

The Kite Runner

Adapted by
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From the novel by Khaled Hosseini

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1

EXT. LAKE ELIZABETH PARK - DAY

1

TITLE CARD: *California, 2000*

We trail a five-year-old BOY as he runs toward Lake Elizabeth.

A lamentation of swans occupies the muddy bank, cleaning themselves, paddling in the shallow water and trumpeting their alarms. The cygnets huddle around their mothers.

The boy runs into the midst of the birds and they rise with a terrible beating of wings, squawking as they fly, a great and violent explosion of white feathers.

AMIR (34) stands by the lake, watching the swans. He has a certain elegance, a professorial demeanor heightened by the smattering of gray in his thick, dark hair.

He walks back to a picnic area where dozens of AFGHAN-AMERICANS grill lamb, drink tea, and gossip. Elsewhere in the park, FOLKS of all ethnicities relax and enjoy the sunshine.

CHILDREN are everywhere, playing soccer in the grass, eating yoghurt and cookies, chasing each other in games of tag.

Amir sees his wife, SORAYA, standing apart from the others, watching the children. Her thick black eyebrows are like the arched wings of a flying bird.

Amir takes her hand. Alone together, they walk away from the picnic, away from the laughing children and the bored mothers gnawing on chicken bones.

2

EXT. VESTIBULE, AMIR'S BUILDING - DAY

2

A package waits beneath the mailboxes. Soraya checks the label and hands the box to Amir.

SORAYA

Is that what I think it is?

Amir checks the label and nods. Clearly this is a significant package and they're both excited, though perhaps Soraya's happiness is a bit more forced than Amir's.

SORAYA (cont'd)

Are you nervous?

They head up the stairs.

(CONTINUED)

2 CONTINUED:

2

AMIR

As long as they spelled my name
right...

3 INT. AMIR'S APARTMENT - DAY

3

Amir closes the front door behind them. Their home is small but tastefully decorated, with Persian rugs on the floor and tapestries hanging from the walls. Picture windows look out over Golden Gate Park.

Books are everywhere. Books crammed on the shelves, books stacked on stools, books in great piles beside the armchair.

SORAYA

(teasing)

You want a moment alone with it?

AMIR

I want you right here with me.

4 INT. STUDY - DAY

4

Amir sets the package on his desk and opens it with a pair of scissors. The box is filled with hardcover novels. He pulls one out and inspects it. *A Season for Ashes*.

He turns the book over. On the back cover, the author photograph shows Amir smiling for the camera.

AMIR

There it is.

Soraya stands beside her husband and looks over his shoulder.

SORAYA

There it is.

(beat)

Your baby.

Amir glances at her and we get a sense of tension between them, but Soraya defuses the moment by kissing him on the side of his neck. She walks out of the study, leaving her husband to admire his book.

He flips through the pages, inspects the copy inside the flap and runs his hands over the dust jacket, taking obvious delight in the physical reality of his creation.

5 INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

5

The phone rings. Amir walks into the room and picks it up.

(CONTINUED)

5 CONTINUED:

AMIR

Hello?

For a moment there is no response, only the static wash of a bad connection.

AMIR (cont'd)

Hello?

RAHIM KHAN (O.S.)

Amir jan.

Amir sets his book on the counter. It takes him a second to place the voice.

AMIR

Rahim Khan?

RAHIM KHAN (O.S.)

It is kind of you to remember.

6 INT. BATHROOM - DAY

6

Soraya sits on the edge of the closed toilet seat as hot water fills the tub. Steam fogs the mirror.

Soraya is a thousand miles away from the tastefully tiled bathroom, but she stands before the water spills and turns off the faucet.

7 INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

7

Amir holds the phone to his ear, smiling at something he just heard. He's been talking for a while.

AMIR

It's good to hear your voice.

RAHIM KHAN (O.S.)

I've missed you, Amir jan. You should come home.

AMIR

(raising his eyebrows)

Home? I don't know if now's such a great time.

RAHIM KHAN (O.S.)

It's a very bad time. But you should come.

(beat)

There is a way to be good again.

(CONTINUED)

7 CONTINUED:

7

The words have an obvious effect on Amir. He stands very still, lips slightly parted, staring out the kitchen window.

High above Golden Gate Park, a red kite with a long blue tail glares down at San Francisco like an angry eye.

8 EXT. KABUL - DAY

8

TITLE CARD: *Kabul, Afghanistan, 1977*

The sky is overcast and threatening. A red kite duels a blue kite, spinning around each other, their glass strings glittering in the cold light.

A horde of YOUNG BOYS stands in an empty lot on the city's outskirts, watching the kites battle.

One of the boys is the young AMIR (11), slender and awkward, a bit intimidated in the throng of boisterous, shoving boys.

Beside Amir stands HASSAN (10), a boy with a face like a Chinese doll. Hassan is an Hazara; his Mongol features set him apart from the other boys in the crowd, all Pashtuns.

Amir wears American-style blue jeans and a clean, new down parka. Hassan wears a bright green *chapan* (a traditional Afghan coat) over a thick sweater.

Unlike Amir, Hassan is not bothered by the roughhousing boys. If someone pushes him he pushes back, without malice or fear.

OMAR (14), an older boy with a wisp of moustache, controls his kite with great skill and confidence. He allows himself a small smile as he guides his kite into a superior position.

Hassan smiles as Omar's kite surges above the other, glass string cutting the adversary free from its line.

The defeated kite slowly glides south. All the boys run in that direction, hollering and elbowing each other.

Hassan takes off in the other direction. Amir stares at him.

AMIR

Where are you going?

Hassan whirls around, motioning with his hand.

HASSAN

This way!

(CONTINUED)

8 CONTINUED:

8

Amir looks at the kite, drifting steadily south. He looks at Hassan, sprinting north again. Finally Amir chases after him.

Though Amir is a bit older and taller, Hassan is the natural athlete.

9 EXT. KABUL - NARROW STREET - DAY

9

They run through the ancient streets of Kabul, hopping gutters, weaving through narrow alleys.

10 EXT. KABUL - ANIMAL MARKET - DAY

10

Amir can't keep pace with the faster boy. He looks up again. The kite is nowhere to be seen.

AMIR

We're losing it!

Hassan, far ahead, doesn't even bother looking for the kite.

HASSAN

Trust me!

Amir, eyes on the clouds, trips over a rock. When he staggers to his feet he sees Hassan rounding a corner.

Amir hobbles after him.

11 EXT. KABUL - DIRT ROAD - DAY

11

He turns the corner and finds himself on a rutted dirt road. Hassan sits cross-legged in the dirt, eating from a fistful of dried mulberries.

AMIR

What are we doing here?

HASSAN

Sit with me, Amir agha.

Amir drops next to him, wheezing from their run.

AMIR

You're wasting our time. It went the other way.

Hassan pops a mulberry in his mouth. He's not winded at all.

HASSAN

It's coming.

(CONTINUED)

AMIR
How do you know?

HASSAN
I know.

AMIR
How can you *know*?

HASSAN
Would I ever lie to you?

AMIR
I don't know. Would you?

HASSAN
(indignant)
I'd rather eat dirt.

AMIR
(testing)
Really? You'd do that?

HASSAN
(puzzled)
Do what?

AMIR
Eat dirt if I told you to.

Hassan searches Amir's face, trying to decide if his playmate is joking or not. When Hassan speaks he is completely serious, staring into the older boy's eyes.

HASSAN
If you asked, I would.

Amir cannot hold the boy's gaze. He looks away.

HASSAN (cont'd)
But would you ever ask such a thing, Amir agha?

AMIR
(forced smile)
Don't be stupid. You know I wouldn't.

Hassan returns the smile, except his doesn't look forced.

HASSAN
I know.

(CONTINUED)

11 CONTINUED: (2)

11

Hassan stands and walks a few paces to his left. Amir looks up. He watches in awe as the red kite plummets towards them.

Amir hears footfalls and shouts; he turns and sees the approaching kite runners, the boys they stood with before.

But they're wasting their time. Hassan stands with his arms wide open, smiling, as the kite drops right into his hands.

12 INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

12

BABA sits behind a magnificent antique desk. A towering Pashtun with a thick beard and curly brown hair, his hands look capable of uprooting a willow tree.

RAHIM KHAN stands beside Baba. He lacks his old friend's charisma and physical presence, but his kind eyes and wry smile make him more approachable.

An OLDER MAN wearing a cheap gray suit stands in front of the desk, hands clasped, watching nervously as Baba signs papers.

ALI, a servant with a slight limp, refills the men's cups of tea. Baba accepts his with a smile. He and Ali have known each other their whole lives; there should be a sense of easy rapport between them. Ali leaves.

When Baba finishes with the papers he stands and hands them across the desk to the older man, who glances at the papers and holds them carefully, as if they were something precious.

OLDER MAN

Thank you, Agha sahib.

BABA

I want them to start building tomorrow. This should have happened a long time ago.

The older man nods vigorously as Rahim Khan circles around the desk to escort him to the door.

OLDER MAN

Tomorrow, absolutely. And thank you! The orphans of Kabul will never forget you.

BABA

I suspect they will.

(CONTINUED)

12 CONTINUED:

12

Rahim Khan closes the door behind the older man and turns to look at Baba, who sits again behind his desk, already busying himself with more papers.

RAHIM KHAN

You know the bureaucrats will steal half the money.

BABA

Only half? They've gotten lazy.

13 EXT. WAZIR AKBAR KHAN DISTRICT - DUSK

13

Amir and Hassan walk across a small wooden bridge. Amir now carries the kite.

HASSAN

I think maybe you'll win the tournament this year.

Amir gives Hassan a doubtful look.

AMIR

Me? Weren't you watching Omar back there? He never loses.

HASSAN

Omar's good.

(beat)

If you have the right kite, you could do it.

14 EXT. BABA'S HOUSE - LATER

14

The boys walk up a redbrick driveway lined with poplar trees. Baba's house is the most beautiful in the district. A broad entryway flanked by rosebushes leads to the sprawling manse.

From the minaret of a nearby mosque, the MUEZZIN calls the faithful to evening prayers.

Hassan claps Amir on the shoulder and hurries ahead. On the south end of the garden, in the shadows of a loquat tree, stands a little mud hut: the servants' home.

The door of the hut is open. Amir watches Hassan step inside and greet his father, ALI. They begin the ritual of *wudu*, washing their hands three times with water from a bowl, cleaning themselves before their prayers.

Amir walks up the steps leading into his imposing home.

15 INT. BABA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS 15

Gold-stitched tapestries line the walls. A crystal chandelier hangs from the vaulted ceilings.

Amir climbs a sweeping staircase, kite in hand. Nearing his bedroom, he pauses when he hears adult voices coming from the living room. The door is partway open and the adults clearly did not hear him enter the house. Amir peeks into the room.

16 INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS 16

Baba and Rahim Khan recline in leather club chairs, stuffing their pipes with tobacco.

Framed photographs on the wall chart the course of family history, including a picture of Baba's wedding night (Baba dashing in his black suit; his wife a princess in white).

A radio on a book shelf plays a speech delivered by a MARXIST IDEOLOGUE. We only pick up fragments but these are ominous:

MARXIST IDEOLOGUE (O.S.)

The imperialists will lose because they sneer at history, because they sneer at the workers, because they sneer at the people!

(cheers from a crowd)

They can sit behind their high walls, they can drive their American cars, but once the hunt begins, they will never stop running!

Baba lights his pipe and sucks on it till he's got a good draw going. He puts out the match with a flick of his wrist.

RAHIM KHAN

This will get bloody before it gets better.

BABA

Usually a safe bet.

RAHIM KHAN

They say the Communists are starting brawls at the University. A student was stabbed last week. I'm glad Amir's too young to be involved in all this.

(CONTINUED)

BABA

Amir?

(snorts)

Trust me, he won't be getting into any brawls.

Baba inspects the bowl of his pipe.

BABA (cont'd)

Sometimes I see him playing on the street with the neighborhood boys. They push him around, take his toys from him, give him a shove here, a whack there. And he never fights back. Never.

RAHIM KHAN

So he's not violent.

BABA

You know what happens when the other kids tease him? Hassan steps in and fends them off. I've seen it with my own eyes. And when they come home, I say to him, "How did Hassan get that scrape on his face" and he says, "He fell down."

(beat)

There's something missing in that boy.

RAHIM KHAN

Children aren't coloring books. You don't get to fill them with your favorite colors.

(beat)

He's not like you, my friend. He'll never be like you. But watch. He'll turn out well.

BABA

A boy who won't stand up for himself becomes a man who won't stand up for anything.

Rahim Khan turns and looks through the open study door, perhaps spying movement outside the room.

Amir retreats from the open door and goes to his bedroom, dragging the brightly-colored kite on the floor behind him.

18 INT. AMIR'S ROOM - LATER

18

Amir sits at his desk, reading through a sheaf of handwritten pages. He doesn't answer when there's a knock on the door.

RAHIM KHAN (O.S.)
May I come in, Amir jan?

Amir looks up from his papers but says nothing. After a moment, Rahim Khan opens the door and steps into the room.

RAHIM KHAN (cont'd)
I wanted to say goodbye. I'm
leaving for Pakistan tomorrow.

Rahim Khan notices the red kite lying on top of the bed.

RAHIM KHAN (cont'd)
That's a fine kite.

AMIR
Hassan ran it down.

RAHIM KHAN
The boy's got a gift.

Amir nods, not keen to discuss Hassan's kite running.

RAHIM KHAN (cont'd)
What are you working on?

AMIR
A story.

RAHIM KHAN
May I read it?

AMIR
It's not very good.

RAHIM KHAN
All the same, I'd love to read it.

Amir stares at the story. Finally he hands it to Rahim Khan.

AMIR
It's only four pages.

RAHIM KHAN
Thank you, Amir jan. I'll read it
tonight.

(CONTINUED)

18 CONTINUED:

He turns to leave.

AMIR

He hates me because I killed her.

Rahim Khan turns and stares at Amir, not comprehending.

AMIR (cont'd)

My mother.

Rahim Khan crouches beside the boy's chair.

RAHIM KHAN

Don't ever say such a thing. Don't ever think it.

AMIR

But it's true.

RAHIM KHAN

No, Amir. It's a dangerous thing, being born. Dangerous for the mother, dangerous for the child.

(beat)

Your father would die for you. You know that, don't you?

Amir shrugs and says nothing. Rahim Khan gives him a sad smile, grips his shoulder, and walks out the door.

19 EXT. MOSQUE - DAWN 19

The muezzin in the minaret calls the faithful to prayer.

20 INT. BABA'S HOUSE, DINING ROOM - MORNING 20

Amir sits at the dining room table, hastily finishing his homework. Hassan brings him his breakfast: a cup of black tea and a toasted naan spread with sour cherry marmalade.

Amir sips his tea and munches his toast without taking his eyes off his schoolwork or thanking Hassan. Hassan hands him an envelope.

AMIR

What's this?

HASSAN

Rahim Khan left it for you.

Amir tears open the envelope. He reads the letter quickly, a broad smile spreading across his face.

(CONTINUED)

AMIR

He liked it!

HASSAN

Liked what?

AMIR

My story!

HASSAN

Well of course he liked it, Amir
agha. You tell great stories.

AMIR

Bravo, he wrote. *Bravo*!

HASSAN

Bravo!

AMIR

Do you know what "bravo" means?

HASSAN

No.

AMIR

It's Italian for genius.

HASSAN

What's the story about?

Amir leans back, content with his new-found literary fame.

AMIR

It's about a man who finds a magic
cup. And he learns that if he weeps
into the cup, his tears turn to
pearls. He's very poor, you know.
And at the end of the story, he's
sitting on a mountain of pearls
with a bloody knife in his hand and
his dead wife in his arms.

Hassan frowns, confused for a moment.

HASSAN

So he killed her...

AMIR

Yes, Hassan.

(CONTINUED)

HASSAN

So that he'd cry and get rich!

AMIR

Yes. You're very quick.

Hassan nods, smiling. But the smile soon fades from his face.

AMIR (cont'd)

What?

HASSAN

Nothing, Amir agha. Are you done with breakfast?

Hassan clears the dirty plate and cup.

AMIR

What?

HASSAN

Well... will you permit me to ask a question about the story?

AMIR

Of course.

HASSAN

Why did the man have to kill his wife?

AMIR

Because each of his tears becomes a pearl!

HASSAN

Yes, but why couldn't he just smell an onion?

Amir opens his mouth to berate the boy but then realizes that Hassan has a point. Shoving his homework into his knapsack, Amir storms off, leaving Hassan alone in the dining room.

Hassan picks up the half-eaten naan and takes a big bite.

The wind blows through the tree branches. Hassan sweeps poplar leaves off the redbrick driveway into tidy piles. Later, he repairs some broken wire on a pigeon cage.

22 INT. STUDY - EVENING

22

Amir sits cross-legged in one of the club chairs, textbook on his lap. Baba stands by the wet bar in the corner of the room, pouring himself a whiskey.

AMIR

The mullahs at school say drinking
is a sin.

Baba selects several ice cubes from a silver bucket and drops them into his glass.

AMIR (cont'd)

They say drinkers will pay when the
Reckoning comes.

Baba sits on the leather sofa and swallows some whiskey, crushing an ice cube between his teeth.

BABA

Do you want to know what your
father thinks about sin?

AMIR

Yes.

BABA

Then I'll tell you. But first
understand this and understand it
now: You'll never learn anything of
value from those bearded idiots.

AMIR

You mean the mullahs?

BABA

I piss on the beards of those self-
righteous monkeys.

Amir seems shocked to hear such blasphemy.

BABA (cont'd)

They do nothing but thumb their
prayer beads and recite a book
written in a tongue they don't even
understand.

(beat)

There is only one sin. And that is
theft. Every other sin is a
variation of theft. Do you
understand that?

(CONTINUED)

AMIR
No, Baba jan.

BABA
When you kill a man, you steal a
life. You steal his wife's right to
her husband, his children's right
to their father. When you tell a
lie, you steal someone's right to
the truth. Do you see?

(off Amir's nod)
There is no act more wretched than
stealing. A man who takes what's
not his to take, be it a life or a
loaf of naan, I spit on such a man.
And if I ever cross paths with him,
God help him. Do you understand?

AMIR
Yes, Baba.

BABA
Good.

Baba drains the last of his whiskey with a single swallow. He
stands and returns to the bar.

