

THE KITE RUNNER

by

David Benioff

Based on the novel by

Khaled Hosseini

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1st Draft

Walter Parkes

A Note on Language:

The characters speak Farsi while in Afghanistan and Pakistan, except where otherwise noted. They speak a mixture of Farsi and English while in America. All Farsi dialogue in the American scenes is italicized, as are the occasional Arabic words.

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO - DAY

TITLE CARD: *San Francisco, 2001*

The wind shakes the branches of the ginkgo trees lining a hillside street near the Golden Gate Park. A summer day, the fog already burned off, the pigeons scavenging for crumbs.

A DELIVERY BOY on a bicycle, plastic bags of Chinese food hanging from the handles, cruises down the hill.

A PUNK ROCKER, face festooned with rings, staples concert fliers to a telephone pole.

A crew of YOUNG SKATEBOARDERS rolls down the sidewalk. Agile and fearless, they show off for each other, hitting wallies off the passing buildings, dodging the passing PEDESTRIANS.

AMIR (mid-thirties) steps out of a corner coffee shop just as the skaters speed past. He steps aside to make way for them, watching their progress with a smile.

Though casually dressed, Amir has a certain elegance, a professorial demeanor heightened by the smattering of gray in his thick, dark hair. He climbs up the hill toward his home.

INT. VESTIBULE, AMIR'S BUILDING - DAY

A package waits beneath the mailboxes. Amir sees that it's addressed to him. He picks it up and walks toward the stairs.

INT. AMIR'S APARTMENT - DAY

Amir closes the front door behind him. His 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 piled on stools, books in great piles beside the armchair. Half the books seem to be halfway read, with strips of paper marking the current page.

Passing the closed bathroom door, Amir calls to someone puttering away in there:

AMIR
The books came.

Only a trace of an Afghan accent remains in his voice. He's been in America for many years.

(CONTINUED)

Walter Parkes

CONTINUED:

He walks into the cramped kitchen, sets the package on the counter and opens it with a pair of scissors.

The box is filled with dozens of copies of a hardcover novel. Amir 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.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)
(from the bathroom)
How does it look?

AMIR
I think it looks good. I don't know.

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.

The phone rings. Amir picks it up.

AMIR (cont'd)
Hello?

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

AMIR (cont'd)
Hello?

VOICE ON PHONE
Amir jan.

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

AMIR
Rahim Khan?

VOICE ON PHONE
It is good of you to remember.
(long beat)
Amir jan... There is a way to be good again.

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.

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CONTINUED: (2)

Amir watches the kite and listens to the voice on the phone.

EXT. KABUL - DAY

TITLE CARD: *Kabul, Afghanistan, 1977*

The winter sky is overcast and threatening. Two red kites duel, spinning around each other, their glass strings glittering in the cold light.

A horde of YOUNG BOYS stands in the dead grass of a roadside field. Patches of snow dot the landscape. Everyone stares into the sky, 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.

Hassan smiles as he watches one of the kites surge 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, bewildered.

AMIR

Where are you going?

Hassan whirls around, motioning with his hand.

HASSAN

This way!

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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. He rounds the corner and finds himself on a rutted dirt road. A snow-covered field lies on one side and a row of sour cherry trees on the other.

Hassan sits cross-legged at the foot of one of the trees, 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.

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?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HASSAN
I'd rather eat dirt.

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

HASSAN
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.
(looking up)
Here it comes.

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.

EXT. WAZIR AKBAR KHAN DISTRICT - DUSK

Amir and Hassan stroll through an affluent neighborhood of elegant houses in northern Kabul. Amir now carries the kite.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AMIR

My father won the tournament when he was a boy. Cut down fourteen kites.

HASSAN

I know. It's a record, isn't it?

AMIR

Probably.

Amir strokes a paper wing with his index finger. Hassan sees the pensive look on Amir's face.

HASSAN

I think maybe you'll win next year.

Amir glances at Hassan, trying to see if the smaller boy is playing with him.

HASSAN (cont'd)

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

EXT. BABA'S HOUSE - LATER

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 house.

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, who has already laid down the prayer rugs.

Father and son kneel next to each other, facing Mecca, bowing their foreheads to the ground three times.

Amir walks up the steps leading into his imposing home.

INT. BABA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

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

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CONTINUED:

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

INT. STUDY - CONTINUOUS

BABA and RAHIM KHAN recline in leather club chairs, stuffing their pipes with tobacco. Both are in their late thirties.

Baba is a towering Pashtun with a thick beard, a wayward crop of curly brown hair, and hands that look capable of uprooting a willow tree.

Rahim Khan lacks his friend's charisma and physical presence. But his kind eyes and wry smile make him more approachable.

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).

Another shows Baba, grim-faced and tired, holding an infant Amir outside the house. Rahim Khan stands beside them in the photograph, and little Amir reaches out to him.

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.

BABA

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RAHIM KHAN

You just need to let him find his way.

BABA

And where is he headed? A boy who won't stand up for himself becomes a man who won't stand up for anything.

RAHIM KHAN

It's hard, my friend, growing up without a mother.

BABA

Hassan's mother ran off when he was what, two weeks old? He seems to be doing fine.

RAHIM KHAN

How long have we worked together?

BABA

Twenty years.

RAHIM KHAN

Twenty years. And how many times have I told you you're wrong?

Baba puffs on his pipe, thinking about it.

BABA

At least two come to mind.

RAHIM KHAN

Well here's number three. You're wrong about the boy. He's not like you. He'll never be like you. But watch. He'll turn out well.

Baba stares out the window at the poplar trees silhouetted in the evening light.

BABA

(lowered voice)

If I hadn't seen the doctor pull him out of Sofia with my own eyes, I'd never believe he's my son.

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

INT. BABA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

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

INT. AMIR'S ROOM - LATER

Amir sits at his desk, writing on looseleaf paper. He doesn't raise his head 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.
If you'd let me.

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AMIR

It's only four pages.

RAHIM KHAN

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

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. No. 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.

EXT. MOSQUE - MORNING

The muezzin in the minaret calls the faithful to prayer.

INT. BABA'S HOUSE, DINING ROOM - MORNING

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.

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CONTINUED:

Hassan hands Amir an envelope.

AMIR
What's this?

HASSAN
Rahim Khan left it for you.

Amir tears open the envelope. He pulls out his four-page story and a folded letter. He reads the letter quickly, a broad smile spreading across his face.

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 inspects Hassan.

AMIR
Do you know what "bravo" means?

HASSAN
No.

Amir sighs, exasperated at Hassan's ignorance.

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.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

AMIR (cont'd)

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.

HASSAN

So that he'd cry and get rich!

AMIR

Yes. You're very quick.

Hassan nods, smiling. But the smile fades from his face as he considers something.

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!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

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 angrily rises from the table.

AMIR

The tea was very weak today.

Amir storms off, leaving Hassan alone in the dining room. Hassan watches him go. He picks up the half-eaten naan and takes a big bite.

INT. SCHOOLHOUSE - DAY

Amir sits at his desk in a classroom filled with other BOYS his own age. All the students are dressed neatly and sit straight-backed in their chairs.

The boys seem terrified of their teacher, MULLAH FATIULLAH KHAN, a short, stubby man with acne scars and a gruff voice. He holds a stripped willow branch by his side.

MULLAH FATIULLAH KHAN

With me: *Rabba-nagfir...*

STUDENTS

(in unison)

Rabba-nagfir...

The Mullah prowls through the classroom, listening to the students' pronunciation of the Arabic words, tapping the willow branch against his leg.

MULLAH FATIULLAH KHAN

Lee wa li-waali-dayya...

STUDENTS

Lee wa li-waali-dayya...

MULLAH FATIULLAH KHAN

*Wa lil mu'mi-niina yawma yaquu-mul
hisaab.*

STUDENTS

*Wa lil mu'mi-niina yawma yaquu-mul
hisaab.*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The Mullah swats one of the students, FARUQ, on the hand with the willow branch. Faruq bites his lip, trying not to cry.

MULLAH FATIULLAH KHAN
Yaquu-mul hisaab.

FARUQ
Yaquu-mul hisaab.

The students seated behind Faruq grin at each other, grateful that someone else got striped today.

MULLAH FATIULLAH KHAN
Pronounce the Arabic correctly so
God can hear you better. Now,
again! Lee wa li-waali-dayya...

STUDENTS
Lee wa li-waali-dayya...

INT. STUDY - DAY

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
Mullah Fatiullah says that drinking
is a sin.

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

AMIR (cont'd)
He says drinkers will pay when the
Reckoning comes.

Baba sits on the leather sofa. He studies his whiskey.

BABA
Mullah Fatiullah. It rhymes.

AMIR
But if he's right, does it make you
a sinner, Baba?

Baba crushes an ice cube between his teeth.

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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 Mullah Fatiullah?

BABA

I mean all of them. Piss on the beards of those self-righteous monkeys.

At first Amir seems shocked to hear such blasphemy, but then he begins to giggle.

BABA (cont'd)

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

Baba takes a sip from his glass, letting the whiskey sit in his mouth for a moment before swallowing.

BABA (cont'd)

Enough about that. You asked about sin and I want to tell you. Are you listening?

Amir tries to quit giggling. He presses his lips together.

AMIR

Yes.

But a snort escapes through his nose and he starts giggling again until he sees Baba's stony eyes boring into him.

BABA

I mean to speak to you man to man. Can you handle that for once?

Amir lowers his eyes.

AMIR

Yes, Baba jan.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BABA

No matter what the mullah teaches,
there is only one sin, only one.
And that is theft. Every other sin
is a variation of theft. Do you
understand that?

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.

EXT. BABA'S HOUSE - DAY

Amir and Hassan sit on a high branch of a poplar tree rising
beside the driveway. Sunlight flickers through the leaves.

Their pockets are filled with walnuts, which the boys crack
in their palms and eat.

AMIR

Come on, do it.

HASSAN

It's wrong, Amir agha.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AMIR

Do you have to be so holy all the time?

HASSAN

I'm not holy--

AMIR

You said you'd do anything I asked.

