amir asked him, and if they were caught Hassan would always take the blame.

Amir lives in a mansion in the wealthy Wazir Akbar Khan district of Kabul with his father, **Baba**. The house is decorated lavishly and always filled with Baba’s friends and the smells of smoke and cinnamon. In the living room is a photo of Amir’s grandfather hunting deer with the old king **King Nadir Shah**.

Outside **Amir**’s house is a little mud hut where **Hassan** and his father **Ali** live. Though Amir and Hassan play together every day, Amir has only entered Hassan’s hut a few times. Amir explains that neither he nor Hassan grew up with a mother – Amir’s mother died giving birth to him, and Hassan’s mother ran away after he was born. Amir is one year older than Hassan.

Amir begins his recollections with more characterization than plot, as Hosseini introduces the characters. From the start we see that Hassan and Amir are inseparable, but that Hassan is the more honest and courageous of the two.



Amir’s social and familial standing are revealed – he is a wealthy, privileged child being raised by a single father with powerful connections. The smells are an image of Amir’s memory and nostalgia for his happy childhood.



Both the contrasts and the similarities between Hassan and Amir are made clear here – though Hassan is Amir’s closest companion, also raised by a single father, and similar in age, Hassan is still Amir’s servant and lives in drastically different conditions from Amir’s privileged upbringing.



One day **Hassan** and **Amir** were out walking when a soldier confronted them and claimed to have had sex with Hassan’s mother, whose name was **Sanaubar**. Sanaubar and **Ali** had been a strange couple – Sanaubar was nineteen years younger than Ali, beautiful, and had a bad reputation. Ali, on the other hand, was a devout Muslim whose face was partially paralyzed, and who walked with a bad limp because of polio. People thought that Sanaubar’s father arranged her marriage to Ali to restore her honor.

Some of the children mock **Ali**’s appearance and limp, and call him **Babalu**, or Boogeyman. Ali and **Hassan** are Hazaras, an ethnic minority in Afghanistan that is looked down on by the Pashtun majority (**Amir** and **Baba** are Pashtuns). The Hazaras have more Asian features, while the Pashtuns appear more Arabic. Another division between them is that the Hazaras are Shi’a Muslims, while the Pashtuns are Sunni. **Amir** once read a history book about a Hazara uprising in the nineteenth century, and how the Pashtuns put down the rebellion with “unspeakable violence.”

Amir returns to describing **Sanaubar**, and he says that she mocked **Ali**’s appearance just as much as the Pashtun children did, but that Ali never retaliated with anger against his tormentors. Amir says that **Hassan** was born smiling, and had a **cleft lip**. Sanaubar saw her son, mocked him, and then ran away with a group of traveling entertainers five days later. **Baba** hired the same nursing woman that fed Amir to feed Hassan, and Ali often says that there is a special kinship between people who “fed from the same breast.” Amir says his first word was “Baba,” and that Hassan’s first word was “Amir.” Amir muses that perhaps everything that would later happen was already foretold by those two words.

CHAPTER 3

Amir describes **Baba** and relates some memories of him. There was a legend that Baba had once wrestled a black bear with his bare hands. If it was anyone else Amir would have called it a fable, but with Baba it was probably true. Amir describes him as a “force of nature,” a huge man with a wild beard and hair.

Amir expands on Hassan’s past and brings in some Afghan social constructs, particularly the gender double standard dealing with pre-marital promiscuity. Hosseini will critique Afghan society on this later in the novel. Ali is introduced as a saint-like figure, crippled and poor but religious, humble, and kind.



Hosseini introduces the Hazara and Pashtun conflict, which will be crucial to the plot. The Hazaras are shown as an oppressed minority – this is why Ali and Hassan are assumed to be “servant-class” despite their closeness with Baba and Amir, and why the wealthier Pashtun children mock Ali’s appearance. This “unspeakable violence” is only in history books for now, but soon it will return to Afghanistan.



Hassan is also portrayed as an almost saintlike figure, born smiling. Sanaubar leaves Ali in the first betrayal of the novel. The closeness of Amir and Hassan is emphasized by the fact that they “fed from the same breast,” and so are basically brothers. This makes the fact that one is wealthy and one is a servant seem even more strange and poignant, and shows how difficult it is to overcome old differences of religion and class in Afghanistan. Their first words imply that conflict will arise from Amir’s love of Baba and Hassan’s loyalty to Amir.



It is significant that Amir opens his description of Baba with this legend – both showing that Baba is a larger-than-life figure, and that he has spent his life wrestling with things, as the bear will symbolize other struggles later.



Baba always succeeded where other people said he would fail. He had no training as an architect, but he had designed and built an orphanage and paid for it himself. Amir describes how proud he was when the orphanage opened, and how he was jealous when Baba would sometimes praise **Hassan** over **Amir**.

Baba has overcome many challenges and become successful – he is a man of force and action, and it is clear how much Amir admires him. Amir’s jealousy surrounding Baba’s affections is first revealed here.



More of **Baba**’s successes included business – people thought he would fail, but he became one of the most successful men in Kabul. They also thought he could not marry well, but he had married **Amir**’s mother, **Sofia Akrami**, who was beautiful, well-educated, and of royal blood. Amir describes himself as the “glaring exception” to Baba’s successes – something Baba could not control to his liking. Baba saw the world in black and white, and Amir could not help loving him without fearing him, and possibly hating him a little too.

Amir reveals himself as a disappointing son to Baba, though he doesn’t explain why yet. Baba sees things clearly as challenges to be overcome, and yet he has been unable to be as “successful” at fatherhood as he was in business or marriage. Amir hints at the complexity of their relationship here. This father-son connection will be one of the most important elements in the book.



One day at school **Mullah Fatiulla Khan**, a religious teacher at **Amir**’s school, taught the children that drinking alcohol was a sin punishable by damnation. Amir tells **Baba** this as Baba pours himself a glass of whiskey. Baba calls the religious teachers “bearded idiots” and says “God help us all if Afghanistan ever falls into their hands.” Baba explains that the only real sin is theft – to lie is to rob someone of the truth, and to kill is to rob someone of their life. Baba has a strong moral sense, but it is independent of the stricter Muslim rules.

Hosseini introduces another social divide here, between the conservative, fundamentalist Muslims (like Amir’s teacher) and more liberal Afghans like Baba. Baba’s words foreshadow the brutal Taliban regime that is to come – when these same fundamentalists take over Afghanistan and institute a violent religious law. Baba’s speech about theft will resonate throughout the novel, and deals with the theme of betrayal.



Amir constantly tries to please **Baba**, but usually feels like a failure. He can’t help but think that Baba hates him a little for “killing” his mother in childbirth. The only skill Amir feels he has is reading and memorizing poems, and Baba looks down on such pursuits. Amir tries to please Baba by playing soccer, Baba’s favorite sport, but Amir is a terrible player. Once Amir goes with Baba to a *Buzkashi* (the national Afghan sport, similar to polo) tournament, but he cries when a rider gets trampled and Baba cannot hide his scorn for Amir’s tears.

Amir feels he has betrayed Baba by “killing” his mother, and is constantly trying to redeem himself by becoming a better son, though it is clear that their natures are very different. The things Amir admires most in his father – his strong principles, forceful success in all his ventures, and love of sport – are the things Amir most lacks. Amir’s desire to please Baba will lead to conflict later.



Rahim Khan, **Baba**’s friend and business colleague, seems to understand **Amir** better than Baba. Amir overhears him encouraging Baba to respect Amir’s love of books, and to accept that he cannot make Amir exactly like himself. Baba says that Amir seems unable to stand up for himself, and he worries that he won’t be able to stand up for anything when he becomes an adult. Baba says that sometimes he can’t believe that Amir is his son.

Rahim Khan acts as a more understanding father-figure to Amir here and later in the novel, one who is willing to nurture Amir’s love of reading and lack of forcefulness. Baba’s worries undercut Amir’s own search for courage and approval, and will resonate later in Amir’s life.



CHAPTER 4

The story shifts to 1933, the year that **Baba** was born and **Zahir Shah** became king of Afghanistan. In that same year two young men went driving while drunk and high and killed a Hazara couple – **Ali**’s parents. The killers were brought before **Amir**’s grandfather, who was a respected judge, and he ordered them to enlist in the army. He then adopted the orphaned **Ali** into his own home. **Ali** grew up as a servant, but also as **Baba**’s playmate.

Hosseini begins to connect the private lives of the characters with the political history of Afghanistan. This date is significant because Baba’s fate (and that of the other characters) will become bound with the fate of the Afghan political climate. Baba and Ali grew up in a similar situation to Amir and Hassan.



They are still close, but **Baba** never calls **Ali** his friend and **Amir** never thinks of **Hassan** as his friend – their ethnic and religious divides seem too great. Nevertheless, when Amir thinks of Afghanistan he imagines **Hassan**’s face, and he remembers their childhood as one long playtime together. He describes some of their adventures, including watching a John Wayne movie and comparing him to the other Americans they had seen – the long-haired hippies that hung around Kabul.

Amir openly acknowledges that the divides between Hazara and Pashtun, Shi’a and Sunni seem insurmountable in Afghanistan, even by close companionship and love. Hosseini introduces the prevalence of American culture in Kabul at this time – this would be surprising to the average American reader used to the Afghanistan of the present day.



Despite their closeness, **Hassan** spends the day cleaning the house and preparing food while **Amir** goes to school in **Baba**’s fancy American car. **Hassan** is illiterate because of his servant class, but he is fascinated by stories. Amir often reads to him in an old cemetery atop a nearby hill, under the boys’ favorite pomegranate tree. In the trunk of the tree Amir had carved the words “Amir and Hassan, the sultans of Kabul.” Amir enjoys teasing **Hassan** when **Hassan** doesn’t understand a big word that Amir reads, and sometimes Amir makes up a meaning for it.

Baba is representative of this liberal, Americanized side of Afghanistan that will be eradicated in the years to come. The pomegranate tree, the hill, and Amir’s carved words all become etched in his memory as symbols of a happy childhood and his friendship with Hassan. These images will return later to remind Amir of his guilt, and also to inspire nostalgia in him for an Afghanistan at peace.



The boys’ favorite story is “**Rostam** and **Sohrab**,” in which the warrior **Rostam** kills his enemy in battle and then discovers it is his long-lost son **Sohrab**. It is a tragic story, but **Amir** feels that all fathers have a secret desire to kill their sons.

This story will echo throughout the novel as a symbol of the father-and-son relationships that are so important in The Kite Runner. Amir understands the love/hate nature of his relationship with Baba.



One day under the pomegranate tree **Amir** begins to make up his own story while pretending he is still reading out loud. **Hassan** says it is one of the best stories Amir has ever read to him. Amir is elated by this and that night he writes his first story, about a man whose tears turn into pearls, and who makes himself miserable so he can keep crying and become richer. The story ends with him atop a mountain of pearls, crying over the wife he has murdered.

Amir tries to show the story to **Baba** (who is talking with **Rahim Khan**), but **Baba** is uninterested. **Rahim Khan**, however, takes the story and offers to read it. At that moment Amir wishes **Rahim Khan** was his father, but then he feels immediately guilty.

Later that night **Rahim Khan** leaves **Amir** a note that says he has a "special talent," and that the story has an impressive use of irony. He encourages Amir to keep writing. Amir is exhilarated by the praise, and he wakes up **Hassan**, who is downstairs, and reads the story to him. **Hassan** says the story is wonderful and that Amir will be a great writer one day, but then **Hassan** wonders why the man in the story didn't just make himself cry by chopping onions. Amir is annoyed that **Hassan** thought of this and he didn't, and he thinks a cruel thought about **Hassan** as just an illiterate Hazara.

CHAPTER 5

That same night there is the sound of gunfire in the streets. **Amir** and **Hassan** are frightened, but **Ali** embraces them and says it is just people hunting ducks. Later Amir would learn that the gunfire symbolized the end of the Afghan monarchy – **Daoud Khan** had overthrown his cousin **King Zahir Shah** (while the king was abroad) in a bloodless coup. **Daoud Shah** instituted a republic and became president. Amir says that that night was the end of the old Afghanistan, though no one knew it yet.

Amir and **Hassan** distract themselves from a political radio show by going off to climb a tree, but on the way a group of boys attacks **Hassan** with rocks – **Assef**, **Kamal**, and **Wali**. **Assef** is a feared bully who carries a set of brass knuckles and loves to be cruel. Amir says that later he would realize **Assef** is a sociopath. **Assef** is one of the ones who mocks **Ali**, and calls Hazaras derogatory names.

Amir first recognizes his talent for storytelling here. The adult Amir is telling this story, so it is clear that his ability to write and tell stories will continue to develop and become part of the novel itself. Writing about his past guilt will become part of Amir's redemptive process. The story ends tragically just like "Rostam and Sohrab."



Amir again fails to please Baba. Though he has now "stood up for himself" by writing a story, it is not the kind of talent Baba wants in a son.



Rahim Khan acts as a kind of foil father-figure to Baba. He gives Amir the attention and praise he wants so badly, and is willing to nurture his unorthodox gifts. Amir again shows his selfishness and vanity – he always wants to be better than Hassan, and uses his wealth and education to put him down whenever Hassan proves himself cleverer or better. The Pashtun idea of Hazaras as inferior is deeply ingrained in Amir's subconscious.



Again the political intrudes on the private, and Amir makes it clear that the characters' lives are about to change, though he doesn't say how yet. Amir's idyllic childhood is about to change, and not for the better. Zahir Shah's reign lasted for forty years, and marked a time of peace for Afghanistan that has not been seen since.



Assef, the antagonist of the novel, first appears here. His arrival in the narrative is a sign of negative political change in the country as well, as Assef is bullying, violent, and hates Hazaras – like many of the Afghan governments to come.



Assef gloats about the new government, and says that his father knows **Daoud Khan**, the new president. **Assef** says the next time **Daoud Khan** comes over for dinner **Assef** will tell him about **Adolf Hitler**, and how **Hitler** was a great leader with the right ideas about ethnic purity. **Assef** says Afghanistan is the land of the Pashtuns, and he wants to purify it of the "dirty" Hazaras.

Amir tries to defuse the situation but **Assef** takes out his brass knuckles and says that Amir is making things worse by being friends with **Hassan**. Amir cannot help but think that **Hassan** is his servant, not his friend, but he immediately feels guilty for the thought. **Assef** is about to hit Amir when **Hassan** suddenly grabs a rock and aims his slingshot at **Assef's** face. **Hassan** politely asks **Assef** to leave them alone, or he will have to change his name to "One-Eyed **Assef**." **Assef** is shocked but scared, and he vows to get his revenge someday. The three boys leave, with **Kamal** and **Wali** amazed that their leader was humiliated by a Hazara. Amir and **Hassan** return home, trembling.

