

The Kite Runner



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF KHALED HOSSEINI

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.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

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.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

As a child, Hosseini was greatly influenced by ancient Persian poets like Rumi and Hafez. *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.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Kite Runner*
- **When Written:** 2001-2003
- **Where Written:** Mountain View, California

- **When Published:** 2003
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary literature
- **Genre:** Historical fiction, Drama
- **Setting:** Kabul, Afghanistan, Pakistan (mostly Peshawar), and San Francisco Bay Area, California
- **Climax:** Amir's fight with Assef
- **Antagonist:** Assef
- **Point of View:** First person limited, from Amir's point of view

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.

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.

MINOR CHARACTERS

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



CHARACTERS

MAJOR 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

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

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



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

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



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.



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.

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes from the opening lines of the book, which Hosseini introduces by immediately looking back into the past and examining how the past has affected the present. Amir offers no explanation of the "alley" he is thinking about yet, but later on in the book we will learn that he is haunted by the alley where he watched Hassan being raped by Assef—the place of his first great betrayal, Amir feels. None of this is clear yet, except for the idea that things we try to forget never really go away. The past is always there, lingering just under the surface of the present—one of Hosseini's most important themes in the novel.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☞ 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.

Related Characters: Amir (speaker), Baba, Sofia Akrami

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

Here Amir describes his relationship with his father (Baba) as a child. Baba was a big, bold, and successful man, while Amir grew up timid, physically weak, and insecure. Most of the important relationships in the book deal with fathers and children, the central one being Amir and his relationship with Baba. Though Amir is still young at this point, he is already wrestling with the ideas of betrayal and redemption that will follow him throughout the novel. He feels that he has betrayed Baba by being born at all, because Amir's mother died giving birth to him, and Baba cherished his wife above all else. As a way of "redeeming" himself for this "betrayal," then, Amir tries to be like Baba and make Baba proud, but he is constantly faced with the fact that he is absolutely nothing like Baba, and Amir's strengths don't lie in areas Baba finds important or worthy.

☞ "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."



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Riverhead Books edition of *The Kite Runner* published in 2013.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ 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.

Related Characters: Amir (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 1

Related Characters: Baba (speaker), Amir

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 22

Explanation and Analysis



In this quote Baba is referring to Amir, and discussing him with his friend, Rahim Khan. Baba and Rahim Khan are alone in Baba's study, but Amir is eavesdropping on them through the door. Once again the father-son relationship between Amir and Baba takes center stage, as we briefly see Baba's perspective here—he is indeed ashamed of his son, doesn't understand him, and is worried about his future. This essentially confirms all of Amir's fears and insecurities about being unworthy of Baba. At the same time, Baba's words are eerily prophetic, as Amir does indeed go on to not "stand up" for his friend Hassan when he is in trouble. Yet this also might be a self-fulfilling prophecy too—Amir knows that Baba thinks he is weak and cowardly, and so he acts weak and cowardly.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☝ 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 harelippped 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.

Related Characters: Amir (speaker), Hassan

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

Here Amir reflects on his relationship with Hassan, who was like a brother to him, but whom he never really thought of as a friend because of their ethnic, cultural, religious, and economic differences. Amir is a Pashtun (an Afghan ethnic group) and a Sunni Muslim, while Hassan is a Hazara (a persecuted minority) and a Shi'a Muslim. Furthermore, Hassan and his father work for Amir and his father—they are all very close, but Hassan and Ali are also clearly the


subordinates of Baba and Amir. These political and social differences then ultimately affect the actual relationship between Amir and Hassan, although otherwise the two would be best friends. Testament to this is the fact that when the adult Amir remembers Afghanistan, he thinks of Hassan's face and of the two boys' time together. His present vision of the country is primarily an image of a lost past.

Here Amir also mentions the symbols of kites and Hassan's cleft lip. In this particular memory, kites represent Amir's idyllic past in an Afghanistan that was at peace, while the cleft lip is one of Hassan's distinguishing features—and particularly distinguishing for the Hassan who existed before Baba had his lip fixed, and before Amir betrayed him.