BABA (cont'd)
All this talk of sinning is making
me thirsty.

Amir and Hassan sit on a wall overlooking the neighborhood.
Their pockets are filled with walnuts, which they crack in
their palms and eat.

AMIR
Come on, do it.

HASSAN
It's wrong, Amir agha.

AMIR
Do you have to be so holy all the
time?

Hassan sighs. He and Amir look toward the neighbor's yard,
where an overweight German Shepherd sleeps by the porch.

HASSAN
Just one?

AMIR

Just one.

Hassan pulls an old, flimsy slingshot from his back pocket. He loads a whole walnut into it and takes aim.

The walnut hisses through the air and hits the sleeping dog in his haunch. The dog leaps to his feet, growling, spinning around in circles as he searches for his assailant.

AMIR (cont'd)

You think he'd figure it out one day.

He pulls a smooth, folded Afghani bill from his pocket.

HASSAN

You got your allowance?

Amir pulls the bill taut between his fingers.

AMIR

I was thinking of buying some Turkish taffy. Or maybe a yo-yo. I need a new yo-yo.

Hassan nods politely as Amir considers his purchasing power.

AMIR (cont'd)

Or we could go see *The Magnificent Seven* again.

Hassan's face lights up. The boys hop down from the wall and chase each other across the yard, making guns from their fingers and thumbs, firing make-believe bullets.

AMIR (cont'd)

(affecting a macho accent)
We deal in lead, friend.

The Magnificent Seven plays on the screen. Amir and Hassan, faces illuminated by the flickering images, watch as Charles Bronson and Yul Brynner confer in dubbed Farsi.

YUL BRYNNER

Job for six men, watching over a village south of the border.

CHARLES BRONSON

How big's the opposition?

YUL BRYNNER

Thirty guns.

HASSAN

I admire your notion of fair odds, mister.

AMIR

I admire your notion of fair odds, mister.

CHARLES BRONSON

I admire your notion of fair odds, mister.

Amir and Hassan walk past the big houses, humming the Elmer Bernstein score from *The Magnificent Seven*.

HASSAN

Who's your favorite?

AMIR

Steve McQueen.

HASSAN

I like Charles Bronson.

(beat)

Maybe someday we'll go to Iran.

Amir squints at Hassan in confusion.

AMIR

Why?

HASSAN

Maybe we'd see him somewhere. I could get his autograph.

AMIR

Charles Bronson's not Iranian.

HASSAN

He's not?

(contemplative beat)

So why does he speak Farsi with an Iranian accent?

A rock strikes Amir in the back. The boys whirl around. ASSEF (15) strolls toward them, flanked by his entourage, WALI (14) and KAMAL (14). All three wear jeans and T-shirts.

ASSEF

Where you going, faggots?

Amir glances around nervously, hoping to spot an adult, but the street is deserted. Already broad-shouldered and deep-voiced, Assef towers over the other kids.

ASSEF (cont'd)
(to Wali and Kamal)
What do you boys think: if I paid you to be my friends, would you really be my friends? Or would you be my servants?

WALI
If you were paying us, we'd be your servants.

ASSEF
So if Amir's only friend is really his servant, I guess Amir's got no friends.

AMIR
(voice trembling)
We're not bothering you.

ASSEF
Oh, you're bothering me.
Afghanistan's the land of the Pashtuns. We're the true Afghans, not this Flat-Nose here. His people pollute our homeland. They dirty our blood. If idiots like you and your father didn't take these people in, we'd be rid of them.

Wali and Kamal nod. Assef advances on Amir, grinning. Amir cowers, too frightened even to run.

HASSAN (O.S.)
Please leave us alone, Agha.

Assef turns. Hassan holds the slingshot in his hands, the elastic band pulled all the way back. The stone sits in the cup, aimed at Assef's face.

Assef's eyes widen with surprise. Wali and Kamal look even more astonished. Hassan's hand trembles with the strain of the taut elastic band.

ASSEF
Put it down, you motherless Hazara.

HASSAN
Please leave us be, Agha.

ASSEF
Maybe you didn't notice, but there
are three of us and two of you.

HASSAN
You're right, Agha. But maybe you
didn't notice that I'm the one
holding the slingshot.

Assef looks from the rock to Hassan. He searches the boy's
face, trying to gauge his resolve.

ASSEF
This doesn't end here.

Assef turns and walks away, followed by his two henchmen.

Amir and Hassan watch them go. When Amir finally turns to
Hassan, the smaller boy shrugs and tries to stuff the
slingshot back into his pants with trembling hands.

26 EXT. STREETS OF KABUL - DAY 26

A multicolored bus crammed with PASSENGERS navigates the
narrow streets, blaring its horn at the PEDESTRIANS,
BICYCLISTS and CARS that dart past.

27 INT. SERVANT'S HUT - DAY 27

Hassan and his father, Ali, kneel on the prayer rugs, intone
the prayers, and bow their heads to the ground three times.

AMIR (O.S.)
Hassan!

Hassan stands and carefully rolls his rug. His father kisses
him on the forehead and Hassan runs outside.

28 EXT. BABA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS 28

Amir stands by the open iron gates, waiting for Hassan.

AMIR
Well, happy birthday.

He hands a clumsily-wrapped gift to Hassan, who grins and
tears it open. Inside is a brand-new Wham-O Sportsman
slingshot.

AMIR (cont'd)
It's made in America.

Hassan cradles the slingshot in his palms like a newborn infant. He smiles at Amir, his eyes wet with happiness.

AMIR (cont'd)
I figured, if you're going to be my
bodyguard, you need a proper
weapon.

An abandoned cemetery sprawls across the hilltop. Tangles of brushwood clog aisles of unmarked headstones. A pomegranate tree rises near the rusty iron gate.

Amir and Hassan sit beside the tree, scooping the bloody seeds from the fruit, wiping their hands on the grass.

Amir pulls out a pocketknife, gets on his knees, and begins carving words into the bark of the tree. When he finishes, Hassan runs his fingers over the letters.

HASSAN
What does it say?

AMIR
*Amir and Hassan, the Sultans of
Kabul.*

HASSAN
The Sultans of Kabul!

Amir sits again and pulls a leather-bound book, the *Shahnamah*, from his satchel.

AMIR
You want a story?

HASSAN
Rostam and Sohrab!

AMIR
Not them again. I've read you that
one fifty times. How about Rudabeh?

HASSAN
It's your book, Amir agha.

Amir sees Hassan's disappointment.

AMIR

All right, all right. Rostam and
Sohrab. It's your birthday.

Hassan grins and lies on his back with one hand under his
head. Amir flips to the proper page and begins to read.

AMIR (cont'd)

*Give ear unto the combat of Sohrab
against Rostam, though it be a tale
replete with tears...*

The clouds drift across the broad blue sky and the two boys
sit beside the pomegranate tree, one reading, one listening.

AMIR

*"If thou art indeed my father, then
hast thou stained thy sword in the
life-blood of thy son..."*

A loud honking interrupts the reading. The boys turn and see
a gleaming, black '68 Ford Mustang pull up at the bottom of
the hill. Baba sits in the driver's seat.

HASSAN

Your dad got a new car?

Amir shoves the book into the satchel and the two boys sprint
down to the Mustang, Hassan getting there far quicker.

BABA

I heard it was someone's birthday.

HASSAN

Isn't this the car he drives in
Bullitt?

Baba nods. Hassan grins at Amir.

HASSAN (cont'd)

Steve McQueen!

Hassan climbs into the cramped backseat.

BABA

It's your day, Hassan. Why don't
you sit up front?

Hassan glances at Amir, who shrugs. They switch seats. Baba smiles at Hassan. He seems warmer and more comfortable with the Hazara boy than he is with his own son.

BABA (cont'd)
Are you ready for your birthday present?

HASSAN
Is it a drawing book?

BABA
Better.

HASSAN
A toy gun?

Baba shifts into drive.

BABA
Better.

The Mustang's rear tires kick up cattails of gravel and dust. Hassan has a giant smile as they speed away.

31 EXT. JADEH MAYWAND - DAY

31

Baba, Amir and Hassan drive down the crowded street south of the Kabul River. STREET VENDORS hawk lamb kebabs and dates; MERCHANTS sell everything from fresh fish to ornate rugs.

Hassan has a huge smile on his face. People on the street turn to look at the gleaming car and Hassan clearly feels great pride sitting in the front seat.

Amir sits glumly in the backseat.

A few AMERICAN HIPPIES, their hair long and unwashed, wearing bead necklaces and sandals, stroll through the marketplace.

The Mustang pulls up to a store no larger than a prison cell.

32 INT. SAIFO'S - DAY

32

SAIFO, a nearly-blind old man, is a shoe repairman. Stacks of leather shoes are piled on his work bench. He nods to Baba and opens a trapdoor, leading the boys down a set of wooden steps to the dank basement.

Here, Saifo's true art is revealed. Dozens of colorful kites hang from the walls and ceiling.

(CONTINUED)

Saifo's kites are masterpieces, the paper wings cut to perfect proportions, the frames tight and true.

Amir and Hassan examine the wares with expert eyes and fingers, trying to determine which kites would have the best loft, which would be easiest to maneuver.

Hassan picks out a striking red kite with yellow borders. He shows it to Baba. Baba examines the kite, nods, and affectionately ruffles Hassan's close-cropped hair.

BABA

Good pick.

Hassan beams, proud of Baba's approval. Amir watches in silence from a corner of the shop.

Baba, Rahim Khan and Amir sit at the table, eating curried cauliflower over rice. Ali serves them. Hassan stands in the kitchen, washing the pots, visible through the open doorway.

Outside we see the first flakes of snow starting to fall.

BABA

Tournament's tomorrow, eh? You and Hassan ready?

AMIR

We've been practicing.

BABA

Did I ever tell you about the year I won?

RAHIM KHAN

I'm fairly sure you told everyone in Kabul about the year you won.

BABA

Fourteen kites I cut down. I think that's still a record.

Amir and Hassan prepare the *tar*, the cutting line used to decapitate other kites, feeding hundreds of feet of string through a mixture of ground glass and glue.

The section of the string already coated with glass hangs between the trees to dry.

HASSAN

I think you're going to make Agha sahib very proud today.

AMIR

You think so?

HASSAN

Inshallah.

AMIR

(skeptical)

Inshallah.

Amir pricks his finger with a shard of glass. He inspects the drop of blood bubbling on his fingertip.

35 EXT. WAZIR AKBAR KHAN DISTRICT - DAY

35

The sky is a blameless blue. Snow weighs down the branches of the mulberry trees lining the block.

Children from all over Kabul crowd the street. KITE FIGHTERS huddle with their SPOOL HOLDERS, talking last minute tactics. At least fifty kites of all colors already hang in the sky, paper sharks roaming for prey.

The rooftops are jammed with SPECTATORS reclining in lawn chairs, hot tea steaming from thermoses, the music of Ahmad Zahir blaring from cassette players.

Amir and Hassan walk down the center of the street. Hassan carries their kite and Amir holds the spool of glass wire.

Hassan wears black rubber boots and a bright green *chapan* over a thick sweater and faded corduroy pants. Amir wears a black leather coat, a red scarf and American blue jeans.

Amir looks up to the rooftop of his house and sees Baba and Rahim Khan sitting on a bench, both dressed in wool sweaters, sipping tea. Baba waves.

AMIR

I'm not sure I want to fly a kite today.

HASSAN

It's a beautiful day.

Amir shifts his feet, staring at the crowds of kite fighters. Hassan steps closer to Amir and speaks in a low voice.

(CONTINUED)

HASSAN (cont'd)

It's the two of us against all of
Kabul. And we're going to win.

AMIR

I admire your notion of fair odds,
mister.

The two boys exchange a smile.

HASSAN

Let's fly.

He lifts the kite, red with yellow borders. He licks his
finger and holds it up, testing the wind.

He runs with the kite, the spool rolling in Amir's hands
until Hassan stops, fifty feet away, and holds the kite over
his head.

Amir jerks on the line twice. Hassan tosses the kite.

Amir mutters an Arabic prayer under his breath. He pulls on
the string, coaxing the kite into flight. Soon it soars above
them, making a sound like a paper bird flapping its wings.

Hassan claps his hands, whistles, and runs back to Amir, who
hands him the spool, holding on to the glass string as Hassan
spins it quickly to gather the slack.

More and more kite fighters fill the streets, jerking and
tugging on their lines, squinting up to the sky, trying to
gain position to cut the opponent's line.

Every kite fighter has an assistant who holds the spool and
feeds the glass line. Hassan's hands already bleed.

Hassan sees Omar, the talented kite fighter seen earlier,
flying his brilliant blue kite at the end of the street.

The cutting begins and the first defeated kite whirls out of
control. The KITE RUNNERS pursue it, chasing the windblown
kite as it drifts through the neighborhoods.

Hordes of runners go after each fallen kite, swarming the
streets like the bull runners of Pamplona.

Kites fall from the sky like shooting stars with brilliant,
rippling tails.

(CONTINUED)

Assef, Wali, and Kamal sit in the bed of a parked pick-up truck, drinking cans of soda and mocking the running children around them.

Amir keeps stealing glances at Baba, sitting on the rooftop, chatting with Rahim Khan.

HASSAN (cont'd)

Amir agha!

Amir returns his gaze to the sky just in time to see a green kite closing in on his own bird.

Amir plays with the wire, manipulating his kite into a complex dance. Amir comes out on top, his kite's glass wire tearing off one of the green kite's wings.

The green kite plummets to earth as a band of yelling boys chases after it.

Up and down the streets kite runners return in triumph, their captured kites held high, showing off to their friends.

AMIR

Lots of prizes.

HASSAN

(shrugging)

Nothing matters but the last kite.

Amir tugs on his wire, causing his kite to slice a bright yellow kite with a coiled white tail.

HASSAN (cont'd)

Beautiful.

The tug opens a gash in Amir's index finger, the blood trickling down his palm.

Hours pass. Tufts of clouds drift in and the sun slips behind them. Shadows start to lengthen. The spectators on the roofs bundle up in scarves and thick coats.

Only four kite fighters are still alive. Amir keeps his eye on Omar's blue kite, flying through the air with intimidating grace, its glass wire shimmering in the failing sunlight.

AMIR

How many has he cut?

HASSAN

I counted twelve.

(CONTINUED)

The blue kite slices a big purple one and does a victory dance of two broad loops.

AMIR

I think he wants Baba's record.

HASSAN

Can't let that happen.

Spectators on the streets and rooftops stomp their feet, clapping, whistling, chanting:

SPECTATORS

Cut him! Cut him!

Amir, hands bloodied from manipulating the glass wire, gets his red kite to soar low over the rooftops, skimming above the spectators' heads, snapping a white kite's wire.

It's a daring maneuver and the crowd responds with a roar.

HASSAN

We're very low.

Amir's red kite and the deadly blue kite are the final survivors. Amir sees the blue kite diving toward his kite, trying to take advantage of Amir's lack of altitude.

A chase begins, and it's a chase of two master kite fighters, their paper birds winging over the streets, trailed by their shadows on the snow.

The spectators are absorbed in this last battle, tracking the dogfight with their eyes, pointing out exceptional maneuvers. Children sit on high tree branches, mouths open as they thrill to the aerial combat.

AMIR

More line! More line!

Hassan feeds out more line and Amir pulls hard, sending his kite on an elegant loop that leaves it above the blue kite.

The blue kite seems to sense its danger. It jerks up, down and sideways, trying desperately to escape. Amir's kite closes in relentlessly. The crowd knows the end is near.

SPECTATORS

Cut him! Cut him!

Amir closes his eyes and loosens his grip on the wire. It slices his fingers again as the wind drags it.

(CONTINUED)

Amir's red kite whips past the blue kite, severing its line. The crowd roars and Amir opens his eyes.

Hassan howls with joy. He runs over to Amir and wraps his arm around the older boy's neck.

HASSAN

Bravo! Bravo, Amir agha!

The blue kite spins wildly like a tire come loose from a speeding car. Every kite runner on the streets, a band of forty shoving boys, takes off after it.

Amir blinks. For a moment he can't move. Finally he whoops and throws his free arm around Hassan. The boys hop up and down, laughing so hard they're almost weeping.

HASSAN (cont'd)

You won, Amir agha! You won!

AMIR

We won! We won!

Amir sees Baba standing on the edge of his rooftop, pumping both his fists, hollering at the top of his lungs. Rahim Khan stands beside Baba, grinning broadly.

Amir beams. He seems to grow as he basks in the light of his father's pride, standing taller, smiling more brightly.

HASSAN

I'm going to run that blue kite for you.

He drops the spool and runs, the hem of his green *chapan* dragging in the snow behind him.

AMIR

Hassan! Come back with it!

Hassan stops and turns, cupping his hands around his mouth.

HASSAN

For you, a thousand times over!

He smiles and disappears around the corner.

Amir begins to pull his kite in from the sky as people rush to congratulate him. Adults pat his back and tousle his hair.

36

EXT. STREET - DUSK

36

The sun sinks behind the hills. The sky is painted pink and purple. A MULLAH bellows *azan* from the Haji Yaghoub Mosque.

The bazaar is emptying quickly. Amir picks his way through the dwindling crowd, past the LAME BEGGARS dressed in layers of tattered rags, past VENDORS with rugs on their shoulders, past BUTCHERS closing shop for the day.

He stops by a dried fruit stand. A MERCHANT wearing a blue turban loads his mule with crates of pine seeds and raisins.

AMIR

Have you seen a Hazara boy come this way? Wearing a green *chapan*?

MERCHANT

Why's a boy like you looking for a Hazara?

AMIR

He's our servant's son.

MERCHANT

Lucky Hazara, having such a concerned master. His father should get on his knees, sweep the dust at your feet with his eyelashes.

AMIR

Did you see him?

MERCHANT

(pointing south)

I saw a boy running that way. He had a kite in his hand.

The merchant grunts and loads another box onto the mule.

MERCHANT (cont'd)

Of course, they've probably caught him by now.

AMIR

Who?

MERCHANT

The other boys. The ones chasing him.

37 EXT. OLD TOWN - MOMENTS LATER 37

Amir searches through the warrens of shacks and sheep pens.

38 EXT. SIDE STREET - DUSK 38

Amir runs down a rutted road that bounds a neighborhood of flat-ceilinged mud shacks separated by narrow alleys.

Voices filter out from one of these alleys. Amir creeps closer. He holds his breath and peeks around the corner.