For a few years after **Daoud Khan's** coup, life seems to go back to normal, and there is hope of reform and economic growth. One winter (1974) **Ali** calls **Hassan** inside, saying that **Baba** wanted to speak with him. **Amir** describes how **Baba** got a present for **Hassan's** birthday every year. With **Baba** is a plastic surgeon named **Dr. Kumar**, and **Baba** explains that he is his birthday present this year – **Baba** will pay for the surgery to fix **Hassan's** cleft lip. Amir is jealous that **Baba** would do so much for **Hassan**. The surgery is a success, and by the next winter **Hassan's** cleft lip is just a faint scar.

CHAPTER 6

Winter is the best time of year for the children of Kabul, as school is closed because of snow and everyone spends their time flying kites. **Amir** finds the icy city beautiful, and flying kites together is when he and **Baba** are closest. **Baba** takes Amir and **Hassan** to a blind old man who makes the best kites. He always buys the same kites for Amir and **Hassan**, but Amir wishes **Baba** would buy a nicer kite for him than for **Hassan**.

Assef, though he is only a boy, suddenly seems to have more power because his father knows the new president. This is a sign of future events, when the violent will be given power over the weak. In Assef, Hosseini controversially equates the racism of some Afghans to that of Nazis in Germany.



Hassan again proves himself as brave and unwaveringly loyal to Amir, while Amir cannot help his selfishness and racial prejudice against Hassan. Amir is relieved that Hassan saves him from a beating, but the older, narrator Amir knows that his younger self partly believed Assef, and thought that Hazaras were inferior. This slingshot scene will recur much later in the novel, and Assef's vow of vengeance has powerful repercussions.



Hassan's cleft lip was a symbol of his contrast to Amir's privilege – Ali does not have the money to fix his son's deformity. The fact that Baba pays for the surgery will become important later, but also the fact that Hassan is briefly given the privileges of a Pashtun shows more upsetting of balances. Amir is again jealous of Hassan, and automatically bitter against him when he earns Baba's approval or sympathy.



The themes Hosseini has already introduced begin to come to a head as Amir introduces the kite tournament, and the novel's title shows that this event will be important. Once again Amir is desperate for Baba's approval, jealous whenever Hassan is treated as an equal rather than an inferior.



The highlight of the winter is the annual kite-fighting tournament, where boys go to war with their kites by covering the kite strings in broken glass and trying to cut their competitors' kites. When a string is cut and a kite drifts away, boys called "kite runners" chase the kite around the city trying to catch it when it falls. The last fallen kite of the tournament is a trophy.

Amir says that Hassan is the best kite runner in Kabul – he always seems to know exactly where a kite will fall and just waits there as the other boys scramble around the city. One day Hassan makes Amir wait under a tree for a kite, though Amir thinks they are wasting time and will lose the kite.

While they wait Amir tests Hassan's loyalty by asking him if he would eat dirt for Amir, but as he asks he feels he is being cruel. Hassan says that if Amir really wanted him to eat dirt, he would, and Amir is ashamed. Amir pretends it was just a joke, and at that moment the kite falls into Hassan's arms.

One night soon before the big kite tournament of 1975 Baba and Amir are sitting by the fire, talking, when Baba casually says that he thinks Amir will win the tournament this year. The words feel like an omen to Amir, and he becomes determined to win the tournament and win Baba's love and approval – when he was young, Baba himself won the kite tournament. Amir thinks that if he wins, Baba will finally forgive him for "killing" his mother in childbirth.

The night before the tournament Hassan and Amir are playing *panjpar*, a card game. In the other room the radio is on, with someone talking about foreign investments and getting television in Kabul. Amir promises to buy Hassan a color TV someday. Amir can't help pitying Hassan for his shack and servant status, but Hassan seems to read his mind and affirms that he likes where he lives.

Amir first introduces the concept of "kite running," which gives the novel its title. Her kites begin to symbolize Amir's idyllic childhood, his relationship with Baba (as they are closest when they fly kites together), and his friendship with Hassan.



The young Hassan is essentially a flat, saintlike character, a foil to Amir's selfishness and inner turmoil, a loyal friend despite Amir's betrayals. Hassan seems to have an innate, almost mystical feeling for the kites.



Amir again tries to show his superiority over Hassan. He always feels guilty after situations like these, but the older Amir recognizes that they are, at their root, similar to the event that will later haunt his memory.



Amir's desire for Baba's love and approval – and his quest to "redeem" himself to Baba for "killing" his mother – come to a head and focus on this one event. Winning the kite tournament and running the losing kite become tangible things that Amir can reach for and hope that they will bring him and Baba together.



There is still hope for modernization and progress in Afghanistan at this point in its political history. Hassan seems to see through Amir's selfish thoughts, and again acts as his foil – Hassan is sure of his place in the world, and of his moral principles, while Amir is constantly in turmoil.



CHAPTER 7

On the morning of the tournament, Hassan tells Amir about the dream he had the night before. In the dream the two of them were at Ghargha Lake, along with their fathers and thousands of other people. Everyone was afraid to swim because they thought there was a monster in the lake, but then Amir jumped in and Hassan followed. They swim out to the middle and everyone sees that there was no monster after all. They rename the lake "Lake of Amir and Hassan, Sultans of Kabul." Amir is nervous that morning and so he is curt with Hassan, calling it a "dumb dream."

It is a clear, beautiful day as the boys gather in Amir's neighborhood for the tournament. Baba and Rahim Khan sit on the roof to watch. Amir is so nervous that he almost wants to quit the tournament, but Hassan reminds him that "there's no monster," and Amir is again amazed at Hassan's intuition. Amir wonders if Hassan made up his dream just to comfort him. He does feel a little better, and they start to fly their kite.

The tournament lasts for hours, but Amir (and Hassan, who controls the spool of string) do well and keep flying. One blue kite in particular cuts many of its opponents, and Amir keeps his eye on it. By the afternoon it is just Amir and the blue kite left in the running.

Amir prays that he might win and so redeem himself to Baba. Amir tricks the blue kite into a bad position and then cuts it, winning the tournament. Amir and Hassan cheer and embrace, and then Amir sees Baba on the roof yelling and clapping, and he feels that it is the greatest moment of his life so far. Hassan promises to bring back the kite for Amir, and as he runs off he says "for you a thousand times over!"

Amir reels in his kite and accepts everyone's praise, but he wants to wait until he has the blue kite before he meets Baba. He imagines the two of them like Rostam and Sohrab, father and son locking eyes dramatically. Amir runs off to look for Hassan, and he asks some neighbors if they have seen him.

Hassan's dream will become a symbol of both Amir's betrayal and Hassan's optimism in the face of a cruel world. For now Hassan is brave, and he tries to comfort Amir in his nervousness – as usual, Hassan can read Amir's emotions perfectly. The name of the lake echoes the inscription on the pomegranate tree, as an emblem of Hassan and Amir's friendship and their happy childhood days.



Amir is nervous as Baba watches, because he has placed all his hope for Baba's approval in winning this tournament. Hassan tries to put things in perspective – it is just kite-flying on a beautiful day – but Amir is consumed as ever by his desire for Baba's love.



Amir and Hassan flying kites together becomes an image of the happier times of their friendship. The blue kite takes on a symbolic significance, and almost a character of its own, as Amir must defeat it to redeem himself to Baba.



Amir is ecstatic at his victory, and he feels he will surely win Baba's love if Hassan brings back the losing kite. Hassan's parting words are symbolic of his selflessness and devotion to Amir. They will come to haunt Amir for the rest of his life.



Amir wants everything to go just as he imagined it, and he dreams of a "happily-ever-after" relationship with Baba, where this one kite can fix everything. Rostam and Sohrab return as the archetypal father and son.



One old merchant seems suspicious that **Amir** is looking for a Hazara, but he finally tells Amir that he saw **Hassan** going south, chased by three boys. Amir searches everywhere and finally finds Hassan in an alleyway, holding the blue kite – which Amir thinks of as the “key to **Baba’s** heart” – and facing off against **Assef**, **Kamal**, and **Wali**. Amir watches from around the corner and doesn’t interrupt.

Assef tells **Hassan** that they will let him go if he hands over the blue kite. Hassan refuses, as he ran the kite fairly and must deliver it to **Amir**. Assef mocks him and says that Amir would not be so loyal to Hassan if their positions were reversed. He says that Amir thinks of Hassan as a servant, not a friend. Hassan states that he and Amir are friends, and he picks up a rock. He throws the rock at Assef and the three boys jump onto Hassan. Amir still doesn’t cry out, and the older Amir, who is remembering this, thinks of how differently his life might have been if he had.

The older, narrator **Amir** suddenly remembers **Ali** talking about a Hazara woman called **Sakina**, who was the nursemaid of both Amir and **Hassan**. Ali says that there “is a brotherhood between people who’ve fed from the same breast.” Then Amir remembers going to a fortune teller with Hassan. When the fortune teller looks at Hassan’s face and hands, he suddenly seems distressed and he gives Hassan his money back. Then Amir remembers a dream where he is lost in a snowstorm until a familiar hand reaches for him. In the dream he takes the hand and the snow disappears, and the sky is clear and filled with beautiful kites.

The narrative returns to the alley. **Assef** and the others have pinned **Hassan** to the ground and removed his pants. **Wali** and **Kamal** say what Assef wants to do is sinful, but Assef says Hassan is only a Hazara, so it won’t matter. The two other boys still refuse, but they agree to hold Hassan down. Assef raises Hassan’s hips in the air and takes off his own pants. **Amir** catches a glimpse of Hassan’s face, and it looks resigned to its fate, like a sacrificial lamb.

Amir then describes the first day of *Eid-e-Qorban*, a Muslim celebration to honor **Abraham’s** almost-sacrifice of his son **Isaac**. On that day the mullah sacrifices a lamb, and **Ali** gives it a sugar cube to make death sweeter. Amir always can’t help watching the acceptance and understanding in the lamb’s eyes.

Amir realizes that he has condensed all his dreams and aspirations into this one blue kite. The dramatic center of the novel begins with this scene, and the alley recalls Amir’s first words of the book. This begins the memory that will haunt Amir’s future. Assef returns for his revenge.



Assef seems to understand the darker parts of Amir’s nature – he is basically telling the truth when he says that Amir is not as loyal to Hassan as Hassan is to him, and that Amir thinks of Hassan more as a servant than as a friend. The older Amir recognizes that this decision – to do nothing as Hassan is attacked – shaped the rest of his life.



At this traumatic memory the narrative becomes disjointed and connects with other memories. Amir’s guilt at betraying his “brother” is emphasized by Ali’s talk about Sakina. The fortune teller seems to foretell a dark future for Hassan, which was unclear to Amir until this moment. These sudden changes of scene show Amir’s (and Hosseini’s) writerly abilities, and emphasize the shocking nature of this memory.



The theme of rape is introduced here as the ultimate violation and violence. This image of the rich Pashtun boy raping the poor Hazara is symbolic of Amir’s cowardice and unwillingness to stand up for what is right, but also represents the violence coming to Afghanistan, when the weak will be raped by the violent and powerful.



Amir again shifts the narrative. Hassan is symbolic of a sacrificial lamb, like Jesus (for Christians) or Isaac for Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Hassan seems resigned to his fate as the betrayed friend and the victim of abused power.



Amir again returns to the memory of the alley. He realizes that he has been biting down on his fist so hard it is bleeding. He makes his decision then – the decision of “who to be” – and he runs away. Amir muses over why he did what he did – he was a coward who was afraid of Assef, but it was also something worse. He had thought that the blue kite was his key to winning **Baba’s** love, and Amir was willing to sacrifice **Hassan** for that love.

Fifteen minutes later **Amir** sees **Hassan** walking slowly past, and Amir pretends he has been looking for him. He can’t help checking the blue kite for rips. Hassan is crying and blood falls from between his legs, staining the snow, but he doesn’t say anything. He gives Amir the kite, and Amir wonders if Hassan knows what he saw. Both boys walk back and pretend nothing has happened.

When they arrive home, **Amir’s** reunion with **Baba** happens just as he imagined it would. Baba embraces him, and for a moment Amir weeps with joy and forgets what he has just done.

CHAPTER 8

For a week after the tournament, **Amir** hardly sees **Hassan**. He asks **Ali** where he is, and Ali says that Hassan just wants to stay in bed all day. Ali asks Amir if he knows what happened after the kite tournament, but Amir rudely denies knowing anything. Amir and **Baba** decide to take a trip to the city of Jalalabad and stay with Baba’s cousin – after Amir’s victory, he and Baba act much closer. Baba wants to take Hassan, but Amir says that he is too sick to go.

By the time **Baba** and **Amir** actually leave for Jalalabad, Baba has invited many family members and friends to come along too. In the car Amir’s relatives praise him for his kite fighting victory, but Amir gets no joy from their praise and in fact gets car sick, throwing up on his cousin’s dress. When they reach Jalalabad they have a large, traditional Afghan dinner. Baba boasts about Amir but again Amir feels sick. He wonders why he is not happy now that he has gotten what he wanted – Baba’s approval.

Amir’s decision that molds the rest of his life. There is a cruel irony in his motives for abandoning Hassan, as he “sacrifices” his friend for the blue kite and Baba’s approval, but it is clear in hindsight that Baba would have been pleased more if Amir had “stood up for himself” and done what was right, even in the face of danger.



This is the end of the era of childhood innocence, as Hassan bleeds like the sacrificial lamb. Amir is concerned only with the blue kite, his hope for Baba’s approval – though helping Hassan would have been more of a “Baba” action than winning a kite tournament.



At this point Amir feels almost justified in sacrificing Hassan for Baba, but his betrayal will soon poison any pleasure he might get from his father’s approval.



At first it seems that Amir got what he wanted in sacrificing Hassan, as Baba does act like more of a loving and approving father for a while. Amir does not know how to deal with his guilt, however, so he tries to avoid Hassan, and is rude in his unhappiness.



The irony in Amir’s plight continues as Amir gets just what he had wanted – Baba’s praise and approval – but is now unable to enjoy it because of his guilt for betraying Hassan. Amir’s car sickness begins here, a malady that Baba will later see as a sign of weakness, and which seems to be associated with Amir’s guilt.



That night all the men sleep in the same room, but **Amir** lies awake tossing and turning. He says out loud that he watched **Hassan** get raped, but no one hears him. He thinks about Hassan's dream about the **monster in the lake**, and Amir feels that he is the monster. He says that this was the night he became an insomniac.