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 swing down from the tree and chase each other across the yard, making guns from their fingers and thumbs, blasting each other with make-believe bullets.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

AMIR (cont'd)
(affecting a macho accent)
We deal in lead, my friend.

INT. CINEMA ZAINAB - DAY

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

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.

AMIR
I admire your notion of fair
odds, mister.

HASSAN
I admire your notion of fair
odds, mister.

CHARLES BRONSON
I admire your notion of fair odds,
mister.

EXT. WAZIR AKBAR KHAN DISTRICT - DAY

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?

(CONTINUED)

Walter Parkes

CONTINUED:

HASSAN

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

AMIR

(irritated)

Charles Bronson's not Iranian.

HASSAN

He's not?

(contemplative beat)

So why does he speak Farsi with an Iranian accent?

AMIR

It's dubbed, you idiot.

Hassan looks confused. Before he can ask a question, a rock strikes Amir in the back. The boys whirl around.

ASSEF (16) strolls toward them, flanked by his entourage, WALI (15) and KAMAL (15). All three wear jeans and T-shirts.

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

Where you going, faggots?

He crosses his thick arms over his chest, a savage grin on his lips as he tips his chin toward Hassan.

ASSEF (cont'd)

I heard a story about your mother the other day. A couple of soldiers told me she had a tight little sugary cunt. Used to fuck her, one after the other, in the barracks.

Hassan says nothing, keeping his eyes on the pavement, standing very close to Amir.

ASSEF (cont'd)

What happened, your father didn't give it to her enough? She ran off to find someone who could fuck her harder?

Assef thrusts his hips backwards and forwards as his cohorts laugh.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ASSEF (cont'd)

(to Amir)

You should keep your servant on a leash.

AMIR

(voice trembling)

We're not bothering you.

ASSEF

Oh, you're bothering me.

Assef pulls a set of stainless steel brass knuckles from his pocket. He slides them over his fingers.

ASSEF (cont'd)

If idiots like you and your father didn't take these people in, we'd be rid of them by now. They'd all go rot in Hazarajat, where they belong.

Wali and Kamal nod in agreement, grinning as Assef pounds his steel-reinforced fist into his palm.

ASSEF (cont'd)

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.

Hassan crouches, scoops up a stone, and stands. He holds the old slingshot in his hand, 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 pulled elastic band.

HASSAN

Please leave us alone, Agha.

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Hassan shrugs. His voice remains flat and calm.

HASSAN

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

Assef's mouth twitches. Wali and Kamal seem fascinated by
this challenge to their leader.

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

ASSEF

You should know something about me,
Hazara. I'm a very patient person.
This doesn't end here, believe me.

(to Amir)

Your Hazara made a big mistake
today.

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.

EXT. STREETS OF KABUL - DAY

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

A DRIVER'S ASSISTANT straddles the rear bumper of the bus,
shouting directions to the DRIVER.

Loudspeakers mounted on minarets throughout the city
broadcast the muezzin's call to prayer.

INT. SERVANT'S HUT - DAY

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.

EXT. BABA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

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.

EXT. CEMETARY - DAY

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!

A three-note honk. A gleaming, black '68 Ford Mustang pulls up to the cemetery wall. Baba sits in the driver's seat.

HASSAN (cont'd)

Your dad got a new car?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BABA
(shouting)
I heard it was someone's birthday.

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

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, giving the shotgun seat to Amir.

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.

EXT. JADEH MAYWAND - DAY

Baba, Amir and Hassan walk 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.

(CONTINUED)

Walter Parkes

CONTINUED:

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

Baba and the boys duck inside a store no larger than a prison cell.

INT. SAIFO'S - DAY

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.

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

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.

After a moment's conference, the boys look up at Baba.

AMIR

How many?

Baba holds up three fingers. The boys resume their search, intent on choosing the three best kites in the shop.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

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.

BABA

Tournament's tomorrow, eh?

Rahim Khan smiles at Amir.

RAHIM KHAN

Are you and Hassan ready?

AMIR

We've been practicing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BABA

I think maybe you'll win this year.
What do you think?

Amir looks into the kitchen. Hassan, scrubbing a pan, looks back at him.

BABA (cont'd)

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.
Fourteen! I think that's still a
record.

INT. FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Amir and Hassan sit under a *kursi*-- a low table covered with a thick, quilted blanket. An electric heater below the table warms the boys with its red coil.

Outside the snow falls heavily. The wind-rattled tree branches tap the window-panes.

The boys play a card game called *panjpar*. Amir kills Hassan's ten of diamonds, plays him two jacks and a six.

HASSAN

You think it's true your father
wrestled a black bear in
Baluchistan?

AMIR

I don't know. Maybe.

HASSAN

He's got those scars on his back.
Could be from claws.

(beat)

I bet it's true.

Hassan kills the six and picks up the jacks.

HASSAN (cont'd)

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AMIR
You think so?

HASSAN
Inshallah.

AMIR
(skeptical)
Inshallah.

The boys continue their game, huddled under the table, as the snow falls from the sky and the branches scrape the windows.

EXT. WAZIR AKBAR KHAN DISTRICT - DAY

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.

AMIR
I don't know. The other kids look pretty good.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Hassan steps closer to Amir and speaks in a low voice.

HASSAN

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, muttering Koranic prayers under his breath, jerks on
the line twice. Hassan tosses the kite.

Amir 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.

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.

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

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 a blue kite that wings through the air with intimidating grace, its glass wire shimmering in the failing sunlight.

AMIR

How many has he cut?

HASSAN

I counted twelve.

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

AMIR

I think he's going for Baba's record.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

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.

A strong gust of wind blows across the street.

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 throw Amir.

But Amir's kite closes in relentlessly. The crowd senses that the end is near.

SPECTATORS

(louder)

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)

CONTINUED: (4)

Amir's red kite whips past the blue kite, it's glass string severing the blue kite's 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!

Baba stands on the edge of his house's rooftop, pumping both his fists, hollering at the top of his lungs.

Hassan breaks off the embrace.

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. Younger kids look at him with awestruck eyes.

EXT. BAZAAR - DUSK

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 Hazari boy come this way? About my age? Wearing a green *chapan*?

MERCHANT

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

AMIR

He's our servant's son.

MERCHANT

He is? 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 Hazara boy running that way. He had a kite in his hand. A blue one.

AMIR

He did?

The merchant grunts and loads another box onto the mule.

MERCHANT

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

AMIR

Who?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MERCHANT

The other boys. The ones chasing him.

EXT. SIDE STREET - DUSK

Amir runs down a secluded, rutted road. His boots squish in the mud. The road 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.

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 us 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.

KAMAL

That's fair.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WALI

Nothing is free.

ASSEF

You're a lucky Hazara. Because today, it's only going to cost you that blue kite. A fair deal, boys, isn't it?

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

A loyal Hazara. Loyal as a 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Hassan cocks the arm holding the rock.

ASSEF (cont'd)
Whatever you wish.

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, Hazara. 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 his 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 the boy's arms, twisted and 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

ASSEF

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

WALI

I don't know.

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.

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

EXT. BAZAAR - LATER

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 track that
runs mud shacks. In the dimming light, Hassan walks slowly
towards him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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.

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

INT. STUDY - NIGHT

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

A smile plays over Baba's lips. He opens his arms. Amir puts the kite down and walks into his father's embrace.

EXT. WAZIR AKBAR KHAN DISTRICT - MORNING

A KOCHI CARAVAN passes through the street. Nomads from the mountains, the Kochi men have dusty, weather-beaten faces. The women wear long, colorful shawls, beads, and silver bracelets around their wrists and ankles.

The procession includes bleating sheep, mewling goats, and camels with bells around their necks.

Neighborhood BOYS chase the caravan, throwing pebbles at the goats, squirting water at the mules. The nomads ignore them.

Amir sits alone on the curb, watching the Kochi pass. Finally he stands and walks back to the gates of Baba's house.

INT. DINING ROOM - MORNING

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

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AMIR
Where's Hassan?

ALI
He went back to sleep.

Ali kneels before the stove and pushes the little door open.

AMIR
Is he going to play today?

Ali pauses with a log in his hand.

ALI
The last week, all he wants to do is sleep. He does his chores and then he just crawls under his blanket. Can I ask you something?
(off Amir's silence)
After that kite tournament, he came home a little bloodied. And his shirt was torn. I asked him what happened and he said it was nothing. Just a little scuffle with some kids over the kite.

Amir pushes his egg around his plate and says nothing.

ALI (cont'd)
Did something happen to him, Amir agha?

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

Amir pushes back his chair, stands and storms out of the dining room, leaving his full plate of food. Ali, log in hand, stares after him.

INT. STUDY - NIGHT

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Baba lowers the paper and studies his son, smiling. His demeanor towards the boy is far warmer since the tournament.

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
Too bad. I thought you'd have more
fun if he came.

AMIR
We'll have fun, just the two of us.

Baba smiles, winks at his son, and returns to his newspaper.

INT. CINEMA ARYANA - NIGHT

Amir sits next to his father in the plush velvet seats of the theater (a more lavish affair than the Cinema Zainab), watching Charlton Heston gaze manfully over Valencia.

CHARLTON HESTON
It takes more than courage to be a
king.

Amir glances at his father but Baba is absorbed in the movie.

INT. AMIR'S ROOM - DAY

Amir sits cross-legged on his bed, reading an abbreviated Farsi version of *Ivanhoe*. A knock on the door.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AMIR

What is it?

Hassan cautiously opens the door and peers inside, still holding the doorknob.

HASSAN

I'm going to the baker to buy naan.
I was wondering if you... if you
wanted to come along.

AMIR

I think I'm just going to read.

Hassan rests his forehead against the door.

HASSAN

I don't know what I've done, Amir
agha. I wish you'd tell me. I don't
know why we don't play anymore.

AMIR

You haven't done anything.

HASSAN

You can tell me. I'll stop doing
it.

AMIR

I'll tell you what I want you to
stop doing.

HASSAN

Anything.

AMIR

I want you to stop bothering me. I
want you to go away.

Hassan stares at Amir as if hoping the older boy will laugh and tell him it was just a joke, but Amir doesn't look at him. After a few seconds Hassan closes the door.

