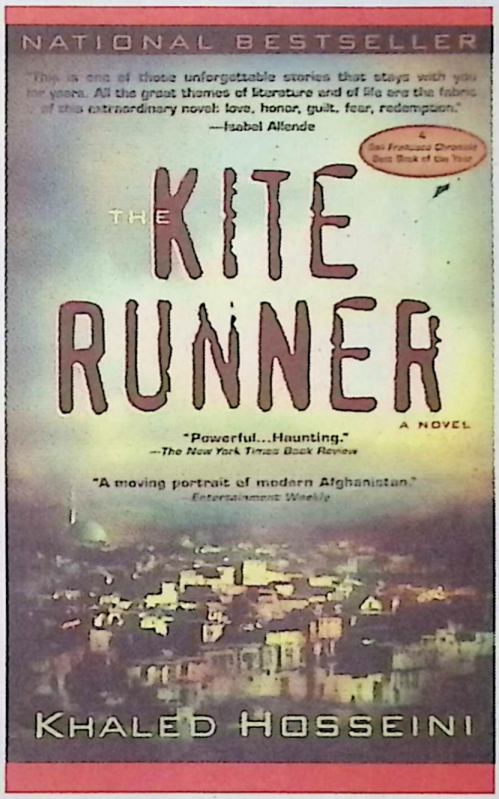
The Kite Runner

Author: Khaled Hosseini
Reviewed by Sameeha Suraiya

"I became what I am today at the age of 12...It's wrong what they say about the past, I've learned, about how you can bury it. Because the past claws its way out". So begins *The Kite Runner*, Khaled Hosseini's debut novel that is here to tug at all the corners of your heart. It sparkles alive with characters that are unforgettable. The words are spoken by Amir, the narrator. Now a grown man and a successful writer living in California with his beautiful wife, a vital piece of this promising puzzle yet, remains missing; the land of Kabul he has long since left behind has never let go of him and neither can he turn his back to it. The mistakes and the memories still cling on. A distant phone call one crisp afternoon offers him that perfect chance, a chance at redemption.



The story swings between two time frames, two entirely different worlds.

Kabul, Afghanistan. The year is 1970. Twelve year old Amir leads a boisterous, lively childhood, running amongst the hills and the orchards of Kabul where mulberries, walnuts and strawberries grow galore. He enjoys a life of privilege that is shaped by his brotherly friendship with Hassan, his constant companion and his staunch ally in all things mischievous. Always standing up for Amir, Hassan is never to deny him anything of which Amir is clearly aware, for Hassan is merely a low-caste servant who is jeered on the streets. In spite of that, Amir admires him silently, as much as he envies him of his natural courage and the place he holds in his father's heart. Desperate for *Baba's* attention, who, more than anything, favours courage and all that it takes to be a man and which he worries, is amiss in his own son, Amir resolves to win the local kite-flying tournament to prove he can be the man his father wants him to be. It is Hassan's help he once again relies on. But neither of the boys can imagine what is to come before them the afternoon of the tournament in the back alley of the street where the boys grew up playing. Before their very eyes, their lives are to change forever. Thrust into an alien world, both find themselves walking on grounds that threaten to overturn all that they have been familiar with. The moment marks a turning point and their friendship becomes a complex tapestry of love, loss, admiration and shame.

The tale of Amir and Hassan is told with stunning depictions of compassion and truth, even when it sometimes may seem brutal. The characters and the dices they roll out are startlingly true to life. Their flaws remain gaping to our eyes, yet equally drawn are we to the painful honesty and tenderness their lives chronicle as we effortlessly begin to identify with each of them. The novel rings with the colour and vivacity of Kabul, the early morning peddlers with their loads overflowing with pomegranates, the endless strawberry fields, all painfully wiped out with another turn in the storythe Russian invasion. While Amir and his father reside safely in America, their homeland is scarred by constant warfare -- streets lined with beggars, fatherless children whose future is marginalized by poverty: "There are a lot of children in Afghanistan, but little childhood." The youthful winters spent "kite running" with Hassan seem light years away. America promises to let him shrug off his past. It does not take long, however, for Amir to discover the futility of that hope.

The story takes twists as abrupt as the snaky mountainous paths of Kabul. The adult Amir has to confront challenges on the path to manhood testing friendships and finding acceptance and forgiveness, for with forgiveness anything is possible, even the wild joy of soaring kites. The reader is called forth to an unforgettable journey where each page turned is a richly woven tapestry of utterly engaging human experiences. The climax is perhaps reached in a bit too cinematic fashion, where readers may feel that the pieces seem to fall in an all too convenient manner, but the culmination of Amir's internal struggle and the language that is filled with haunting, vivid images more than make up for it.

Devastating and inspiring, this one will take a piece out of you.