Amir tries to free himself of his guilt by confessing aloud, but no one hears. He starts to realize the terrible thing he has done, but he is still too afraid to tell anyone – unless they are sleeping.



When **Amir** and **Baba** return to Kabul, **Hassan** asks Amir to go up to their favorite hill. They sit under the pomegranate tree and Amir is sickened by the words he had once carved in the tree. Hassan asks Amir to read to him, but Amir says he has changed his mind and wants to go home, and the two boys walk back down in silence.

Everything has been poisoned by Amir's betrayal, and the tree carving – the sign of his happy childhood with Hassan – makes him sick now. Amir still tries to forget his guilt by avoiding Hassan instead of trying to make things right.



The rest of the winter passes with **Amir** avoiding **Hassan** and pretending his new, close relationship with **Baba** will last forever, even though it is only held together by something as fragile as a **kite**. Hassan keeps trying to rekindle their friendship. One day he asks Amir what he has done wrong, and why they don't play anymore, and Amir tells Hassan to stop harassing him. After that, they avoid each other, but Amir still feels suffocated by Hassan's presence and the constant reminders of Hassan's loyalty and Amir's own betrayal.

Amir cannot enjoy his new, closer relationship with Baba because of his guilt. Here the kite becomes a symbol of the fragile thing Amir sacrificed so much for, and how all the pain he has caused undercuts the happiness he might have gained. Hassan is recovering from his trauma faster than Amir is recovering from his guilt. Amir is unable to avoid Hassan all the time, as Hassan is still part of the house.



One day while they are gardening, **Amir** asks **Baba** if he has ever thought about getting new servants. Baba is furious at the question and says that he will never replace **Ali**, and that **Hassan** is not going anywhere. After that things grow cool again between Baba and Amir. Amir starts school, and he uses his homework as an excuse to spend long hours in his room alone.

It is Amir's guilt that causes him to ask this question, which in turn makes Baba ashamed of Amir. In this way Amir loses the happiness he had gained and Baba's approval through his betrayal. Baba clearly does not think of Ali and Hassan as "servants" as much as Amir does.



One afternoon after school **Amir** asks **Hassan** to walk up the hill with him so Amir can read a story he has written. Hassan is excited to go, and they sit under their pomegranate tree. Amir suddenly picks up a pomegranate and asks Hassan what he would do if he threw it at him. Hassan says nothing, and Amir starts pelting him with pomegranates. He yells at Hassan to hit him back, but Hassan won't. Finally Hassan crushes a pomegranate against his own forehead and asks if Amir is satisfied. Then Hassan leaves, covered in red juice, and Amir starts to cry.

Amir wants Hassan to punish him, as this might make Amir feel better and return things to the way they were. But Hassan proves that his loyalty and love for Amir are unwavering, as he does not retaliate. This makes Amir feel even worse, as it proves that Amir himself is weak and cowardly as compared with Hassan – that is, Hassan is a better person than Amir, which has always been a source of jealousy for Amir.



That summer (1976) **Amir** turns thirteen, and **Baba** decides to throw him a huge party, though their relationship is growing distant again. Baba invites more than 400 people, most of whom Amir does not know. Many of the workers who set up the party do their jobs for free, as Baba has helped them out in the past.

Amir is still receiving the benefits of Baba's favor, though not actually enjoying them. The many people thanking Baba for his charity only highlight Amir's own shame for his selfishness and insecurity.



When the party begins **Baba** makes **Amir** greet each guest personally. **Assef** arrives and jokes politely with Baba, and he gives Amir a gift he says he picked out himself. Amir is visibly distressed by Assef's presence and subtle taunting, and Baba is embarrassed and has to apologize for his behavior. Amir escapes the crowd for a moment and hides behind a wall to open Assef's present – a biography of **Hitler**. He throws it away and sinks to the ground.

Again Amir's guilt makes him do something that embarrasses Baba, so he falls farther out of Baba's favor. Assef is remorseless for his actions, still believing that Hassan is "only a Hazara," and still idolizing Hitler.



As **Amir** sits alone in the dark, **Rahim Khan** approaches and starts to talk to him, saying that he was almost married once, to a Hazara girl. They would meet in secret and plan their future life together. When Rahim Khan told his family, his mother fainted and his father sent the girl and her family away. Rahim Khan says it was for the best in the end, as his family would have made his wife's life miserable.

Rahim Khan's story shows more of the injustices against Hazaras – instead of Rahim Khan's father moving, he sent away the whole Hazara family to spare a scandal. Rahim Khan also implies that sometimes the prejudices of the world are too strong, and not even love can overcome them.



Rahim Khan then says that he is always there if **Amir** needs to tell him something. Amir almost confesses everything, but again he says nothing. Rahim Khan gives Amir a leather-bound notebook to write stories in.

Rahim Khan seems to know about Amir's plight, but he offers compassion instead of judgment. His gift of the notebook could be interpreted as a path to redemption through writing.



Suddenly fireworks start up and interrupt their conversation. **Amir** and **Rahim Khan** hurry back to the house. In the glow of the fireworks Amir sees **Hassan** serving drinks to **Wali** and a grinning **Assef**.

This devastating image captures the injustice of the situation – Hassan has no choice but to serve his rich, powerful, Pashtun rapist.



CHAPTER 9

The next morning **Amir** opens his birthday presents, but none of them give him any pleasure and he tosses them aside. **Baba** gives him a new bike and a nice watch. The only gift Amir doesn't immediately discard is **Rahim Khan's** notebook. Amir sits on his bed and thinks about what Rahim Khan said about his Hazara lover, and how it was better in the end that she was dismissed. He decides that either he or **Hassan** must leave the household.

Instead of working to redeem himself or make things right with Hassan, Amir continues to try to escape his feelings of guilt by avoiding Hassan. But he cannot avoid him forever as long as Hassan lives in the same household, so Amir decides to make him leave. Amir continues to not get any pleasure out of his gifts and Baba's approval.



As **Amir** is leaving on his new bike, **Ali** stops him and gives him a present from him and **Hassan** – a glossy new book of old Persian stories (including “**Rostam and Sohrab**”) called the *Shahnamah*. Amir feels unworthy of the book, but he thanks Ali and rides guiltily on.

Hassan and Ali again prove themselves as loyal and selfless, contrasting sharply with Amir. Even the joy of reading and poetry has been corrupted by his betrayal.



The next morning **Amir** waits for **Ali** and **Hassan** to go out grocery shopping, and then he hides some of his birthday money and his watch from **Baba** under Hassan’s mattress. Then he knocks on Baba’s door and tells him that Hassan stole the watch and money. When Ali and Hassan return, Baba confronts Ali, who goes back to speak with Hassan. Then Baba decides to sit down all together and settle the matter.

Amir’s first betrayal involved a lack of action – doing nothing as Hassan was raped – but in this betrayal he goes out of his way, actively framing Hassan for thievery and lying to Baba. As Baba considers theft the greatest sin, Amir is sure that this will make Baba send Hassan away and Amir will have some peace.



The four gather in the study, and **Baba** asks **Hassan** directly if he stole the watch and money. To **Amir**’s surprise, Hassan says that he did. At that moment Amir understands that Hassan saw him in the alley, and he realizes that Hassan is making one last sacrifice for him now, despite his great betrayal. Amir feels the full horror of his guilt then, and again he feels like the **monster in the lake**.

Far from easing his conscience, Amir’s actions only heighten his guilt when he realizes Hassan knows all his sins and continues to sacrifice himself for Amir. Hassan again proves he is the better person, which makes Amir feel even worse about himself – like he is a monster.



Baba forgives **Ali** and **Hassan**, which also surprises **Amir** – as Baba had considered theft the worst of sins – but Ali insists that they must leave. Baba begs him to stay, but Ali refuses and draws Hassan close, as if protecting him. Amir knows that it is *he* Hassan must be protected from. Baba cries for the first time that Amir has ever witnessed, and even Ali’s paralyzed face twitches in pain, and then Amir understands the enormity of the suffering he has caused. Ali says that he will go live with his cousin in Hazarajat. He will not let Baba drive him all the way there, but only to the bus station.

Baba shows how close he really is to Ali, and Amir starts to understand the years of shared history he is now destroying between the two men. Like Rahim Khan’s father, the privileged Amir sends the Hazaras away instead of himself doing something about his unhappiness. Ali and Hassan will go to Hazarajat, which is a poor region of Afghanistan that is mostly populated by Hazaras.



It hardly ever rains in the summer in Kabul, but it rains the day **Ali** and **Hassan** leave. **Amir** watches from inside his bedroom as **Baba** tries one last time to convince them to stay. Then they drive away and Amir realizes that the life he has known is now over.

This ends Amir’s memories of his time in Kabul, as they are inextricably linked with Hassan and his own betrayal.



CHAPTER 10

The story jumps to March of 1981. **Amir** and **Baba**, along with several others, are in the back of a truck fleeing Afghanistan for Pakistan. The drive is bumpy and makes Amir feel car sick, which Baba sees as another of Amir’s weaknesses. They had to flee at night and leave no evidence of their escape, because informers are everywhere. Afghanistan is under the control of Afghan communists and Russian soldiers. They have turned everyone against each other, and people inform on each other for money or under duress.

The political situation in Afghanistan has changed drastically since the last chapter. In 1978 the Afghan communist party overthrew President Daoud Khan, and there were many executions of those opposed to the new party. This led to the paranoia and betrayals that Amir describes. In 1979, external Russian forces invaded the country, leading to even more violence and turmoil.



The driver, **Karim**, is first taking them to Jalalabad, where his brother will drive them the rest of the way to Peshawar, Pakistan. Karim has an arrangement with the Russian soldiers that guard the road. They arrive at a checkpoint, and a young Russian soldier eyes a woman in the truck and decides to increase the price of passing through – he wants half an hour with the woman.

This is the first example of the power shift that has occurred in Afghanistan. “Assef types” are in control now, and they can use their power to act on their cruel whims. The theme of rape returns with the soldier’s demand, symbolizing the larger rape of Afghanistan by violence and oppression.



Baba stands up and tries to shame the Russian soldier, but the soldier says there is no shame in war. Baba still won’t stand aside and the soldier threatens to shoot him. **Amir** tries to get Baba to sit down, but he pushes Amir away. Just before the soldier shoots, another Russian stops him. When the truck starts moving again, the young woman’s husband kisses Baba’s hand.

For Baba, strong moral principles are as important as ever, so his country’s disintegration into lawlessness and atrocity is a personal affront to him. He is willing to face danger and death for his principles, but in this he is a minority. Baba tries to shame the Russian soldier, but there is little honor left in Afghanistan any more.



When the truck reaches Jalalabad, **Karim** tells them that his brother **Toor** can no longer take them to Peshawar, as his truck broke down the week before. **Baba** is furious that Karim kept this information from them just so he could get paid for his leg of the journey, and he attacks Karim and starts strangling him until the young woman asks him to stop.

Baba is again insulted by a lack of honor, this time in Karim, one of his countrymen, who lies to get paid. Baba is wrestling another “bear” here as he attacks Karim, trying to personally preserve the honor and dignity of his country through his own strength of will and body.



The group then joins a larger group of refugees who are staying in a basement. **Amir** recognizes **Kamal** among them, but he looks sickly and old. Amir overhears Kamal’s father explaining what happened to him – four men caught Kamal while he was out alone and raped him, and now Kamal no longer speaks, but just stares.

Rape returns here as another example of the atrocities in Afghanistan. Kamal, who, in a tragic irony, helped Assef rape Hassan, is clearly haunted by his past trauma now.



Karim finally finds a way to get the refugees to Pakistan, but it is not his brother's truck – it is a fuel truck. Before they get in the truck **Baba** picks up a handful of Afghan dirt, kisses it, and stows it in a snuff box next to his heart. Inside the truck it is terrifyingly dark and the air is thick with fumes, which makes it hard to breathe. **Amir** is saved from his panic by the small light of Baba's wristwatch. Baba whispers in his ear to think of something happy, and Amir immediately thinks of a day flying kites with **Hassan**.

Baba kisses the soil of Afghanistan, already mourning for a country that is destroying itself. Amir's happy childhood with Hassan is here not just a source of remorse but also of strength. Flying kites becomes a symbol of hope for something better, and nostalgia for a past that was more innocent and peaceful. Amir has finally lost all his privileges and wealth, and is reduced to huddling in the back of a fuel truck.



They arrive in Pakistan and unload the truck. **Amir** is saddened by the sight of **Baba's** two suitcases – the result of all his life's work, along with “one disappointing son.” Suddenly **Kamal's** father starts screaming, as Kamal isn't breathing. Kamal's father lunges for **Karim** and wrests his gun away. Before anyone can stop him, he puts the gun in his own mouth and pulls the trigger.

The horrors of their journey continue, as everything safe and stable has been torn away. Kamal was an antagonistic character at first, but after suffering so much he becomes sympathetic. Hosseini reminds us that these are just children – the powerless being raped by the powerful.



CHAPTER 11

The story skips forward in time, and **Baba** and **Amir** have been living in Fremont, California for almost two years. Baba likes the idea of America, but he has a hard time adjusting to the culture shock. One day at a convenience store where he often shops, Baba overturns a magazine rack in anger that the manager asked to see his ID when Baba used a check. Baba is enraged at the lack of trust and honor in this society, and Amir tries to apologize to the owners and defuse the situation.

Baba is again disgusted that the rest of the world does not live up to his high moral standards. When the manager asks to see his ID, Baba sees at as a personal attack, as if he himself were untrustworthy. In America Baba has none of the wealth and respect he had in Afghanistan.



That night **Amir** asks if they should go back to Pakistan, where they had spent six months waiting to get U.S. visas, but **Baba** says they are in America for Amir's sake, not his own. Amir thinks bitterly that this is yet another gift he does not deserve, though he is glad to be in a place so far from home, where he can try to bury his old guilt.

Baba feels disconnected from everything he has ever known, but he continues to sacrifice himself for others' sakes. For Amir, the disconnection is a good thing, as being so far away allows him to forget about his guilt for betraying Hassan.



Baba works at a gas station for twelve hours a day, six days a week. He was offered food stamps, but he rejected them with pride. **Amir**, meanwhile graduates high school at the age of twenty, and Baba is truly proud at his graduation ceremony.

In Afghanistan Baba was Ali's master, but in America he now works more like a servant. He has lost his status and respect, but he retains his pride and principles and rejects charity.