EXT. BABA'S HOUSE - DAY

Spring. The snow has melted and the hills to the north are dotted with patches of green grass.

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.

(CONTINUED)

Walter Parkes

CONTINUED:

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.

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

Is this about you and Hassan? I know there's something going on between you two, but whatever it is, you have to deal with it, not me. I'm staying out of it.

AMIR

All right. I'm sorry.

BABA

I grew up with Ali. My father took him in, loved him like his own son. Forty years Ali's been with my family. Forty goddamn years.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BABA (cont'd)
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. 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.

INT. BABA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

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

We only hear snippets of conversation, but everyone seems to be discussing the same thing.

GUEST #1
Why would they invade? Amin does
whatever they say...

GUEST #2
He's been cozying up to the
Americans. Brezhnev doesn't like
that...

EXT. BABA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

GUESTS chatter under the glow of red, blue, and green lights winking in the trees. Kerosene torches burn on stakes.

GUEST #3
I say let them come! Better the
Russians than the fanatics, telling
everyone what to wear, what to eat--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GUEST #4

The Communists are fanatics, too.
They're just godless fanatics.

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...

ASSEF (O.S.)

Happy birthday, Amir.

Amir turns and sees Assef standing with his father, MAHMOOD, a small, dark-skinned man. Amir freezes. Assef notes the smaller boy'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.

Amir is still unable to look at Assef.

ASSEF

(to Amir)

It's a great party.

Amir says nothing, still staring at the ground.

BABA

(low voice)

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.

EXT. EMPTY LOT - NIGHT

Amir sits in a barren dirt lot down the block from Baba's, 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.

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
(smiling)
Thanks.

Rahim Khan lifts his glass to Amir in toast and drinks.

RAHIM KHAN
Did I ever tell you I was almost married once?

AMIR
Really?

RAHIM KHAN
It's true. I was eighteen. Her name was Homaira. She was a Hazara, the daughter of our neighbor's servants. We used to meet in my father's apple orchards. After midnight, when everybody had gone to sleep. We'd walk under the trees and I'd hold her hand... Am I embarrassing you, Amir jan?

AMIR
A little.

RAHIM KHAN
It won't kill you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He takes another swig from his drink.

RAHIM KHAN (cont'd)
Anyway, we had this fantasy. I would build us a big house, white with a tiled patio. We'd plant fruit trees in the garden and grow all sorts of flowers...

He swirls the whiskey in his glass and coughs.

RAHIM KHAN (cont'd)
You should have seen the look on my father's face when I told him. My mother actually fainted. My brother Jalal went to fetch his hunting rifle before father stopped him.

Rahim Khan laughs bitterly.

RAHIM KHAN (cont'd)
It was Homaira and me against the world. And I'll tell you this, Amir jan: In the end, the world always wins.

AMIR
So what happened?

RAHIM KHAN
That same day, my father put Homaira and her family on a lorry and sent them off to Hazarajat. I never saw her again.

AMIR
I'm sorry.

RAHIM KHAN
Probably for the best, though. She would have suffered. You don't order someone to polish shoes one day and call them "sister" the next.

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

AMIR
(uncertain)
I know.

(CONTINUED)

Walter Parkes

CONTINUED: (2)

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

RAHIM KHAN

Here. I almost forgot.

He hands Amir a brown, leather-bound notebook. Amir traces his fingers over the gold-colored stitching on the borders.

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.

EXT. BABA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Amir and Rahim Khan walk through the gates. All the guests stand in the yard, looking up at the sky. Kids hoot and scream with each crackle and whoosh. 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.

EXT. WAZIR AKBAR KHAN DISTRICT - DAY

Amir rides a brand new, candy apple-red Schwinn Stingray down the block. The bicycle doesn't seem to give him any pleasure.

EXT. BABA'S HOUSE - DAY

Amir rides the bike through the open gates and down the driveway. He rolls into the backyard, where Ali and Hassan clean the mess from the party. Paper cups, crumpled napkins, and empty bottles of soda litter the yard.

Ali folds chairs, setting them along the wall. He sees Amir and waves. Amir nods back.

(CONTINUED)

Walter Parkes

CONTINUED:

ALI
Beautiful bicycle, Amir agha.

Amir hops off the bike and walks it toward the house.

INT. AMIR'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

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

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

INT. STUDY - DAY

Baba sits at his desk, signing various documents.

AMIR (O.S.)
Baba?

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

BABA
You like your new bike?

AMIR
It's great. Thanks.
(beat)
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
Well, I'm sure it'll turn up somewhere.

EXT. BABA'S HOUSE - MORNING

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

INT. AMIR'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Amir stands by his window, the curtain gathered in his hand, watching Ali and Hassan walk away.

He walks over to the pile of gifts, grabs a few envelopes of cash and the new watch, and heads out his door.

EXT. BABA'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

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

INT. SERVANT'S HUT - CONTINUOUS

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

INT. BABA'S HOUSE - LATER

Amir knocks on the door of the study.

BABA (O.S.)
Come in.

INT. STUDY - CONTINUOUS

Amir steps inside. Baba listens to an impassioned voice on the radio:

PARTISAN (V.O.)
(on radio)
If they come, we will do what
Afghans have always done. We will
fight. We defeated the armies of
Alexander the Great, we defeated
the armies of Ghengis Khan, we
defeated the armies of the British
Empire. And we will defeat the
Russians.

Baba lowers the volume and smiles wearily at Amir.

BABA
The others didn't have tanks and
bombers, of course.
(noting Amir's grim face)
What's wrong?

INT. AMIR'S ROOM - LATER

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.

INT. STUDY - DAY

Hassan and Ali stand before Baba. From their red, puffed-up eyes, it seems that they've both been crying. Amir sits apart from them on the leather sofa.

BABA

Did you steal that money? 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?

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Baba spreads open his arms, his palms up.

BABA

I don't care about the money or 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.

For the first time that we've seen, 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, his finger twirling a loose string on the hem of his shirt.

BABA (cont'd)

At least tell me why. I need to know!

ALI

Will you drive us to the bus station?

BABA

(bellowing)

I forbid you to do this! Do you hear me? I forbid you!

ALI

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

EXT. BABA'S HOUSE - DAY

A heavy rain falls as Ali hauls a single suitcase to Baba's car, idling outside the gates. Hassan lugs his mattress, rolled tightly and tied with a rope, on his back.

Ali shoves the suitcase into the trunk and Baba slams the lid. Ali and Hassan get inside the car. Everyone's drenched from the downpour.

INT. AMIR'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Amir watches through a rain-soaked window as the car pulls away. He rest his cheek on the glass and watches Kabul drown.

EXT. KABUL - NIGHT

A crescent moon casts its pale light on the domed mosques and slender minarets.

A screaming comes across the sky: four MiG-21 fighter jets blast northwards, gray steel barely visible in the darkness.

EXT. BABA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Baba stands outside his house, watching the sky. There is a constant roar of jets overhead: MiGs, Tupolev cargo planes and bombers, all heading for the Kabul airport.

Other neighborhood LOCALS wander out of their houses, staring at the sky. Amir steps into the yard and stands beside Baba.

BABA
The Russians.

EXT. JADEH MAYWAND AVENUE - DAY

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

EXT. BAZAAR - DAY

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

INT. STUDY - MORNING

Baba sits behind his desk, trying his telephone. Rahim Khan paces the room. Amir sits on the sofa, watching the nervous adults. A radio softly broadcasts news reports.

BABA
The lines are still down.

RAHIM KHAN
Apparently they blew up the telephone exchange.

(CONTINUED)

Walter Parkes

CONTINUED:

Baba pricks up his ears, hearing something on the radio.

BABA

Turn up the radio, Amir.

Amir walks over to the radio and dials up the volume.

BABRAK KARMAL (O.S.)

Today is a day of triumph for the
Afghan people.

RAHIM KHAN

They say they're going after anyone
considered anti-Communist.

Amir goes to the window and looks outside.

BABRAK KARMAL (O.S.)

Today we have broken the torture
machine of Amin and his henchmen,
wild butchers, usurpers and
murderers of tens of thousands of
our countrymen.

BABA

They'll come for me.

BABRAK KARMAL (O.S.)

All patriotic Afghans should thank
our friends in the Soviet Union for
their support. Together we shall
rid this land of the greedy
overlords who have kept the working
people in chains for too long.

Outside the window, beyond Baba's wrought-iron gates, a
Soviet T-72 tank lumbers down the street.

BABA

Pack a bag, Amir. Only what you
need.

INT. AMIR'S ROOM - DAY

Amir stands in his bedroom, taking one last look at the toys
piled in wooden chests, at the framed photographs of his
relatives, and, most of all, at the leather-bound books on
his bookcase. He runs his finger down the spines of the
collected Rumi, Hafez, and Khayyam.

He picks up the suitcase at his feet and walks out the door.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - NIGHT

An old Russian truck motors down the dark road.

INT. TRUCK - NIGHT

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.

EXT. CHECKPOINT - NIGHT

The old truck pulls up to a Russian Army checkpoint.

INT. TRUCK - NIGHT

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.

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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
indecentry take place.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

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.

RUSSIAN OFFICER (cont'd)

(thick accent)

Please forgive, forgive. They are just boys.

He gives the young soldier the rueful look of a father exasperated with his misbehaving son. He turns to Karim and waves 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.

INT. TRUCK - LATER

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

EXT. JALALABAD - NIGHT

The truck has stopped in front of a one-story house at the intersection of two dirt roads.

Karim throws open the tarpaulin and ushers his passengers into his house, anxious not to be spotted.

INT. KARIM'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

The passengers, fatigued from their long trip, stand in the dimly lit, unfurnished room. Karim locks the front door and pulls tattered sheets over the windows.

KARIM

Look, there's some bad news. My brother can't take you into Pakistan yet. His engine blew out and he's waiting for parts.

BABA

How long?

KARIM

What?

BABA

(roaring)

How long for the parts?

KARIM

(flinching)

Not long, Agha. Not long.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

Karim leads his passengers down to the basement. The only dim light comes from a pair of kerosene lamps. Baba and Amir find an empty corner and set down their suitcases.