Chapter 6 Quotes

☝ 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.

Related Characters: Amir (speaker), Baba

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 56



Explanation and Analysis

Amir is preparing for a big upcoming kite tournament, and he decides that this tournament will be a way for him to win Baba's affection and prove himself worthy as Baba's son. In order to truly win Baba's admiration, Amir decides that his must not only be the last kite in the sky, cutting all the others down, but he must also "run" the final defeated kite (find it when it falls and bring it back). This again speaks to the father-son relationship between Amir and Baba, in which Amir feels that he is a disappointment and embarrassment to his father. It also shows Amir's childlike desire for "redemption"—he feels he must somehow prove himself or achieve a tangible victory in order to earn Baba's love.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☞ 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.

Related Characters: Amir, Hassan (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

This is the moment just before the central tragedy and betrayal of the book. Amir has just cut down the last remaining kite in the tournament, and Hassan, the "kite runner," runs off to find the fallen kite and bring it back to Amir. This scene is then immediately juxtaposed with the adult Amir's later memories and experiences. Thus this is both a scene in Hosseini's narrative and a "flashback" into a happier past that Amir is remembering. After this moment, in which Hassan seems to declare his total devotion to Amir, Amir will go on to abandon Hassan as he is raped by Assef, changing both boys' lives forever.

☞ "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.

Related Characters: Hassan, Assef (speaker), Amir

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 72

Explanation and Analysis

Here the wealthy, sadistic Assef taunts Hassan, who has just found the tournament's last kite and is trying to bring it back to Amir. Assef not only racistly scorns Hassan because Hassan is a Hazara, but also tries to undercut Hassan's relationship with Amir. Assef suggests that Amir doesn't really consider Hassan to be his friend. Though Hassan stoutly defends Amir, the tragic part of this scene is that Assef is partly right—Amir is incredibly close to Hassan, but still always considers himself somehow separate from and

superior to Hassan, and would be ashamed to openly declare himself "friends" with his Hazara servant. This is the root of betrayal, as Amir will go on to abandon Hassan as Assef rapes him—partly because Amir is afraid, but partly because society has always taught Amir to see Hassan as inferior to himself.

☞ 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?

Related Characters: Amir (speaker), Assef, Hassan, Baba

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis



This is one of the most crucial scenes in the book, as Amir abandons Hassan to be raped by Assef. Not only is Amir essentially betraying his best friend and brother-figure, a boy who is totally loyal and devoted to him, but he is also doing so in a selfish and almost premeditated way. Amir is afraid of being beaten up or mocked by Assef, certainly, but more than that Amir decides in this moment that he is willing to abandon Hassan to violence and rape in order to bring back the kite and impress Baba. Amir basically sacrifices his relationship with his friend for the sake of his relationship with his father—betraying Hassan as a part of earning Baba's love.


Another element of this scene is how social divisions and prejudice allow Amir to justify his decision to himself. Because Hassan is a Hazara, he is seen by many Pashtuns as inferior, and even as less than human. Taking this prejudiced view (which Amir doesn't really believe in his heart) would allow Amir to feel a little less guilt for his actions—if the person he's betraying isn't really a person, then it isn't really a betrayal.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☞ 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.

Related Characters: Amir (speaker), Hassan

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 86

Explanation and Analysis

Amir has just betrayed Hassan, abandoning him to be raped by Assef. Now Amir remembers a dream about a lake monster that Hassan claimed to have had the night before the kite tournament. At the time, Amir suspected that Hassan told him about the dream to comfort him, but now Amir finds himself thinking about the dream again, and considers himself to be the monster in the lake that Hassan dreamed about. Amir feels so guilty about what he has done, and simultaneously so afraid of admitting it, that he feels he has become something monstrous and grotesque. The nature of his betrayal, as well—a scene involving violence and rape—also seems especially inhuman.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☹☹ 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.