39 EXT. BLIND ALLEY - DUSK 39

A havoc of scrap and rubble litters the alley. A rusted cast-iron stove with a hole in its side tilts against a wall.

Hassan stands at the blind end of the alley in a defiant stance: fists curled, legs slightly apart. Behind him, sitting on a heap of rubble, is the blue kite.

Blocking Hassan's way out of the alley are the three bullies encountered earlier: Wali on one side, Kamal on the other, Assef towering in the middle.

Assef seems relaxed, confident. He twirls his brass knuckles around his index finger.

ASSEF

Where's your slingshot, Hazara? Eh?
You don't look so brave today.

Amir exhales quietly. He doesn't move from his hiding place.

ASSEF (cont'd)

But I'm in a mood to forgive. What do you say to that, boys?

KAMAL

Very generous. Especially after the rude manners he showed last time.

Assef waves a dismissive hand.

ASSEF

Forgiven. It's done. Of course, nothing is free in this world. My pardon comes with a small price.

WALI

Nothing is free.

(CONTINUED)

ASSEF

You're a lucky Hazara. Because today, it's only going to cost you that kite. Fair deal, boys?

KAMAL

More than fair.

HASSAN

Amir agha won the tournament and I ran this kite for him. I ran it fairly. This is his kite.

ASSEF

Loyal Hazara. Loyal dog.

Kamal laughs, shrill and nervous.

ASSEF (cont'd)

Before you sacrifice yourself for him, think about this: Would he do the same for you? Have you ever wondered why he only plays with you when no one else is around?

Assef pauses and studies Hassan's face.

ASSEF (cont'd)

I'll tell you why, Hazara. To him, you're nothing but an ugly pet. Something he can play with when he's bored, something he can kick when he's angry.

HASSAN

Amir agha and I are friends.

ASSEF

(snorting)

Friends? You fool. Enough of this. Give us that kite.

Hassan stoops and picks up a rock. Assef flinches, taking a step backwards.

ASSEF (cont'd)

Last chance.

Hassan cocks the arm holding the rock.

ASSEF (cont'd)

Whatever you wish.

(CONTINUED)

Amir opens his mouth. He's on the verge of calling out, of shouting in protest.

Instead he does nothing. He watches, stiff with fear.

Assef motions with his hand and the other two boys separate, forming a half circle, trapping Hassan in the alley.

ASSEF (cont'd)

I've changed my mind. I'm letting
you keep the kite. I'll let you
keep it so it always reminds you of
what I'm about to do.

Assef charges. Hassan throws the rock. It strikes Assef on the forehead. Assef yelps as he flings himself at Hassan, knocking him to the ground.

Wali and Kamal follow. The three of them pound Hassan, punching him in the face, kicking him in the ribs. Hassan struggles desperately but he's far too small, far too weak.

Amir retreats behind the wall. He shuts his eyes and bites down on his fist. The sounds of the beating wash over him, the cries of pain, the slap of knuckles on skin.

For a long time Amir doesn't move. Finally the noises quiet. Only muffled voices can be heard from the alley. Amir opens his eyes and peers around the corner again.

The blue kite lies beside the cast-iron stove. Hassan's brown corduroy pants rest atop a head of eroded bricks.

Hassan lies with his chest pinned to the ground, naked from the waist down. Kamal and Wali each grip one of his arms, bent at the elbow so that Hassan's hands are pressed to his back.

Assef stands over them, the heel of his snow boot crushing the back of Hassan's neck.

WALI

I don't know. My father says it's
sinful.

ASSEF

Your father won't find out. And
there's nothing sinful about
teaching this donkey a lesson.

WALI

I don't know.

(CONTINUED)

39 CONTINUED: (3)

ASSEF
 Suit yourself.
 (to Kamal)
 What about you?

KAMAL
 I... well...

ASSEF
 It's just a Hazara.

Kamal looks away, shaking his head.

ASSEF (cont'd)
 Fine. Just hold him down then. Can
 you manage that?

Assef kneels behind Hassan, puts his hands on Hassan's hips
 and lifts his bare buttocks. He keeps one hand on Hassan's
 back and undoes his own belt buckle with his free hand.

He unzips his jeans, drops his underwear and positions
 himself behind Hassan.

Hassan doesn't struggle. Doesn't whimper. His face is blank.

40 EXT. NARROW STREETS - DUSK 40

Amir runs-- away from the alley, away from Assef's quick,
 rhythmic grunts, away from Hassan's silence.

41 EXT. BAZAAR - LATER 41

Amir hides in a cubicle of the deserted bazaar, crouched
 beside the padlocked swinging doors.

Hearing voices and running footfalls, he peers outside the
 cubicle and sees Assef and his crew sprinting past, laughing.

Amir takes several deep breaths. He waits until Assef and the
 others are well out of earshot.

Finally he stands and walks back to the rutted road by the
 mud shacks. In the dimming light, Hassan trudges toward him.

Hassan holds the blue kite in his hands. His *chapan* has mud
 smudges down the front. His shirt is ripped below the collar.

He sways on his feet as if he's about to collapse. He
 steadies himself and hands Amir the kite.

(CONTINUED)

41 CONTINUED:

41

AMIR

Where were you? I looked for you.

Hassan begins to say something but his voice cracks. He drags his sleeve across his face, wiping away tears.

HASSAN

Agha sahib will worry.

He limps toward home. Amir stares after him. Tiny drops of blood fall from between Hassan's legs, staining the snow.

42 INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

42

Amir opens the door and steps inside, carrying the blue kite. Baba drinks tea, listening to the news on the radio.

Baba smiles, standing, and opens his arms. Amir puts the kite down and walks into his father's embrace.

43 EXT. BABA'S HOUSE - MORNING

43

Icicles hang from the eaves, dripping in the sun. The snow is melting and the hills to the north are patched with green.

44 INT. DINING ROOM - MORNING

44

Amir sits at the table. His breakfast has already been set out for him: toasted naan, a boiled egg, black tea. Hassan is nowhere in sight.

Amir sits and examines his plate. He rolls the egg back and forth. Ali walks in, cradling a pile of chopped wood.

AMIR

Where's Hassan?

ALI

He went back to sleep.

Ali kneels before the stove and pushes the little door open. He pauses with a log in his hand.

ALI (cont'd)

The last few weeks, all he wants to do is sleep. He does his chores and then he just crawls under his blanket. Can I ask you something?

Amir pushes his egg around his plate and says nothing.

(CONTINUED)

ALI (cont'd)
Did something happen, Amir agha?
Something he's not telling me?

AMIR
How should I know? Maybe he's sick.
People get sick, you know.

45 INT. STUDY - NIGHT

45

Baba reads the newspaper, sipping from his whiskey and soda. Amir does his homework. A well-stoked fire burns in the fireplace. Baba groans at something he reads in the paper.

BABA
The mullahs want to rule our souls
and the Communists tell us we don't
have any.

Baba lowers the paper and studies his son, smiling.

BABA (cont'd)
More importantly, *El Cid* is
playing. We could go tonight.

Amir nods, very excited.

BABA (cont'd)
Why don't you ask Hassan to come
along.

AMIR
He's not feeling well.

Baba's brow furrows with worry.

BABA
Really? What's wrong with him?

AMIR
He's got a cold or something. Ali
says he's sleeping it off.

Baba considers Amir for a moment.

BABA
I haven't seen you two playing
together in weeks. What happened?

AMIR
Nothing. He's just been a little
sick.

(CONTINUED)

BABA

Hassan never gets sick.

(beat)

Whatever's going on, you should deal with it before too long. Don't let these things fester.

46 EXT. CEMETERY - LATER

46

Amir climbs the hill to the cemetery. He stops beside the low stone wall when he sees Hassan sitting alone in the shade of the pomegranate tree. Dozens of overripe pomegranates have fallen to the ground.

Hassan is trying to read from a children's book. Reading is clearly a struggle for him; he mouths the words, pronouncing them slowly.

Amir steps over the crumbling wall and approaches Hassan, who looks up and smiles when he sees Amir.

AMIR

What are you reading?

HASSAN

(embarrassed)

It's for little kids. I just... I'm trying to learn.

Amir nods and says nothing.

HASSAN (cont'd)

I'd rather hear one of your stories.

AMIR

I'm done making up stories.

HASSAN

Why?

AMIR

Because they're stupid.

HASSAN

I don't think they're stupid. I love your stories.

Amir stares at Hassan for a long count. He picks up one of the fallen pomegranates.

(CONTINUED)

AMIR

What would you do if I hit you with
this?

Hassan's smile wilts. He looks older, somehow, as if the question had aged him before our eyes.

AMIR (cont'd)

What would you do?

Hassan does not answer. Amir hurls the pomegranate. It explodes against Hassan's chest with a spray of red pulp.

AMIR (cont'd)

Hit me back!

Hassan looks at the red stain and then at Amir.

AMIR (cont'd)

Get up! Hit me!

Hassan stands, dazed, unsure what is happening or why. Amir picks up another pomegranate and whips it at Hassan.

AMIR (cont'd)

Hit me back! Hit me back!

Amir picks up another fruit and throws it, and then another, and then another, throwing all the pomegranates he can find, splattering Hassan's body and face with red juice.

AMIR (cont'd)

You're a coward! A coward!

When Amir finally stops, exhausted and panting, Hassan, smeared in red, looks like he's been shot by a firing squad.

Hassan stoops to pick up a pomegranate. He walks to Amir, tearing the fruit open in his hands. Hassan crushes the pomegranate against his own forehead. Juice drips down his face. He turns and walks away from Amir, down the hill.

Amir stares after him, tears filling his eyes.

SALAHUDDIN, a butcher, slaughters a calf in the shade of a poplar tree, soaking the grass with fresh blood. Two sheep, tied to the tree trunk, grimly await execution.

WORKMEN climb the oak trees, stringing coils of small electric bulbs. Others set up tables in the yard, while CARPENTERS build a stage on a balcony overlooking the garden.

Amir stands beside his father, watching with horror.

SALAHUDDIN

Blood's good for the tree.

Baba sees the queasy look on Amir's face and smiles.

BABA

Come on, birthday boy. Let's go inside.

He puts his hand on Amir's shoulder and leads him toward the house. On their way, Amir sees Hassan and Ali spreading tableclothes on the tables.

Hassan looks at Amir and Amir averts his eyes. Baba and Amir climb the steps toward the front door.

AMIR

Baba, have you ever thought about getting new servants?

Baba drops his hand off Amir's shoulder, startled.

BABA

Why would I want to do that?

AMIR

(already regretting it)
I guess you wouldn't. It was just a question.

BABA

I grew up with Ali. My father took him in, loved him like his own son. Forty years he's been with my family. Forty goddamn years. And you think I'm just going to throw him out?

Baba's face is flushed with anger. Amir looks down.

BABA (cont'd)

I've never laid a hand on you, but you ever say that again...

(shaking his head)

You bring me shame. And Hassan... Hassan's not going anywhere.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

47 CONTINUED: (2)

47

BABA (cont'd)
Do you understand?
(furious)
I said, do you understand?

AMIR
Yes, Baba.

Baba walks to the front door, no longer looking at his son.

BABA
Hassan's not going anywhere.

48 INT. BABA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

48

The place is packed. GUESTS with drinks in hand mingle in the hallways, smoke on the stairs, lean against doorways.

49 EXT. BABA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

49

GUESTS chatter under the glow of red, blue, and green lights winking in the trees. Kerosene torches burn on stakes. AHMAD ZAHIR plays an accordion and sings on the stage as DANCERS spin on a parquet dance floor.

Amir walks through the crowd beside Baba, greeting his guests, a plastered smile on his face. He kisses cheeks, hugs older women, shakes hands.

AMIR
Thank you so much for your gift.
Thank you. Thank you for coming.

ALI
Amir agha...

Amir turns and sees Ali, Hassan's father, standing nervously on the fringes of the crowd. He looks out of place amongst these well-heeled folks, wearing a threadbare old suit.

Amir nods awkwardly, feeling suddenly guilty in the older man's presence.

Ali hands the boy a box.

ALI (cont'd)
It is modest and not worthy of you.
But Hassan and I hope you like it.
Happy birthday.

Amir opens the box. Inside is a deluxe edition of the *Shahnamah*, with an embossed cover and glossy color illustrations. He stares at the book, unsure how to react.

(CONTINUED)

ALI (cont'd)
Hassan said your copy was getting
old, missing some pages.

Amir cannot meet the older man's eye.

AMIR
Thank you.

ASSEF (O.S.)
Happy birthday, Amir.

Assef stands with his father, MAHMOOD, a small, dark-skinned man. Amir freezes. Assef notes Amir's fear and grins.

Baba, concerned that his son seems rude, gives Amir a stern look before smiling at Assef and Mahmood.

BABA
Thank you both for coming.

ASSEF
Great party, Amir jan.

Amir says nothing, still staring at the ground.

BABA
Aren't you going to thank Assef
jan?

AMIR
Thanks.

Amir steps away, unable to stand in the little circle any longer. He squirms through the throng of guests, ignoring the people who pat his back or call out "Happy Birthday."

Baba, annoyed and embarrassed, watches him go.

Amir sits by the bank of the narrow river behind Baba's house, his knees drawn up to his chest, looking at the stars.

RAHIM KHAN (O.S.)
Shouldn't you be entertaining your
guests?

Rahim Khan walks over, ice clinking in his glass.

AMIR
I didn't know you drank.

50 CONTINUED:

Rahim Khan sits beside Amir and examines his glass.

RAHIM KHAN

Turns out I do.

(elbowing Amir)

But only on the most important occasions.

Amir smiles. Rahim Khan raises his glass, toasting the birthday boy, and drinks.

RAHIM KHAN (cont'd)

You know, you can tell me anything you want, Amir jan. Anytime.

AMIR

(uncertain)

I know.

Rahim Khan watches Amir, waiting, his black eyes bottomless.

RAHIM KHAN

Here. I almost forgot.

He hands Amir a beautiful leather-bound notebook.

RAHIM KHAN (cont'd)

For your stories.

Before Amir can thank him, explosions rip through the sky. They look up and see fireworks lighting the night. Rahim Khan smiles and helps Amir to his feet.

RAHIM KHAN (cont'd)

Come. You're missing your party.

51 EXT. BABA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

51

Amir and Rahim Khan walk through the gates. All the guests stand in the yard, looking up at the sky. The flares sizzle and explode into bouquets of flowers.

In one of these brief bursts of light, Amir sees Hassan serving drinks to Assef and Wali from a silver platter.

The light winks out. A hiss and a crackle and another flicker of orange light: Assef grinning, kneading Hassan in the chest with a knuckle. Darkness.

52 INT. AMIR'S ROOM - DAY 52

A pile of presents occupies one corner of the room: a Polaroid camera; a cricket bat; envelopes stuffed with cash.

Amir sits on his bed and inspects a wristwatch with a blue face and gold hands shaped like lightning bolts.

53 INT. STUDY - DAY 53

Baba sits at his desk, signing various documents as a radio plays news reports in the background.

AMIR (O.S.)

Baba?

Baba looks up and sees his son standing in the doorway.

AMIR (cont'd)

Have you seen my watch anywhere?

BABA

The one I just bought you? Don't tell me you already lost it.

AMIR

No... I know I had it in my room.

Baba returns his attention to his papers.

BABA

I'm sure it'll turn up somewhere.

54 EXT. BABA'S HOUSE - MORNING 54

Ali and Hassan walk out the house gates, pushing empty wheelbarrows as they head to market.

55 INT. AMIR'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS 55

Amir watches them from his window, the curtain gathered in one hand, the new watch in his other hand.

56 EXT. BABA'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER 56

Amir crosses the yard and steps inside the servants' hut.

57 INT. SERVANT'S HUT - CONTINUOUS 57

Amir lifts Hassan's mattress and plants the watch under it.

58 INT. BABA'S HOUSE - LATER 58

Amir knocks on the door of the study.

BABA (O.S.)

Come in.

59 INT. STUDY - CONTINUOUS 59

Amir steps inside. Baba signs papers at his desk. He looks up at Amir's grim face.

BABA

What's wrong?

60 INT. AMIR'S ROOM - LATER 60

Through his window, Amir watches Ali and Hassan push their wheelbarrows full of meat, naan, and fruit up the driveway.

Baba emerges from the house and walks up to Ali. They speak for a moment. Baba points to the house and Ali nods.

61 INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY 61

Hassan and Ali stand before Baba. From their red, puffed-up eyes, it seems that Hassan and Ali have both been crying. Amir sits on the leather sofa.

BABA

Did you steal Amir's watch, Hassan?

Hassan looks at Amir, who studies the rug intently. Hassan looks at him for a long time before lowering his eyes.

HASSAN

Yes.

Amir closes his eyes. Ali shakes his head, angry. Baba nods.

BABA

I forgive you.

Amir looks up, stunned to hear his father give pardon.

ALI

We are leaving, Agha sahib.

BABA

What?

(CONTINUED)

ALI

We can't live here anymore.

BABA

But I forgive him, Ali. Didn't you hear?

ALI

Life here is impossible for us now, Agha sahib. We're leaving.

Ali curls his arm around his son's shoulder. He glances at Amir and there is something cold and unforgiving in his eyes.

Baba spreads open his arms, his palms up.

BABA

I don't care about the watch. I don't understand why you're doing this...

ALI

I'm sorry, Agha sahib, but our bags are already packed. We've made our decision.

Baba looks lost, a sheen of grief spreading across his face.

BABA

Ali, haven't I provided for you? Haven't I been good to you and Hassan? Please don't do this.

Hassan's head is downcast, his shoulders slumped.

BABA (cont'd)

At least tell me why. Please.

Ali shakes his head. His arm around his son's shoulders, he turns and leads Hassan to the door.

BABA (cont'd)

I FORBID YOU TO DO THIS! DO YOU HEAR ME? I FORBID YOU!

Ali stops at the doorway and looks back at Baba.

ALI

Respectfully, you can't forbid me anything, Agha sahib. We don't work for you anymore.

62 INT. AMIR'S ROOM - DAY 62

Amir watches through his window as Ali and Hassan walk across the little bridge, carrying their flimsy suitcases.

In the courtyard down below, Baba closes the iron gate and walks back to the house.

Hassan turns and gives the house a final look. Amir edges away from the window, hiding from sight.

63 EXT. KABUL - NIGHT 63

A crescent moon shines on the mosques and slender minarets. A screaming comes across the sky.