That night **Baba** takes **Amir** to an Afghan kabob house, where he buys drinks for everyone and starts an impromptu party. After dinner Baba shows Amir his graduation present – an old Ford Grand Torino to take to college. Amir is moved with gratitude, but then Baba says he wishes that **Hassan** was there too and Amir feels suddenly suffocated.

Baba keeps acting as if he were back in his old life with his old money and connections, but his personality is still the same, and he can start up a party around himself even among strangers. Amir has been able to escape his guilt for a while, but Baba still regrets losing Hassan.



The day after his graduation **Amir** tells **Baba** that he wants to study creative writing, knowing that Baba will disapprove. Baba does indeed think the degree will be useless, but he does nothing more than grumble. Amir feels guilty thinking of Baba working so hard while he leaves to pursue his dream, but he decides he will stand firm and not sacrifice anything else for Baba's approval.

Amir considers his betrayal of Hassan as a sacrifice for Baba, and he now decides to stay true to himself and his dreams. Unfortunately this does not involve redeeming himself or helping right things with Hassan, but only pursuing his love of writing.



Amir likes to take long drives in his car alone, past rich neighborhoods and poor ones. He says the first time he saw the Pacific, he almost cried. America has become a place for Amir to bury the ghosts of his past – his memories of war-torn Kabul and his guilt for his betrayal of **Hassan**. America is huge and moves quickly like a river, and Amir embraces the country because it helps him forget.

Amir describes America as a river, which becomes almost a symbol of baptism for him – a huge, fast-moving place where he can wash away his past sins. Amir wants to be reborn here, like in a Christian baptism, and start a new life where he can pursue writing and not be haunted by Hassan.



The next summer, in 1984, **Baba** buys an old van and spends his Saturday going around filling it up with purchases from garage sales. Then on Sunday, he and **Amir** set up a booth at a flea market and sell everything for a profit. Soon there is a whole section of the flea market made up of only Afghan families. It becomes a close community, with food and gossip flowing constantly between the booths.

With the flea market Baba does find a piece of his old Afghan community. There are people there who know him and his good reputation, and though he is only selling things for small profits, he is able to feel more at home in America.



One Sunday **Baba** introduces **Amir** to a man named **General Taheri**, who is very traditional and formal in his appearance and demeanor. Baba tells him that Amir will be a great writer someday, and Taheri insists that Amir should appreciate Baba, who is a great man. Then General Taheri's daughter **Soraya** comes over with his tea, and she and Amir briefly exchange glances.

Hosseini introduces new characters that will become important in Amir's life in America. Soraya is the first woman to take a major role in the plot, and with her appearance Hosseini is able to comment on other aspects of Afghan society.



On the way home **Amir** asks **Baba** about **Soraya** – he had heard rumors about her before. Baba is unwilling to spread gossip, but he says that Soraya was romantically involved with a man once, but it didn't go well. Since this “loss of honor” no men have tried to court her. That night Amir falls asleep thinking of Soraya's face.

In the character of Soraya Hosseini critiques the Afghan double standard regarding men and women. If a woman is involved with a man outside of marriage, it is a subject for a lifetime of shame and gossip, but if a man does the same thing, it is just him “having fun.”



CHAPTER 12

After meeting **Soraya**, **Amir** thinks about her constantly – he compares his every night to *yelda*, the Afghan first night of winter, when tormented lovers wait for their beloveds. Almost an entire year passes before Amir gets up the nerve to talk to her. **Baba** understands what is going on, and he warns Amir that **General Taheri** is a very traditional Pashtun, and greatly concerned with his daughter's chastity.

Amir goes to the Taheris' booth while the General is away and he greets **Soraya**, who is reading a book. When he asks her what she is reading, he understands that the conversation now has potential for gossip, and he recognizes that the Afghan double standard will judge Soraya for "flirting" with him if she engages. She responds, and they discuss stories and writing.

Soraya's mother, **Jamila**, appears and interrupts the conversation. She offers **Amir** a seat but he does the polite thing and declines, referring to her formally as "Khanum Taheri." Amir can see the excitement in her eyes that a man has been talking to Soraya, and he feels guilty for the power he wields just because he is a man.

For a few weeks after that, **Amir** goes over to her booth and talks to **Soraya** only when **General Taheri** is away. Soraya reveals that her dream is to be a teacher, and she tells Amir how as a child she had taught her father's servant to read. Amir feels guilty then, remembering how he had used his education to mock **Hassan**, not to help him.

Amir gives **Soraya** one of his stories, but suddenly **General Taheri** appears and Soraya looks terrified. The General throws Amir's story in the trash and reminds him that he is among other Afghans, and that they will gossip. Amir is disheartened by this encounter, but he has no time to brood because soon after that **Baba** gets sick.

At first **Baba** only has a bad cold, but then **Amir** catches him coughing up blood. Amir takes him to a hospital, and then to several specialists – one of whom Baba refuses to speak to because he is Russian – and finally he is diagnosed with terminal lung cancer. The doctors want to give him chemotherapy to prolong his life, but Baba proudly refuses treatment.

This begins a new section of the novel, as Amir starts to grow and mature in America. He has mostly escaped his past for now, and is able to start building a new life for himself with less guilt. He starts by falling in love with Soraya.



Hosseini critiques Afghan sexism here – if Soraya answers even Amir's seemingly innocent question, she will be seen as a "disreputable" sort of woman, especially because of the gossip already circulating about her past.



In these interactions Hosseini also shows how the characters preserve their Afghan traditions even in America. An unmarried man talking to a woman would be normal in America, but in Afghanistan there are strict rules about courtship and honor.



Amir still cannot escape Hassan entirely, and his guilt occasionally resurfaces. Soraya was raised in a similar situation to Amir, but she used her privilege to teach her servant/friend, rather than taunt her.



General Taheri only needs to remind Amir that he is among peers for Amir to feel he has been acting inappropriately. They might be physically in America, but their community still has all the rules of Afghanistan, and Amir should not disregard them.



Baba encounters the last "bear" he has to wrestle – cancer – and though he recognizes that it will beat him, he decides to lose on his own terms. Baba's looming death will be a crisis for Amir, however, who has always been dependent on his father.



After **Baba's** diagnosis, **Amir** breaks down and wonders aloud what he will do when Baba dies. Baba is ashamed of the question, and says that all his life he has been trying to teach Amir how to stand up on his own. He also forbids Amir from telling anyone about his illness, as Baba doesn't want any sympathy.

Baba grows progressively weaker but keeps working and going to the flea market. He starts losing a lot of weight though, and people begin to notice his sickliness. One day at the flea market Baba collapses and has a seizure. At the hospital, the doctor says that the cancer has spread to Baba's brain.

The next morning Afghans fill the waiting room, wanting to visit **Baba**. The Taheris arrive and **Soraya** comforts **Amir**. Two days later Baba is discharged from the hospital, and that night Amir asks him to go to **General Taheri** and ask for his permission to marry Soraya. Baba is pleased and proud, and the next day he goes. Amir has to wait nervously at home until Baba calls. He says that General Taheri has accepted, and then he says that Soraya wants to tell Amir something in private.

Soraya gets on the phone and says she is happy that her father approved, but she must tell **Amir** about her past, as she doesn't want any secrets between them. When she was eighteen and living in Virginia, she ran away with an Afghan man. They lived together for almost a month until **General Taheri** found them and took Soraya home, screaming and cursing at him. When she came home she saw that her mother had had a stroke, and she felt responsible for it. She was glad, in the end, that her father took her away.

Soraya asks if her story bothers **Amir**, and he admits it does a little bit, but he still wants to marry her. He feels that he of all people is in no position to judge anyone for a troubled past. Soraya weeps with joy at his acceptance, and Amir envies her because her secret has been confessed and dealt with. He is still too afraid to tell her about **Hassan**.

Amir starts to understand why Baba has been so strict with him, and always worried about his quietness and insecurity – he has been training Amir to be a man, and to live on his own without Baba's help.



When the legendary, larger-than-life Baba starts growing weak and nearing death, Amir's looming identity crisis seems much more real. His pillar, the thing he built his life around, and sacrificed Hassan for, is about to be gone.



After General Taheri's warning, Amir proceeds much more traditionally with his courtship. While this is a bonding moment for Baba and Amir, it shows that in Afghan society the woman has no choice in whether she will marry her suitor, as it is all up to her father. Baba begins to be proud of Amir when he sees he is making decisions for himself and growing up.



Soraya has her own past guilt, like Amir, but her history has much less to do with betrayal and more to do with youthful rebelliousness. In Afghan society, however, Soraya's past relationship is the worst kind of scandal for a woman, and she would usually be seen as having "lost value" as a potential wife.



Amir avoids the prejudices of his society because of his own guilty past. He envies Soraya's confession, but is not as brave as she is. His secret is still alive and constantly haunting him.



CHAPTER 13

The next night **Amir** and **Baba** go to the Taheris' house for the *lafz*, the ceremony of "giving word." Baba looks tired, but he says it is the happiest day of his life. The house is full of people, and **Jamila** is already crying with happiness when Amir enters. **General Taheri** is also pleased, and he says they are doing things the proper Afghan way now.

Hosseini gives more examples of the characters preserving Afghan society and tradition in America. Baba is so pleased because with the marriage, Amir is truly becoming an adult and ready to strike out on his own.



Usually there would be an engagement party, then an engagement of a few months, and then the wedding, but they decide to have the wedding quickly because of **Baba's** illness. Baba spends almost all of his life savings on the wedding, renting an Afghan banquet hall and buying **Amir's** tuxedo and rings.

Baba is as generous as ever, and gives up everything he has worked for Amir's sake. He is especially generous because of his pride in Amir's marriage and because he is among peers, and so can act as he once did in Afghanistan.



The wedding is a happy blur for **Amir** – he and **Soraya** repeat their oaths and then walk through the hall as the Afghan wedding song plays. Then they sit together on a sofa, are covered with a veil, and look at each other's reflections in a mirror. Amir whispers to Soraya for the first time that he loves her. After the ceremony there is joyful partying in the banquet hall, and then back at **Baba's** apartment. Amir cannot help wondering if **Hassan** had also been married. Late that night Amir and Soraya make love for the first time.

The wedding follows traditional Afghan customs, and is American only in its location. Even at his happiest moment, Amir cannot help but think of Hassan, although now it is not so much with guilt as with curiosity. Amir is becoming a man, and he wonders in what manner his "brother" has matured apart from him.



Soraya wants to move in with **Baba** immediately because he is so sick. One day **Amir** comes home and sees Soraya slipping Amir's old leather-bound notebook – the one **Rahim Khan** gave him – under Baba's blanket. They admit they have both been reading his stories, and Amir has to leave the room to cry with joy. A month after the wedding the Taheris and some other friends come over for a big dinner. Amir can tell that Baba is happy watching him and Soraya together. Baba dies in his sleep that night.

Baba finally starts to give Amir the approval and support he craved so much as a boy. The irony is that Baba is proud of Amir for taking his own path, getting married and pursuing his career as a writer, rather than always trying to please Baba only. This is a crucial event for Amir, as he must truly find his own inner strength now that his principle support is gone.



The mosque is filled with Afghans for **Baba's** funeral, and many of them tell stories about how Baba helped them when no one else would. **Amir** thinks of the old story of Baba wrestling the black bear, and he thinks of the many bears Baba had to wrestle in his lifetime – the last one was cancer, but even then Baba lost on his own terms.

Amir understands the symbolism of Baba and the bear, and how his father spent all his life overcoming challenges and fighting for honor and decency. Baba was never afraid of conflict, unlike Amir.



Listening to everyone's stories of **Baba**, **Amir** realizes how his father has defined who he is all his life. Now Baba is not around anymore, and Amir must find his own way. This thought frightens him. He finds **Soraya** and they walk together through the cemetery, and Amir cries for the first time since Baba's death.

Amir begins to realize the crucial turning point he is experiencing in his life. He does not have Baba's example to follow, but he does have the principles Baba tried to instill in him.



Because they had such a brief engagement, **Amir** is still learning about **Soraya's** family after the wedding. **General Taheri** gets bad, week-long migraines once a month. He does not work, as laboring is beneath someone of his position, and he accepts welfare. Every day he dresses up in his suit and waits for Afghanistan to be freed, and for his services to be called upon again.

Amir begins transitioning from one family to another now, and the Taheris take more prominence in the story. General Taheri is seen as a much more "proper" Afghan than Baba was, but his pride and unwillingness to work contrast negatively with Baba's self-sacrificing labors.



Jamila was once a great singer, but the General has not allowed her to sing in public since they were married. **Jamila** comes to adore **Amir**, as he listens to her complain about her health, and he has cured her of her greatest fear – that her daughter would never marry.

This is another tragedy of Afghan sexism, that Jamila's voice is silenced by her marriage. But even Jamila thinks in the same way as her husband – her greatest fear for Soraya was that she would not marry, implying that she could only be happy with a man.



After **Soraya** overhears some other Afghans gossiping about her "lack of virtue" at a wedding, she becomes frustrated and enraged at the Afghan double standard for men and women's promiscuity. She tells **Amir** more about what happened to her in Virginia – when **General Taheri** came to fetch her, he had a gun with him, and when she got home he made her cut off all of her hair.

Hosseini gets more specific in his critique of the gender double standard here. Soraya, unlike her mother, is unwilling to accept the traditional, unfair treatment of women, though there is little she can do about it.



Soraya is still relieved that **Amir** didn't reject her when he learned about her past, and she says that he is very different from any other Afghan guy she has met. Amir thinks that maybe this is because **Baba** was such a liberal father, or because Amir was only around men his whole life, or because he knows all too well about having a guilty past.

All the other Afghan men have put tradition over forgiveness, and subscribe to the gender double standard that would call Soraya "damaged." Amir would feel hypocritical judging someone for their past mistakes.



After **Baba's** death, **Amir** and **Soraya** get their own apartment in Fremont, close to the Taheris' home. **General Taheri** gives Amir a typewriter as a housewarming gift. Amir sells Baba's van and never returns to the flea market. Amir is accepted to San Jose State college and becomes an English major, and he takes on a security job on the side, using the long, quiet hours to start his first novel.

Amir makes more outward moves towards maturity and manhood. He transitions from living with Baba to living alone with Soraya, and begins his career as a writer while pursuing his studies. Even the conservative General Taheri comes to support Amir's writing, as Baba finally did.



Soraya enrolls at the same school and starts studying to be a teacher.

General Taheri thinks she is wasting her talents, which makes Soraya angry – she thinks her father is a coward for running from the Russians and then collecting welfare instead of working.

Soraya often speaks with Hosseini's voice, critiquing Afghans more plainspokenly than other characters. The General does indeed seem unsympathetic for his pride and lack of action.