Related Characters: Amir (speaker), Hassan

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 105

Explanation and Analysis

This quote takes place just after Amir has gotten Hassan falsely accused of stealing money and a watch. Baba confronts Hassan and asks him directly whether or not he took the money. Hassan, though obviously aware of what Amir has done, immediately admits to the crime, and Amir is shocked. In this moment Amir realizes that Hassan also knows that Amir saw him being held down and raped, and did nothing. Instead of being angry, Hassan has only proven his devotion by seemingly forgiving Amir and now sacrificing himself for Amir's sake yet again. Amir betrays Hassan for the second time (the first being abandoning him to be raped), and with more premeditation this time, but Hassan's only response is to meekly accept the punishment

he doesn't deserve.

Chapter 10 Quotes

☹☹ 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.

Related Characters: Amir (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 112

Explanation and Analysis


At this point the novel shifts from the personal story of Amir and Hassan to a larger political scale, as huge events affect Afghanistan and thus the lives of Hosseini's characters. Right now Amir and Baba are fleeing their house because of the political turmoil—Afghanistan has been taken over by a Communist regime, and Russian soldiers have invaded the country. The theme of betrayal is no longer just a personal one relating to Amir, but now seems to be a part of the very consciousness of the war-torn country—violence is everywhere, no one trusts each other, and neighbors betray neighbors for the sake of their own safety. Likewise, the theme of violence and rape now broadens to the national scale, most obviously because of the war and violence tearing Afghanistan apart, but also because the country's violation by external Soviet forces constitutes its own kind of "rape."

Chapter 11 Quotes

☹☹ 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 harelipped 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.

Related Characters: Amir (speaker), Hassan

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 136

Explanation and Analysis

Amir and Baba have now left Afghanistan and moved to America, driven away from their home by violence and Soviet rule. While Baba is distraught at having to leave his beloved home, Amir feels almost relieved to be away from the place where reminders of his past betrayals (abandoning Hassan to be raped, and then framing Hassan for theft) are everywhere. Once again Hassan is associated with his cleft lip (harelip), which at this point is a symbol of a lost, happier past. Amir is still consumed by guilt and self-hatred for his betrayals, and so he is eager to forget the past and try to lose himself in the strange, overwhelming new world of America and its fast-paced society.

Chapter 12 Quotes

☝☝ 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.

Related Characters: Amir (speaker), Soraya, Baba, Ali, Hassan

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 165

Explanation and Analysis

Amir has just asked Soraya to marry him, and she has agreed, but she said she had something to confess to first. Soraya then tells Amir about how she ran away with a man when she was a young woman, and how her father had to forcibly bring her back. Amir feels somewhat shaken by this revelation, but realizes that it pales in comparison to his own secret betrayals. Amir then has this opportunity to confess, and to start working towards redemption—but he finds that he can't bring himself to tell Soraya the truth. Both Amir and Soraya have pasts that haunt them, but Soraya now at least doesn't have to bear the burden of secrecy along with the burdens of memory and guilt.

Chapter 13 Quotes

☝☝ 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.

Related Characters: Amir (speaker), Baba

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 174

Explanation and Analysis

Baba has just died, and Amir is trying to come to terms with his death. Amir realizes that his whole life has essentially centered around Baba—who was his only parent, a larger-than-life public figure, and Amir's role model and moral compass—and now Amir feels suddenly very alone and frightened. This is the conclusion of the most important father-child relationship of the book, and a sign of Amir truly "coming of age." Amir has also spent his life trying to "redeem" himself to Baba, and now that goal is no longer relevant—Amir must act as his own guide, learning to redeem himself in his own eyes.

☝☝ 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.