64 INT. AMIR'S ROOM - NIGHT 64

The roar of the fighter jets overhead awakens Amir. He sits up and stares out the window, confused and disoriented.

Baba opens the bedroom door.

BABA

Pack a bag. Only what you need.

65 EXT. JADEH MAYWAND AVENUE - NIGHT 65

An Armored Personnel Carrier weaves through the outdoor market, past the empty stalls.

66 EXT. BAZAAR - NIGHT 66

RUSSIAN SOLDIERS carrying AK-47s patrol the deserted street.

67 INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT 67

Baba sits behind his desk, trying his telephone. Rahim Khan paces the room. Pro-Soviet propaganda plays softly on the radio.

BABA

The lines are down.

RAHIM KHAN

They blew up the telephone exchange. They're going after everyone they think is anti-Soviet.

68 INT. AMIR'S ROOM - NIGHT

68

Amir takes one last look at the pile of toys and the framed photographs of his family.

He leaves all of these behind, taking only two books: the *Shahnamah* and the leather-bound notebook Rahim Khan gave him. He slips them in his suitcase.

69 INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

69

BABA

They'll come for me.

RAHIM KHAN

We don't know that.

BABA

Read your history, my friend. By the time we know it, it will be too late.

(weary smile)

You know how I am. You know how I talk. Everyone in Kabul has heard me cursing the Communists.

Baba begins removing the framed photographs from the wall. He stares at the face of his dead wife on their wedding day before glancing up at Rahim Khan.

BABA (cont'd)

Will you watch over the house for me? We'll be back when the Russians leave.

RAHIM KHAN

What if they don't leave?

BABA

Everyone leaves. This country's not kind to invaders.

RAHIM KHAN

And you, my friend? Where will you go?

BABA

Pakistan, first. After that... wherever is safest for the boy.

(CONTINUED)

69 CONTINUED:

69

RAHIM KHAN

The smugglers want five thousand a head for safe passage to Pakistan. And I'm fairly sure they won't take checks.

Baba scoops a set of keys off the desk.

BABA

What about a Mustang?

70 EXT. RURAL ROAD - DAWN 70

An old Russian truck motors down the road.

71 INT. TRUCK - DAY 71

A dozen PASSENGERS are crammed onto facing benches in the back of the truck, beneath a heavy canvas tarpaulin. They sit with their suitcases tucked between their legs.

Amir sits beside Baba. Across from them sits a BURLY MAN wearing a sky-blue turban, an INFANT cradled under his arm. He thumbs prayer beads with his free hand. His YOUNG WIFE sits beside him, a black shawl wrapped around her face.

72 EXT. CHECKPOINT - DAY 72

The old truck pulls up to a Russian Army checkpoint.

73 INT. TRUCK - DAY 73

The passengers listen to a muffled conversation outside the truck between the driver and a Russian soldier. The soldier laughs, a shrill cackling sound.

Boot heels click on asphalt. KARIM the driver flings open the tarpaulin covering the back of the truck. He and the RUSSIAN SOLDIER peer inside.

Karim is a scrawny man with a pencil-thin mustache. The Russian has the face of a bulldog. A cigarette dangles from his lips. He hums tunelessly, drumming his fingers on the tailgate, eyes skipping from passenger to passenger.

His eyes settle on the young wife wearing the black shawl. He speaks in Russian to Karim. Karim answers with a curt reply. The soldier shouts something that makes Karim flinch.

Karim clears his throat and drops his head.

(CONTINUED)

KARIM

He wants a half hour with the lady
in the back of the truck.

The young wife pulls the shawl down over her face. She begins to sob. The toddler sitting in her husband's lap starts crying, too. The husband stares nervously at the automatic holstered on the soldier's hip.

BURLY MAN

Please, ask Mister Soldier Sahib to
show a little mercy.
(getting desperate)
Maybe he has a wife, too. Please.

Karim cannot look the husband in the eye.

KARIM

It's his price for letting us pass.

Baba stands. Amir grabs his leg, trying to keep Baba from interfering, but Baba shakes his leg free. He speaks to Karim but looks directly at the Russian.

BABA

I want you to ask this man
something. Ask him where his shame
is.

Karim translates and the Russian responds.

KARIM

He says this is war. There is no
shame in war.

BABA

Tell him he's wrong. War doesn't
negate decency.

The soldier speaks to Karim, a smile creasing his lips.

KARIM

Agha sahib, these *Roussi* are not
like us. They understand nothing
about respect, honor.

BABA

What did he say?

KARIM

He says he'll enjoy putting a
bullet in you almost as much as...

Karim nods toward the young wife. The soldier flicks away his unfinished cigarette and unholsters his pistol.

BABA

Tell him I'll take a thousand of his bullets before I let this indecency take place.

The Russian raises his automatic. Amir tugs on Baba's sleeve.

AMIR

Baba, please sit down. He'll shoot you.

Baba slaps away Amir's hand.

BABA

Haven't I taught you anything?
(turning to the soldier)
Tell him he'd better kill me good with that first shot. Because if I don't go down, I'm tearing him to pieces, goddamn his father!

The Russian presses the gun's muzzle to Baba's chest.

RUSSIAN OFFICER (O.S.)

Octahobka!

The soldier turns and sees a gray-haired OFFICER hurrying toward them. The soldier rolls his eyes and holsters his gun. The officer glares at the soldier and looks inside the truck, making sure that no one's been shot.

The officer yells at his subordinate in Russian before turning to Karim and waving his hand.

RUSSIAN OFFICER (cont'd)

Go, go.

Karim jogs to the truck's cab, hops in, and shifts into gear. Baba sits, never taking his eyes off the young soldier. The soldier blows him a kiss.

The passengers ride in silence. Suddenly the burly man stands, walks over to Baba, crouches, and kisses his hand.

75 EXT. JALALABAD - NIGHT

75

The truck has stopped at the intersection of two dirt roads. Karim throws open the tarpaulin. The passengers step out.

BABA

Why are we stopping?

KARIM

We can't get you across the border in that truck. We don't have enough money to bribe all the Russians.

Baba glares at the smaller man, smelling a swindle.

BABA

Then how?

Karim gestures to the end of the street, where an old fuel truck rounds the corner and rattles toward the refugees.

BABA (cont'd)

You're joking.

KARIM

Your choice, Agha sahib.

76 EXT. KARIM'S HOUSE - LATER

76

One by one the refugees mount the idling truck's rear deck, climb the access ladder, and slide down into the empty tank.

Baba fishes the snuffbox from his pocket. He empties the box and picks up a handful of Afghani dirt from the unpaved road. He kisses the dirt, pours it into the box, and stows the box in his breast pocket, next to his heart.

Amir climbs the ladder and hesitates by the dark maw of the tank. Inside is pitch black, a steel coffin. Baba has climbed up behind him. He clamps his big hand on his son's shoulder.

BABA

I'll be with you the whole way.

Amir nods, takes a deep breath and slides into the shadows.

77 INT. TANKER - NIGHT

77

Absolute darkness. The sound of the truck's wheels crushing gravel filters through the walls of the tanker. A BABY cries. Men and women softly sob and mutter ancient prayers.

(CONTINUED)

For a long time nothing breaks the dark. And then a small miracle, something glowing green. Baba's wristwatch.

BABA
You see it?

AMIR
Yes.

BABA
Don't be afraid. I'm right here
with you.

In the weak green light of the watch, Amir huddles against his father's side. The boy is close to panic.

AMIR
I can't breathe, Baba...

BABA
Shh. Think of something else. Think
of Rumi.

AMIR
Rumi?

BABA
You've got his poems memorized,
don't you? I want to hear one.

For a moment Amir is quiet, collecting the words. When he begins to recite, his voice is weak, timid, reflecting the terror of his situation.

AMIR
*If we come to ignorance, that is
His prison. And if we come to
knowledge, that is His balcony.*

The tanker rolls on through the darkness. Amir's voice gains confidence.

AMIR (O.S.)
*If we come to sleep, we are His
drowsy ones. And if we come to
wake, we are in His Hands. If we
come to weeping, we are His cloud
full of raindrops. And if we come
to laughing, we are His lightning
in that moment.*

(MORE)

78 CONTINUED:

78

AMIR (O.S.) (cont'd)
*If we come to anger and battle, it
 is the reflection of His Wrath. And
 if we come to peace and pardon, it
 is the reflection of His Love.*

79 EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

79

TITLE CARD: *Fremont, California, 1988*

A '68 Mustang, black and freshly waxed, pulls up to one of the pumps. The driver, a WHITE MAN wearing a leather jacket, steps out of the car and walks into the convenience store.

80 INT. CONVENIENCE STORE - DAY

80

Baba, wearing the service station uniform, stands behind bulletproof glass. His face looks pale and drawn under the bright fluorescent lights.

He coughs, covering his mouth with a handkerchief. He is older now, somewhat diminished, beard graying, hair thinning.

WHITE MAN
 Pack of Camels.

Baba hands the man his cigarettes, takes his money, and makes change. He looks out the window to the parked car.

BABA
 Beautiful car.

Baba speaks English with a thick accent, sometimes struggling with the words.

WHITE MAN
 Thanks, man.

The white man walks out of the store and Baba watches him walk toward the gleaming Mustang.

81 INT. CONVENIENCE STORE BATHROOM - DAY

81

Baba straightens his tie. He wears a brown suit that has seen better days. He studies his reflection in the chipped mirror.

82 EXT. COMMUNITY COLLEGE - DAY

82

Graduation day. A stage has been set up on the campus green. The SENIORS march one by one in their gowns and mortarboards, accepting their diplomas from a COLLEGE DEAN.

(CONTINUED)

FAMILY MEMBERS sit on folding chairs on the green, snapping photographs, cheering for their loved ones. Baba stands apart from the others, standing very straight in his brown suit.

The DEAN OF STUDENTS, speaking into a microphone at the lectern, reads off the list of graduating seniors, who step forward as their names are called.

DEAN

Richard Hidalgo. Aaron Hill. Denise
Hocking. Jennifer Holliday. Damon
Hooper...

Amir (24) waits for his name to be called. Baba watches and waits, deeply proud of his son.

Baba leads Amir (now wearing pleated slacks and a sports jacket) into a rundown bar. WHITE MEN in baseball hats and wifebeaters play pool. Clouds of cigarette smoke hover over the pool tables. The men stare at the Afghans.

Baba and Amir sit at the bar beside an OLD MAN whose leathery face looks sickly in the blue glow of a Michelob sign. Baba lights a cigarette and addresses the BARTENDER in English:

BABA

Tonight I am very happy. Tonight I
drink with my son.

Baba pats the old man on the back.

BABA (cont'd)

And one, please, for my friend.

The old man tips his hat and smiles. He has no upper teeth.

BABA (cont'd)

What do you drink?

OLD MAN

I like a good scotch.

BABA

(to bartender)

One good scotch and two beers.

When the drinks are delivered Baba touches glass with Amir and the old man. He downs his beer in three gulps.

BABA (cont'd)
One more, sir.

Amir sips his beer tentatively.

BABA (cont'd)
My son, the college graduate.

Amir's English is nearly perfect, only a trace of accent:

AMIR
It's just a community college.

BABA
It is college. And someday, Doctor Amir!

AMIR
I think I want to write.

BABA
Write?

AMIR
You know, short stories and stuff.

BABA
Ah. So instead of being a doctor and saving lives, you'll make up stories. And for money you can work at the gas station with me. We'll put your diploma on the wall.

Baba sighs, picking peanuts out of a bowl on the bar. He turns to the pool table just in time to see one of the players make a tricky bank shot.

BABA (cont'd)
Ay, beautiful! Beautiful!

The pool players turn and stare at Baba.

BABA (cont'd)
(to the bartender)
A pitcher of beer for the gentlemen!

BABA
My son, he graduates college today.

The pool players raise their beers to Amir.

POOL PLAYER #1
Way to go, kid.

Everyone drinks. Baba rises to his feet, beer spilling from his glass onto the sawdust floor.

BABA
Fuck the Russia!

The bar patrons laugh, impressed by the crazy Afghan.

BAR PATRONS
FUCK THE RUSSIA!

Everyone drinks. A country song plays on the jukebox and the crowd grows festive.

Amir smiles, shaking his head. Even here, ten thousand miles from home, Baba is the most popular man in the joint.

Baba drinks his beer and puts his hand on Amir's shoulder.

BABA
Hassan should be here. This would
make him happy.

The smile fades from Amir's face.

85 EXT. SAN JOSE FLEA MARKET - DAY

85

Baba and Amir have their own stall in the Used Goods section of the flea market. All the other stalls in their aisle are occupied by AFGHANS. Afghan music plays on boomboxes.

Near the edge of the market, a HAZARA FAMILY sells knitted sweaters and hats. Afghans not busy haggling with SHOPPERS gossip in the shade, sipping tea with almond *kolchas*.

Baba saunters down the aisle, hands pressed to his chest in respect, greeting old acquaintances from Kabul.

Amir runs the stand, collecting ten dollars for the Chicago albums. After giving the buyer his change, Amir sees Baba approaching with an older, distinguished-looking man.

BABA
Amir, this is General Sahib, Mr.
Iqbal Taheri. He was a decorated
general in Kabul.

(CONTINUED)

The GENERAL laughs politely. His silver hair is combed back from his smooth, tanned forehead. He wears a gray three-piece suit, shiny from too many pressings.

GENERAL TAHERI

Such a lofty introduction. Salaam, my child.

Amir shakes the general's hand.

AMIR

Salaam, General Sahib.

BABA

Amir is going to be a great writer.

GENERAL TAHERI

Mashallah. Will you be writing about our country? History, perhaps?

AMIR

I write fiction.

GENERAL TAHERI

Ah, a storyteller. Well, people need stories to divert them.

SORAYA (O.S.)

Padar jan, you forgot your tea.

The men turn. Soraya is a slim-hipped beauty with velvety black hair. She carries an open thermos and a Styrofoam cup.

Amir blinks, staring at her. Her walnut brown eyes, shaded by fanned lashes, meet Amir's, hold for a moment, and look away.

GENERAL TAHERI

You are kind, my dear.

Soraya turns and heads back to her own family's stall, two aisles away. Amir watches her go.

GENERAL TAHERI (cont'd)

My daughter, Soraya jan.

The general checks the time on his gold pocket watch.

GENERAL TAHERI (cont'd)

Well, time to go set up.

(CONTINUED)

He and Baba exchange kisses on the cheek. He shakes Amir's hand with both of his.

GENERAL TAHERI (cont'd)
Best of luck with the writing.

The general leaves them. Baba stares at Amir, smiling.

AMIR
What?

BABA
Has she made an impression on you?

AMIR
Please, Baba.

Baba laughs and pours himself another cup of tea.

Amir types feverishly on an old manual typewriter.

BABA (O.S.)
What are you writing?

Amir looks up and sees Baba standing in the doorway, smoking.

AMIR
A story.

BABA
Can't doctors write stories, too?

Amir smiles and looks at the typed words on the white page. Baba sighs.

BABA (cont'd)
Write well.

Baba exits the room, closing the door behind him, leaving his son alone with his typewriter.

It's a sweltering day. Baba fans his face with a newspaper. Amir counts their earnings: fives, singles, and coins.

BABA
How much?

AMIR
One hundred and sixty.

BABA
Not bad.

Amir stands and stretches.

AMIR
Do you want a Coke?

BABA
Please.

Amir steps out from behind their table.

BABA (cont'd)
Be careful, Amir.

AMIR
Of what?

BABA
The general is a Pashtun to the
root. He has honor and pride.

AMIR
I was only going to get us Cokes.

BABA
Just don't embarrass me, that's all
I ask.

AMIR
I won't. God, Baba.

Baba lights a cigarette and starts fanning himself again.

88 EXT. SORAYA'S BOOTH - MOMENTS LATER

88

Soraya reads a book behind a table covered with old curling
irons and neckties. She looks up when Amir approaches.

AMIR
Salaam.

SORAYA
Salaam.

She waits for more and Amir struggles to think of something.

(CONTINUED)

AMIR

Is General Sahib here today?

SORAYA

He went that way.

Soraya points, one of her silver bracelets slipping from her wrist to her elbow.

AMIR

Will you tell him I stopped by to pay my respects?

SORAYA

I will.

AMIR

Thank you.

Amir nods and smiles and Soraya stares at him, not sure if their conversation is over.

AMIR (cont'd)

Oh, and my name is Amir. In case you need to know. So you can tell him. That I stopped by. To...

SORAYA

Yes.

AMIR

...pay my respects.

Amir shifts on his feet, clearing his throat.

AMIR (cont'd)

I'll go now. Sorry to disturb you.

SORAYA

No, you didn't.

AMIR

Oh. Good.

Amir begins to walk away but stops and turns around.

AMIR (cont'd)

Can I ask what you're reading?

The words seem to hush the chatter of the nearby Afghans. Their collective focus shifts to Amir and Soraya. Heads turn. Soraya shows the book's cover to Amir. *Wuthering Heights*.

(CONTINUED)

SORAYA
Have you read it?

AMIR
(nodding)
It's a sad story.

SORAYA
Sad stories make good books.

AMIR
They do.

SORAYA
I heard you write.

Amir perks up. He hesitates and goes for broke:

AMIR
Would you like to read one of my
stories?

Soraya's eyes flick from side to side nervously.

SORAYA
I'd like that.

Amir nods and smiles. He walks away from her table again, realizes he's heading in the wrong direction, spins around and goes the other way, nodding one last time at Soraya.

89 INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT 89

Amir hammers at the keys of his typewriter.

90 INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS 90

Baba reads a Farsi newspaper and sips from a cup of black tea. He flips the page. He coughs once, and then again, violent coughs that leave him bent over in his chair.

When the coughing fit is done, Baba leans back in the chair, eyes closed, trying to slow his ragged breathing. He listens to his son's typing and smiles.

91 EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY 91

Amir and Baba carry boxes from their apartment down to their van, parked on the street. While Amir loads the back of the van, Baba has to stop at the bottom of the stairs, struggling for breath.

(CONTINUED)

91 CONTINUED:

91

By the time Amir looks back, though, Baba has managed to mask his weakness. He soldiers forward, carrying his boxes.

92 EXT. SAN JOSE FLEA MARKET - DAY

92

Amir strides through the aisles, attempting an air of confidence. He holds a roll of stapled pages in one hand.