Karim walks back up the stairs and locks the door behind him.

INT. BASEMENT - LATER

It's impossible to tell what time it is. Without a muezzin to call them, the faithful have to guess when they should pray.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

All the men except Baba kneel facing the same direction. They bow their heads to the floor as they mutter the prayers. When they're done, one of the refugees returns to his place by the wall. He glances at Baba, who pulls out his tin of snuff.

REFUGEE

God is going to save us all. Why
don't you pray to him?

Baba snorts a pinch of his snuff and stretches his legs.

BABA

What'll save us is eight cylinders
and a good carburetor.

That ends the conversation.

INT. BASEMENT - LATER

Karim addresses the refugees.

KARIM

The truck's beyond repair.

A collective groan from the exhausted people.

KARIM (cont'd)

But there's another option. My
cousin has a fuel truck.

BURLY MAN

A fuel truck?

KARIM

It's up to you.

EXT. KARIM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Karim and his COUSIN help the refugees into the fuel truck. One by one they 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 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. Baba has climbed up behind him. He clamps his big hand on his son's shoulder.

(CONTINUED)

Walter Parkes

CONTINUED:

BABA

I'll be with you the whole way.

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

INT. TANKER - NIGHT

Absolute darkness.

The sound of the truck's wheels crushing gravel filters through the steel walls of the tanker. A BABY cries. Ancient prayers are quietly intoned. Men and women softly sob.

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.

EXT. PAKISTANI BORDER COUNTRY - DAY

Amir climbs out of the fuel truck into the blinding light of day. He turns his face to the sky, squinting, breathing like the world is running out of air.

He lies down by the side of the dirt road. A moment later Baba stands above him, smiling down at him.

BABA

We're in Pakistan.

Amir sits up, still gulping the fresh air. The dirt road carves through untended fields. In the distance a small village is strung out atop a sunbaked slope.

AMIR

It looks like Afghanistan.

Baba nods, surveying the uninspiring landscape.

BABA

We won't stay long. We're going to America.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AMIR

America?
(off Baba's nod)
Steve McQueen?

BABA

(smiling)
Steve McQueen.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

TITLE CARD: *Fremont, California, 1986*

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.

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE - DAY

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. ENRIQUE, a young attendant from Honduras, steps through the employee's entrance, joining Baba behind the counter.

Baba smiles at Enrique and pats the young man on the back.

BABA

Thank you for coming early.

(CONTINUED)

Walter Parkes

CONTINUED:

ENRIQUE

Hey, it's a big day, right?

BABA

Big day.

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE BATHROOM - DAY

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

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL FIELD - DAY

Graduation day. A stage has been set up in the home endzone. The SENIORS march one by one in their gowns and mortarboards, accepting their diplomas from the school PRINCIPAL.

FAMILY MEMBERS sit on folding chairs on the field, snapping photographs, cheering for their loved ones.

Baba stands apart from the others, standing very straight in his brown suit.

When all the seniors have received their diplomas the principal approaches the microphone.

PRINCIPAL

Congratulations to the class of
1986!

The seniors whoop and toss their mortarboards into the air. Squealing girls in blue gowns hug each other and cry. Boys high-five their fathers and each other.

Amir walks over to Baba. He is twenty now, the oldest senior in his class. Baba raises his camera.

BABA

Put on the hat.

AMIR

It's called a mortarboard.

While Amir still retains a hint of his Farsi accent, his English is nearly perfect.

BABA

Okay, the mortarboard.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Amir complies. Baba snaps a picture. Amir starts to take off the mortarboard.

BABA (cont'd)

One more.

Amir rolls his eyes. Baba takes another shot. He lowers the camera, curls his arm around Amir's neck, and kisses his son on the brow.

BABA (cont'd)

I am proud of you.

Amir smiles, bathing in his father's pride. Baba watches the young Americans celebrate. No one has approached them; clearly Amir doesn't have many friends here.

BABA (cont'd)

Hassan should be here. This would make him happy.

The smile fades from Amir's face.

BABA (cont'd)

Come, we have party.

AMIR

Where?

BABA

Somewhere good.

INT. DIVE BAR - NIGHT

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:

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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

BABA (cont'd)
(to old man)
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 graduate. And junior school next.

AMIR
Junior college.

BABA
Junior college. And someday, Doctor Amir!

Amir carefully inspects the head of his beer.

AMIR
I'm thinking of studying English.

BABA
English?

AMIR
Creative writing.

Baba gulps down his second beer and shows the bartender his empty glass. The bartender refills it.

BABA
(Farsi)
Stories, you mean. You'll make up stories.
(beat)
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BABA (cont'd)
*They pay for that, making up
stories?*

AMIR
*If you're good. And if you get
discovered.*

BABA
*How likely is that, getting
discovered?*

AMIR
It happens.

BABA
*And what will you do while you wait
to get good and get discovered?*

AMIR
I'll find a job.

BABA
*Wah, wah! So, if I understand, you
study for years to get your degree,
then you get a crap job like mine,
a job you could get today, on the
small chance that your degree might
someday help you get... discovered.*

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)
(English)
Ay, beautiful! Beautiful!

The pool players turn and stare at Baba.

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

Soon Baba is surrounded by a group of tough-looking men, everyone hoisting beers.

BABA (cont'd)
*My son, he graduates his high
school today.*

The pool players raise their beers to Amir.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

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.

EXT. FREMONT - DAY

A dilapidated '71 Volkswagen bus sputters down the street. A sad carcass of rusted metal, the bus's shattered windows have been replaced by black garbage bags.

The bus pulls to a stop in front of a ranch house, the engine giving off one last tired fart before shutting down.

A sign staked into the front lawn reads: **Garage Sale Today!**

INT. BUS - DAY

Baba sits behind the wheel. Amir's riding shotgun.

BABA
Well... it's not Steve McQueen.

They both laugh.

EXT. GARAGE SALE - DAY

Amir and Baba examine various knickknacks. Other SHOPPERS wander about, glancing at items, but none scrutinize the used goods as carefully as Amir and Baba.

MONTAGE:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Baba and Amir haggle with various SELLERS at various garage, yard, and estate sales.

Baba gets a good price on an old Singer sewing machine.

Amir buys a stack of Chicago albums.

Baba snags an Electrolux vacuum cleaner.

Amir purchases a guitar with no strings.

Amir shoves the guitar into the back of the bus, which is now filled with all their accumulated junk.

END MONTAGE

EXT. SAN JOSE FLEA MARKET - DAY

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.

Afghans not busy selling their goods to SHOPPERS gossip in the shade, sipping green 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 five dollars for the Chicago albums. After giving the buyer his change, Amir sees Baba approaching with an older, distinguished-looking man.

BABA

(Farsi)

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

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BABA

*Amir is going to be a great writer.
He's going to college in the fall.*

AMIR

Junior college.

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. She has thick black eyebrows like the arched wings of a flying bird. Her eyes, walnut brown and 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.

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. Amir realizes that Baba is staring at him, smiling.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

AMIR

What?

Baba raises his eyebrows.

AMIR (cont'd)

What?

BABA

Has she made an impression on you?

AMIR

Please, Baba.

Baba laughs and pours himself another cup of tea.

INT. AMIR'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Amir types feverishly on an old manual typewriter.

His bedroom is much smaller than his room in Kabul, furnished only with a futon and a fragile-looking desk.

Amir rolls the page forward, grips the upper edge of the sheet, and reads what he's composed.

The enthusiasm fades from his face. He shakes his head, pulls the paper out, and jabs holes in it with a ballpoint pen.

EXT. BABA AND AMIR'S STALL - DAY

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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.

EXT. SORAYA'S BOOTH - MOMENTS LATER

Soraya sits alone, behind a table, reading a book. Old
curling irons and neckties are laid out on the table. She
looks up when Amir approaches.

AMIR
Salaam. I didn't mean to disturb
you.

SORAYA
Salaam.

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

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?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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 tips his head and gives a half-smile. He begins to walk 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. Eyes narrow with interest.

Soraya turns the book's cover toward Amir. *Wuthering Heights*.

SORAYA

Have you read it?

AMIR

(nodding)

It's a sad story.

SORAYA

Sad stories make good books.

(CONTINUED)

Walter Parkes

CONTINUED: (2)

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

(quiet)

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.

INT. AMIR'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Amir hammers at the keys of his typewriter. A sheaf of pages is already stacked on his desk.

INT. KITCHENETTE - CONTINUOUS

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.

EXT. SAN JOSE FLEA MARKET - DAY

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

EXT. SORAYA'S BOOTH - DAY

A POTBELLIED MAN in a deerstalker hat examines a set of pewter candlesticks.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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 the smile vanishes from Soraya's face. Her eyes fix on something behind Amir. He turns around, coming face to face with General Taheri.

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?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

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
at this flea market.*

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.*

EXT. BABA AND AMIR'S STALL - LATER

Baba sells a vintage teddy bear to an ELDERLY WOMAN.

BABA
For your daughter?

ELDERLY WOMAN
My granddaughter.

BABA
You have a granddaughter?
Impossible.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The elderly woman laughs and walks away with the teddy bear. Amir returns to the stall, slouched and disconsolate. He sits atop an old television set. Baba inspects him.

BABA (cont'd)
What's wrong?

AMIR
Nothing.

BABA
So tell me about nothing.

Amir stares at his feet.

BABA (cont'd)
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.

Finally Baba manages to control the coughing. He takes deep breaths, holding his son's hand.

INT. EXAMINING ROOM - DAY

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, actually. Came out here for medical school. Once you get used to that California sunlight...

BABA
But your family?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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 shrugs his head in apology.

INT. SECOND EXAMINING ROOM - DAY

Baba's 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.

INT. DR. AMANI'S OFFICE - DAY

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

BABA

Oat cell carcinoma? It sounds like
a cereal.

Baba smiles. Dr. Amani and Amir do not.

BABA (cont'd)

So, tell me. Tell me the truth.

DR. AMANI

There is chemotherapy, of course.
But it would only be palliative.

BABA

What does this mean?

DR. AMANI

It means it wouldn't change the
outcome. Just... delay it.

