

Nadia Hlebowitsh
Iowa City

Dear Mr. Khaled Hosseini,

I can never fly a kite without thinking of Arim and Hassan...of Afghanistan...of the world...of peace.

I had never tasted 'Afghanistan' on my lips before 9-11, and even afterward, it was only grey blob on the atlas, on the other side of the world. I knew the country only through newscasts with terroristic headlines, never newscasts of Afghanistan's robust culture and internal struggles.

Your story, The Kite Runner, has haunted and enlightened me with each honest and exasperating page. I hated Arim – for becoming a frozen bystander as his servant friend Hassan was brutalized (at which point I slammed the novel down on the coffee table, only to flip through it minutes later to frantically find my way back), for taking the kite Hassan ran as his own, for planting money in Hassan's mattress. For all of Hassan's dignity, Arim treated him worse than the strays on the streets of Kabul. But this was the yet unredeemed Arim.

It happens – people drift, as kites do, but in the winds of society, in class and religion. Arim and Hassan's relationship embodied a struggle to find reconciliation between that which divides people; in their case, between the master and the servant, the Pashtun and the Hazar, and the Sunni and the Shiite. I was intrigued by the irony. Here Hassan is acting as servant, peeling mangos for Arim and tagging along, when in reality Hassan is, by blood, Arim's equal – his half-brother. It made me furious to think that Arim's treatment of Hassan didn't change significantly, even after the truth of their common father was revealed. But in the end, because of his guilt and true companionship, Amir attempts to save Hassan's son from his sad plight as an orphan. I grasped with clarity the value of our differences, that we are equals by blood – half brothers and half sisters of the human race.

I used to goof around with our classroom globe, whirling it as fast as I could, tracing the blurry continents with my finger and waiting for it to stop to reveal my future home. Each country had an equal claim and chance to make its way into my life. I realized that we are one globe – of America, of Afghanistan, of me and Arim, and of Christians, Sunni, Shi'a; or any other place, person, or religion. It seems cliché for me to say it that way, but that's what The Kite Runner did for me. It blurred the lines of differences and held the hope of finding acceptance across divisions.

I completed The Kite Runner in the eye of a late summer thunder storm. There I was, entranced on the loveseat, the coffee table nicked, my bladder chock-a-block, a pinkish blot on my forehead where my hand held up my thinking cap. I stayed there, refreshed as the quenched cornfields outside, believing in the world and hoping that we can all overcome our differences, toward the comfort of understanding, and even redemption.

I can't wait until spring, when the kites will float in the Iowan firmament, just as they did in Kabul.

Sincerely,
Naida Hlebowitsh

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