93 EXT. SORAYA'S BOOTH - DAY

93

A POTBELLIED MAN examines a set of pewter candlesticks.

POTBELLIED MAN

How much?

SORAYA

Five dollars.

POTBELLIED MAN

I'll give you three.

SORAYA

Okay.

The potbellied man fishes out three singles and walks off with his candlesticks. Amir has watched the transaction.

AMIR

You're not much of a haggler.

Soraya looks up and smiles when she sees Amir.

SORAYA

That's what my mother keeps telling me.

AMIR

I brought you something.

He hands her the roll of stapled pages.

SORAYA

You remembered.

She looks pleased, holding the story carefully, as if it could shatter if she squeezed too hard. Suddenly her smile vanishes. Her eyes fix on something behind Amir. He turns around, coming face to face with her father.

(CONTINUED)

GENERAL TAHERI
 (smiling thinly)
 Amir jan. Our aspiring storyteller.
 What a pleasure.

AMIR
 Salaam, General Sahib.

The general moves past Amir, toward the booth.

GENERAL TAHERI
 What a beautiful day it is, no?

He extends his hand toward Soraya. She gives him the story.

GENERAL TAHERI (cont'd)
 They say it will rain this week.
 Hard to believe, isn't it?

He drops the rolled pages in the garbage can. Turning back to Amir, he puts a hand on the young man's shoulder and guides him, gently but firmly, away from the stall.

GENERAL TAHERI (cont'd)
 You know, child, I've grown rather
 fond of you. You are a decent boy,
 I really believe that, but--

The general sighs and waves his hand.

GENERAL TAHERI (cont'd)
 Even decent boys need reminding
 sometimes. So it's my duty to
 remind you that you are among
 peers.

They stop walking. The general's expressionless eyes bore into Amir's.

GENERAL TAHERI (cont'd)
 You see, everyone here is a
 storyteller.

The general smiles, revealing perfectly even teeth.

GENERAL TAHERI (cont'd)
 Do pass my respects to your father,
 Amir jan.

Baba sells a vintage teddy bear to an ELDERLY WOMAN.

BABA
For your daughter?

ELDERLY WOMAN
My granddaughter.

BABA
You have granddaughter? Impossible.

The elderly woman laughs and walks away with the teddy bear. Amir returns to the stall, slouched and disconsolate.

BABA (cont'd)
What's wrong?

AMIR
Nothing.

BABA
The general?
(off Amir's nod)
Akh, Amir.

Baba's about to say something more but he begins to cough. At first Amir, caught up in his own worries, doesn't notice. But when the coughing doesn't stop Amir turns to his father.

AMIR
Baba?

Baba holds up a hand, as if to say, *it's okay*. But the coughing doesn't stop. Amir hurries over to his side. Baba takes deep breaths, holding his son's hand.

95 INT. EXAMINING ROOM - DAY

95

Baba, shirtless, sits on the examining table. DR. STAROBIN listens to his chest with a stethoscope. Baba stares at the doctor. Amir stands to the side, watching.

BABA
Where are you from, Doctor?

DR. STAROBIN
Grew up in Michigan. Came out here for medical school. Once you get used to that California sunlight...

BABA
But your family?

(CONTINUED)

95 CONTINUED:

95

DR. STAROBIN

Oh, my family. Well, originally
from Russia, I guess.

Baba takes the stethoscope off his chest. He slides off the examining table and grabs his shirt. The doctor, puzzled, stares at Baba and then Amir, who shakes his head in apology.

96 INT. SECOND EXAMINING ROOM - DAY 96

Baba sits on another examining table while DR. AMANI, an Iranian man with a crooked mustache, listens to Baba's chest with his stethoscope.

Baba smiles beatifically at Amir. Amir rolls his eyes.

97 INT. DR. AMANI'S OFFICE - DAY 97

Dr. Amani sits behind his desk, CAT scans and bronchoscopy reports piled before him. Baba and Amir sit across from him.

DR. AMANI

So... I have the test results.

Baba studies the doctor for a moment. He understands what he is about to hear.

BABA

(to Amir)

Wait for me outside.

98 INT. DOCTOR'S WAITING ROOM - LATER 98

Amir waits nervously for his father. When he sees Baba he stands. Father and son look at each other for a long moment. Finally Baba shrugs, a small smile on his face.

The shrug says: *there is nothing to be done.*

99 INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY 99

Baba lies in bed, an IV line keeping him hydrated. Time has passed since we last saw him and he has grown more frail, the sickness leeching the color from his skin.

Amir sits in a chair beside the bed, making corrections on a typed manuscript with a ballpoint pen. Baba watches him.

BABA

Read to me.

(CONTINUED)

Amir looks up. He sets aside the manuscript and picks up a newspaper from the bedside table.

BABA (cont'd)
No, no... Read me one of your stories.

AMIR
(startled)
Really?

BABA
You're a writer, aren't you?

AMIR
It's sort of a work in progress...

BABA
Read.

Amir gathers the typed pages and stares at them, a little nervous.

AMIR
It's called "The Sultans of Kabul."

BABA
Good title.

AMIR
"The Russians came on a winter night, their warplanes splitting the sky, their tanks rumbling down the boulevards, cracking asphalt in their wake."

100 INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER

100

Time passes, the light outside fades, the shadows shift.

AMIR
"Last night I dreamed I walked through the streets of my ruined city. The citizens of Kabul were skeletons now, skeletons selling naswar in the night market, skeletons drinking cups of strong tea, skeletons playing cards in the moonlight. They greeted me as I passed, teeth clacking together in their jaws. 'Salaam, brother,' they said. 'Welcome home.'"

(CONTINUED)

Amir looks up from his story, waiting for a response.

BABA
Keep going.

AMIR
That's the end.

BABA
That's not an ending.

Amir smiles as he puts the story back in a folder.

AMIR
It's my story. I get to end it how
I want.

BABA
Is that what your teachers told
you?

He lifts his arm and stares glumly at the plastic tube protruding from his arm.

BABA (cont'd)
I'm tired of these machines.
Tomorrow I want you to take me
home.

AMIR
But Dr. Amani said--

BABA
(sharp)
It is not Dr. Amani's decision.

A knock on the door. Amir stands to open the door. He smiles at whomever stands outside the room and beckons them to enter.

General Taheri, his wife JAMILA, and Soraya enter the room. Amir and Soraya glance at each other and look away at the same time. General Taheri takes Baba's hand.

GENERAL TAHERI
How are you, my friend?

Baba motions to the IV hanging from his arm. He smiles thinly. The general smiles back.

BABA
You shouldn't have burdened
yourselves.

JAMILA
It's no burden.

GENERAL TAHERI
No burden at all. Do you need
anything? Anything at all? Ask me
like you'd ask a brother.

Baba shakes his head on the pillow.

BABA
Your coming here has brightened my
eyes.

The general smiles and squeezes Baba's hand.

GENERAL TAHERI
How are you, Amir jan? Do you need
anything?

AMIR
No, thank you, General Sahib. I'm--

Amir's voice catches, tears coming to his eyes. He bolts from
the room.

101 INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER 101

Amir stands by a viewing box. He leans against the wall,
trying to control himself, to keep from breaking down. The
door to Baba's room opens and Soraya walks out.

SORAYA
I'm so sorry, Amir.

Amir tries to smile.

AMIR
You'd better go back inside or your
father will come after me.

SORAYA
Your story made me cry.

AMIR
You read it?

SORAYA

You think I'd leave it in the trash?

She puts a finger over her lips.

SORAYA (cont'd)

Our secret?

AMIR

Our secret.

SORAYA

You write beautifully.

She walks away, leaving Amir smiling improbably in the oncology ward.

Baba lies on the couch, a wool blanket covering him. Amir brings him hot tea and a plate of roasted almonds.

Amir sets the dishes on the coffee table, wraps his arms around his father, and pulls him upright, adjusting the blanket. Baba has lost a good deal of weight.

AMIR

Can I do anything else for you?

BABA

No, child. Thank you.

AMIR

Then I wonder if you'll do something for me. If you're not too exhausted.

Baba looks up at his son.

AMIR (cont'd)

I want you to go khastegari. I want you to ask General Taheri for his daughter's hand.

Baba's dry lips stretch into a smile.

BABA

Are you sure?

AMIR
More sure than I've ever been about anything.

BABA
Then give me the phone. And my address book.

Amir blinks-- he didn't expect it to happen so fast.

AMIR
Now?

BABA
Then when?

Amir smiles. He grabs the phone and the address book and brings them over to his father.

Baba looks up the number, picks up the receiver and dials the number. As he waits, he glances at his nervous son and winks.

BABA (cont'd)
General Sahib, Salaam alaykum...
yes, much, much better... It was gracious of you to come... General Sahib, I'm calling to ask if I may pay you a visit tomorrow morning. It's an honorable matter... Yes... Eleven o'clock is fine. Until then.

Baba hangs up. He and Amir stare at each other. Amir bursts into laughter and Baba joins in.

103 INT. BABA'S BEDROOM - MORNING 103

Sunlight streams in through the windows. Amir helps Baba into a clean white shirt. He knots his father's tie for him. There is a two-inch gap between the collar button and Baba's neck.

Amir stoops and ties his father's shoes.

104 EXT. TAHERI'S HOUSE - MORNING 104

The Volkswagen pulls up to the curb. Amir hops down from the driver's seat, walks around to the passenger side and helps Baba out. Once Baba is on his feet he shoos his son away.

BABA
Go home. I'll call you in an hour.

104 CONTINUED:

AMIR
Okay. Good luck.

Baba smiles. He turns and hobbles toward the house.

105 INT./EXT. BABA'S APARTMENT - DAY 105

Amir, holding a cordless phone, paces back and forth along the walkway on the second floor of his building. He steps into his apartment to check the clock and resumes his pacing.

The phone rings. He stares at the phone for a moment, willing it to deliver good news, before finally answering.

AMIR
Hello?

BABA (V.O.)
The general accepted.

Amir lets out a burst of air and sits down.

AMIR
He did?

BABA (V.O.)
He did. But Soraya jan wants to talk to you first.

AMIR
About what?

BABA (V.O.)
About what? How do I know about what? She wants to talk to you.

106 INT. TAHERI'S HOUSE - DAY 106

Soraya's mother Jamila opens the front door and lets Amir inside. She beams at him.

JAMILA
Welcome, Amir jan. Would you like some tea?

General Taheri smiles at Amir and shakes his hand.

GENERAL TAHERI
He didn't come for tea.

(CONTINUED)

Baba, frail but happy, sits on the sofa. He and the general have been playing backgammon on an old wooden board. He smiles at his son and nods his congratulations.

Soraya walks into the living room. She attempts an awkward smile but ends up staring at the floor, terribly nervous.

JAMILA

Come, we'll walk.

Jamila takes Amir's elbow and ushers him outside.

Amir and Soraya walk past small houses with tidy lawns. Neither of them speaks; both look deeply uncomfortable. Amir turns and looks at Jamila, who follows ten paces behind.

SORAYA

You didn't think they'd let us walk alone, did you? They're very traditional.

AMIR

I know.

SORAYA

We can't be alone together until--

AMIR

Until the wedding night.

SORAYA

Yes.

AMIR

But you want a wedding night? With me, I mean?

SORAYA

Of course I do! It's just... I want to tell you something. Something you need to know. I don't want us to start with secrets.

(beat)

We lived in Virginia before we came here. We left because... I ran away with an Afghan man. I was eighteen. I guess I thought I was being rebellious. We lived together for almost a month. All the Afghans in Virginia were talking about it.

Soraya peeks at Amir's face, terrified that this news might dissuade him from his proposal. Tears have begun to drip from her eyes and she rubs them away with the back of her hand.

SORAYA (cont'd)

Father eventually found us. He showed up at the door and... made me come home. I was hysterical. Screaming, everything. Told him I hated him.

(beat)

We moved out to California a few weeks later. I didn't talk to my father for a long time. And now... now I think he saved me.

They stop walking. Jamila stops twenty feet behind and pretends to study her neighbor's flower garden.

SORAYA (cont'd)

Does what I told you bother you?

AMIR

A little.

SORAYA

Does it bother you enough to change your mind?

AMIR

No, Soraya. Not even close. I'd marry you tonight if I could.

Soraya smiles up at him through her tears.

SORAYA

(softly)

I feel safe with you. I want you to feel safe with me.

AMIR

I do.

SORAYA

Tell me one of your secrets.

Amir, caught off guard, can think of no quick reply.

SORAYA (cont'd)

You must have something buried in there. Tell me.

(CONTINUED)

Amir stares into Soraya's eyes and she waits, hopeful that he will confide in her. For a moment it appears he might tell her everything, finally confess the truth. But he hesitates a moment too long and shakes his head.

AMIR

No dark secrets. I've had a pretty boring life.

SORAYA

We can change that.

Amir, wearing a tuxedo, walks hand in hand with Soraya, who shimmers in a white dress, veiled and lovely. Her hands are painted with henna.

Baba limps along next to Amir; the general and his wife walk beside their daughter.

A procession of UNCLES, AUNTS, and COUSINS follows the bride and groom as they make their way through the hall, parting a sea of APPLAUDING GUESTS, blinking at flashing cameras.

A YOUNG MAN holds a Koran over the bride and groom's heads as they inch forward. Afghan wedding songs blare from the speakers.

Amir and Soraya slowly make their way to a stage upon which a spotlit sofa sits like a throne.

They sit on the sofa as three hundred faces look on. A cousin hands Amir a mirror. A translucent muslin cloth is thrown over Amir and Soraya's heads.

Under the cloth, the lighting is soft and multicolored. Amir is careful not to look directly at Soraya yet. Instead he watches in the mirror as she removes her veil.

Amir smiles at the beautiful face in the mirror.

SORAYA

What do you see?

AMIR

I see the rest of my life.

The party is in full swing. Guests pick from platters of *chopan kabob*, *sholeh-goshti*, and wild-orange rice.

(CONTINUED)

109 CONTINUED:

109

Sweat-drenched men dance the traditional *attan* in a circle, bouncing, spinning faster and faster with the feverish tempo of the tabla.

Amir, walking from table to table with Soraya, greeting guests, looks over to Baba, who sits on the sofa on the stage, smiling at his son, frail but happy.

110 INT. BABA'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

110

Amir and Soraya sit by the coffee table, flipping through photos from the wedding.

SORAYA

That's a good one of my mother.

Baba lies on the couch, under a wool blanket. He watches his son push back a loose curl of Soraya's hair.

BABA

Help me to bed, Amir.

Soraya and Amir place Baba's frail arms around their shoulders and guide him into the bedroom.

111 INT. BABA'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

111

Soraya and Amir ease Baba into his bed. Soraya switches off the bedside lamp.

BABA

(to Soraya)

Come here, my child.

Soraya leans close and Baba kisses her cheek. He beckons for Amir and kisses his son's cheek.

SORAYA

I'll come back with your morphine
and a glass of water, Kaka jan.

BABA

Not tonight. There is no pain
tonight.

Soraya pulls up his blanket. Amir and Soraya walk out of the room, hand in hand.

Baba watches them go, a small smile on his face. He stares at the closed door for a moment.

(CONTINUED)

111 CONTINUED:

111

He reaches for the tin snuffbox he filled with Afghan dirt long ago. He kisses the snuffbox and rests it on his chest.

112 EXT. MUSLIM SECTION, CEMETERY - DAY

112

The GRAVEDIGGERS lower a simple wooden casket into the ground. Scores of MOURNERS stand by the open grave, the men on one side (Amir, the general, etc.), the women on the other (Soraya, Jamila, etc.).

A MULLAH recites a Koranic verse. Amir watches the first shovelful of dirt hit the coffin. He walks away. Soraya hurries after him. She takes Amir's hand and they walk in silence down a winding gravel path.

CROSSFADE TO:

A red kite flies in the sky above Golden Gate Park.

RAHIM KHAN (V.O.)

There is a way to be good again...

113 INT. AMIR'S APARTMENT - DAY

113

TITLE CARD: *San Francisco, 2000*

Amir lowers the phone into the cradle, still staring at the kite flying above Golden Gate Park.

114 INT. BEDROOM - DAY

114

Soraya, wearing a bathrobe, brushes her wet hair in the mirror. Amir walks in and leans against the door frame, a somber expression on his face.

SORAYA

Are you all right?

AMIR

I have to go to Pakistan.

SORAYA

Pakistan?

AMIR

Rahim Khan is very sick.

SORAYA

Your father's friend?

(off Amir's nod)

I'm so sorry.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

- 114 CONTINUED: 114
- SORAYA (cont'd)
(beat)
What about your book tour?
- AMIR
There wouldn't be any books if not
for him.
- 115 EXT. STREETS OF PESHAWAR - DAY 115
- TITLE CARD: *Peshawar, Pakistan*
- A taxicab weaves through a maze of narrow alleys, dodging PEDESTRIANS, BICYCLISTS, and rickshaws popping blue smoke. The cab passes BEARDED VENDORS selling carpets and lampshades, KIDS selling cigarettes, and tiny restaurants with maps of Afghanistan painted on their windows.
- 116 INT. TAXICAB - DAY 116
- Amir sits in the backseat of the smoke-filled car, on shredded upholstery. The DRIVER steers with one thumb.
- DRIVER
Terrible what's happening in your
country. Afghani people and
Pakistani people, they're like
brothers. Muslims have to help
Muslims.
- Amir nods politely, staring out the window.
- DRIVER (cont'd)
They call this area "Afghan Town."
Sometimes it feels like Peshawar is
a suburb of Kabul.
- He laughs at his own joke and Amir continues to nod politely.
- 117 EXT. RAHIM KHAN'S BUILDING - DAY 117
- The cab pulls up to a narrow building on a busy street. Amir steps out of the cab, takes his lone suitcase, and walks up to the hand-carved door.
- 118 INT. CORRIDOR - DAY 118
- Amir walks down a dimly lit hallway. He stops at the last door, checks the address on a piece of paper, and knocks.
- After a moment, the door swings open. Sickness has dwindled Rahim Khan to skin and bones, but his eyes, sharp and intelligent, are the same. He smiles.

119 INT. RAHIM KHAN'S APARTMENT - LATER

119

Rahim Khan sits on a wispy mattress set along the wall, looking at a photograph of Soraya. Amir pours two cups of tea from a samovar and brings them over.

RAHIM KHAN

General Taheri's daughter, eh? If that man had got his way, he'd be king of Afghanistan.