BABA

That's a clear answer, Dr. Amani.
Thank you for that.

(beat)

No, no chemotherapy.

AMIR

But Baba--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Baba turns and glares at Amir, who shuts his mouth.

BABA
(quiet but intense)
Never challenge me in public.
Never.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Baba and Amir walk toward their apartment building. A rainy day in California: the passing cars spray grimy water onto the sidewalk.

Baba smokes, shielding the cigarette from the rain with the palm of his hand. At the lobby door, he fishes in his pants for the keys.

AMIR
I wish you'd give the chemo a chance.

Baba turns on Amir. He kneads his son's chest with the hand holding the cigarette.

BABA
Enough! I've made my decision.

AMIR
(near tears)
What about me, Baba? What am I going to do?

A look of disgust sweeps across Baba's face. Above them, the rain drums on the canvas awning.

BABA
All these years, Amir, all these years, that's what I've been trying to teach you. How to live without ever having to ask, What about me?

EXT. BABA AND AMIR'S STALL - DAY

Baba sells a lampshade to a stocky FILIPINO MAN.

INT. BUS - CONTINUOUS

Amir rummages through a pile of toys in the back of the bus.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FILIPINO MAN (O.S.)
Hey, man, this guy needs help!

Amir rushes toward the front of the bus.

EXT. BABA AND AMIR'S STALL - MOMENTS LATER

Amir runs to Baba, who lies on the ground, his arms and legs jerking. Baba froths at the mouth, foamy spittle soaking his beard, upturned eyes rolled white.

BYSTANDERS rush toward the stall.

BYSTANDER #1
Call 911!

Amir kneels beside Baba and grabs his arms, trying to keep him from hurting himself.

AMIR
I'm here, Baba, I'm here. You'll be all right.

Amir looks up at the crowd now circling them.

AMIR (cont'd)
Somebody help! Please, somebody get help!
(to Baba)
I'm right here, Baba. I'm right here with you.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Baba lies in bed, groggy but awake. Amir sits in a chair beside the bed, reading to Baba from a Farsi newspaper.

AMIR
A Hazara boxer won the Commonwealth Games.

BABA
Mm. Hassan would have been a good boxer. I should have taught him.

Amir nods. He continues to look at the newspaper story but his eyes have lost their focus.

BABA (cont'd)
What is it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Amir looks at his weakened father and struggles for words.

AMIR

*There's something I need to tell
you... About Hassan, I mean.*

Baba takes his son's hand. There is a look of patience in the dying man's eyes, of understanding.

BABA

Tell me.

A knock on the door. Amir squeezes his father's hand and releases him.

AMIR

Come in.

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?*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

AMIR

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

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

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

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 blots his eyes with his shirtsleeve.

SORAYA (cont'd)

Do you need anything?

AMIR

No.

Amir tries to smile. She puts her hand on his. Amir presses her hand against his face, against his closed eyes.

AMIR (cont'd)

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

SORAYA

Your story made me cry.

AMIR

What story?

(comprehending)

Wait... You read it?

She puts a finger over her lips.

SORAYA

Our secret?

AMIR

Our secret.

SORAYA

You write beautifully.

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

INT. BABA'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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.

INT. BABA'S BEDROOM - MORNING

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.

EXT. TAHERI'S HOUSE - MORNING

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.

Amir gets back in the driver's seat. Baba leans in the passenger window.

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

AMIR
Okay. Good luck.

Baba smiles. He turns and hobbles toward the house.

INT. BABA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Amir paces back and forth. He steps into the kitchenette and checks the oven clock. 11:45. He resumes his pacing.

The phone rings. Amir hurries over to it and then stops, staring at it, willing the blaring machine to bring him good news. He picks up the receiver.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AMIR

Hello?

BABA

The general accepted.

Amir lets out a burst of air and sits down.

AMIR

He did?

BABA

He did. But Soraya jan wants to talk to you first.

AMIR

About what?

BABA

About what? How do I know about what? She wants to talk to you.

INT. TAHERI'S HOUSE - DAY

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.

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.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

Amir and Soraya walk past small houses with tidy lawns. Neither of them speaks; both look deeply uncomfortable.

He 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... well...

AMIR

Until the wedding night.

SORAYA

Yes.

AMIR

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

SORAYA

Of course I do!

She reaches out and takes Amir's hand, then quickly drops it, glancing back at her mother. Jamila, less strict than her husband, pretends not to notice.

SORAYA (cont'd)

It's just... I want to tell you something. Something you need to know.

AMIR

I don't care what it is.

SORAYA

I care. 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.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SORAYA (cont'd)

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.

AMIR

So that's the big dark secret?

Soraya laughs, dabbing away fresh tears.

SORAYA

That's it. Does it make you want to change your mind?

AMIR

Not even close. I want to marry you. I'd marry you tonight if I could.

She takes his hand and lifts it to her mouth, kissing it, before dropping it quickly.

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

AMIR

What?

SORAYA

It's only fair. I told you mine.

AMIR

There's really nothing too--

SORAYA

You must have something buried in there. Tell me.

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.

A flicker of disappointment passes over her face, but she conceals it quickly with a smile.

SORAYA

We can change that.

INT. BANQUET HALL - NIGHT

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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
(whispering)
What do you see?

AMIR
(whispering)
I see the rest of my life.

INT. BANQUET HALL - LATER

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

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.

INT. BABA'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

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.

INT. BABA'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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.

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

EXT. MUSLIM SECTION, CEMETARY - DAY

The GRAVEDIGGERS lower a simple wooden casket into the ground. Scores of MOURNERS stand by the open grave, including Amir, Soraya, the general and his wife.

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.

They sit on a bench beneath a red maple tree.

AMIR
I used to think he hated me.

Soraya looks into her husband's face.

AMIR (cont'd)
But he just wanted me to be ready.

SORAYA
Ready for what, love?

AMIR
For today.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Soraya rests her head on Amir's shoulder. The wind rattles the branches of the maple tree.

CROSSFADE TO:

INT. AMIR'S APARTMENT - DAY

TITLE CARD: 2001

Amir lowers the phone into the cradle and stares at it.

Soraya walks into the kitchen. The intervening years have combed a few streaks of cinder gray into her black hair, but she still has the face of a Grand Ball princess.

SORAYA

Are you all right?

AMIR

I have to go to Pakistan. Rahim Khan is very sick.

SORAYA

Your father's old business partner?
(off Amir's nod)
I'm so sorry.

AMIR

He needs a favor.

SORAYA

What kind of favor?

AMIR

I don't know.

SORAYA

What about your book tour?

He pulls her into his arms.

AMIR

There wouldn't be any books if not for him.

EXT. STREETS OF PESHAWAR - DAY

TITLE CARD: Peshawar, Pakistan

(CONTINUED)

Walter Parkes

CONTINUED:

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.

INT. TAXICAB - DAY

Amir sits in the backseat of the smoke-filled car, on shredded upholstery. The DRIVER steers with one hand and holds a cigarette in the other.

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.

EXT. RAHIM KHAN'S BUILDING - DAY

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.

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

Amir walks down a dimly lit hallway. He stops at the last door on the right, checks the address on a piece of paper in his hand, and knocks.

After a moment, the door swings open. Twenty years have dwindled Rahim Khan to skin and bones, but his eyes, sharp and intelligent, are the same. He smiles.

RAHIM KHAN

Look at you.

INT. RAHIM KHAN'S APARTMENT - LATER

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

RAHIM KHAN

Thank you, child. Ah, before I forget...

Rahim Khan takes a hardcover book, *A Season for Ashes*, from the coffee table and hands it to Amir.

RAHIM KHAN (cont'd)

Will you sign it for me?

AMIR

How did you find this?

RAHIM KHAN

I've been reading your stories since you were a boy. I'd have walked a hundred miles for your novel.

Amir pulls a pen from his jacket pocket and scribbles an inscription on the title page.

RAHIM KHAN (cont'd)

As it happens, I didn't have to walk anywhere. This "Amazon" is a wonderful company.

(beat)

You're a fine writer, Amir. A truly fine writer.

Amir smiles and hands Rahim Khan the signed novel.

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--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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.

(beat)

Tell me, are you married?

AMIR

Fourteen years.

RAHIM KHAN

And what's her name?

AMIR

Soraya Taheri.

RAHIM KHAN

Taheri... the general's daughter?

AMIR

You haven't lost your memory.

RAHIM KHAN

I knew him, a little bit. A real Pashtun.

AMIR

That he is.

RAHIM KHAN

Any children?

Amir stares into his cup of tea.

AMIR

We tried. But...

(changing the subject)

Have you been here long?

RAHIM KHAN

Less than a year.

(beat)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RAHIM KHAN (cont'd)

Kabul's no longer safe for me.
Kabul's no longer safe for anyone.

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.

Rahim Khan coughs into a handkerchief and Amir notices flecks
of blood on the white cloth.

RAHIM KHAN (cont'd)

You know that I lived in your
father's house after you left.

AMIR

(nodding)

He sold it to you.

RAHIM KHAN

Sold it? No. He gave it to me to
watch over, until it was safe to
come home. It was always his house.
I was just a caretaker.

Rahim Khan leans forward to sip his tea. His scalp is spotted
with honey-crusted sores.

RAHIM KHAN (cont'd)

The last few years I wasn't alone.
Hassan and his family lived there
with me.

Amir looks up. He hasn't heard the name in years.

AMIR

Hassan?

RAHIM KHAN

I knew I couldn't take care of that
place by myself. So I went to
Hazarajat to find him.

AMIR

And his family? Hassan married?

RAHIM KHAN

A lovely woman. Farzana. And their
son... well, take a look.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Rahim Khan picks up an envelope from a sidetable and hands it to Amir, who opens it and pulls out a letter and a Polaroid.

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

Amir shakes his head, staring at his old playmate. He glances at the letter and then up at Rahim Khan.

AMIR

Hassan wrote this?

RAHIM KHAN

He taught himself how to read and write. He didn't want to send you a letter until he could do it properly.

Amir begins reading the neatly-composed Farsi.