In the summer of 1988 **Amir** finishes his first novel, and eventually gets it published. All the Taheris celebrate his success, and Amir knows that **Baba** would have been proud of him.

Amir reaches another milestone of maturity. He is becoming a man without Baba, and apart from his past guilt.



The next year **Amir's** novel is released and he becomes somewhat famous in the Afghan community. It is also the same year the Russians complete their exit from Afghanistan. Instead of being a time of victory in the country, the violence continues between rival *Mujahedin* groups and the Soviet puppet government. This is also the same year that Amir and **Soraya** start trying to have a baby.

As Amir tries to reach the next goal of maturity – fatherhood – Hosseini reintroduces the politics of Afghanistan to the narrative. While Amir has been quietly building a life in America, violence and upheaval have swept through Afghanistan. Hosseini implies that Amir will not be able to escape his homeland forever.



After a long time without being able to conceive, **Amir** and **Soraya** start going to see different specialists, but none of them can explain why they cannot have a child. Amir and Soraya tentatively start discussing adoption, but **General Taheri** says he does not think it is right for Afghans, and Soraya feels slightly uncomfortable with the idea too.

The first hitch in Amir's happy American life appears with his inability to have a child, but this seems like a small loss compared to the suffering of Hassan and the Afghans that remained to fight in the wars.



Amir wonders if his inability to have a child is his punishment for the things he has done. Meanwhile, his writing career is going well, and they use the advance for his second novel to buy a house in San Francisco. Amir and **Soraya** lie next to each other and are happy, but the emptiness of their infertility lingers between them.

It is notable that the most important relationships of the novel involve fathers and sons, and Amir is unable to become a father until he has dealt with his guilty past and redeemed himself.



CHAPTER 14

The story moves ahead to June of 2001, and **Amir** has just gotten off the phone with **Rahim Khan**, who is in Pakistan and is very sick. He wants Amir to come see him, and says “there is a way to be good again.” Amir takes a walk through Golden Gate Park, and parts of the narrative are exactly repeated from the opening chapter – Amir watches the beautiful lake, a man playing with his son, and two **kites** flying overhead. Amir feels that **Rahim Khan** knows everything about **Hassan**, and that he is inviting Amir to return as a way of redeeming himself.

The narrative returns to the beginning of the novel as Amir receives the phone call that interrupts his successful American life. He is upset that Rahim Khan is sick, but also Rahim Khan's words imply that he knows about Amir's past betrayal of Hassan. Here the kites represent Amir's memories of Kabul – both nostalgia and guilt – and also a possibility of future redemption.



Amir decides to go to Pakistan, and **General Taheri** and **Jamila** agree to come stay with **Soraya** while he is gone. The General broke his hip two years earlier, and Jamila would sing songs to him as he slept in the hospital. The night after the phone call, Amir lies in bed with Soraya and thinks about their marriage. They still make love, but it feels almost futile now. They used to talk often about their future children, but now they talk of other things. Amir falls asleep and dreams of **Hassan** running in the snow, saying over his shoulder “For you, a thousand times over!” A week later, Amir gets on a plane for Pakistan.

There are two things keeping Amir from happiness at this point – his guilty past in Afghanistan, and his inability to have a child with Soraya. These two things become linked as one feeling of emptiness, as Amir lies in bed after “futilely” making love with Soraya and then dreams of Hassan as a child. Amir's decision to go to Pakistan shows that he is finally willing to take some positive steps to make things right.



CHAPTER 15

Amir lands in Peshawar, Pakistan. His cab driver talks about the terrible things happening in Afghanistan. The city is a blur of sensations for Amir, and everything reminds him of Afghanistan. They drive through an area called “Afghan Town,” where there are many businesses but everyone is poor.

Amir has been away from his country for so long that seeing the poverty of “Afghan town” is shocking reminder of all the atrocities that have happened in Afghanistan since he left.



Amir thinks about the last time he saw **Rahim Khan** in 1981, the night Amir and **Baba** fled Kabul. Baba and Rahim Khan had kept in touch since then, but Amir had not spoken to him since soon after Baba's death. They arrive at Rahim Khan's apartment and he answers the door, looking wasted and sickly.

Though Amir and Baba had to leave everything behind and flee, it is clear that they were among the lucky ones – they had money to go to America, and were not caught up in the wars or left as starving refugees.



At first **Amir** tries to avoid talking about **Rahim Khan's** appearance, and he tells him about his marriage to **Soraya**, and about his career as a novelist – he has published four novels by now. Rahim Khan says he never doubted that Amir would be a writer, but he does not remember the leather-bound notebook he gave him.

Rahim Khan appears as the agent of Amir's past, as it is his phone call that brings Afghanistan back to Amir and Amir back to Afghanistan. Their fates are contrasted in this meeting, as Rahim Khan is sick and dying, and Amir is a successful novelist and married man now.



The conversation then turns to the Taliban, and how bad things are in Afghanistan now. **Rahim Khan** says that he was at a soccer game and a man next to him cheered too loudly, and the guard on patrol smashed his rifle butt into Rahim Khan's forehead, leaving a scar.

It is clear that the Afghanistan Amir knew is long dead. The Taliban now rule and have put a rigid Islamic law into place, which they use violence freely to uphold.



After **Baba** and **Amir** left Kabul, **Rahim Khan** lived in their house (Baba “sold” it to him) and tried to take care of it so they could return some day. Everyone thought Afghanistan’s troubles would only be temporary. Rahim Khan describes how after the Soviets left, different factions of the “Northern Alliance” took over different parts of Kabul, and there was constant violence and rockets hitting civilian houses. Baba’s orphanage had been destroyed by a rocket. When the Taliban took over, everyone celebrated them as saviors, and Rahim Khan actually danced in the street.

Amir finally asks **Rahim Khan** about his health, and Rahim Khan says that he is dying, and that he does not expect to last the summer. He says that he wanted Amir to come to Pakistan to see him, but also for another reason. When Rahim Khan was living in **Baba**’s house, he was not alone – **Hassan** was there too. Rahim Khan wants to tell Amir about Hassan, and then ask him for a favor.

Rahim Khan gives a summary of the fighting that destroyed the old Afghanistan. Though the Northern Alliance helped push out the Soviets, they ended up causing even more damage than the Russians, as they turned against each other and sent rockets into civilian buildings. Many Afghans like Rahim Khan celebrated the Taliban’s victory, thinking it would mean peace, but the Taliban only instituted a new kind of daily terror.

As Amir suspected, there is more to Rahim Khan’s request to come to Pakistan. There is something Amir can do to redeem himself, to “be good again.” And it must involve Hassan, the victim of Amir’s betrayal.

CHAPTER 16

The narrative changes so that **Rahim Khan** is speaking in the first person as he tells his story. In 1986 he went to Hazarajat to find **Hassan**, both because he was lonely and because he was getting too old to take care of **Baba**’s house by himself. Rahim Khan found Hassan in a mud hut, but the only one in the village with a walled garden. Hassan was in the yard, and when he saw Rahim Khan he would not stop kissing his hands. Hassan took Rahim Khan inside and introduced him to his wife, a visibly-pregnant Hazara woman named **Farzana**. Hassan revealed that **Ali** had been killed by a land mine two years before.

Rahim Khan invited **Hassan** and his wife to come back to Kabul and stay in **Baba**’s house, but Hassan said that Hazarajat was his home now. Hassan asked Rahim Khan many questions about **Amir** – whether he was happy, if he thought he could write him a letter (Hassan had learned to read and write) – and when he learned that Baba was dead, Hassan broke down and wept. Rahim Khan spent the night at the house, and in the morning Hassan agreed to go to Kabul with him and **Farzana**.

Hassan finally returns to the narrative, and many of the novel’s earlier themes will begin to coalesce around his fate. Hassan has indeed married, like Amir, and he and Farzana have conceived a child, unlike Amir and Soraya. Ali dies in a very “Afghan” way, as many civilians were killed by buried mines left by various warring factions.

Clearly Hassan had forgiven Amir for his betrayals, and he wished to rekindle their friendship even as Amir tried to escape any memory of Hassan. Hassan also learned to read and write on his own, overcoming the disadvantage that Amir had once lorded over him.

When they arrived in Kabul, **Hassan** and **Farzana** insisted on staying in the servants’ hut instead of the big house. Hassan worked hard cleaning and preparing the house, as if readying it for **Amir**’s return. Farzana gave birth to a stillborn girl, who they buried in the yard. Outside the house war was raging, but inside was a safe haven. Hassan would read to **Rahim Khan** from Amir’s mother’s books, and Farzana became pregnant again.

One day that same year **Sanaubar**, **Hassan**’s mother, showed up at the gate of the house starving and with her face cut up. When Hassan first recognized her he fled, but when he returned he nursed her back to health, and the two became close. Sanaubar delivered **Farzana**’s baby, a boy that they named **Sohrab** after the character from “**Rostam** and **Sohrab**,” the story Hassan and **Amir** loved as children. Sanaubar loved and doted on the boy, and she lived until Sohrab turned four.

By then it was 1995, the Soviets were gone, and Kabul was ruled by rival Afghan groups that were constantly at war. **Hassan** taught **Sohrab** to read and write, so that he would not grow up illiterate like his father. In the winter Hassan took Sohrab kite running, though there were not as many tournaments as the old days. Sohrab was just as good a kite runner as his father had been.

In 1996, however, the Taliban took over, and they banned kite fighting. **Rahim Khan** was optimistic about the Taliban, but **Hassan** knew that their regime meant danger for Hazaras – and two years later, the Taliban massacred the Hazaras in the town of Mazar-i-Sharif.

CHAPTER 17

The narrative returns to **Amir**’s perspective, as he sits with **Rahim Khan** thinking of the huge repercussions of his actions so long ago. Amir asks if **Hassan** is still at Baba’s house. Rahim Khan does not answer, but hands Amir an envelope. Inside is a letter and a picture of Hassan as a grown man, standing with his son **Sohrab**. They are both smiling as if the world were a kinder place than it is.

Unlike Amir, Hassan is able to recapture some of his idyllic childhood in Baba’s house, though he insists on keeping his servant status. Hassan is now the one reading out loud to someone else, but the house is still a haven against the cruel, violent Afghanistan outside its walls.

Though Sanaubar had “betrayed” Hassan by abandoning him, when she returns, Hassan is able to forgive her and welcome her back to his family. This scene shows the possible reunion Amir might have had with Hassan, had he returned. The fact that Hassan names his son “Sohrab” shows that Amir is still very present in Hassan’s thoughts.

The political begins to intrude on the personal again as Hassan starts to recreate his childhood with his own son. They do the same things – like flying kites – that Hassan and Amir had done together. We never see details of Hassan’s relationship with Sohrab, but it appears to be one of the healthiest father-and-son relationships of the book.

The racial oppression against Hazaras returns with greater danger when the Taliban take power. Hassan understands that the new, ultra-religious government will be even harsher against those with different beliefs, like the Shi’a Hazaras. The banning of kites is an especially poignant kind of violation.

Amir reads the letter, which is addressed to him from **Hassan**. Hassan says that the Afghanistan of their childhood is gone, and that fear and violence are everywhere now. A man at the market struck **Farzana** just because she raised her voice to make a hard-of-hearing man understand her.

Hassan describes his son **Sohrab**, and how much he loves him. They still walk up to the cemetery on the hill and read "**Rostam** and **Sohrab**," though the pomegranate tree has not given fruit in years. Hassan laments **Rahim Khan's** illness, and he says that he has been having nightmares lately, but he dreams of **Sohrab** growing up in an Afghanistan that is safe and beautiful again. Hassan says that if **Amir** ever returns, he will be waiting for him as his faithful friend.

Rahim Khan then answers **Amir's** question – about a month after **Rahim Khan** came to Pakistan, he got a call from a neighbor in Kabul explaining what had happened. The Taliban had gone to **Baba's** house and found **Hassan** living there. Hassan said he was taking care of the house, but the Taliban accused him of being a lying Hazara even after the neighbors supported Hassan's story. They made Hassan kneel in the road and shot him in the back of the head. **Farzana** came out of the house, screaming, and they shot her too, claiming "self-defense."

Amir cannot help imagining **Hassan's** execution, and he is wracked with grief. **Rahim Khan** continues – the Taliban moved into **Baba's** house, and they sent **Sohrab** to an orphanage. **Rahim Khan** then says that this was the other reason he wanted **Amir** to visit him – he wants **Amir** to go to Kabul and find **Sohrab**, and then bring him back to Pakistan. **Rahim Khan** knows an American couple named **Thomas** and **Betty Caldwell** that have a good orphanage in Peshawar.

Amir protests that he cannot go to Kabul, but he is willing to pay someone to go for him. **Rahim Khan** gets angry at this, and says that it is not about money – **Amir** knows why he must go. **Rahim Khan** says that **Baba** had told him he worried about **Amir** being unable to stand up for himself as a man, and **Rahim Khan** wonders if **Amir** has become such a man.

Hassan begins his story similarly to Rahim Khan, by describing the most recent random act of Taliban violence. Hassan shares Amir's nostalgia for the peaceful Afghanistan of their childhood.



Hassan gives more examples of how Amir is always present in his thoughts. It is clear that Hassan is a good father, though his son is growing up in a much more dangerous time than Amir and Hassan did. Hassan's goodbye is heartbreaking in light of his ultimate fate – if only Amir had apologized, Hassan would probably have forgiven him.



Hassan's murder is another tragic turning point in the novel. It shows how Hazaras have no rights at all in Afghanistan now, as there is no punishment for those who murdered Hassan and Farzana. This also destroys any hope Amir might have had of apologizing to Hassan in person and making amends with him. Hassan again acts as a sacrificial lamb, the innocent victim of violence.



Amir grieves for his own unending guilt as much as he does for Hassan, but then Rahim Khan explains his plan, the way Amir can "be good again." Sohrab was the most important thing to Hassan, and the part of him that still lives on, and if Amir is to make things better (even after Hassan's death) he must save him.



Rahim Khan brings up Baba's old worries about Amir's courage, as Amir always craved Baba's approval more than anything. Amir finally starts to see that Baba would have loved him more for standing up for Hassan than for winning a kite tournament.



Amir still considers refusing, but then **Rahim Khan** delivers one last piece of information – **Ali** was unable to have children. **Amir** asks who **Hassan's** father was then, but then he understands that it was **Baba**. **Hassan** never knew either – they couldn't tell anyone because of the dishonorable situation. **Amir** feels his whole world collapsing around him, and he storms out of the apartment, raging at **Rahim Khan** and **Baba**.