AMIR

Well, he didn't.

RAHIM KHAN

(handing back the photo)
She's a beauty. Any children?

AMIR

No.
(hesitates)
We tried, but... It doesn't seem possible for us.

Rahim Khan nods, drinking his tea, too courteous to press the matter.

AMIR (cont'd)

How long have you been in Pakistan?

RAHIM KHAN

Less than a year. Kabul's no longer safe for me.

AMIR

The Taliban are as bad as they say?

RAHIM KHAN

Oh, worse. Much worse. They don't let you be human. They even banned kite flying.

AMIR

(remembering)
I have something for you.

He opens his satchel, pulls out a copy of *A Season for Ashes*, and hands it to Rahim Khan.

RAHIM KHAN

(starting to smile)
What is this?

(CONTINUED)

AMIR

Look...

He opens the cover and shows Rahim Khan the dedication page.

RAHIM KHAN

(reading in halting
English)

"For Rahim Khan, who taught me how
to read and why to read."

Tears fill Rahim Khan's eyes as he looks at the words.

RAHIM KHAN (cont'd)

It's not even true. You taught
yourself.

(looking up at Amir)

This is a great honor. Thank you,
Amir. You must sign it for me
before you go.

AMIR

How are you? I mean *really*, how are
you?

RAHIM KHAN

Dying, actually. I don't think I'll
see the end of this summer.

AMIR

Let me take you home with me. I can
find you a good doctor. They're
coming up with new treatments all
the time--

RAHIM KHAN

I see America has infused you with
her optimism. But there is such a
thing as God's will.

AMIR

There is only what you do and what
you don't do.

RAHIM KHAN

(laughing)

You sound like your father. I miss
the man so much... But it *is* God's
will, Amir jan. It really is.

Rahim Khan takes Amir's hand and holds it between his.

(CONTINUED)

RAHIM KHAN (cont'd)

I didn't bring you here to complain about my health. Forgive me... for what I have to tell you.

(long beat)

Hassan is dead.

Amir opens his mouth but no words come out. He hasn't seen Hassan in twenty-one years but the news devastates him.

AMIR

How?

RAHIM KHAN

You know that I watched over your father's house after you left. But none of the caretakers I hired lasted more than a year. Some were dishonest; some were lazy. So a few years ago I went to Hazarajat and brought Hassan and his family home with me. His wife, Farzana. And their son, Sohrab.

Amir places his cup of tea on the floor. He stands and walks to the window, gazes out at the street.

AMIR

Rostam and Sohrab. I used to read him that story all the time.

RAHIM KHAN

It was good to have them there. Hassan kept the house from falling apart; Farzana cooked the meals; it was good. But when my health began to fail... well, there isn't a hospital in Afghanistan that can help me. So I came here.

Rahim Khan shrugs and offers a thin smile.

RAHIM KHAN (cont'd)

Not that anyone here can help me, either. But I came. A few weeks after I left, the Taliban came. They accused Hassan of lying when he said he was looking after the house for me. The Talibs said he was a liar and a thief like all Hazaras. They ordered him to get his family out by nightfall.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

119 CONTINUED: (3)

RAHIM KHAN (cont'd)
(beat)
Hassan refused.

Amir turns from the window and stares at Rahim Khan.

RAHIM KHAN (cont'd)
So they took him to the street, and
ordered him to kneel...

Amir lowers his eyes.

RAHIM KHAN (cont'd)
And shot him in the back of the
head. Hassan's wife came screaming
and attacked them. So they shot
her, too.

Amir can do nothing but stare at the floor.

AMIR
And the boy? Sohrab?

RAHIM KHAN
He's in an orphanage in Karteh-Seh.

Rahim Khan picks up an envelope from a side table and offers
it to Amir, who walks over from the window to take it.

RAHIM KHAN (cont'd)
Hassan sent this to me a week
before he died. It's for you.

Amir looks at his own name, printed in neat Farsi letters on
the front of the envelope.

RAHIM KHAN (cont'd)
He taught himself how to read and
write. He didn't want to send you a
letter until he could do it
properly.

Rahim Khan leans forward to sip his tea.

RAHIM KHAN (cont'd)
You need to go back to Kabul.

Amir, still stunned by the news of his old playmate's death,
doesn't know how to respond.

RAHIM KHAN (cont'd)
I've already arranged for a driver.
He's a good man.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

RAHIM KHAN (cont'd)
Fought with Massoud's people
against the Taliban.

AMIR
I... I can't go to Kabul. Can't you
pay someone here to go? I'll pay
for it if it's a matter of money.

RAHIM KHAN
(roaring)
It isn't about money! I'm a dying
man and I will not be insulted!

AMIR
But why me?

RAHIM KHAN
Because he's the blood of your
blood.

Amir stares at Rahim Khan, not comprehending.

RAHIM KHAN (cont'd)
You know this. You're a
storyteller. Some part of you has
always known this story. Hassan's
father, Ali, was married once
before to a Hazara woman from
Jagheri.

AMIR
What does that have to do with
anything?

RAHIM KHAN
She left him childless after five
years and married a man in Khost.
She bore him three daughters. Do
you understand what I'm trying to
tell you? Ali was sterile.

AMIR
No, he wasn't. He had Hassan.

RAHIM KHAN
He raised Hassan. He didn't father
him.
(beat)
Your father loved you both. Don't
you see that? Because you were both
his sons. And Sohrab--

AMIR
No.

RAHIM KHAN
He's your nephew.

AMIR
I don't believe you.

RAHIM KHAN
You *do* believe me. That's what
frightens you.

AMIR
You're saying my father lied to me
all those years.

RAHIM KHAN
Please think, Amir jan. All that a
man had back then was his honor,
his name, and if people talked--

AMIR
He lied to me.

RAHIM KHAN
To both of you. And now there's a
way to be good again.

Amir turns and walks out of the apartment.

120 EXT. STREETS OF PESHAWAR - DAY 120

Amir walks down a noisy lane choked with PEDESTRIANS and
rickshaws, the walls plastered with Lollywood movie posters.

121 INT. TEA HOUSE - DAY 121

Amir sits at a table by himself, looking at the unopened
envelope in his hands. Finally he tears it open and pulls out
a Polaroid and a folded letter.

INSERT POLAROID

A tall man in a green-striped *chapan* stands with a little boy
in front of the wrought-iron gates of Baba's house. Twenty
years later Hassan still has the same narrow green eyes.

The boy, Sohrab, looks exactly the same as Hassan did at that
age, shaved head and all.

END INSERT

(CONTINUED)

Amir begins reading the neatly-composed Dari letter.

ADULT HASSAN (V.O.)

In the name of Allah the most beneficent, the most merciful, Amir agha, with my deepest respects. My wife and son and I pray this letter finds you in fine health and in the light of Allah's good graces. I am hopeful that one day I will hold one of your letters in my hands and read of your life in America. I am trying to learn English so I can read your books. It is such a tricky language! But one day, agha. I miss your stories.

Amir shakes his head, his eyes gone glassy with tears.

ADULT HASSAN (V.O.) (cont'd)

I have included a picture of me and my son, Sohrab. He is a good boy. Rahim Khan and I taught him how to read and write so he does not grow up stupid like his father. And can he shoot with that slingshot you gave me! But I fear for him, Amir agha. The Afghanistan of our youth is long dead. Kindness is gone from the land and you cannot escape the killings. Always the killings.

Amir covers his eyes with one hand, unable to continue for a moment. After taking a deep breath he finishes the letter.

ADULT HASSAN (V.O.) (cont'd)

I dream that Allah will guide us to a better day. I dream that my son will grow up to be a good person, a free person, an important person. I dream that flowers will bloom in the streets of Kabul again and music will play in the samovar houses and kites will fly in the skies. And I dream that someday you will return to Kabul to revisit the land of our childhood. If you do, you will find an old faithful friend waiting for you. May Allah be with you always. Hassan.

Amir studies the photograph again.

122 INT. INTERNET CAFE - DAY 122

Amir sits in a private booth at the back of the cafe, making a calling card call on an international phone.

AMIR

Soraya jan. Did I wake you?

(long beat)

I have to tell you a story.

123 INT. AMIR'S APARTMENT - NIGHT 123

The lights of San Francisco glitter outside the window. Soraya lies in bed, the phone held to her ear. As the camera pushes in, we see that she has been listening for a long time. Tears streak her cheeks.

SORAYA

What's the boy's name?

AMIR (V.O.)

Sohrab.

Soraya stares out the window at the city lights.

SORAYA

It's a beautiful name.

124 INT. RAHIM KHAN'S APARTMENT - SUNSET 124

Amir steps inside the dimly-lit apartment. Rahim Khan prays in a corner of the room, a silhouette bowing westward against a blood-red sky. Amir waits for him to finish.

AMIR

It's not so easy getting a boy into America.

RAHIM KHAN

Not so easy at all.

AMIR

You have to get the right visas, you have to put your name on a waiting list, you have to--

RAHIM KHAN

Everything is arranged. You get the boy out of Afghanistan. I'll take care of the rest.

125 EXT. KHYBER PASS - DAY 125

An old Land Cruiser, body pockmarked with dime-sized rust holes, motors past a bullet-riddled sign that reads: *The Khyber Pass Welcomes You.*

The road ahead winds through cliffs of shale and limestone. Old fortresses, adobe-walled and crumbling, top the crags.

126 INT. LAND CRUISER - DAY 126

Amir sits in the passenger seat wearing the garb of a native Afghan (the kind of garb he never wore when he actually lived in Afghanistan): a rough wool blanket wrapped over a gray *pirhan-tumban* and a vest.

He also wears an expertly-crafted fake beard-- if we didn't know him we could never spot it for a fake.

The driver, FARID, is a lanky, bearded Tajik with narrow shoulders and a weather-beaten face. He clutches a cigarette between the two remaining fingers of his maimed left hand.

Amir scratches at the underside of his fake beard, where it itches.

Farid has barely glanced at Amir this whole time. He doesn't look at him now as he gives an order.

FARID
Quit playing with it.

AMIR
I really have to wear it?

Now Farid turns and glares at Amir.

FARID
You know what the Taliban will do to you if they see you're clean-shaven?

Amir stops touching the scratchy beard.

127 EXT. BORDER CROSSING - LATER 127

The Land Cruiser slows to a stop. A guard hut flanks the road. A PAKISTANI SOLDIER approaches. Farid offers papers but the soldier, after a cursory glance inside, waves them on.

128 INT. LAND CRUISER - CONTINUOUS

128

Amir stares out the window at the countryside.

AMIR

I feel like a tourist in my own country.

Farid tosses his cigarette out the window.

FARID

You still think of this place as your country?

AMIR

I grew up in Afghanistan.

Farid snickers, never looking at his passenger.

AMIR (cont'd)

Why do you do that?

FARID

Never mind.

AMIR

No, I want to know. Why do you do that?

FARID

You want to know? Let me imagine, Agha sahib. You probably lived in a big house with a nice yard. Gated, of course. Your father drove an American car. You had servants, probably Hazaras. And I would bet my first son's eyes this is the only time you've ever worn a *pakol*.

He grins at Amir, revealing a mouthful of rotting teeth.

FARID (cont'd)

Am I close?

AMIR

Why are you saying these things?

FARID

Because you wanted to know.

The Land Cruiser passes the ruined remnants of a village. Smoke still rises from the rubble.

(CONTINUED)

FARID (cont'd)

That's the real Afghanistan, Agha sahib. That's my Afghanistan. You? You've *always* been a tourist here. You just didn't know it.

Amir stares at the tuft of blackened, roofless walls.

129 EXT. SAND DUNES - DAY 129

The Land Cruiser rolls past an endless expanse of dunes.

130 INT. LAND CRUISER - DAY 130

FARID

Why did you come back here, anyway? Sell off your father's land? Pocket the money and run back to your mother in America?

AMIR

I'm not here to sell anything. I'm going to Kabul to find a boy.

FARID

A boy?

Amir fishes the Polaroid from the pocket of his shirt. He hands it to Farid, who holds it over the steering wheel and examines it. He looks from Amir to the photo and back again.

FARID (cont'd)

This boy?
(off Amir's nod)
This Hazara boy?

AMIR

Yes.

FARID

What does he mean to you?

AMIR

His father meant a lot to me. He's the man in the photo. He's dead now.

FARID

He was a friend of yours?

For a moment Amir is silent, staring out the window.

(CONTINUED)

130 CONTINUED:

130

AMIR
He was my brother.

Farid sighs, watching the road unroll before them.

FARID
You should have told me.

AMIR
You didn't ask.

Farid pulls out another cigarette and lights it. He takes a deep drag and lets the smoke spill out from his nostrils.

FARID
Maybe I'll help you find this boy.

131 EXT. DESTROYED ROAD - DAY

131

The Land Cruiser lurches over the ravaged old highway leading to Kabul. Land mines and artillery shells have left massive craters that Farid needs to steer around.

CHILDREN dressed in rags chase a soccer ball. A cluster of MEN sit on the carcass of a burned-out Soviet tank.

132 INT. LAND CRUISER - DAY

132

FARID
Kabul is not the way you remember it.

AMIR
So I hear.

Farid smiles, shakes his head, and takes another drag.

133 EXT. JADEH MAYWAND AVENUE - DAY

133

The Land Cruiser drives west. To the north is the bone-dry Kabul River. On the hills to the south stands the broken old city wall. A haze of dust hovers over the city.

Entire blocks have been obliterated to rubble. The buildings that haven't entirely collapsed are barely standing, with caved in roofs and walls pierced with rocket shells.

A bullet-pocked sign is half-buried in a heap of debris:
Drink Coca Co-

(CONTINUED)

133 CONTINUED:

133

CHILDREN play in the ruins of a windowless building amid jagged stumps of brick and stone. BICYCLISTS and mule-drawn carts swerve around kids, stray dogs, and piles of debris.

BEGGARS squat on every corner, dressed in shredded burlap rags, mud-caked hands held out for a coin. Many of them are very young, sitting in the laps of their burqa-clad MOTHERS.

134 INT. LAND CRUISER - CONTINUOUS

134

Amir stares out the window, a rubbernecker in the ruins.

AMIR

Where are the trees?

FARID

Russians chopped them down because snipers kept using them.

AMIR

Can you pull over?

135 EXT. CHICKEN STREET - DAY

135

Amir and Farid step out of the parked Land Cruiser, not far from the location of Saifo's kite store.

AMIR

What's that smell?

FARID

Diesel. The power's always going off so people use generators.

AMIR

Remember what this street smelled like in the old days?

FARID

Kabob.

AMIR

Lamb kabob.

FARID

(tasting the word)

Lamb. The only people in Kabul who can afford lamb now are the Taliban.

(pulling on Amir's sleeve)

Speaking of which. Beard patrol...

(CONTINUED)

A red Toyota pickup truck cruises slowly down the street. A handful of stern-faced YOUNG TALIBS sit in the truck's bed, Kalashnikovs slung over their shoulders. They all wear beards and black turbans.

One of them twirls a whip in his hands, rhythmically slapping the side of the truck with it. His roaming eyes fall on Amir. Amir holds his gaze.

The Talib spits tobacco juice and looks away. The truck rolls away.

FARID (cont'd)
(hissing)
What's the matter with you?

AMIR
What?

FARID
Don't ever stare at them? Do you understand me? Never!

Farid stalks away. Amir, chastened, follows.

The barracks-style building stands by the banks of the dried-up Kabul River, its windows boarded over with wood planks.

Amir and Farid walk from the Land Cruiser to the door of the orphanage, passing the rusted skeleton of an overturned car.

Amir rings the bell. After a few seconds, ZAMAN, a balding man with a shaggy gray beard, opens the door. He wears a ragged tweed vest, a skullcap, and chipped eyeglasses.

ZAMAN
Salaam alaykum.

AMIR
Salaam alyakum.

He pulls the Polaroid of Hassan and Sohrab out of his pocket and shows it to Zaman.

AMIR (cont'd)
We're looking for this boy.

Zaman gives the photo a cursory glance.

ZAMAN

I'm sorry. I've never seen him.

FARID

You barely looked at the picture,
my friend.

Zaman sighs and takes the photo from Amir's hand. He studies it before handing it back to Amir.

ZAMAN

I know all the children here and
that one doesn't look familiar.
Now, if you'll permit me...

He closes the door and slides the bolt. Amir raps on the door with his knuckles.

AMIR

Agha! Agha, please open the door.
We don't mean him any harm.

ZAMAN (O.S.)

(muffled by the door)
I told you he's not here. Now
please, go away.

Farid steps up to the door and rests his forehead against it.

FARID

Friend, we are not with the
Taliban. The man who is with me
wants to take this boy to a safe
place.

AMIR

Look, I knew Sohrab's father. His
name was Hassan. His mother's name
was Farzana. He knows how to read
and write. And he's good with the
slingshot.

(beat)

There's hope for this boy, Agha. A
way out. I can take him back to
America with me.

(beat)

I'm his uncle.

A moment passes. The bolt slides free and the door opens.
Zaman looks from Amir to Farid and back to Amir.

(CONTINUED)

136 CONTINUED: (2)

136

ZAMAN

You were wrong about one thing.
He's *great* with the slingshot.

Zaman opens the door wide.

ZAMAN (cont'd)

Can't get it away from him.

137 INT. ORPHANAGE - DAY

137

Amir and Farid follow Zaman through dim, grimy hallways where BAREFOOT CHILDREN loiter. The men pass dormitory rooms filled with the skeleton frames of steel beds with no mattresses.

Zaman opens the door to the director's office and ushers his guests inside.

138 INT. DIRECTOR'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

138

Amir and Farid sit on folding chairs across a worn desk from Zaman. A gray rat pokes its head from a burrow in the wall and flits across the floor.

Amir reacts with disgust, amusing Zaman and Farid.

ZAMAN

We can't even afford traps anymore.
Would you like some tea?

AMIR

No, thank you.

Zaman tilts back in his chair and sighs.

ZAMAN

What I have to tell you is not
pleasant. This is... dangerous
business.

(beat)

How badly do you want to find your
nephew?

Amir hesitates. Zaman and Farid watch him.

AMIR

I'm not leaving Afghanistan without
him.

Zaman's gaze lingers for a moment.

(CONTINUED)

ZAMAN

Keep my name out of it.

AMIR

I promise.

ZAMAN

I'll tell you because I believe you. You have the look of a desperate man.

Zaman is quiet for a moment, tapping the pencil.