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 wish you could see 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.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

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

Rahim Khan covers his eyes with one hand, deeply troubled by something. Amir glances at him before finishing 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 looks at the photograph again. He folds the note and places it and the photo back in the envelope.

AMIR
 How is he?

RAHIM KHAN
 I took that picture the day before
 I left Afghanistan. A few weeks ago
 I got a phone call from one of the
 neighbors.

Rahim Khan's tone has turned grim and Amir stares at him.

EXT. BABA'S HOUSE - DAY

MOS

A pick-up truck pulls up in front of the wrought-iron gates. Two TALIB OFFICIALS, wearing glossy black turbans, step out of the truck. They carry AK-47s.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RAHIM KHAN (V.O.)

Soon after I left, a rumor spread
that a Hazari family was living
alone in a big house in Wazir Akbar
Khan. A pair of Talib officials
came to investigate.

HASSAN, full-grown but still kind and deferential, greets the
Talibs at the gates.

RAHIM KHAN (V.O.) (cont'd)

They accused him of lying when he
said he was only looking after the
house for me.

Hassan, head down, careful not to look the Talibs in the eye
for fear of provoking them, tries to explain the truth.

The Talibs barely look at him. They're far more interested in
the big house, the vast yard.

RAHIM KHAN (V.O.) (cont'd)

The Talibs said he was a liar and a
thief like all Hazaras. They
ordered him to get his family out
by nightfall.

Hassan, respectful but not backing down, shakes his head.
Whatever he says, we cannot hear. Now the Talibs look at him.

RAHIM KHAN (V.O.) (cont'd)

Hassan refused.

The Talibs unsling their AK-47s and point them at Hassan. One
of them grabs Hassan's arm and leads him into the street.

RAHIM KHAN (V.O.) (cont'd)

So they took him to the street...

The Talibs force Hassan to his knees.

RAHIM KHAN (V.O.) (cont'd)

... and ordered him to kneel...

One of the Talibs presses the muzzle of his rifle against the
back of Hassan's head. He pulls the trigger. Hassan falls
face forward. Blood slowly puddles on the dusty road.

RAHIM KHAN (V.O.) (cont'd)

And shot him in the back of the
head.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Hassan's wife, FARZANA, a hazel-eyed Hazara woman wearing a burqa, runs through the gates and launches herself at the Talibs. One of them fells her with a backhanded swat. The other fires on the fallen woman with his AK-47.

RAHIM KHAN (V.O.) (cont'd)
Hassan's wife came screaming and
attacked them. So they shot her,
too.

SORHAB, Hassan's son, stands in the yard, all alone, staring at his parents' bodies.

INT. RAHIM KHAN'S APARTMENT - DAY

Amir can do nothing but stare at Rahim Khan.

AMIR
(whisper)
And the boy? Sohrab?

RAHIM KHAN
I heard he's in an orphanage
somewhere in Karteh-Seh.

A coughing fit grips Rahim Khan. When he looks up his face is flushed, his eyes bloodshot.

RAHIM KHAN (cont'd)
Amir jan, I summoned you here
because I wanted to see you before
I die. But that's not all.
(staring into Amir's eyes)
I want you to go to Kabul. I want
you to bring Sohrab home with you.
It's the last request I'll ever
make of you.

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. 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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

I think we both know why it has to be you, don't we?

For a moment neither man says a word.

AMIR

He told you what happened.

RAHIM KHAN

You were a child. Now you're a man. And this is a way to be good again.

AMIR

I have a wife in America. A home, a career--

RAHIM KHAN

Yes. And I'm asking you to risk all that. Because this boy needs you. Because it's a dying man's last wish. And because your father would have gone.

Amir takes a deep breath and lowers his eyes.

AMIR

You've always thought too highly of me. I'll never be my father.

Rahim Khan reaches out and grips Amir's knee.

RAHIM KHAN

You think you've failed because you're not as strong as your father? Amir, no one in this world would pass that test. The man was a force of nature.

AMIR

And I'm a coward.

Rahim Khan smiles sadly and shakes his head.

(CONTINUED)

RAHIM KHAN

All your life you've been too hard on yourself. Listen: there's something else. Something you don't know. You remember Ali?

AMIR

Hassan's father? Of course.

RAHIM KHAN

He was married once before. To a Hazara woman from Jaghori.

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 that man 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.

AMIR

Of course he did. Of course he--

RAHIM KHAN

Have I ever lied to you, Amir?

AMIR

Then who?

RAHIM KHAN

You know who.

Amir shakes his head like a small child refusing an order.

AMIR

No--

RAHIM KHAN

Baba loved you both the same. Don't you see that? Because you were both his sons. And this boy Sohrab--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

AMIR

No.

RAHIM KHAN

He's your blood.

AMIR

(standing)

You goddamn bastards! All of you,
you bunch of lying goddamn
bastards!

RAHIM KHAN

Please sit down.

AMIR

How could you hide this from me?
From him?

RAHIM KHAN

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

Amir turns and storms out of the apartment.

EXT. STREETS OF PESHAWAR - DAY

Amir walks down a noisy lane choked with PEDESTRIANS,
BICYCLISTS, and rickshaws. Lollywood movie posters are pasted
on windows and walls, displaying sultry actresses dancing
with handsome men in fields of marigolds.

Lost in his thoughts, Amir doesn't initially notice a small
hand tugging on his sleeve. Finally, he looks down. A SMALL
BOY stands beside him, holding a carton of cigarettes.

The boy's eyes are as black and loveless as a shark's.

Amir fishes a few rupees from his pocket and hands them to
the boy. The boy pockets the bills. Amir refuses the
cigarettes. The boy shrugs and hustles away.

Amir watches him go.

INT. RAHIM KHAN'S APARTMENT - SUNSET

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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

I've done business in Pakistan for forty years, Amir. You know what I learned? Find the man who can say yes and give him what he needs. In this case it was very simple-- it was money. I made plenty of it and I don't need it anymore.

(beat)

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

EXT. KHYBER PASS - DAY

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.

INT. LAND CRUISER - DAY

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.

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.

FARID

Checkpoint.

Farid slows as the Land Cruiser approaches a guard hut flanking the road and two PAKISTANI SOLDIERS.

(CONTINUED)

Walter Parkes

CONTINUED:

One of the soldiers approaches. Farid offers papers but the soldier takes a cursory glance inside and waves them on.

EXT. BORDER ROAD - LATER

Farid pulls over on a desolate stretch of road.

INT. LAND CRUISER - CONTINUOUS

AMIR

Why are we stopping?

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

FARID

Put on the beard. We're about to cross the border.

AMIR

I really need to wear that?

Now Farid turns and glares at Amir.

FARID

You know what they'll do to you if they see you're clean-shaven?

Amir reaches for a plastic bag in the backseat.

EXT. AFGHAN BORDER TOWN - DAY

The Land Cruiser passes a small village: broken mud houses and huts consisting of little more than four wooden poles and a tattered cloth as a roof.

CHILDREN dressed in rags chase a soccer ball. A cluster of MEN sit on the carcass of a burned-out Soviet tank. A WOMAN in a brown burqa carries a large clay pot on her shoulder.

INT. LAND CRUISER - CONTINUOUS

Amir wears the beard. It's very well made and looks natural. He stares out the window at the impoverished village.

AMIR

I feel like a tourist in my own country.

(CONTINUED)

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.

Farid points out the window, to an OLD MAN dressed in ragged
clothes trudging down a dirt path, a large burlap pack
stuffed with scrub grass tied to his back.

FARID (cont'd)

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Amir turns in his seat to watch the old man as they pass him.

FARID (cont'd)
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
My mother died giving birth to me.

Farid sighs and lights another cigarette.

EXT. BURNED VILLAGE - DAY

The Land Cruiser lurches over two-foot deep craters in the road, passing the charred remains of a tiny village.

INT. LAND CRUISER - CONTINUOUS

FARID
I had a friend who lived there
once. He was a very good bicycle
repairman. The Taliban killed him
and his family and burned the
village.

Amir stares at the tuft of blackened, roofless walls.

AMIR
I'm not here to sell anything.

Farid glances at Amir.

AMIR (cont'd)
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?

(CONTINUED)

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.

AMIR

He was my half-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.

EXT. MAHIPAR DAM - DAY

The Land Cruiser passes the dam on the outskirts of Kabul.

INT. LAND CRUISER - DAY

FARID

Kabul is not the way you remember it.

AMIR

So I hear.

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

EXT. JADEH MAYWAND AVENUE - DAY

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-

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.

INT. LAND CRUISER - CONTINUOUS

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

AMIR

Where are the trees?

FARID

People cut them down for firewood in the winter. The Russians chopped a lot of them down, too.

AMIR

Why?

FARID

Snipers used to hide in them.

AMIR

Can you pull over?

EXT. JADEH MAYWAND AVENUE - DAY

Amir and Farid step out of the parked Land Cruiser. They walk along the avenue.

AMIR

What's that smell?

(CONTINUED)

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...

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 down Jadeh Maywand.

FARID (cont'd)

(hissing)

What's the matter with you?

AMIR

What?

FARID

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

BEGGAR (O.S.)

Your friend is right, Agha. You might as well poke a rabid dog with a stick.

Amir and Farid turn to look at an OLD BEGGAR sitting barefoot on the steps of a bullet-scarred building.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

He wears a threadbare chapan and a dirt-crusting turban. His left eyelid droops over an empty socket.

BEGGAR (cont'd)

They drive around looking for someone to provoke them. Sooner or later, someone always does. Then the dogs feast and everyone says "Allah-u-akbar." Forgive me, could you spare a few Afghanis?

Farid pulls Amir by the arm.

FARID

Enough. Let's go.

Amir hands the beggar a few bills. The old man hurriedly slips the money in his waist, lone eye darting side to side.

BEGGAR

A world of thanks for your benevolence, Agha sahib.

AMIR

Do you know where the orphanage is in Karteh-Seh?

BEGGAR

It's not hard to find. Just west of Darulaman Boulevard.

AMIR

Thank you.

The beggar smiles.

BEGGAR

Welcome home, Agha sahib.

EXT. ORPHANAGE - DAY

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.

(CONTINUED)

Walter Parkes

CONTINUED:

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. Why not take a closer
look?