CHAPTER 18

Amir wanders aimlessly through the streets and stops in a small tea house. He feels that everything he had known was a lie, but now he can recognize the many signs – **Baba** always buying **Hassan** presents, fixing his **cleft lip**, becoming enraged when **Amir** suggested they get new servants, weeping when **Ali** and **Hassan** left. **Amir** thinks of **Baba's** old tirade against theft, and then he thinks of how **Baba** had stolen **Ali's** honor, **Amir's** brother, and **Hassan's** knowledge of his own identity.

Amir realizes that he and **Baba** are more similar than he had thought, as they both betrayed someone who was totally loyal to them. **Amir** feels that **Rahim Khan** called him here to atone for **Baba's** sins as well as his own.

Amir cannot help thinking that he is responsible for **Hassan's** death. If he had not driven **Ali** and **Hassan** from the house, they might have come to America with **Baba** and **Amir**, and things could have been totally different. **Amir** wishes that **Rahim Khan** had never called him and dredged up the past, but again he thinks of the phrase "a way to be good again," and hopes that perhaps with **Sohrab** there is a way to end the cycle of betrayals and lies.

Amir rides a rickshaw back to **Rahim Khan's** apartment, and on the way he realizes that he is not too old to start fighting for himself. **Hassan** was gone, but part of him lives on in Kabul. **Amir** finds **Rahim Khan** praying, and he tells him that he will go to Kabul and find **Sohrab**.

This new knowledge increases Amir's obligation to go to Kabul, as Sohrab is his nephew by blood. The revelation also means that Baba had betrayed his closest friend and servant, and so he and Amir were more similar than they seemed at first. The decision to go to Kabul or not becomes Amir's greatest test of maturity and courage as an adult.



The signs that Baba was Hassan's real father become clear to the reader now too, and change things in hindsight – when Amir drove Ali and Hassan away, he was also robbing Baba of his son. Baba himself seems like much less of a saint now in light of this new knowledge, but there is yet another father/son relationship to add to the book.



This is a new irony, that Amir is not so different from Baba in his betrayal. But Amir now starts to see that by saving Sohrab, he can share in Baba's virtues, which redeemed Baba later in his life.



Even though Baba also betrayed Ali, Amir sees that his own betrayal ultimately led to Hassan's death. There is more irony in that if Amir does go save Sohrab, he will be doing what Baba would have done – after his own betrayal – in having the courage to stand up for what is right. Amir is about to take his first positive steps toward redemption.



Amir realizes that Baba was right – Amir was unable to stand up for himself for most of his life – but now he has a chance to do the right thing. By rescuing Sohrab, Amir will symbolically be saving Hassan as well, and righting some of the wrongs of his past.



CHAPTER 19

Rahim Khan arranges for a man named **Farid** to drive **Amir** to Kabul. As they drive past a bullet-riddled sign for the Khyber Pass, Amir starts to get car sick. Farid acts scornful of Amir, and hardly ever speaks as they drive. Rahim Khan had told Amir that Farid joined the *jihad* against the Russians at age fourteen, but many years later he moved to Peshawar after two of his daughters were killed by a land mine.

Farid appears as an important new character representing the Afghans that did not flee when the wars began. Amir must face the realities that he tried to escape – his country has been ravaged by violence, and the Afghans who stayed to fight (and then lost loved ones to land mines) are bitter against those who left.



Amir is dressed like **Farid**, in an Afghan hat called a *pakol* (which he never wore when he actually lived in Afghanistan), but Amir has to wear a fake beard that reaches his chest – beards are required for men under Taliban law. Amir explains that he left Pakistan soon after his decision, as he didn't want his comfortable life in America to lure him to change his mind. He did not tell **Soraya** he was going to Afghanistan, but let her assume he was staying with **Rahim Khan**.

Amir must dress up like an Afghan man, as he has changed and been "Americanized" more than is acceptable in the Afghanistan he is now returning to. Amir recognizes his own natural cowardice and insecurity, but he manages to overcome it with a newfound strength of will.



As they cross the border, **Amir** starts to see the poverty and damage of constant warfare. He says that he feels like a tourist in his own country. **Farid** sarcastically asks if Amir still thinks of Afghanistan as his own country.

Afghanistan has changed radically, and when Amir sees it for himself it is even more shocking. This reaction is the same one Hosseini himself had when he first returned home after living in America.



Amir asks **Farid** to stop snickering, and Farid guesses that Amir grew up in a big house with servants, that his father drove an American car, and that this was Amir's first time wearing a *pakol*. Farid points to an old man dressed in rags, and says that this is the *real* Afghanistan, and Amir has always been a tourist. Farid assumes that Amir is returning to sell off his father's land and then go back to America.

Farid recognizes and points out Amir's privilege. Though Amir had to flee his home, he still had money to escape and never had to fight or lose loved ones to random violence. Even when he lived in Afghanistan, Amir was much better off than the average citizen, and has never suffered as they have.



They reach Jalalabad that night and stay with **Farid's** brother **Wahid**. The house is small and bare, and though the family is clearly very poor, they treat **Amir** like a guest. Wahid is impressed that Amir is a writer, and he hopes that Amir will write about Afghanistan, as the rest of the world should know of their plight.

Unlike Farid, Wahid is not bitter against Amir for his privilege, but is generous with what little he has. Amir is almost embarrassed to say he is a writer, as it is a career that implies the privilege of having safety and food, but Wahid reminds him how he can use his talents to help Afghanistan.



Wahid asks **Amir** why he has returned to Afghanistan, but **Farid** interrupts and says scornfully that Amir is probably there to sell his land and bring the money back to America. Wahid is angry that Farid would insult a guest in his home, but then Amir explains that he is here to find the son of his illegitimate half-brother (he no longer tries to keep **Baba's** secret) and bring him back to Peshawar to be cared for. Wahid says that Amir is a true Afghan, and he is proud to have him in his home. Farid looks uncomfortable.

Almost everything that Farid had assumed was indeed true – Amir did grow up with servants, never had to fight the Russians, and escaped to an easier life in America – except for Amir's reason for returning. Wahid's description of Amir as a "true Afghan" seems tragic and idealistic, like Baba defending Afghan honor and decency, as the country has now become defined by violence.



Wahid's wife serves dinner to **Amir** and **Farid**, and Wahid apologizes that there is no meat – only the Taliban have meat now. Wahid says that he and his family ate earlier, so they do not join the guests. As he eats, Amir notices Wahid's three young sons staring at his wristwatch. He gives them the watch as a present, but they quickly lose interest in it.

Amir gets his first experience of real Afghan poverty (which is at its worst at this point in the story, but was always there in Afghanistan despite Amir never experiencing it) with Wahid's family. Again the father and son relationship is emphasized, but Wahid has no resources to help his boys.



As they prepare for bed (all in the same room), **Farid** apologizes to **Amir** and says he should not have assumed Amir's reason for returning. He says he will help Amir find **Sohrab**.

Farid becomes a loyal companion to Amir after he learns his real reason for coming to Afghanistan. Farid has no qualms about facing danger to do what is right.



That night **Amir** dreams of **Hassan's** execution, but in the dream the executioner is Amir himself. He wakes up and looks at the stars, and for the first time feels like he is back home. His feeling of kinship with the land surprises Amir.

Amir will be haunted by Hassan's death until he acts to make things better. Amir is still deeply connected to the land of his childhood, despite how it has changed.



While he is out, **Amir** overhears **Wahid** and his wife arguing about dinner – they gave all their food to Amir and **Farid**, and so the children had nothing to eat. Amir realizes then that the boys weren't staring at his wristwatch, but at his food. Before Amir and Farid leave the next morning, Amir slips a wad of money under one of the mattresses in the house.

This is an even more distressing example of both Afghan poverty and generosity. Amir mirrors his old action – framing Hassan by stuffing money under his mattress – but this time Amir doing it to make things right, and so he begins his path to redemption.



CHAPTER 20

On the drive to Kabul **Amir** is horrified by the results of two wars – old burned-out Soviet tanks, overturned Russian jeeps, destroyed villages. When they reach Kabul, Amir does not even recognize it as his old home. Rubble and orphaned beggars are everywhere, and the trees have all been cut down. The Soviets cut them down because they could hide snipers, and then the Afghans cut them down for firewood. There are no more *kites*, and the streets smell like diesel instead of lamb kabob.

Kabul is like a post-apocalyptic landscape, and totally transformed from the place Amir grew up. Anything that might signal normalcy – even trees – have been destroyed, so the place seems even more nightmarishly barren. The wars have taken the lives of many men, so there are lots of orphans without fathers – Sohrab is one of these.



A Taliban patrol approaches in a red pickup truck, with a few bearded men in the back with AK-47s. **Amir** can't help staring at them in terror. Once they pass, **Farid** angrily warns Amir not to stare at them again, as the Taliban will use even the slightest provocation as an excuse for violence.

The Taliban are the latest "rapists" of Afghanistan with their brutal regime. They are all bearded and checking Amir for his (fake) beard, as under their interpretation of Islam, a man without a beard is breaking the law.



An old beggar agrees with **Farid's** warning, and **Amir** starts to speak to him. The beggar talks about how the Taliban were first welcomed as heroes, and he quotes the poet **Hafez**. Amir recognizes the line, and the beggar explains that he used to teach literature at the university. He knew Amir's mother (who was also a teacher), **Sofia Akrami**, and Amir begs him for details about her, as Baba rarely spoke of her. The beggar cannot remember much, however, and soon Farid and Amir have to go. Amir muses on how the coincidence of meeting such a man should seem unlikely, but Afghans all know at least someone in common.

The beggar who was once a professor highlights the tragic decline of Afghanistan. The fact that he knew Amir's mother is another painful reminder that this broken city is the place of Amir's idyllic childhood – this was once a beautiful, peaceful place, and now it is home only to violence and poverty. The beggar's memories are the most we learn about Amir's mother, and apparently the most Amir learns too, as Baba told him very little about her.



Amir and **Farid** find the new orphanage (which replaced **Baba's**, which was destroyed) where **Sohrab** is supposed to be. The director, **Zaman**, is very wary of their questions and at first pretends he has never seen Sohrab. Only after Amir explains that he is Sohrab's half-uncle and reveals some defining details about Sohrab does Zaman let them in.

Zaman's wariness is an ominous sign, implying that grown men come to orphanage for more nefarious reasons. Baba's orphanage has been destroyed, which is another personal blow to Amir's memory.



Zaman says that many of the children there are not true orphans, but this place is better than what their widowed mothers could provide for them, as the Taliban forbid women to work. The building was once a warehouse for a carpet manufacturer, and there are not enough beds or blankets for the hundreds of children. A girl had frozen to death there last winter.

More examples of how the Taliban's strict religious laws bring real suffering to many citizens. Widowed mothers are forbidden from working, and so they must send their children away to the unequipped orphanage or else watch them starve.



Zaman takes **Amir** and **Farid** to his office and says he has bad news – **Sohrab** is no longer there, and it may be too late for him. He is hesitant to say more because the information he has is secret and dangerous, but Amir presses him. Zaman explains that there is a Taliban official who comes to the orphanage occasionally and pays to take a child away with him. Farid accuses Zaman of selling the children, and he attacks Zaman. He almost strangles Zaman to death until Amir points out that the children are watching.

Though the Taliban justifies its violence with religious dogma, it is clear from Zaman's horrible revelation that the Muslim language is a thin cover for corruption and sin. Once again the powerful are taking advantage of the weak, and this is the most extreme example yet – an adult government official abusing an orphaned child.



Zaman gets up, choking, and says that the official took **Sohrab** a month ago. Zaman explains that he has no power against the Taliban, and the money helps him feed the children – he has already spent all his life savings on the orphanage. **Amir** asks how to find the official, and Zaman says he will be at the soccer game at Ghazi Stadium the next day, wearing black sunglasses. Amir and **Farid** leave as the children gather around Zaman.

Just like Hassan was helpless against Assef, so Zaman is helpless against the Taliban. He can only choose the lesser of two evils, as he has no way to feed the children on his own. Once again, Hosseini shows that there is no easy answer to achieve redemption and make things better, as the violence and corruption in Afghanistan are complex and multi-layered.



CHAPTER 21

Farid and **Amir** drive through Kabul on the way to Amir's old neighborhood. They pass a dead body hanging from a beam, and two beggars haggling over an artificial leg. They reach the Wazir Akbar Khan district and the houses there are in better shape. Farid says the Taliban live there now, as well as the "people behind the Taliban," who are mostly foreigners.

The image of two beggars bargaining for a prosthetic leg captures the tragedy of daily life in the Taliban's Afghanistan. Farid hints at the larger international forces at work in the country, like money and support from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and others.



Amir sees **Baba's** old house, and then the narrative slips into Amir's memory of him and **Hassan** finding a little turtle, painting its shell red, and pretending it is a monster they have tamed. The story returns to the present, as Amir stands outside the gates and looks in. There is an unfamiliar car in the driveway, and the house looks smaller than Amir remembered it. Amir finds his old bedroom window and remembers watching **Ali** and Hassan drive away.

The tragedy of Kabul truly strikes Amir's heart as he looks at Baba's house. Once again, thoughts of Hassan are inextricably linked with Amir's memories of his childhood and Afghanistan. After the opulence of America, Baba's mansion seems smaller and less impressive.



Farid warns **Amir** that they shouldn't linger, and he says that it is best to just forget the past, as nothing has survived. But Amir says he is tired of trying to forget. He climbs the hill to the old pomegranate tree, and finds his old carving in the trunk: "Amir and Hassan. The Sultans of Kabul." Amir sits down and looks down over the city, remembering it as it once was. Then Farid honks and they have to leave.

Amir cannot help revisiting the old places of his childhood, but like everything else in Afghanistan, even the pomegranate tree has wilted. The Kabul that Amir remembers is symbolically dead, and in need of drastic change to redeem itself.



They stay in a run-down, overpriced hotel that night, and **Farid** asks **Amir** about America. Amir talks about the overabundance of food and television, and then he and Farid tell old Afghan jokes. The next day they go to Ghazi Stadium for the soccer game. The field is just cratered dirt, the players have to wear long pants, and no one in the crowd dares cheer too loudly.

America and Amir's life with Soraya, suddenly seem worlds away from this desolate Afghanistan. Even soccer games, once Baba's source of joy and enthusiasm, have been reduced to subdued, frightening events.



At halftime, two red pickup trucks full of **Taliban** drive into the stadium, and they unload a blindfolded man and woman, one from each truck. They bury them both up to their chest, the woman screaming wildly. **Amir** wants to leave, but he feels he must watch. An old cleric recites a prayer, and Amir suddenly remembers **Baba** mocking his old religious teacher, and saying “God help us all if Afghanistan ever falls into their hands.”