ZAMAN (cont'd)

There is a Talib official. He visits every month or two. He brings cash with him-- not a lot, but better than nothing. Usually he takes a girl. But not always.

For a few seconds Amir and Farid are silent, processing this.

AMIR

And you allow this?

ZAMAN

What choice do I have?

AMIR

You're the director here. Your job is to watch over these children.

ZAMAN

There's nothing I can do.

Amir rises from his chair, face darkening with anger.

AMIR

You're selling children!

Farid stands and takes Amir's arm.

FARID

Easy--

AMIR

You're here to protect them!

ZAMAN

Yes, I'm here to protect them.

He stands, hands on the desk, and stares back at Amir.

(CONTINUED)

ZAMAN (cont'd)

And you, brother? You come here to rescue a boy, take him back to America, give him a good life. It must seem heroic, eh? Your wife must be so proud. But what of the other two hundred children? You'll never see them again. You'll never hear them howling in the night.

Fury growing, Zaman points a finger at Amir.

ZAMAN (cont'd)

I spent my life savings on this orphanage. Everything I ever owned or inherited I sold to run this godforsaken place. You think I don't have family in Pakistan or Iran? I could have run like everyone else. Maybe I could have gone to America. But I didn't. I stayed.

Zaman spies three SMALL BOYS crouched by the doorway, peering into the room. He gives them a shooing motion with his hand and they scurry off.

ZAMAN (cont'd)

I stayed because of *them*. If I deny him one child, he takes ten. So I let him take one and leave the judging to Allah. I take his filthy money and I go to the bazaar and I buy food for the children. You think I spend it on myself?

(indicating his shabby appearance)

Look at me. *Look at me!*

FARID

What happens to the children he takes?

ZAMAN

Sometimes they come back. More often they don't.

AMIR

Who is he? How do we find him?

(CONTINUED)

138 CONTINUED: (3)

138

ZAMAN

Go to Ghazi Stadium tomorrow.
You'll see him at halftime. He'll
be the one making speeches.

He sits wearily, as if it pains his knees to bend them.

ZAMAN (cont'd)

I want you to go now. The children
are frightened.

139 OMITTED 139

140 EXT. PASHTUNISTAN SQUARE - DAY 140

A DEAD MAN hangs from a lamppost, his face puffy and blue.
PEDESTRIANS walk past, barely seeming to notice the corpse.

A block north, two MEN argue on a street corner. One of them
hobbles on his lone good leg. The other leg is amputated
below the knee. He cradles an artificial leg in his arms.

141 INT. LAND CRUISER - CONTINUOUS 141

FARID

You know what they're doing?
Haggling over the leg.

AMIR

He's selling his leg?

FARID

You can get good money for it on
the black market. Feed your kids
for a couple of weeks.

142 EXT. WAZIR AKBAR KHAN DISTRICT - LATER 142

The Land Cruiser rolls down the street familiar to us from
Amir's childhood. Unlike the rest of Kabul, this neighborhood
still looks fairly well-maintained.

143 INT. LAND CRUISER - CONTINUOUS 143

Amir stares at the familiar sights.

AMIR

Stop the car.

144 EXT. BABA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS 144

Amir pulls open the rusted iron gate and walks up the driveway leading to his father's house.

The poplar trees have been chopped down. The lawn is nothing but brown dirt now. A jeep is parked where Baba's Mustang used to sit. Oil has spilled onto the driveway, staining it.

The house is a pale remnant of its former glory. The roof sags and the plaster is cracked. Many of the windows are broken and patched with sheets of clear plastic.

145 INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS 145

FARID
(calling out the window)
We should go.

146 EXT. BABA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS 146

Amir stares up at the broken house for one last moment.

147 INT. CAR - MOMENTS LATER 147

Amir closes the passenger door and Farid starts the car.

AMIR
I have to look at one more thing.

Farid flicks his cigarette out the window.

FARID
Let me save you the trouble:
nothing that you remember has
survived. Best to forget.

AMIR
I don't want to forget anymore.

148 EXT. CEMETERY - SUNSET 148

Amir climbs to the top of the hill and enters the abandoned graveyard. The headstones are barely visible through the thick tangles of weeds.

The pomegranate tree has been chopped down. Amir hunkers down on his knees and inspects the stump.

After a moment he finds what he's looking for. The carving is faded but still legible: "*Amir and Hassan, the Sultans of Kabul.*" He traces the curves of each letter with his fingers.

149 EXT. GHAZI STADIUM - DAY

149

Amir and Farid sit amongst thousands of SPECTATORS on the concrete terraces overlooking the soccer pitch.

The playing field is nothing but pitted dirt. A pair of deep holes plunge into the soil behind the south-end goalposts.

A whistle blows, signalling halftime. The PLAYERS jog off the field. They are all bearded and wear long pants.

Young, whip-toting TALIBS roam the aisles, striking anyone who cheers too loudly.

A pair of dusty red pickup trucks drives into the stadium. A WOMAN IN A GREEN BURQA sits in the back of one of the trucks; a BLINDFOLDED MAN sits in the other.

The crowd rises to its feet, watching the trucks ride around the track that circles the field. Farid lowers his head and mutters a prayer under his breath.

The red trucks drive onto the playing field and stop behind the south-end goalposts. A third truck meets them there. This truck's bed is loaded down with rocks.

FARID

Do you want to stay?

AMIR

No. But we have to stay.

Two TALIBS with AK-47s slung over their shoulders help the blindfolded man from the back of the first truck. Two others help the burqa-clad woman. The captives' arms are bound.

The woman's knees buckle and she slumps to the ground. The soldiers pull her up and she screams. It is the cry of a wild animal trying to pry its mangled leg from the trap.

Two more Talibs help their comrades, forcing the woman into one of the chest-deep holes in the ground as she struggles. The blindfolded man quietly allows the Talibs to lower him into the hole. Now only their torsos emerge from the ground.

The Talibs shroud the man and woman's torsos with white sacks, hiding their faces. She shudders beneath the fabric.

A white-bearded CHUBBY CLERIC dressed in gray garments stands at midfield. He clears his throat into a handheld microphone. Behind him the woman in the hole still screams.

(CONTINUED)

FARID

That must be our man.

The cleric speaks with a commanding baritone that rings out from the stadium's speakers.

CLERIC

Brothers and sisters! We are here today to carry out *Shari'a*. We are here today to carry out justice. We listen to what God says and we obey! And what does God say? I ask you? WHAT DOES GOD SAY? God says that every sinner must be punished in a manner befitting his sin. Those are not my words, nor the words of my brothers. Those are the words of GOD!

He points with his free hand to the sky.

CLERIC (cont'd)

Every sinner must be punished in a manner befitting his sin. And what manner of punishment, brothers and sisters, befits the adulterer? How shall we punish those who dishonor the sanctity of marriage? How shall we deal with those who spit in the face of God? How shall we answer those who throw stones at the windows of God's house? WE SHALL THROW THE STONES BACK.

He shuts off the microphone. A low-pitched murmur spreads through the crowd.

A tall, broad-shouldered TALIB IN WHITE steps out of the third truck. His sparkling white garment glimmers in the afternoon sun. He wears dark, round sunglasses like the ones John Lennon wore. The spectators cheer when they see him.

The Talib selects a stone the size of a baseball from the truck bed. He shows it to the crowd. Like a pitcher on the mound, he hurls the stone at the shrouded man in the hole, hitting the man's head with a sickening thunk.

The crowd makes a startled "OH!" sound. Blood begins to stain the white sheet. More Talibs pick up rocks and begin stoning the doomed couple. None are as athletic as the Talib in White; the others throw their stones from far closer range.

(CONTINUED)

149 CONTINUED: (2)

149

Amir closes his eyes and covers his face with his hands. The spectators' "OH!" follows each crack of stone on flesh. And the doomed woman's wail rises above all other noise.

150 EXT. GHAZI STADIUM - LATER

150

WORKERS dump the bloodied corpses into the back of one of the trucks. Men with shovels fill in the holes. One of them tries to cover a large bloodstain by kicking dirt over it.

The soccer teams jog back onto the field.

Farid sees a whip-carrying Talib passing their seats.

FARID

My friend. A word?

The Talib glances at Farid.

FARID (cont'd)

(gesturing to the field)

We have business with your brother.

He rubs his fingers together, the international symbol for money.

FARID (cont'd)

Personal business.

The young Talib comes closer and Farid whispers something in his ear. The Talib nods. He hops onto the dirt field and approaches the chubby cleric, who is chatting with some comrades on the sidelines.

The young man addresses the cleric, who listens and glances at Farid and Amir, now standing on the sidelines. The Talib in White turns to look at them, too. His gaze fixes on Amir.

There is a brief conference before the young Talib hustles back to the stands, nodding to Farid and Amir.

151 EXT. TALIB COMPOUND - DAY

151

The Land Cruiser eases into the driveway of a big house shaded by tall willows-- some of the only trees in Kabul.

152 INT. LAND CRUISER - CONTINUOUS

152

Farid kills the engine and for a moment there is quiet, broken only by the *tink-tink* of the engine cooling. Farid shifts in his seat and toys with the keys hanging from the ignition switch. He doesn't look at Amir.

(CONTINUED)

FARID
 (apologetic)
 I guess I'll wait in the car. This
 is your business now. I--

Amir grips the man's shoulder.

AMIR
 You've done much more than I've
 paid you for.

Amir opens the door but before he can step out:

FARID
 Amir...

Amir turns. This is the first time Farid has said his name.

FARID (cont'd)
 May Allah watch over you.

153 EXT. MANSION - DAY

153

Amir pounds on the tall wooden doors in the outer wall of the compound. A moment later they swing open. A pair of TALIB GUARDS toting AK-47s stare at Amir.

The armed men frisk him from head to toe, patting his legs, feeling his crotch. One comments to the other in Pashtu and both men laugh. They gesture for Amir to follow.

154 INT. MANSION - DAY

154

They enter the sparsely-furnished house, crossing a foyer with a large Afghan flag draped on one wall.

155 INT. SITTING ROOM - DAY

155

The guards lead Amir into a room with twin mint green sofas and a big-screen TV in the far corner. A prayer rug showing Mecca is nailed to one of the walls.

Two doors lead into the room, one open, one closed.

The older of the two guards motions to one of the sofas with the barrel of his gun. Amir sits and the guards leave.

Amir rubs his sweaty palms over his knees. He stares at the coffee table in front of him. The base is X-shaped; brass balls stud the tabletop where the steel legs cross.

(CONTINUED)

One of the brass balls has come loose and Amir spends a few seconds trying to screw it back into place.

The door opens and the armed men return. The Talib in White stands between them, still wearing his John Lennon sunglasses, looking like a broad-shouldered mystic.

He takes the seat across from Amir. For a long time he says nothing, watching Amir, one hand drumming the upholstery, the other twirling turquoise blue prayer beads.

Amir doesn't look the man in the eye. Instead he concentrates on a splotch of dried blood on the Talib's white garment.

TALIB IN WHITE

Salaam alaykum.

AMIR

Salaam.

(beat)

I think there's been a mistake. I came to see your friend.

TALIB IN WHITE

My friend?

AMIR

The man who made the speech at the stadium.

TALIB IN WHITE

He has other business.

(beat)

You can do away with that now.

AMIR

Pardon?

The Talib turns his palm to one of the guards and motions. The guard steps forward and tears off Amir's false beard.

TALIB IN WHITE

One of the better ones I've seen.

Amir's cheeks are red from the sting of the plucked-off beard. His eyes flick from the guards' Kalashnikovs to the Talib in White. The Talib snaps his fingers. The younger guard lights him a cigarette.

TALIB IN WHITE (cont'd)

You come from America?

(CONTINUED)

AMIR

Yes.

TALIB IN WHITE

How is that whore these days?

AMIR

I'm looking for a boy.

TALIB IN WHITE

Isn't everybody?

The guards laugh, their teeth stained green.

AMIR

I understand your friend brought him here. His name is Sohrab.

TALIB IN WHITE

My friend brings many boys here. It's hard to keep track.

AMIR

Perhaps we can ask him?

TALIB IN WHITE

I'll ask you something: What are you doing with that whore America? Why aren't you here, with your Muslim brothers, serving your country?

Amir hesitates, searching for an inoffensive answer.

AMIR

I've been away for a long time.

The Talib turns to his guards.

TALIB IN WHITE

That's an answer?

GUARD #1

No, Agha sahib.

GUARD #2

No, Agha sahib.

The Talib turns back to Amir and shrugs.

TALIB IN WHITE (cont'd)

Not an answer, they say.

He takes a drag off his cigarette.

(CONTINUED)

AMIR

I'm only here for the boy.

The Talib leans back in the sofa and crushes his cigarette.

TALIB IN WHITE

You want to see this boy?

AMIR

Yes.

The Talib nods to one of his guards, who leaves the room. In the hallway, the guard speaks harshly in Pashtu. We hear footfalls, and the jingle of bells with each step.

The guard returns, carrying a boombox stereo. Behind him, a boy dressed in a loose, blue *pirhan-tumban* follows.

SOHRAB looks uncannily similar to his father at that age. His head is shaved, his eyes darkened with mascara, his cheeks glowing with rouge.

When he stops in the middle of the room, the bells strapped around his anklets stop jingling. His eyes linger on Amir for a moment. Then he looks down at his own naked feet.

The guard with the boombox presses play and Pashtu music fills the room. The two guards begin to clap.

GUARD #1

Wah wah! Mashallah!

GUARD #2

Wah wah! Mashallah!

Sohrab raises his arms and turns slowly. He stands on tiptoes, spins gracefully, dips to his knees, straightens, and spins again. His little hands swivel at the wrists, his fingers snap, his head swings side to side like a pendulum.

His feet pound the floor, the bells jingling in perfect harmony with the beat of the tabla. He keeps his eyes closed.

GUARD #1

(cheering)

Mashallah! Shahbas!

GUARD #2

(cheering)

Mashallah! Shahbas!

Sohrab dances until the music stops, stomping his little foot with the song's last note, freezing in mid-spin.

TALIB IN WHITE

Come, my boy.

(CONTINUED)

He beckons for Sohrab and the boy walks to him, head down, and stands between the seated man's thighs. The Talib wraps his arms around the boy.

TALIB IN WHITE (cont'd)
Such a talented little Hazara!
(to guards)
Leave us be.

GUARD #1
Yes, Agha sahib.

The guards exit. The Talib spins the boy around so he faces Amir. He locks his arms around Sohrab's belly and rests his chin on the boy's shoulder.

TALIB IN WHITE
I've been wondering... Whatever
happened to old Babalu anyway?

The question hits Amir like a physical blow.

TALIB IN WHITE (cont'd)
What did you think? That you'd put
on a fake beard and I wouldn't
recognize you? I knew you the
second I saw you in the stadium. I
never forget a face. Not ever.

AMIR
Assef.

TALIB IN WHITE/ASSEF
Amir jan.

AMIR
What are you doing here?

ASSEF
Me? I'm home. The question is, what
are you doing here?

Amir lowers his eyes. For a long count he stares at the floor. Finally he raises his head and looks at Assef.

AMIR
I'm taking the boy home with me.

Neither man blinks. After a long count, Assef shrugs.

ASSEF

You want my advice? Run away.
That's what you do best. You ran
away from your homeland, you ran
away from God. Go on. Run.

AMIR

Not without Sohrab.

ASSEF

The boy's too good for his country?
What do you know about Afghanistan?
You ran like a rabbit when the
Russians came. You weren't here
when the Communists shot our
mullahs and pissed in our mosques.
This country was like a beautiful
mansion littered with garbage. We
took out the garbage. We brought
law. We brought justice.

AMIR

I've seen your laws. I've seen your
justice. And I'm taking the boy
home with me.

Assef smiles and leans back in his chair.

ASSEF

All right, then.

He shoves Sohrab, knocking the boy into the table.

Amir stands, helping Sohrab to his feet. He takes the boy's
hand and the boy stares up at him.

ASSEF (cont'd)

Of course, I didn't say you could
take him for free.

Assef presses play on the boombox and turns the volume all
the way up.

He grins at Amir and, without further warning, hits him hard
in the jaw.

Amir struggles to his feet, blood already spilling from his
mouth. Assef throws him against a wall and a framed picture
shatters and falls to the floor.

Amir tries to fight but he doesn't know how. Assef smashes
him in the mouth, dropping Amir again.

(CONTINUED)

As Amir struggles to rise Assef grabs his hair and punches him in the nose. Amir crawls across the floor, blood from his torn lips staining the carpet.

Pashtu music plays at deafening volume.

Assef lifts him and throws him against the wall again, with so much power that hairline cracks open up in the plaster.

Amir sags to the ground a third time. Assef's turban has come off, loosing curls of shoulder-length hair.

He kicks Amir again and again. Blood leaks from Amir's nostrils, from his lips, from a gash that splits his forehead.

Amir begins to laugh, despite the savage beating he's enduring. The laughter enrages Assef, but the harder he kicks Amir the harder Amir laughs.

ASSEF (cont'd)
WHAT'S SO FUNNY?

Assef's face is a mask of lunacy. He straddles Amir and begins punching his face. But still Amir laughs.

ASSEF (cont'd)
WHAT'S SO FUNNY?

SOHRAB
(soft)
Please.

Assef turns to look at the young boy.

Sohrab holds a Wham-O Sportsman slingshot in his hands, the same slingshot Amir gave to Hassan years before.

The cup at the end of the elastic band, pulled all the way back, cradles one of the brass balls from the coffee table.

SOHRAB (cont'd)
Please, no more.

Amir blinks the blood from his eyes, staring at the boy. The slingshot is aimed at Assef's face.

Twin trails of mascara, mixed with tears, roll down Sohrab's cheeks, smearing the rouge. His lower lip trembles.

(CONTINUED)

SOHRAB (cont'd)

(husky)

No more, Agha. Please. Stop hurting him.

Assef's mouth moves wordlessly for a moment before he speaks.

ASSEF

Put it down, Hazara.

Fresh tears pool in Sohrab's green eyes.

SOHRAB

Please stop.

ASSEF

Put it down or what I'm doing to him will be nothing compared to what I'll do to you.

SOHRAB

Please, Agha. Please stop.

ASSEF

Put it down.

SOHRAB

Don't hurt him anymore.