AMIR
Please.

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, I have
work to do.

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.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

FARID (cont'd)

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.

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.

INT. ORPHANAGE - DAY

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.

FARID

How many orphans live here?

ZAMAN

More than we have room for. About
two hundred and fifty. But they're
not all orphans. Many of them lost
their fathers in the wars. And
their mothers can't feed them
because the Taliban don't let them
work. So they bring their children
here.

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

INT. DIRECTOR'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

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? I could
make some.

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. Then he nods, picks up a pencil, and twirls it between his fingers.

ZAMAN

Keep my name out of it.

AMIR

I promise.

ZAMAN

Despite your promise I think I'll
live to regret this. But perhaps
it's just as well. I'm damned
anyway. But if something can be
done for Sohrab... 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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.

(beat)

Usually he'll take a girl. But not always.

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

FARID

And you allow this?

ZAMAN

What choice do I have?

Farid rises from his chair, face darkening with anger.

FARID

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

ZAMAN

There's nothing I can do to stop it.

Farid advances on the desk.

FARID

You're selling children!

Amir stands and takes Farid's arm, trying to hold him back. Farid yanks his arm free and charges at Zaman.

AMIR

Don't--

Zaman's chair goes flying as Farid lunges at him, pinning him to the floor. Zaman thrashes beneath Farid, kicking a desk drawer free. Papers spill to the floor.

Farid strangles the director, his strong hands squeezing the older man's windpipe. Amir grabs at Farid's shoulders but can't move him.

AMIR (cont'd)

That's enough!

FARID

I'm killing him! You can't stop me, I'm killing him!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

AMIR

The children are watching, Farid.

Farid turns and sees the children standing silently by the door, holding hands, some of them crying. His hands slip off Zaman's throat. He stands and spits on the man's face.

Farid walks to the door. The children back away, frightened. He closes the door.

Zaman struggles to his feet, blotting his bloodied lips with his sleeve. Coughing and wheezing, he puts on his skullcap and his glasses.

He sees that the lenses are cracked and takes the glasses off again. He rights the chair and sits heavily at his desk.

ZAMAN

I haven't been paid in six months.
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.

(pointing at the door)

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 drops his eyes.

AMIR

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)

CONTINUED: (3)

ZAMAN

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

He picks up his broken glasses and turns them in his hands.

ZAMAN (cont'd)

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

INT. LAND CRUISER - DAY

As they pull away, Amir sees Zaman standing in the doorway. A group of children surround him, clutching the hem of his loose shirt.

EXT. PASHTUNISTAN SQUARE - DAY

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.

INT. LAND CRUISER - CONTINUOUS

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.

EXT. WAZIR AKBAR KHAN DISTRICT - LATER

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.

INT. LAND CRUISER - CONTINUOUS

Amir stares at the familiar sights.

AMIR
Stop the car.

EXT. BABA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Amir steps out of the car. He walks over to the rusted iron gates and puts his hands on the bars.

The gate is not locked. Amir pulls it open 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.

Farid honks his horn twice.

FARID
(calling out the window)
We should go. We'll draw attention.

AMIR
Just give me one more minute.

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.

Another honk. Amir walks back to the Land Cruiser. Farid sits smoking behind the wheel.

AMIR (cont'd)
I have to look at one more thing.
Give me ten minutes.

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.
Give me ten minutes.

EXT. CEMETARY - DAY

Amir climbs to the top of the hill and enters the abandoned graveyard. The headstones are barely visible through the thick tangles of weeds. A pair of crows sits on the low wall that encloses the cemetery.

The pomegranate tree is wilted and leafless. Amir hunkers down on his knees and brushes his hands against the trunk. After a moment he finds what he's looking for.

The carving has faded but is still legible: "Amir and Hassan, the Sultans of Kabul."

He traces the curves of each letter with his fingers.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

The grim quarters feature blankets laced with cigarette burns, a window with a spiderweb crack, and a dried bloodstain on the wall.

Amir and Farid sit on the bed eating skewers of kabob, fresh naan, and a bowl of white rice.

FARID

You heard what Mullah Nasruddin did when his daughter came home and complained that her husband beat her?

AMIR

(smiling)

What?

FARID

He beat her too, then sent her back to tell her husband that Mullah was no fool: If the bastard was going to beat his daughter, then Mullah would beat the man's wife in return.

Amir laughs, shaking his head.

AMIR

That's one thing that hasn't changed. I think my father told me that joke thirty years ago.

(CONTINUED)

FARID

Mullah Nasruddin walks into his favorite teahouse and says: "The moon is more useful than the sun." And someone asks him, "Why, Mullah?" Nasruddin says: "We need the light more during the night than during the day."

Amir smiles. He looks out the window, past the spiderweb crack, into the starlit Kabul sky.

EXT. GHAZI STADIUM - DAY

Amir and Farid walk through the entrance tunnel, past PEDDLERS selling cigarettes, pine nuts, and biscuits. Thousands of SPECTATORS mill about the concrete terraces.

There is no assigned seating here. Farid shoves and elbows through the scrum to find them room to sit.

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

The two SOCCER TEAMS take the field. All the players are bearded and wear long pants. Play begins, though it's sometimes difficult to follow due to the clouds of dust.

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

At halftime, a whistle blows. The players jog off the field.

A pair of dusty red pickup trucks drives into the stadium. A woman dressed 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 knows what he's about to see. He looks sick.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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.

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.

FARID

That must be our man.

The Talib in White raises a microphone. Behind him the woman in the hole still screams. He speaks with a commanding baritone that rings out from the stadium's speakers.

TALIB IN WHITE

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 because we are nothing but humble, powerless creatures before God's greatness. 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.

TALIB IN WHITE (cont'd)

Every sinner must be punished in a manner befitting his sin. And what manner of punishment, brother and sister, befits the adulterer? How shall we punish those who dishonor the sanctity of marriage?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

TALIB IN WHITE (cont'd)

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.

The Talib in White walks to the back of the third truck and selects a stone the size of a baseball. He shows it to the crowd. Like a pitcher on the mound, he hurls the stone at the blindfolded man. It strikes the side of his head.

The woman screams again. The crowd makes a startled "OH!" sound. Blood spills from the blindfolded man's scalp.

Amir closes his eyes and covers his face with his hands. We STAY ON AMIR. The spectators' "OH!" follows each crack of stone on flesh. And the doomed woman's wail rises above all other noise.

EXT. GHAZI STADIUM - LATER

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
in white.

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 shouts in Pashtu to a YOUNG MAN on the field, who runs to the south-end goalposts where the Talib in White chats with some comrades.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The young man addresses the Talib in White, who listens and glances toward the stands. He nods.

EXT. WAZIR AKBAR KHAN DISTRICT - DAY

The Land Cruiser eases into the driveway of a big house shaded by tall willows-- some of the only trees in Kabul.

INT. LAND CRUISER - CONTINUOUS

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.

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)
Don't go in there.
(beat)
They'll never let him go.

Amir looks at the forbidding wall of the compound and hesitates for a moment.

AMIR
He's the blood of my blood.

Farid nods. There is great respect in the way he looks at Amir, a respect that was never there before.

FARID
May Allah watch over you.

EXT. MANSION GATES - DAY

Amir rings the bell by the tall wooden doors in the outer wall of the compound. There is no sound.

FARID
(from the car)
No electricity, Agha.

Amir nods. He pounds on the door. A moment later it swings 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.

EXT. MANSION GROUNDS - DAY

The guards escort Amir across a well-manicured lawn and up the front steps of the house.

INT. MANSION - DAY

They enter the sparsely-furnished house, crossing a foyer with a large Afghan flag draped on one wall.

INT. SITTING ROOM - DAY

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.

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 crosses his legs. He uncrosses them. He rubs his sweaty palms over his knees. He stares at the coffee table in front of him. The base is X-shaped; walnut-sized brass balls stud the tabletop where the steel legs cross.

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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.

TALIB IN WHITE

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?

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 from chewing *naswar* (a smokeless tobacco).

AMIR

I understand he's here with you.
His name is Sohrab.

(CONTINUED)

Walter Parkes

CONTINUED: (2)

TALIB IN WHITE

I'll ask you something: What are you doing with that whore? 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.

TALIB IN WHITE (cont'd)

There are those in my circle who believe that abandoning your homeland when it needs you most is the same as treason. I could have you arrested for treason. Have you shot for it, even. Does that frighten you?

AMIR

I'm only here for the boy.

TALIB IN WHITE

Does that frighten you?

AMIR

Yes.

TALIB IN WHITE

It should.

He leans back in the sofa and crushes his cigarette.

TALIB IN WHITE (cont'd)

Would you like to see him? Would you like to see my boy?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

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 three Taliban men 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.

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)

How talented he is, no, my Hazara boy!

His hands slide down the boy's back, then up again, feeling under his armpits.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

TALIB IN WHITE (cont'd)
(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 Baba 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 never forget a
face. Not ever.

He brushes his lips against Sohrab's ear.

AMIR
Assef.

TALIB IN WHITE/ASSEF
Amir jan.

AMIR
What are you doing here?

TALIB IN WHITE/ASSEF
(arching an eyebrow)
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.

Sohrab's eyes flick to Amir. There is pleading in the boy's look. Assef grins.

ASSEF
Always trying to protect little
Hazara boys... You didn't protect
his father so well. Did you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

Amir says nothing but he's finished looking at the floor. He stares back at Assef. Neither man blinks.

ASSEF (cont'd)

You want my advice? Run away.
That's what you do best. You ran
away from your best friend, 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
now? What do you know about
Afghanistan? You, who fled with
your Baba when the Russians came.
Were you here when the Communists
shot our mullahs and pissed in our
mosques? Were you here when the
warlords' gangs raped our women in
the streets? This country was chaos
before we came. 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.

ASSEF (cont'd)

Take him.

Amir stands, helping Sohrab to his feet. He takes the boy's
hand and the boy stares up at him.

ASSEF (cont'd)

(pointing to door)

Go, take him.

The bells jingle as Amir and Sohrab cross the room.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

ASSEF (cont'd)

Of course, I didn't say you could take him for free.