Related Characters: Amir (speaker), Soraya

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 180

Explanation and Analysis

Soraya has expressed her gratitude for the fact that Amir did not judge her or leave after she confessed her past relationship to him. She says he's "different from every Afghan guy" she's met, and now Amir wonders why this is the case. Part of this involves Amir acknowledging his own male privilege, as Afghan society is in many ways divided along gender lines. This is Hosseini's critique of the "double standard" he sees for men and for women, in which women are treated as inferior to men, and are punished for doing the same things men do with impunity. Since Amir is a man and was raised by a single father (Baba) with male friends and servants, he apparently has had less of an opportunity to be "trained" by society to look down on women (although this reasoning could just as easily go the opposite way too). On another level, this passage again brings up the themes of betrayal, regret, and memory. Amir is still haunted by his

past betrayals of Hassan, and though this is a burden that constantly weighs on him, he still hasn't found the strength or courage to confess his secret—not even to Soraya, who seemingly gave Amir an opportunity in confessing her own shameful past.


Chapter 14 Quotes

☝☝ 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.

Related Characters: Amir (speaker), Rahim Khan, Hassan, Assef

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 192



Explanation and Analysis

Rahim Khan is dying, and he has just called Amir to ask him to come to Pakistan and see him. Amir has been building a new, happy life in America with Soraya, but with this phone call it's as if his past catches up with him once more. Rahim Khan's phrase "there is a way to be good again" then becomes a kind of mantra for the second half of the novel, as Amir tries to redeem himself for his past betrayals through taking action of his own. This moment is also important because Amir realizes that his past has not been as secret as he thought—Rahim Khan knew all along what Amir did to Hassan. This is crucial because it shows that Rahim Khan never gave up on Amir despite his sins, and even now feels that Amir has the opportunity to create something good out of his past mistakes.

Chapter 16 Quotes

☝☝ "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.

Related Characters: Rahim Khan (speaker), Hassan

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 213

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes from Rahim Khan's explanation of his own past, which he is describing to Amir in Pakistan. Rahim Khan found Hassan and invited him (along with Hassan's wife and son) to come live with him in Kabul. At this point the Soviet-Afghan War was raging, and Kabul was a very dangerous place to be. The Taliban (an Islamic fundamentalist group) finally drove out the Soviet forces, and many Afghans (like Rahim Khan, here) felt hopeful that peace would come at last. Instead, the Taliban began a reign of terror, enforcing their rigid interpretation of Sharia (Islamic) law through violence and terrorism. Hassan, a Hazara (an ethnic minority), rightfully recognizes that the Taliban won't make things better at all—especially for Hazaras, who are Shi'a Muslims, while the Taliban are Sunni. Indeed, the Taliban went on to slaughter thousands of Hazaras, as Rahim Khan sadly notes here.

This tragic passage is a clear condemnation of the war that has ravaged Afghanistan for decades, and it also continues the theme of violence and rape on a political scale. The first part of the book dealt mostly with this subject on a personal level, focusing on Assef's rape of Hassan. In the novel's second part, however, this theme expands and Hosseini connects the idea of rape to Afghanistan itself, as the country is violently violated by external forces like the Soviets and the Taliban. This idea is made even more poignant by Hosseini's mention of kite fighting. Kites symbolized Amir and Hassan's happy childhood days, then they also became associated with Hassan's rape, and now their absence represents the Taliban's brutal rule.

Chapter 17 Quotes

☝☝ "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?"

Related Characters: Rahim Khan (speaker), Amir, Baba

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 221

Explanation and Analysis

Rahim Khan is trying to convince Amir to go to Kabul and rescue Sohrab, Hassan's son, as a way of redeeming himself for his past betrayals of Hassan (who is now dead). Amir is afraid and reluctant, and tries to make excuses. Rahim Khan then references a past conversation he had with Baba—which we as readers know that Amir actually overheard, and which led him to feel even more insecure about his relationship with his father. The repetition of this quote about standing up for oneself then cements its importance in the novel, and also helps bring things full circle. The past is still very much alive, and as a man Amir has a chance to redeem himself for the mistakes he made as a boy.

Chapter 18 Quotes

☝☝ 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.