The true horror of the Taliban starts to be revealed here. They interpret Islamic law in a strict, harsh way (that most Muslims do not agree with) and use it to justify their violence and oppression of women. The violent punishment of “criminals” is considered an appropriate spectacle for a soccer game.



The cleric makes a speech, explaining that they are there to carry out God’s law and punish sinners. He says that adulterers throw stones at God’s house, and so they must throw stones back. Then another Taliban official steps out of the truck, and **Amir** and **Farid** recognize him as the man they are looking for – he is wearing “John Lennon” sunglasses and draws cheers from the crowd.

The rules of decency have been broken down and corrupted by the Taliban, and fear is used as a replacement for law. It is not a jury or even a judge that pronounces the man and woman guilty, but a religious cleric, and the punishment for a sexual sin is a violent, public death.



The official throws stones at the male prisoner until his head is a mangled pulp, and then he moves on to the woman. The Taliban then throw the bodies into the back of a truck, and the soccer game resumes. **Farid** arranges a meeting with the official for three o’clock that same afternoon – all he has to do is tell one of the Talibs that they have business to discuss.

The official who has taken Sohrab emerges as a formidable antagonist, as he personally murders the man and woman. Clearly the population lives in constant fear, as anything perceived as a sin by the Taliban can be punished with public, unquestioned violence.



CHAPTER 22

Amir and **Farid** return to the Wazir Akbar Khan neighborhood and arrive at the big house where Amir is to meet the Taliban official. Farid waits in the car, and Amir thanks him for all his help. Amir goes up to the door, wishing **Baba** was there to help him, but he is all alone. Two armed guards come out, frisk Amir, and lead him to an upstairs room to wait. Amir grows more terrified as time passes, and he thinks maybe it was a mistake to try and redeem himself – maybe he is just a coward at heart, and should accept this.

Amir cannot help thinking of Baba and wishing he was there, but he is finally doing what Baba always wanted him to do – stand up for himself even in the face of danger. This is Amir’s first positive action to make things right and redeem himself, so his natural inclination is still to flee and try to forget. But he overcomes his fear.



Finally the Taliban official enters, still wearing his sunglasses, with the two guards. He sits down and **Amir** notices that his shirt is still stained with blood from the execution at the soccer game. He and Amir greet each other, and then he motions for one of the guards to rip off Amir’s fake beard. He asks Amir if he enjoyed the show at halftime, and Amir is suddenly gripped with terror. The man says the best “show” was when he went door-to-door in Mazar-i-Sharif, shooting Hazara families. He says it is the best feeling in the world to kill and know that you are doing God’s work.

All the atrocities of the Taliban seem to coalesce in this one figure, who is remorseless and even pleased by the murders he has committed. The racial oppression of Hazaras returns as a theme, and the official references the massacre of Hazara citizens in the city of Mazar-i-Sharif. Amir is terrified once again, but this time he does not try to escape.



The official asks **Amir** about America, but Amir only says that he is looking for **Sohrab**. The official says that many think that abandoning Afghanistan for America is as good as treason, and he could have Amir shot. Amir tries to think about **Soraya** to calm his fear. The official sends a guard away, and he returns with **Sohrab**, who is dressed in blue silk, with bells on his ankles and mascara lining his eyes. To Amir, he looks exactly like **Hassan** did at that age.

Sohrab’s attire and demeanor make it clear that he has been sexually abused by the Taliban official and possibly others. Sohrab enters the narrative as the part of Hassan that lives on, the new “son” figure of the book, and for Amir he is a stand-in for Hassan himself and a chance for Amir to redeem himself.



The guards turn on music and make **Sohrab** dance, and then the official takes Sohrab in his arms and orders the guards to leave the room. The official rubs Sohrab’s stomach and asks **Amir** whatever happened to **Babalu** – the name **Assef** used to call **Ali**. Amir realizes with horror that the official is actually Assef, and that everything bad about his past has returned.

Assef’s return is another horrible, ironic coincidence. As Sohrab is an “extension” of Hassan, it is as if Assef is raping Hassan all over again by sexually abusing his son. In Assef all the terrible parts of Amir’s past return in a single, antagonistic figure.



Amir says he will pay **Assef** for the boy, but Assef replies that he does not need money – his parents live in a beach house in Australia. He tells Amir why he joined the Taliban. He was in prison once, and got a painful kidney stone. One night a guard started kicking Assef, and the blows caused the kidney stone to pass. Assef started laughing with relief, though the man kept kicking him, and at that moment he knew God was on his side.

Amir joined the Taliban because they gave him free reign to indulge his sadistic tendencies. He even feels justified and guiltless because the Taliban uses religion to excuse their atrocities. Assef acts as a sort of foil to Amir, in that both were raised with wealth and privilege.



Assef continues that he is now on a mission to “take out the garbage” in Afghanistan – which is what he was doing by massacring Hazaras. **Amir** says that this is called ethnic cleansing, and Assef seems to enjoy the term. Amir again asks for **Sohrab**, but he won’t tell Assef what he plans to do with him. Finally Assef shoves Sohrab towards Amir, but says he cannot have him for free. Assef says he and Amir have unfinished business, and Amir remembers the day **Hassan** pointed the slingshot at Assef’s eye and Assef promised revenge.

Assef represents the violent, abusive part of Afghanistan, and Amir (as his young, cowardly self) the ones with power who stood by as the powerful raped the powerless. But now Amir is standing up for what is right for the first time, and trying to stop more violence being committed. Certain images begin to recur from Amir and Assef’s past, like the slingshot and laughing while being beaten.



Assef calls the guards and tells them not to come in, no matter they might hear, and that if **Amir** leaves the room alive they are to let him pass. He wants **Sohrab** to stay and watch, however. Then Assef puts on his old brass knuckles. After that the narrative becomes disjointed, as Amir remembers little that follows – first the scene jumps forward to a doctor leaning over Amir’s body.

Amir’s fight with Assef becomes the climax of the novel. The brass knuckles return as another image from Amir’s childhood. As when he says Hassan being raped, Amir’s memory starts to jump around and the narrative breaks up, emphasizing the trauma of the event.



Amir then describes the fight in flashes of swallowing teeth and blood, **Assef** throwing him against a wall and striking him, and **Sohrab** screaming. Then Amir starts laughing, as he suddenly feels at peace for the first time since his betrayal of **Hassan** back in 1975. He is finally getting the punishment he deserves, and he feels healed, not broken. Assef is enraged by Amir's laughter, but just before he beats Amir to death Sohrab stops him, his slingshot loaded with a part of the table and pointed at Assef's eye.

Amir as a foil to Assef becomes more clear as he acts out the story Assef just told, about laughing while being beaten. This beating is replacing the one Amir should have gotten decades earlier, had he stepped into the alley and defended Hassan. Amir is not trying to win the fight, but only to not run away, and to redeem himself by getting the punishment he feels he deserves.



Sohrab cries and asks **Assef** to stop hurting **Amir**, and Assef warns him to put down the slingshot or terrible things will happen to him. Then Assef lunges at Sohrab, and Sohrab fires the slingshot into Assef's left eye. Assef screams and rolls around on the floor, his eye bleeding, and Sohrab and Amir run past the guards and out of the house. **Farid** is shocked at Amir's state, but he helps carry him to the car, and they drive off with a sobbing Sohrab.

More motifs return from the past as Sohrab reenacts Hassan's threat with the slingshot, and this time actually puts out Assef's eye, as Hassan had threatened to do years earlier. This recalls the saying "an eye for an eye," and implies that Assef, like Amir, is getting the punishment he deserves.



CHAPTER 23

The narrative continues with a blur of **Amir's** memories. Time seems out of order, and he sees a nurse named **Aisha** leaning over him, and a man with a moustache, and a familiar man in a *pakol*. Amir imagines **Baba** wrestling the black bear, but when Amir looks into his eyes he sees it isn't Baba, but Amir himself that is wrestling the bear.

The image of Baba and the bear returns, but this time it is Amir who is wrestling the bear – this means that Amir has become the kind of man Baba always wanted him to be, and he can face obstacles head-on and fight to overcome them.



Amir wakes up and learns that he is in a hospital in Peshawar, and the man with the moustache is named **Dr. Faruqi**, though Amir thinks of him as "Armand." Amir tries to speak, but discovers his mouth is wired shut. The doctor tells him he has a ruptured spleen, seven broken ribs, a fractured eye socket, and a split upper lip. He will have to eat only liquids for a few weeks. Amir thinks about the damage, but the thing that sticks with him is the lip injury – it is split down the middle like **Hassan's** cleft lip.

The cleft lip was a sign of Hassan's lower social status, but also his purity of heart, as he was Baba's "other half" and inherited his courage and goodness. Now that Assef has split Amir's lip, Amir has symbolically become more like Hassan in that he is willing to stand up for what is right. This also represents a kind of unity between Pashtun and Hazara, a unity that is necessary if Afghanistan is ever to heal.



Farid and **Sohrab** visit **Amir** the next day, and Amir thanks them and properly introduces himself to Sohrab, who barely speaks. Amir asks about **Rahim Khan**, and Farid says he disappeared the day after they did, but left Amir a note. When Farid leaves, Amir asks if Sohrab will stay. Sohrab sits with Amir, but he does not speak and only looks at his hands.

Sohrab is haunted by his past trauma like so many other characters (Hassan, Kamal, and Amir with his guilt), so he is slow to open up and trust Amir. Farid has become a loyal friend on Amir's journey.



That night **Amir** reads **Rahim Khan's** note. Rahim Khan says that he knew what happened with Amir and **Hassan**, and though what Amir did was wrong, he was too hard on himself afterward. He hopes Amir will find some peace on his trip to Afghanistan.

Rahim Khan then says that he knows **Baba** was hard on **Amir**, but part of the reason for this was Baba's own guilt. He could not love **Hassan** openly as a son, and Amir represented his privileged half, so when Baba was being hard on Amir he was also being hard on himself. All of Baba's good works, including the orphanage and his many works of charity, were a way of redeeming himself for his sin. Rahim Khan says he hopes Amir can forgive both Baba and himself.

With the letter, **Rahim Khan** leaves **Amir** a key to his safe-deposit box, where there is money to cover Amir's expenses in Peshawar. He asks that Amir not come looking for him, as he has little time left to live. Amir weeps as he reads the letter, and thinks about his similarities with **Baba** – how they were both "tortured souls," who had betrayed their truest friend. Amir compares himself with Baba's many good works, and wonders if he has done anything to redeem himself.

The next morning **Amir** looks at himself in the mirror, and sees all the damage to his face. **Farid** and **Sohrab** arrive, and Farid says they should leave Peshawar soon, as the Taliban have friends there. Amir gives Farid the names of the American couple that **Rahim Khan** told him ran the Peshawar orphanage, and he leaves to find them.

Amir spends the rest of the day playing a card game, *panjpar*, with **Sohrab**, who still rarely speaks. Amir asks what Hassan had said about him, and Sohrab says that **Hassan** told him Amir was the best friend he ever had. When Amir tries to touch him, Sohrab flinches.

Amir's suspicions were true, and Rahim Khan did know of his betrayal, and asked him to save Sohrab in part to give Amir a way to redeem himself.



Rahim Khan expands on the idea that Baba was metaphorically split in two, and that Amir was the half that inherited the privilege, while Hassan inherited the virtue. Rahim Khan also emphasizes that betrayal does not need to mean only guilt and evil – Baba's good works came out of his betrayal, and so much good came from the initial sin.



Amir is now beginning to positively act for good, like Baba did, to try and amend his past wrongs. He does not know what to do yet, but he knows that it involves Sohrab. Amir has now lost another father-figure in Rahim Khan.



Amir is unrecognizable because of all his injuries, but he is on the path to redemption now. Amir is still in danger, as the Taliban are supported by many in Pakistan.



Sohrab is traumatized by his sexual abuse, and so cannot let himself be touched by an adult yet. Amir used to play panjpar with Sohrab. Hassan was clearly still loyal to and fond of Amir, as he spoke so positively of him to his son.



For the next two days, **Sohrab** and **Amir** play *panjpar* in silence. The next day Amir decides that he must leave, and he discharges himself from the hospital early. Then **Farid** arrives and says that there never was a **John** and **Betty Caldwell** in Peshawar. Amir and Farid are worried about what they will do now, but they get **Rahim Khan's** money from the bank and decide to take Sohrab to Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan. On the drive there Amir sleeps, and he dreams of Rahim Khan's words: "a way to be good again."

It is unclear whether Rahim Khan thought that the American couple was in Pakistan or not. He may have been trying to break the news to Amir slowly that "the way to be good again" is to adopt Sohrab himself. This would cure some of Amir's guilt for betraying Hassan, and also help with the emptiness he feels for being unable to have a child. But things are never so convenient in the world of The Kite Runner.



CHAPTER 24

Amir, **Farid**, and **Sohrab** arrive in Islamabad, and Amir is impressed with its size and cleanliness – to him it looks like the city "Kabul could have become someday." They pass the Shah Faisal mosque, one of the largest mosques in the world, and Sohrab appears interested in it. They arrive at a nice hotel and Sohrab starts watching TV in silence. Farid says goodbye, and Amir gives him more than two thousand dollars and thanks him for all his help.

Amir's description of Islamabad is both tragic (because of the current state of Kabul) but also slightly hopeful, as he imagines what Kabul could be like in a time of peace and economic prosperity. Everything Sohrab does shows his past trauma and how he cannot escape it.



Amir takes a pain pill and falls asleep, and when he wakes up **Sohrab** is gone. The hotel manager is unhelpful, and implies that Amir is a bad father. Amir starts to get desperate, but then he remembers Sohrab's fascination with the huge mosque. He finds Sohrab in the parking lot, looking at the mosque. Sohrab talks a little bit about his parents, and then Amir talks about **Baba**. Amir gives Sohrab the snapshot of **Hassan**.

Sohrab runs away because he is still unable to trust anyone, even after he watched Amir get beaten for him. He is not running away to escape – he is too depressed to have the energy for that – but just wants to be alone and think about what has happened to him compared to the religious teachings he has heard about sex and violence.



Sohrab starts crying softly and asks if he will go to hell for what he did to **Assef**. **Amir** says that Assef deserved it and more, and explains that Assef had hurt **Hassan** very badly when he was a boy. Sohrab says sometimes he is glad his parents aren't around anymore, because he doesn't want them to see him so dirty and sinful. Amir says he is not dirty or sinful, and Sohrab lets him hug him for a while. Then Amir asks if Sohrab wants to go back to America with him, but Sohrab doesn't answer.