Assef lunges at Sohrab. The slingshot makes a *thwiiiiit* sound when Sohrab releases the cup. Assef screams. He puts his hand where his left eye had been a moment ago. Blood and vitreous fluid, white and gel-like, oozes between his fingers.

He falls to the carpet, rolling side to side, shrieking, hand still cupped over the bloody socket. The Pashtu music, incredibly loud and incongruously cheerful, plays over the horrific scene.

Sohrab grabs Amir's hand and helps him to his feet.

ASSEF

OUT! GET IT OUT!

Sohrab leads Amir to the window and opens it. They climb out.

The guards play backgammon in the outer room. The blasting music has drowned out most of the violence, but now Assef's shrieks become audible.

156 CONTINUED:

156

They grab their rifles and run for the sitting room.

157 EXT. BACK OF BUILDING - DAY

157

Sohrab tugs on Amir's hand.

SOHRAB

Come.

Sohrab guides Amir down the narrow walkway between the back of the building and the compound wall. They climb over the wall.

158 INT. SITTING ROOM - DAY

158

The two guards huddle over the shrieking Assef.

The older guard, tending to his maimed leader, gestures to the younger guard, who stands and hurries out.

159 EXT. TALIB COMPOUND - DAY

159

Amir's arm is around Sohrab's shoulder, the boy keeping Amir upright. They run for freedom.

Farid leans against the Land Cruiser, smoking. He throws down the cigarette when he sees Amir, runs over to him, and slings Amir's arm around his shoulders.

Sohrab runs alongside them. Farid hurries Amir to the car and into the backseat; Sohrab gets into the backseat with him.

The young guard runs out of the mansion. He spots the interlopers trying to make a getaway. He raises his AK-47 and fires a burst of bullets.

Bullets shatter the Land Cruiser's windows and perforate the steel panels.

Farid jumps into the driver's seat, turns the ignition, and hits the gas, the wheels spinning in the dusty driveway for a second before finding traction. They speed away.

160 INT. LAND CRUISER - CONTINUOUS

160

Amir lies in the backseat, half conscious. He stares up at the familiar little face looking down at him. He smiles through bloodied lips.

161 EXT. BACK ROADS OF AFGHANISTAN - DUSK 161

The Land Cruiser, avoiding the major roads, navigates along rocky back roads little wider than goat paths.

165 EXT. BORDER CROSSING - DAY 165

A road sign says **Welcome to Pakistan** in Pashtu, Farsi and English. The Land Cruiser pulls up to a gate arm blocking the road. A PAKISTANI SOLDIER approaches the car.

Farid opens the window and hands the soldier a folded hundred dollar greenback. The soldier glances at the battered man sitting beside the quiet boy in the backseat.

The soldier considers this tableau for a moment before waving them through.

167 EXT. RAHIM KHAN'S BUILDING - NIGHT 167

The Land Cruiser is parked by the curb. Farid stands with Amir and Sohrab by the building's front door. Amir's face is badly bruised but he's able to stand on his own.

AMIR

Stay the night. It's a long drive.

FARID

I miss my children.

Amir hands Farid an envelope. Farid refuses it.

FARID (cont'd)

Rahim Khan already paid me.

AMIR

Please.

FARID

(shaking his head)

Amir jan...

AMIR

Please. You've done so much for me.

Farid finally, reluctantly, accepts the envelope.

FARID

For you a thousand times over.

(CONTINUED)

167 CONTINUED:

167

Hearing that old phrase, tears come to Amir's eyes. He blinks them back. The two men embrace with the sad affection of friends who know they will never see each other again.

FARID (cont'd)
Goodbye, Sohrab jan.

Sohrab, staring at the sidewalk, does not respond. Farid nods to Amir, gets back in the Land Cruiser and drives away.

168 INT. RAHIM KHAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

168

Amir, limping down the hallway, leads Sohrab to the apartment. He knocks on the door. No answer. He knocks again.

An ELDERLY NEIGHBOR across the hallway opens his door and peers at Amir and Sohrab.

NEIGHBOR
You're Amir?

AMIR
Yes.

The neighbor peers at Amir's face in the dim light.

NEIGHBOR
You got into a fight?

Amir nods.

NEIGHBOR (cont'd)
I guess you lost. Wait a moment, I have something for you.

The neighbor closes his door and reappears a moment later, holding a manila envelope and a key.

NEIGHBOR (cont'd)
Rahim Khan left this for you.

Amir accepts the envelope and key.

AMIR
Where did he go?

The neighbor gives a philosophical shrug.

NEIGHBOR
I did not ask.

(CONTINUED)

AMIR

But he's coming back, isn't he?

NEIGHBOR

I think he has left us, my friend.

The neighbor closes his door.

INT. RAHIM KHAN'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

The place has been emptied out. No furniture, no clothes, no sign that anyone ever lived here.

Sohrab wanders over to the window, where two pigeons strut back and forth on the sill, pecking at old crumbs of bread.

Amir opens the manila envelope and pulls out a sheaf of documents, including travel visas and a Pakistani passport.

Amir replaces the documents and passport and looks at Sohrab.

AMIR

Are you hungry? Should we get something to eat?

Sohrab never turns from the feeding pigeons.

INT. RAHIM KHAN'S APARTMENT - LATER

Amir sits at the table, shuffling a deck of cards.

AMIR

Do you want to play *panjpar*?

Sohrab doesn't look up. Farid glances over.

FARID

I'll play you, Agha sahib.

Amir deals out five cards to each of them. Farid glances at his cards. He plays one and picks another from the pile.

AMIR

(to Sohrab)

Your father and I used to play this game. In the winter, mostly, when it snowed and we couldn't go outside.

Sohrab doesn't look up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SOHRAB

He told me.

AMIR

He did? What else did he tell you?

SOHRAB

(never looking up)

That you were the best friend he
ever had.

Amir blinks, deeply affected by the comment, staring at this little boy who looks so much like the friend he betrayed.

169 INT. RAHIM KHAN'S APARTMENT - MORNING 169

Amir wakes up on his mat in the corner of the apartment.

Amir sees that the mat Sohrab had been lying on is now empty. He looks around the apartment, panicking.

170 EXT. STREETS OF PESHAWAR - DAY 170

Amir hurries down the street, dodging WOMEN IN BURKAS, YOUNG BOYS chasing a hairless dog, and BLIND PANHANDLERS. He looks down every alleyway he passes, looks inside store fronts, asks a man selling newspapers if he's seen a Hazara boy.

Sohrab is gone.

Amir runs through the streets of the strange city, sweating through his shirt.

A MAN ON A MOTOR SCOOTER, his son sitting side-saddle behind him, nearly runs Amir over. The man swerves at the last moment and curses Amir as he scoots off.

The sun beats down on the crowded, dirty city. The locals shelter from the heat in the shade but Amir never stops.

PAKISTANIS and AFGHAN EXILES stare with suspicion at this foreigner with the desperate face.

Amir hears the MUEZZIN'S call to prayer.

171 EXT. MOSQUE OF MAHABAT KHAN - DAY 171

Amir hesitates at the edge of the carefully tended lawn in front of the splendid old mosque. He watches WORSHIPPERS dressed in white walking inside.

(CONTINUED)

171 CONTINUED:

171

Amir follows them.

172 EXT. MOSQUE COURTYARD - DAY

172

Amir, distracted, seems out of place in the mosque. He searches the faces of all the boys walking through the vast courtyard.

SMILING MAN

Brother...

Amir is confused for a moment, until he realizes the smiling man is showing him where to remove his shoes.

Amir hesitates, then nods in thanks, pulls off his shoes, and places them on the rack beside the shoes of the faithful.

SMILING MAN (cont'd)

Do you need a prayer rug?

AMIR

Please.

The smiling man hands Amir a clean, folded rug.

173 INT. MOSQUE OF MAHABAT KHAN - LATER

173

Amir walks into the main prayer hall, the last one to arrive, the only man still standing.

The hall is crowded, but Amir finds an open spot in a row of kneeling men near the back.

He carefully unfolds his prayer rug and gets on his knees. He takes a deep breath and lowers his forehead to the ground.

Tears spill from his eyes as Amir bows to the west.

AMIR

*La illaha il Allah, Muhammad u
rasul ullah.*

There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger.

174 EXT. MOSQUE OF MAHABAT KHAN - DAY

174

Amir walks out of the mosque, amongst his fellow worshippers. His search has failed. He trudges away, defeated.

175 EXT. RAHIM KHAN'S BUILDING - DAY

175

Amir walks down the street, despondent. He turns the corner onto Rahim Khan's street. A half a block from the building, Amir sees the small boy sitting on the steps.

For a moment, he cannot believe it. He runs to Sohrab and tries to gather the boy in his arms, but Sohrab flinches. Amir holds up his hands, anxious not to frighten the boy.

AMIR

I thought I lost you.

Sohrab stares at the minaret. For a long time he is quiet.

SOHRAB

He used to come get me in the morning, before prayers.

(beat)

I didn't want him to get me anymore.

AMIR

He won't, Sohrab. I swear to you, he won't get you anymore.

SOHRAB

Are your parents dead?

AMIR

Yes.

SOHRAB

Do you remember what they look like?

AMIR

I never met my mother. I remember what my father looked like.

Sohrab rests his cheek on his knees.

SOHRAB

I'm starting to forget their faces. Is that bad?

Amir hesitates. He pulls the envelope from the pocket of his coat, takes out the Polaroid inside and hands it to Sohrab.

AMIR

Here.

(CONTINUED)

It's the picture of Hassan and Sohrab standing outside the gates of Baba's old house. Sohrab holds the photo in both hands, tracing his thumb over its surface.

SOHRAB

Sometimes I'm glad they're dead.

AMIR

Why?

SOHRAB

Because-- because I don't want them to see me. I'm so dirty.

He sucks in his breath and lets it out in a long, wheezy cry.

SOHRAB (cont'd)

I'm so dirty.

Amir touches his arm but Sohrab flinches.

AMIR

You're not dirty.

Amir reaches again, gently, but Sohrab clearly does not want to be touched. Amir drops his hand.

AMIR (cont'd)

I won't hurt you.

Sohrab stares into the street, watching the bicyclists and the cars.

AMIR (cont'd)

Would you like to come live in America with me and my wife?

Sohrab does not answer.

Soraya stands with a group of PAKISTANI-AMERICANS waiting for their loved ones outside of customs.

She searches through dozens of unfamiliar faces, smiling PAKISTANIS greeting their loved ones.

Finally Amir and Sohrab step through the doors. Sohrab wears a long-sleeve T-shirt and blue jeans.

Soraya locks her arms around Amir's neck. He closes his eyes, face buried in her thick black hair.

She releases him and kneels to eye level with Sohrab. She takes the boy's hand and smiles at him.

SORAYA

Salaam, Sohrab jan. I'm your Aunt Soraya. We've all been waiting for you. We'll have a wonderful dinner tonight, and you'll meet your new family...

Sohrab shifts on his feet and looks away. Soraya glances at Amir, who shrugs and nods: *give it time*.

177 INT. AMIR'S APARTMENT, GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

177

Soraya has spent days preparing the apartment for Sohrab's arrival, converting the guest room into a child's bedroom. A painted ruler on the wall ticks off inches and feet, to measure a child's growth.

The bedsheets show blue skies festooned with fluffy clouds. At the foot of the bed, a basket is stuffed with children's books in Farsi and English, toy trains, and a watercolor set.

Soraya, Amir and Sohrab stand by the door.

SORAYA

(to Sohrab)

Do you like your new room?

Sohrab lowers his head. He walks over to the bed and lies down, facing away from Amir and Soraya.

178 INT. AMIR'S APARTMENT, HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

178

SORAYA

I don't think he's looked at me once.

AMIR

Give him time, darling. He's seen too much of Hell.

179 INT. AMIR'S APARTMENT, DINING ROOM - LATER

179

Amir, Soraya, General Taheri, and the General's wife Jamila sit around the table, passing heaping platters of lamb and spinach, meatballs and chick peas, and orange rice.

A fifth place setting goes unused, the fifth chair conspicuously empty.

(CONTINUED)

JAMILA

I'm knitting him a turtleneck sweater for next winter. The sweaters they sell here don't last a month.

The general sips his wine and sets the glass down.

GENERAL TAHERI

So, Amir jan, you're going to tell us why you've brought this boy back with you?

JAMILA

Iqbal jan! What sort of question is that?

GENERAL TAHERI

While you're busy knitting sweaters, my dear, I have to deal with the community's perception of our family. People will ask. They will want to know why there is a Hazara boy living with our daughter. What do I tell them?

Soraya drops her spoon and turns on her father.

SORAYA

You can tell them--

Amir takes her hand.

AMIR

It's okay. General Sahib is quite right. People *will* ask.

SORAYA

Amir--

AMIR

It's all right.

(to the general)

You see, General Sahib, my father slept with his servant's wife. She bore him a son named Hassan. Hassan is dead now. That boy sleeping in the other room is Hassan's son. He's my nephew. That's what you tell people when they ask.

Everyone stares at Amir.

(CONTINUED)

AMIR (cont'd)

And one more thing, General Sahib.
You will never again refer to him
as a "Hazara boy" in my presence.
He has a name and it's Sohrab.

Amir resumes his meal. His in-laws sit quietly, stunned by his words and demeanor. Soraya can't quite hide her smile. She never lets go of Amir's hand.

A strong breeze blows through the park, ruffling the leaves on the magnolias, shooing paper cups and plastic bags across the rolling lawns.

AFGHAN FAMILIES gather in one corner of the park, standing by grills loaded with *morgh* kabob. A woman fries spinach *bolani*. Old Hindi movie soundtracks play on a boombox.

CHILDREN kick a soccer ball and scream at each other.

Sohrab stands alone, farther up the sloping hill, wearing a yellow raincoat.

Amir speaks with an AFGHAN-AMERICAN DOCTOR. Soraya walks over to them and pulls on Amir's sleeve.

SORAYA

Look!

She's pointing to the sky. Six kites fly high, speckles of bright yellow, red, and green against the gray sky.

SORAYA (cont'd)

Check it out.

She nods toward a KITE SELLER at a nearby stand.

AMIR

(to the doctor)

Excuse me for a minute.

Amir walks over to the kite seller, another Afghan.

KITE SELLER

Good day for flying.

Amir chooses a yellow kite with good bone structure. He hands over some cash and the dealer gives him the kite and a spool of glass line.

180 CONTINUED:

180

Amir tests the line between his thumb and forefinger, drawing blood. Amir nods at the seller.

181 EXT. LAKE ELIZABETH PARK - MOMENTS LATER

181

Amir approaches Sohrab, who stands with his arms crossed over his chest, staring at the sky.

AMIR

Do you like the kite?

Sohrab's eyes shift from the sky to the kite and back.

Twenty yards away, Soraya, standing with a group of Afghan women, watches Amir and Sohrab.

AMIR (CONT'D) (cont'd)

Did I ever tell you your father was the best kite runner in Kabul?

Amir knots the loose end of the spool wire to the string loop tied to the central spar.

AMIR (cont'd)

He made all the neighborhood kids jealous. He'd run kites and never look up at the sky, and people used to say he was chasing the kite's shadow. But they didn't know him like I did. Your father wasn't chasing shadows. He just... knew.

Another half-dozen kites have taken flight. People gather in small groups, teacups in hand, gazing into the sky.

AMIR (cont'd)

Do you want to help me fly this?

Sohrab's gaze bounces from the kite to Amir to the sky.

AMIR (cont'd)

Okay. Looks like I'll have to fly it solo.

Amir balances the spool in his left hand and feeds about three feet of line. The yellow kite dangles above the grass.

AMIR (cont'd)

Last chance.

Sohrab watches two kites tangling high above the trees.

(CONTINUED)

AMIR (cont'd)

All right. Here I go.

He runs, holding the kite above his head. Faster and faster, sprinting downhill, letting the spool spin in his left hand.

When Amir stops and turns, he can't help smiling. High above, the yellow kite tilts side to side, paper wings flapping.

For a moment Amir proudly watches his flying kite. When he looks down, he sees Sohrab standing beside him, hands dug deep in the pockets of his raincoat.

AMIR (cont'd)

Do you want to try?

Sohrab says nothing, but when Amir holds the string out for him, the boy's hand finally leaves his pocket. He hesitates and takes the string.

Amir spins the spool to gather the loose line. He turns and sees Soraya watching them.

Kids chase each other across the lawn, sneakers sliding on the grass. A line of ELDERLY MEN perform the afternoon prayers on a plastic sheet spread on the ground.

In the sky, a green kite closes in on Amir's yellow flyer. Amir traces the green kite's glass wire to a CREWCUT KID thirty yards away. The Kid sees Amir looking at him. He smiles and waves. Amir waves back.

Sohrab hands the string back to Amir.

AMIR (cont'd)

Are you sure?

Sohrab takes the spool. Amir grins. The boy knows how this game is played.

AMIR (cont'd)

Let's teach him a lesson, no?

Sohrab's gaze flits from their yellow kite to the Crewcut Kid's green one. His eyes are suddenly alert.

AMIR (cont'd)

Let's wait. We'll let him get a little closer.

The green kite dips twice and creeps closer.

(CONTINUED)

AMIR (cont'd)
Come on. Come to me.

The green kite draws closer, rising above the yellow kite.

AMIR (cont'd)
Watch, Sohrab. I'm going to show
you one of your father's favorite
tricks. The old lift-and-dive.

The spool rolls in Sohrab's palms. The green kite hovers
above the yellow one, holds its position for a moment and
then shoots down.

AMIR (cont'd)
Here he comes!

Amir loosens his grip and tugs on the string, dipping and
dodging the green kite. A series of quick sidearm jerks and
the yellow kite soars up counter-clockwise, in a half circle.

The green kite scrambles, panic-stricken. Amir pulls hard on
the line, forcing the yellow kite to plummet, its glass wire
slicing the green kite's wire.

The green kite spins out of control. People cheer. Whistles
and applause breaks out.

Amir, panting and exhilarated, looks down at Sohrab. One
corner of the boy's mouth has curled up in a lopsided smile.

A melee of screaming kite runners chases the loose kite
drifting high above the trees.

AMIR (cont'd)
Do you want me to run that kite for
you?

Sohrab's Adam's apple rises and falls as he swallows. He
nods, a very slight nod but a nod all the same.

AMIR (cont'd)
For you, a thousand times over.

Amir runs, a grown man running with a swarm of screaming
children. The wind blows in his face and he runs, a smile as
wide as the Valley of Panjsher on his lips.