Related Characters: Amir (speaker), Baba, Rahim Khan, Amir, Hassan

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 226



Explanation and Analysis

Amir has just learned that Hassan was actually his half-brother—Baba was Hassan's father. This is a huge revelation for Amir, as he realizes that the loyal friend he scorned and betrayed was actually a brother, and he also realizes that Baba committed a great sin and betrayal in sleeping with his best friend's (Ali's) wife. This adds a new layer of complexity to the father-son relationships in the book: Baba and Amir (who were both more alike than either thought), Baba and Hassan (who didn't know Baba was his real father), and Ali and Hassan. It's also suggested that all of Baba's philanthropy and charity work was partly inspired by a desire to redeem himself for his betrayal of Ali. Amir now has his own chance at redemption, in going to save Sohrab, and so it is especially moving that he now recognizes the true parallels between his own life and his father's. Once again time seems almost cyclical in the events of the novel, as the past is always returning to the present, and the present seems to echo the past.

Chapter 19 Quotes

☝☝ 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."

Related Characters: Amir, Farid (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 232

Explanation and Analysis

Amir has finally returned to Afghanistan, and he feels like a stranger in his own country. He makes a remark stating this to his driver, a man named Farid, and Farid only scoffs. Farid criticizes Amir for his privileged upbringing, and suggests that Amir never knew the real Afghanistan—he feels like a tourist now because he's always been a tourist in Afghanistan. Farid then points out this random stranger, an extremely poor old man trudging down the road, as a symbol of the "real" Afghanistan.



It's impossible to know someone else's experience, of course, or to judge what makes someone a "real" citizen of anywhere, but Farid also has a point in his bitter accusation. Amir did live apart from the majority of the country, and his experiences growing up were vastly different from most Afghans. For him, all the violence and war seems like a huge disruption, but for those who grew up poor and dissatisfied, it's almost a logical continuation of an already-bad situation. Amir has always had the privilege of being able to avoid or look away from poverty and violence (and even to move to an entirely different continent), while most Afghans like Farid cannot.

Chapter 21 Quotes

☝☝ "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.

Related Characters: Farid, Amir (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 263

Explanation and Analysis



Farid has taken Amir to see Baba's old house, which is now

occupied by members of the corrupt Taliban (who seized it from Hassan, because he was a powerless Hazara). Amir is fascinated and saddened by how much has changed, but Farid advises him to just forget the past—everything in Afghanistan has changed for the worst. Farid's advice clearly comes from lots of experiences of tragedy, but he doesn't know that Amir has returned to Afghanistan precisely to confront the past. Amir has been trying to forget his old betrayals all his life, but now he is finally working to redeem them—and part of this involves facing just how much tragedy and change Afghanistan itself has endured since he saw it last.

Chapter 22 Quotes

☞ 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."

Related Characters: Amir (speaker), Assef

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 281

Explanation and Analysis

Amir is now facing a violent, pedophilic Taliban leader, and is hoping to rescue Sohrab, Hassan's son. Earlier this same day Amir watched the Taliban leader preside over an execution, and now the leader reveals his identity—it's Assef, the brutal, privileged boy who threatened Amir and raped Hassan when they were all younger. This immediately brings up memories of Assef's sadistic tendencies, and shows that his role with the Taliban has given him free reign to commit whatever violent atrocities he wants to without facing any consequences. It also connects to the novel's idea of the past and memory as constantly recurring in the present. Amir has lived in America for decades, and has built a life for himself entirely separate from his past, but now it's as if he's facing an echo of the same situation he faced as a boy—being threatened by Assef, and trying to defend (and now, redeem himself to) Hassan, or in this case Sohrab, Hassan's son. Time seems almost cyclical in the *Kite Runner*, and nothing ever really goes away or is forgotten.

☞ 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*.