Sohrab finally lets Amir touch him, but his sexual abuse has left him feeling physically dirty at all times, and ashamed of what his parents would think of him. Amir realizes what must be done now. He had known in theory what would probably happen, but now he is bonding personally with Sohrab, and genuinely wants to adopt him and bring him home.



For a week afterward, neither **Amir** nor **Sohrab** mentions America, but one day they are playing cards and Sohrab asks about San Francisco. Then Amir tells him the truth about **Hassan** – that they were half-brothers, but neither of them knew. Sohrab guesses it is because Hassan was a Hazara, and he wonders if **Baba** was ashamed of him, but Amir says Baba was only ashamed of himself.

Amir is tired of trying to hide the truth and forget the past, and he wants to start a new, honest father/son relationship with Sohrab to break the cycle of lies and betrayals. Sohrab is surprisingly shrewd for someone so young, just like his father was when he seemed to read Amir's mind.



Later that day **Sohrab** asks about San Francisco again, and **Amir** describes the fog. Sohrab worries that Amir or his wife will get tired of him if he goes to America, but Amir promises that they won't. Sohrab then makes Amir promise not to send him back to an orphanage, and then Sohrab agrees to go to America. Amir calls **Soraya**, who has been sick with worry, and explains everything to her, including the story of his betrayal of Hassan. At the end of the story, Soraya says Amir must bring Sohrab back with him, and she is excited to meet him.

Amir finally confesses his past to Soraya, as he should have done the day of their engagement when she told him the story of her past relationship. Amir is excited by this solution which seems to solve all of his and Sohrab's problems neatly, but he does not anticipate the complications that life always throws in the way.



The next day **Amir** goes with **Sohrab** to the American embassy. They meet with a man named **Raymond Andrews**, who listens to Amir's story and then bluntly tells him that it will be almost impossible to adopt Sohrab. Without death certificates for his parents, they cannot prove that Sohrab is an orphan, and usually the cooperation of the country in origin is necessary, and there is no American embassy in Kabul. When Amir insists, Andrews suggests that he could talk to an immigration lawyer named **Omar Faisal**, but otherwise he should give up the endeavor.

Once again Hosseini seems to be saying that there are no easy solutions to the complicated problems like those in Afghanistan and in Amir's personal life. In a more ideal world or a less realistic novel, this section would never occur, and Amir could just bring Sohrab back to America to live happily ever after. But there are always tragic coincidences and random complications.



Amir asks if **Andrews** has any children, and Andrews says no. Amir then leaves angrily with **Sohrab**, and on the way out he comments about Andrews' rudeness to his secretary. She explains that Andrews' daughter recently committed suicide.

Even Andrews cannot be made into a bureaucratic villain, as he has his own tragic backstory. Often it is the system to blame, not individuals, which makes problems much more complex and harder to solve.



They return to the hotel and **Sohrab** takes a long bath. **Amir** wonders when he will begin to feel cleaned of the sexual abuse. Amir calls **Soraya**, and she says she has a family member who can contact his colleagues at the immigration office. The next day Amir and Sohrab meet with **Faisal**, the lawyer. He says the adoption will be difficult, but not impossible. He says the best option is to put Sohrab in an orphanage, fill out the forms, and then wait for up to two years for the government's approval.

Amir recognizes Sohrab's trauma, and why he keeps taking long baths to try and physically rid himself of his abusive past. Faisal is more hopeful of the adoption, but the best possibility will involve Amir going back on his promise to never make Sohrab return to an orphanage – essentially betraying Sohrab like Amir betrayed his father.



That night, **Amir** tells **Sohrab** that he thinks he will be able to come to America, but first he might have to go back to an orphanage for a while. When he hears that, Sohrab screams and cries that they will hurt him there, and eventually he cries himself to sleep in Amir's arms. Then Amir himself takes a nap.

Amir feels he must go through with this betrayal, as it is for the greater good. Sohrab is so traumatized by his past that the thought of being abandoned again terrifies him.



When **Amir** wakes up, **Sohrab** is in the bath, and **Soraya** calls. She says that her family contact can get Sohrab a visa, and that it will be easier to adopt him once he is in America. Amir is overjoyed and goes into the bathroom to tell Sohrab, but he finds him passed out and bleeding in the bathtub, and Amir falls to his knees, screaming.

Amir's redemption is still incomplete, as Sohrab's attempted suicide will now hang over his head just like Hassan's rape. Sohrab tries to free himself of his own past trauma through the ultimate escape. In a tragic coincidence, Amir is just moments too late for a happier ending to his story.



CHAPTER 25

Sohrab is taken to the emergency room, and **Amir** is not allowed to go in with him. Amir takes a sheet from a supply closet, asks a nurse which way is west, and uses the sheet as a prayer rug. He prays for the first time in more than fifteen years, and he recites the only words he can remember: "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger."

Amir feels responsible for Sohrab's suicide just as he did for Hassan's rape and death, and he feels he is once again being punished for his sins. Amir returns in his time of need to the religion he has always struggled with, caught between liberal Baba and the Islamic fundamentalists.



Amir realizes then that he does not believe in a God, and he asks God to forgive him for his neglect and betrayal, and he promises to pray every day if only God will save **Sohrab's** life.

At this tragic juncture Amir seems to accept religion – not an Islam of harsh rules and violent jihad (holy war), but of a God who is willing to forgive and heal.



After a while **Amir** falls asleep on the floor, and he dreams of **Sohrab** in the bloody bathtub and the razor he used to cut himself, the same razor Amir had shaved with that day. A doctor wakes Amir up and tells him that Sohrab is alive, but he has lost a lot of blood. Amir is overcome with joy, and he cries into the doctor's hands.

Amir's prayers are answered, and so he will return to Islam for the rest of the narrative, and keep praying regularly. Amir's redemption is imperfect, but so is this latest betrayal. Sohrab still lives, and so Amir has more time to regain his trust and try to make things right.



Several days pass with **Amir** sleeping on a hospital couch and **Sohrab** sleeping with a ventilator. Eventually Amir returns to his hotel to get some rest, but he can't help lingering in the bathroom and imagining Sohrab's suicide attempt. The next day Amir returns and finds Sohrab in a new room. He is awake, but under constant suicide watch. Amir asks him how he feels, but Sohrab says nothing, and his eyes look lifeless.

If before Sohrab seemed subdued because of his terrible past, now it seems that he has truly given up on life. He is even one of the luckier ones, compared to many Afghan children, as at least he has a relative trying to adopt him and take him away. The rape of the weak by the powerful leaves many broken, lost victims in its wake.



Amir reads from the story of "**Rostam and Sohrab**," but Sohrab shakes his head when Amir asks if he should continue. Finally Sohrab speaks, and he says that he is tired of everything, and he wants his old life back, with his parents and **Rahim Khan**. He says he wishes Amir had left him in the bathtub. Amir touches his shoulder and he flinches. Amir says that he had been coming to tell Sohrab that he found a way to take him to America. Amir asks if he still wants to go, but Sohrab stops speaking altogether, and the light of hope seems to have left his eyes.

Sohrab once again flinches at Amir's touch, as he has lost what little trust he had regained. Sohrab seems totally lost and hopeless now – similar to the current state of Afghanistan – but Amir is unwilling to give up. He has to believe that redemption is possible, or else he himself will sink under the weight of his guilt, and his country will collapse beyond any hope of recovery.



Eventually **Amir** takes **Sohrab's** silence as an acceptance, and a week later they arrive in America. Amir remembers a small incident years before (in America), where he "ruined" the end of a movie for another customer at the video store. He says that in Afghanistan, people only want to know how the movie ends – if the protagonist finds happiness or failure, gets married or dies. Amir says that if he was describing his own story, he would not know how to explain the end. Life is not a movie – it is complex and does not care for dramatic arcs.

Amir comments on the arc of his own story, and once again Hosseini illustrates that there are no easy answers in life, especially with such dense, complex problems as those in Afghanistan and in Amir's past. History and memory are constant sources of pleasure and pain, complicating the present and keeping any truly happy or tragic ending from being neatly tied up. Hosseini is trying to write realistic fiction, and there are no totally happy or sad endings in reality.



Amir returns to the narrative, as he and **Sohrab** arrive in San Francisco in August of 2001. **Soraya** picks them up at the airport, and she talks to Sohrab and shows him the bedroom she has decorated for him, but he does not respond or show interest.

The happy ending that should have been, with Sohrab completing Amir and Soraya's family, and them raising Sohrab in a safe, loving environment, seems to dry up in the face of Sohrab's traumas.



That night **Amir** finds the photo of **Hassan** under **Sohrab's** pillow. Looking at Hassan's face, Amir realizes how **Baba** was torn between his two sons, and how maybe he had thought of Hassan as his true son, as he was the half that contained all of Baba's goodness. Amir realizes then that he has forgiven Baba, though it did not happen as dramatically as he expected.

Even Amir's forgiveness of Baba and loss of guilt over their relationship comes with no dramatic fanfare, but quietly and realistically. This small, unobtrusive victory suggests how Amir, and later Sohrab, might eventually escape their pasts, by the slow letting go of pain, and the building up of something new to replace it.



The next night **General Taheri** and **Jamila** come over for dinner. While **Soraya** and her mother set the table, **Amir** tells the General about Kabul and the Taliban. General Taheri skirts the subject of **Sohrab** at first, but then asks Amir why there is a Hazara boy living with him now. Amir explains simply – **Baba** slept with his servant's wife and had a son named **Hassan**, who is dead now. Sohrab is Hassan's son, Amir's nephew, and Amir warns General Taheri to never call Sohrab a "Hazara boy" in his presence again.

Amir has been changed by his experience in Afghanistan, and he acts like Baba would now, being refreshingly truthful and courageous in the face of General Taheri's stiffness and Pashtun racial prejudice. Amir is not bothering to keep secrets now, but feels exhilarated in speaking out loud the truths that were kept closeted for so long.



Amir describes the nature of **Sohrab's** silence – it is not just quietness, but as if he had shut himself down or curled up deep inside himself. He seems to occupy no space, and leaves no trace when he enters or leaves a room. The silence is hard on **Soraya**, as she had dreamed of doing so many "parent-child" things with him, and both her and Amir's dreams of a happy family seem to wilt in Sohrab's presence.

Soraya also feels the potential for the "happy ending" of their story, and the tragedy of how it went awry. Sohrab takes much longer this time to open up again, as his multiple traumas are now heaped onto his back and weighing him down. He is tragically world-weary for someone so young.



While the family lives quietly, great movements shake America and Afghanistan. **Amir** describes the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the American bombing of Afghanistan that followed. The names of Afghan cities are suddenly common words on American television, and the Taliban flee into the mountains, driven back by the Northern Alliance. **Hamid Karzai** becomes the new president of the country, and there is some hope for the future.

At this point the political events have little effect on Amir's personal life, except that Afghanistan becomes an international topic of conversation. After so much tragedy there is still hope of redemption for the country, but as with Amir, it will not be quick and easy, but will be slow and complicated like the problems themselves.



Feeling helpless in the face of **Sohrab's** silence and the new war in Afghanistan, **Amir** and **Soraya** get jobs with a hospital project where they help fund and run a hospital on the Afghan-Pakistani border. **General Taheri** is finally summoned back to Afghanistan for a ministry position, and **Jamila** stays with Amir and Soraya until she is ready to join him.

Amir does not try to avoid Afghanistan anymore, but is now willing to work to help his homeland. Hosseini implies that it is only through the work of many like Amir (or Baba before him) and Soraya that Afghanistan can be healed.



Amir describes a "small miracle" that takes place on a rainy day in March of 2002. He takes **Sohrab**, **Soraya**, and **Jamila** to a park where a group of Afghans are celebrating the Afghan New Year. Amir prays before he leaves – he knows all the verses by heart now. They arrive and Sohrab stands silently in the rain for a while, apart from the rest. Amir talks with some friends about **Baba** and about the difficult job **Karzai** has. By the afternoon the weather clears.

After undercutting so much potential for a "happy ending," Hosseini does allow his story to end on a warily hopeful note with this final scene. Amir and Soraya are still part of the Afghan community, and they keep their traditions alive just as they did at the flea market.



Soraya interrupts **Amir's** conversation and points out some **kites** flying in the sky over the park. Amir finds an Afghan kite seller and buys a kite, and he takes it over to **Sohrab**. Amir checks the string and talks to Sohrab about **Hassan**, and his skill at kite-flying and kite-running. Amir asks if Sohrab wants to fly the kite, but there is no response. Amir starts running, the kite rising behind him, and then he realizes Sohrab is following him. Amir feels a rush of joy, as he hasn't flown a kite in decades.

Kites return to the narrative, but this time as a symbol of hope for the future. Amir shares this small moment with Sohrab, a moment like those he had with Hassan so long ago, and like Hassan had with Sohrab. Again there is no dramatic transformation – Sohrab does not suddenly speak, and shrug off his trauma – but there is a small instance of hope in the face of a dark world.



Amir offers again, and **Sohrab** hesitantly takes the **kite** string. Amir wishes time would stand still. Then a green kite approaches for a fight and Sohrab hands the spool back to Amir, but he looks alert and alive, interested in the kites. Amir shows Sohrab what was **Hassan's** favorite trick, and soon they have trapped the green kite, with Amir flying and Sohrab holding the spool. Amir lets himself slip into his memories of Kabul, Hassan, **Ali**, and **Baba**, and then he cuts the string of the green kite.

As when he was in the back of the fuel truck, thinking of something happy, Amir instinctively returns to his memories of flying kites with Hassan. Hassan lives on in Sohrab, so Amir sharing this moment with Sohrab shows that Amir has achieved a kind of redemption. He cannot undo the past, but he can find again the happiness of his childhood, and it is almost as if he has made things right with Hassan.



Behind them people cheer for their victory, and the tiniest smile appears on **Sohrab's** face. **Amir** knows it is only a little thing, but it is perhaps a sign of better things to come, an omen of hope for the future. Amir asks if he should run the green **kite** for Sohrab, and Sohrab nods. Amir says "for you, a thousand times over," and he sets off running with a smile on his face.

As it was with Baba, flying the kite becomes a link between Amir and Sohrab, a place where their separate worlds intersect. Sohrab's smile is a small thing, but Hosseini implies that it is an omen of more to come. Amir brings the story to a dramatic close with his own words, repeating the phrase Hassan spoke before his rape. When Amir says these words, they are words of hope, which suggests that Amir has indeed redeemed himself and been able to bring good out of his guilty past.