AMIR

What do you want?

ASSEF

You have to earn him.

AMIR

What do you want?

ASSEF

We have some unfinished business, you and I. You remember, don't you?

Assef calls out in Pashtu and the guards return.

ASSEF (cont'd)

(to the guards)

I want you to listen to me. In a moment, I'm going to close the door. Then he and I are going to finish an old bit of business. No matter what you hear, don't come in! Do you hear me? Don't come in!

The guards nod, looking from Assef to Amir.

GUARD #1

Yes, Agha sahib.

ASSEF

When it's all done, only one of us will walk out of this room alive. If it's him, then he's earned his freedom and you let him pass. Do you understand?

GUARD #1

But Agha sahib--

ASSEF

(screaming)

If it's him, you let him pass!

The guards flinch but nod again. As they turn to go, the younger guard reaches for Sohrab.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

ASSEF (cont'd)

Let him stay. Let him watch.
Lessons are good things for boys.

The guards walk out of the room and close the door behind them. Assef puts down his prayer beads. He reaches inside his garment and pulls out the stainless-steel brass knuckles.

Assef presses play on the boombox and raises the volume. He grins at Amir and lunges forward.

Years of warfare have not yet diminished Assef's athleticism. The steel knuckles flash in the afternoon light and crack against Amir's jaw, felling the smaller man.

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, breaking teeth, dropping Amir again.

As Amir struggles to rise Assef kicks him in the ribs, kicks him in the face, grabs his hair and punches him in the nose.

Amir crawls across the floor, blood from his torn lips staining the mauve carpet.

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 straddles his chest. The Talib's turban has come off, loosing curls of shoulder-length hair.

He punches Amir again and again, the blows starting to sound wet. Blood leaks from Amir's nostrils, from his lips, from a gash that splits his forehead.

Assef's face is a mask of lunacy. One hand is locked around Amir's throat. The other, the steel-knuckled fist, is raised above his shoulder, ready to deliver the coup de grace.

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (8)

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.

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 releases Amir's throat and 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 just 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (9)

Sohrab grabs Amir's hand and helps him to his feet. He hauls the battered man toward the door.

ASSEF
OUT! GET IT OUT!

Sohrab opens the door. The guards stare at Amir and Sohrab for a second before rushing past them into the room.

ASSEF (cont'd)
OUT!

Sohrab tugs on Amir's hand.

SOHRAB
Come!

INT. MANSION HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Amir stumbles down the hallway, led by the little boy.

SOHRAB
This way!

Sohrab guides Amir to a narrow servants' staircase. They hurry down the spiralling steps.

INT. SITTING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The two guards are huddled over the shrieking Assef.

ASSEF
Kill them!

The older guard, tending to his maimed leader, gestures to the younger guard, who stands and hurries out.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Sohrab leads Amir through a kitchen where a HAZARA COOK slices potatoes. The cook sees that Amir has been beaten. He can hear the screaming from upstairs.

The cook unbolts the kitchen door and gestures for Sohrab and Amir to hurry through. Sohrab nods in thanks to his tribesman, who nods back and shuts the door behind them.

The cook resumes his slicing just as the young guard enters the kitchen, AK-47 gripped in his hands.

(CONTINUED)

Walter Parkes

CONTINUED:

The guard shouts in Pashtu to the cook, who points to the corridor leading away from the kitchen (i.e., away from the back door.)

The guard hurries down the corridor.

EXT. MANSION - DAY

Amir's arm is around Sohrab's shoulder, the boy keeping Amir upright. They run for freedom.

At the compound walls, Sohrab slides free the deadbolt and swings open the tall doors.

Farid leans against the Land Cruiser, smoking. He throws down the cigarette when he sees Amir.

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.

Sohrab falls.

Amir, battered and dazed, stares down at the fallen boy.

He crouches down, scoops up the bleeding child, and carries him to the Land Cruiser. He opens the back seat and slides in with the boy.

The young guard opens fire again. 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.

INT. LAND CRUISER - CONTINUOUS

Sohrab's head rests on Amir's lap. The boy is unconscious. The bullet entered his back beneath the shoulder and exited his chest, just below the collarbone.

Blood seeps out, spilling onto the car seat, onto Amir.

AMIR

We need a hospital!

FARID

Not here. The Taliban will kill us all.

(CONTINUED)

Walter Parkes

CONTINUED:

AMIR

Where?

FARID

I know a place, just over the border.

The boy's face has gone pale from loss of blood. Amir pulls off his shirt and applies pressure to the wound, trying to staunch the bleeding.

AMIR

He's not going to make it.

EXT. BORDER CROSSING - DAY

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 into the rear seat. He sees a battered man cradling a lifeless boy.

The soldier considers this tableau for a moment before waving them through. The gate arm raises and Farid guns it.

EXT. PAKISTANI HOSPITAL - DAY

Farid pulls up in front of a small hospital in a dusty border town. Amir opens the rear door and hurries toward the emergency room, holding the limp boy in his arms.

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Two MALE NURSES take Sohrab from Amir's arms, rest him on a gurney and wheel him through swinging double doors.

Amir attempts to follow but a FEMALE NURSE blocks his path.

FEMALE NURSE

We need to treat you--

AMIR

I'm fine, I'm his uncle--

FEMALE NURSE

Please. Please. You can't go in there.

(CONTINUED)

Walter Parkes

CONTINUED:

In his anguish for the boy, Amir had forgotten about his own wounds, but now his injuries and exhaustion catch up with him. He sags against the nurse, who holds him upright.

FEMALE NURSE (cont'd)

Come. Come.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER

Amir sits on an examining table as a doctor stitches the gash on his forehead. The pain must be excruciating but Amir suffers it stoically, his mind on other things.

Farid enters the room. Amir glances at him.

FARID

They won't let me in there. But...
it doesn't look good. He lost too
much blood.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

Amir walks down a wide, windowless corridor crammed with people sitting on metallic folding chairs set along the walls. Moths fling themselves at the ceiling lights.

He spots a dark supply room, the door ajar.

INT. SUPPLY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Amir grabs a white bedsheet from the pile of folded linens.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Amir sees a FEMALE NURSE talking to a POLICE OFFICER by the restroom. He approaches them and touches the nurse's elbow.

AMIR

Please... which way is west?

The nurse frowns, the lines on her face deepening.

AMIR (cont'd)

Please...

Tears have begun to roll down Amir's face.

The policeman finally points in the proper direction.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Amir throws the folded bedsheet onto the floor, making it an impromptu prayer rug. He gets on his knees, facing toward Mecca, and bows his forehead to the ground.

Conversation throughout the corridor ceases. All eyes are on Amir as he begins the ancient prayer:

AMIR (cont'd)
*La illaha il Allah, Muhammad u
rasul ullah.*

There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger.

INT. CORRIDOR - LATER

Late at night now, the corridor is empty of everyone save Amir, who dozes in a corner. He wakes when someone taps his shoulder. He looks up at a handsome, dark-skinned doctor.

DR. NAWAZ
(English w/British accent)
You are the boy's uncle?

Amir stares at a drop of dried blood on the surgical mask hanging from the doctor's neck. Amir nods.

DR. NAWAZ (cont'd)
He lost a great deal of blood.

Amir closes his eyes.

DR. NAWAZ (cont'd)
We revived him twice.
(beat)
If his heart wasn't young and
strong--

Amir opens his eyes. The doctor smiles and nods.

DR. NAWAZ (cont'd)
May he live a long life.

CROSSFADE TO:

INT. AIRPORT - DAY

Soraya stands with a group of PAKISTANI-AMERICANS waiting for their loved ones outside of customs.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She searches through dozens of unfamiliar faces, smiling PAKISTANIS greeting their loved ones.

Finally Amir and Sohrab step through the doors. Soraya covers her mouth when she sees them.

Sohrab wears a white T-shirt and blue jeans. His arm is in a sling and gauze bandages are wrapped around his shoulder.

A stitched scar crosses Amir's forehead; his eyes are still blackened; a purple welt discolors his jawline.

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.*

INT. AMIR'S APARTMENT, GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

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 white clouds. At the foot of the bed, a wicker basket is stuffed with children's books in Farsi and English, a locomotive, 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.

Soraya, confused, turns to her husband. He nods and leads her out of the room.

INT. AMIR'S APARTMENT, HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

SORAYA
I don't think he's looked at me
once.

Amir embraces his wife and whispers in her ear.

AMIR
Give him time, darling. He's seen
too much of Hell.

SORAYA
I know, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I
just want him to, you know, to--

AMIR
He will. Listen... before we
married, you asked me if I had any
secrets. And I said I didn't.

SORAYA
I remember.

AMIR
I was lying.

SORAYA
Of course you were lying.

She strokes her husband's face and looks into his eyes.

SORAYA (cont'd)
Don't hide from me anymore. Not
from me, love.

Amir takes her hand and leads her to his bedroom.

AMIR
I need to tell you a story about
two boys.

INT. AMIR'S APARTMENT, DINING ROOM - LATER

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.

(CONTINUED)

Walter Parkes

CONTINUED:

There is a new intimacy between Amir and Soraya. She rests her hand on his leg, he runs his fingers through her long black hair. When they glance at each other their eyes linger, as if seeing these familiar faces for the first time.

A fifth place setting goes unused, the fifth chair conspicuously empty.

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)
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

AMIR (cont'd)

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.

AMIR (cont'd)

And one more thing, General Sahib. You will never again refer to him as a "Bazara 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.

EXT. LAKE ELIZABETH PARK - DAY

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 apart from everyone else, wearing a yellow raincoat, leaning against a garbage pail.

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Amir walks over to the kite seller, another Afghan.

KITE SELLER

Good day for flying.

Amir chooses a yellow kite with a good bone structure. He hands over some cash and the dealer gives him the kite and a spool of glass line.

Amir tests the line between his thumb and forefinger, drawing blood. Amir smiles at the seller and nods.

Amir goes to 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 the conversation.

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 and back to the sky.

AMIR (cont'd)

*Okay. Looks like I'll have to fly
it solo.*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

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.

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?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Sohrab's gaze flits from their yellow kite to the 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.

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

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.