Related Characters: Amir (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 289

Explanation and Analysis

Amir has refused to leave without Sohrab, and now Assef is attacking Amir. Assef has his brass knuckles on, and Amir is unarmed, so it's hardly a fair fight (also Amir has been living comfortably in America while Assef has been fighting and murdering in Afghanistan). This scene is so significant because it is essentially the conclusion of two scenes from decades earlier—both of Amir and Hassan's encounters with Assef, the first being when Hassan frightened Assef away with his slingshot, and the second being when Amir watched Assef rape Hassan and did nothing. For Amir, this beating feels like relief, and like redemption—as if he's finally experiencing what would have happened had he intervened to save Hassan from Assef so many years before. The past is ever-recurring in the present, and this just feels like a logical continuation of Amir's experiences with Assef. The brutal beating doesn't erase Amir's past sins, but it is at least a cleansing kind of suffering, as Amir feels he is finally being punished for the sins he's "gotten away with" for years.

Chapter 23 Quotes

☞ 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.

Related Characters: Rahim Khan (speaker), Baba

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 302

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes from a letter Rahim Khan left for Amir before Rahim Khan's death. Rahim Khan talks more about Baba and his past betrayal of Ali, and tries to clarify things for Amir. Here Rahim Khan also delivers one of the most important messages of the book—that redemption is always possible, and good can come even out of evil. Rahim Khan suggests that Baba was partly "redeeming" himself when he went on to live such a charitable and philanthropic life, and Amir likewise feels that he is finally working towards redemption in rescuing Sohrab from Assef—redeeming not just himself for betraying Hassan, but also redeeming Baba for never claiming Hassan as his son.

As with many of Hosseini's themes in the novel, this idea works on a personal level and also on a larger, more political one. Afghanistan has experienced terrible violence and tragedy, but here Hosseini suggests that redemption is still possible for the country—peace can come out of war, and Afghanistan can be "good again." Past mistakes can never be undone, but they can lead to "real good" in the present, and this is what true redemption means.

☞ *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?

Related Characters: Amir (speaker), Rahim Khan, Baba

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 303

Explanation and Analysis

Rahim Khan continues to draw parallels between Baba and Amir, but Amir, as usual, still feels inadequate when he's compared to his father. Even if Baba committed a great betrayal of his best friend, just like Amir did, Baba's acts of redemption still seem larger-than-life and far superior to Amir's own (in Amir's eyes, at least). Amir has rescued Sohrab from Assef, but even this feels like too little and too late when compared with Baba's life of philanthropy and generosity. Amir continues to dwell on ideas of betrayal (his own betrayal of Hassan and Ali, and Baba's betrayal of Hassan and Ali) while also questioning whether redemption is possible for past sins.

Chapter 25 Quotes

☞ "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."

Related Characters: Amir (speaker), Sohrab

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 355



Explanation and Analysis

Amir has rescued Sohrab and offered to adopt him and take him back to America, but then Amir faced a major setback and told Sohrab this might be impossible. Sohrab then tried to kill himself, and Amir found him in a bloody bathtub. Sohrab survived, and is now healing up, but he seems to have lost whatever spark of hope he had in him, and soon he stops speaking altogether. Here Amir reaffirms his promise that he will take Sohrab with him to America—even if Sohrab himself seems to have no opinion on the matter. Amir has come to see Sohrab as a son-figure, and also as a way for him to somehow redeem himself or bring good out of his past sins and betrayals. He did not help Hassan when he was raped, but now Amir can help Hassan's son, and he works with a passion that would not have been there had not Amir felt so guilty and driven to redeem himself.

☞ 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?

Related Characters: Amir (speaker), Hassan, Sohrab

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 357

Explanation and Analysis

Hosseini starts drawing the book to a close, and Amir, who has been looking back and reflecting on his past, now catches up to his present in the narrative—he is back in the U.S., and Sohrab is living with him and Soraya. There is no neat conclusion here, and Amir's and Sohrab's future is uncertain. Sohrab still won't speak, and seems traumatized beyond repair, but as Amir has learned, there is always a possibility of redemption and turning bad into good.

Hassan's part in the narrative has ended, as he was killed by the Taliban, but he seems to live on in his son, and Amir continues to live out his own relationship with Hassan and cycle of betrayal/redemption through taking care of Sohrab.

“ 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.

Related Characters: Amir (speaker), Hassan, Baba

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 359


Explanation and Analysis

In this beautifully-written passage, Amir learns one of the main "lessons" of the book—that forgiveness and redemption often do not involve concrete acts or dramatically-satisfying conclusions, but rather consist of slow, unnoticeable changes to messy, complicated situations. In this case, Amir realizes that he has finally reached some closure in his relationship with Baba, but he also sees that there was no defining moment that the closure arrived. All his life Amir has been struggling both against his father and to earn his father's love and respect, and now Amir acknowledges that perhaps Hassan was more truly Baba's son than Amir himself—something the young, jealous Amir would never have dared consider. Once again Hosseini shows how the past is always present, but here he also shows how past pain doesn't have to be painful forever—even memories can be redeemed.

“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.

Related Characters: Amir (speaker), Sohrab

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 371

Explanation and Analysis

This poignant passage closes the book on a note of uncertainty, but also of hope. Kites return as the novel's most important symbol, here representing Amir's happy past and old friendship with Hassan, and also the potential of future happiness with Sohrab, Hassan's son. Sohrab is still traumatized and won't speak, but here he shows the first signs of healing—a small smile as he flies a kite with Amir, his new father-figure.

This passage also has a dramatic symmetry to it, as Amir repeats the words Hassan spoke to him years before, just before the rape that changed both their lives: "For you, a thousand times over." Hassan had been the "kite runner" of the novel's title, but now Amir is the one saying these words and running a kite—not for Hassan, but for Hassan's son. This suggests that Amir has finally found a kind of redemption through his actions, and he can relive his past and memories without the pain and guilt he once felt. It's also implied that in becoming the new "kite runner," Amir more fully assumes the good qualities that once existed in Hassan, and thus Amir becomes closer to his lost half-brother. The past is always repeating itself in the present, but now that his past pain has been partially healed, Amir no longer has to flee his memories of flying kites with Hassan—he can embrace them, while also looking forward to the potential of a better future with Sohrab.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

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.”

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.



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**.

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 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 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.

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.



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.

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.

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.

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 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.



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 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 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.



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.

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.

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.

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.

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.



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.



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.



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.



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.

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.



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.

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.



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.

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.

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.



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.

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.



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.

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.



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.

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 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.



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.

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.



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.

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.



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.

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'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.



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 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 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 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.

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.

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 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.

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.



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**.

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 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 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.

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'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.



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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.



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.



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.



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.



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.

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.

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.

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**.

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.

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.

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.



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.



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.



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 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.



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 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.



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.



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.



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.



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.

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.

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.

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 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.

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 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.



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.



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 it as a personal attack, as if he himself were untrustworthy. In America Baba has none of the wealth and respect he had in Afghanistan.



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.



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.



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 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.

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.

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.

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.

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 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 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.



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.



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.



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."



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.



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.

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.



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.

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.



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 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.



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.

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.



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.

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.

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.



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.

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.



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.

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 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 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.



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 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.



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.



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 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.



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



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.



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.

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.

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.

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 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.



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.



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.



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.



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.

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.

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.



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.



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.

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 has not thought about Hassan so specifically – the Hassan that continued to live and mature along with Amir – in a long time. This photograph is the first time Amir has seen Hassan smiling his old smile since before the rape.



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.



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.

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.

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.



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.



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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 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.



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.



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.



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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.



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.



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.



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.



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.



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 starts throwing 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.

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.

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 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 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.

Assef's return is another horrible, ironic coincidence. As Sohrab is an “extension” of Hassan, it 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.



Assef 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 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.



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 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.

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 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.

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.



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.

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 Thomas 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.”

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 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.



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.



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 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.

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.

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.

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 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.

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.

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.



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.



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.



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.



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.



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 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.

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.

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 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.

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.



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.



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.



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.



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.

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.

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.

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.



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.



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.





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