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The Kite Runner

Adapted by

MATTHEW SPANGLER

Based on the novel by

KHALED HOSSEINI

Dramatic Publishing Company

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Based on the novel *The Kite Runner* by KHALED HOSSEINI

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The Kite Runner received its world premiere on March 27, 2009, at the San Jose Repertory Theatre, Rick Lombardo, Artistic Director, Nick Nichols, Managing Director. It was directed by David Ira Goldstein. *The Kite Runner* also received a developmental production at San Jose State University in February 2007.

The film *The Kite Runner* was released by DreamWorks Studios in 2007.

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The Kite Runner

CHARACTERS

AMIR

RAHIM KHAN: Baba's business partner.

HASSAN: Amir's childhood servant and best friend.

ALI: Hassan's father and Baba's servant.

BABA: Amir's father.

ASSEF: Neighborhood bully and sociopath.

WALI: Assef's friend.

KAMAL: Assef's friend.

GENERAL TAHERI: Soraya's father.

SORAYA: Amir's wife.

DR. SCHNEIDER: American oncologist.

FARID: Driver.

ZAMAN: Orphanage director.

SOHRAB: Hassan's son.

OMAR FAISAL: Pakistani/American immigration attorney.

REBECCA ANDREWS: American embassy official in Pakistan.

PAKISTANI DOCTOR: Surgeon in a hospital in Pakistan.

ENSEMBLE:

Radio Announcer	Wife
Kite Runners and Flyers	2 Russian Soldiers (the
Woman in the Market	second should appear
Merchant in the Market	more senior than the first)
Birthday Party Guests	1980s Americans
Afghan Refugees	2 Taliban Officials
Husband	2 Taliban Guards

CASTING NOTES

The play is written for 9 men and 2 women but could be presented with a larger cast at the discretion of the company. Also, each producing company should feel free to cast according to or against the genders suggested as needed. The doubling of roles is also flexible. Here is one example configuration:

ACTOR #1: Amir

ACTOR #2: Baba, Taliban Guard, Ensemble

ACTOR #3: Hassan, Sohrab, Ensemble

ACTOR #4: Assef, Ensemble

ACTOR #5: Ali, Farid, Ensemble

ACTOR #6: Rahim Khan, Russian Soldier #2, Dr. Schneider,
Omar Faisal, Ensemble

ACTOR #7: General Taheri, Merchant, Ensemble

ACTOR #8: Wali, Russian Soldier #1, Taliban Official, Taliban
Guard, Pakistani Doctor, Ensemble

ACTOR #9: Kamal, Husband, Taliban Official, Ensemble

ACTRESS #1: Soraya, Ensemble

ACTRESS #2: Woman, Wife, Rebecca Andrews, Ensemble

PRODUCTION NOTES

AMIR: Amir should relive the events of the play as if they are happening in the present tense. Even though his monologues are written in past tense, each moment should be played with emotional intensity and immediacy as if they are happening right now. Resist the urge to play the emotions associated with the end of a scene in the beginning or middle.

ENSEMBLE: The ensemble should fill the stage with movement and embody many of the descriptive passages. The kite tournament, birthday party, escape from Afghanistan, arrival in California, flea market setup, wedding and other scenes should feature the entire cast.

SETTING: The play should be performed with minimal props and furniture. Consider a tabla player onstage to provide musical accompaniment.

SCRIPT:

“/” indicates an interruption in the middle of a line.

“[]” indicates words thought, but not said.

The Dari words in the script have been written phonetically with English-language speakers in mind.

Some of the stage directions are intended to offer possibilities rather than fixed movements and gestures.

Assef’s name for Hassan, first used in Scene 4, could be any of the following, depending on what the company prefers: fuck face, freak, or flat nose. Just be consistent and use the same name throughout.

The Kite Runner

ACT I

Scene 1

(San Francisco, California, 2001. Tabla music. A bare stage, except for maybe a blue sky backdrop, some rugs or some other kind of general atmosphere, but nothing too specific. The ENSEMBLE stands facing the audience. AMIR is C. Music fades out.)

AMIR *(to us)*. I became what I am today at the age of twelve. I remember the precise moment, crouching behind a mud wall on a frigid winter day in 1975 ... peeking into a deserted alley. It's wrong what they say about the past, about how you can bury it, because the past claws its way out.

(Beat.)

AMIR *(cont'd)*. Last summer, I got a phone call from Rahim Khan.

RAHIM KHAN. Come see me. There is a way to be good again.

AMIR *(to us)*. He was my father's friend when we lived in Afghanistan.

RAHIM KHAN. Please. Come see me.

AMIR *(to us)*. Afterward, I went for a long walk in Golden Gate Park. I saw a pair of kites looking down on San Francisco, the city I now call home. I thought about Baba, Rahim Khan, Ali and most of all, Hassan, the best kite runner in Kabul and my best friend.

(Beat.)

AMIR *(cont'd)*. I thought about how the winter of 1975 changed everything.

Scene 2

(Kabul, Afghanistan, 1973. Everyone exits, except AMIR and HASSAN, who break into a run. The boys are playing as American West cowboys. They run after each other and yell lines like, "I got you!" "No, you didn't!" "Got you that time!" "No, you didn't!!!" Ad lib. These lines and the lines below could be done in either Dari or English. If Dari: "Ma koshtom et! [I killed you!]" "Nay, na koshteem! [No, you didn't!]" "Ee dafa koshtom et! [Got you that time!]" "Pas biya! [Come back!]" Eventually, they face each other, head-on, as in a Western-style duel.)

AMIR *(cont'd)*. *Ba een shar barai-e-hardo e maw jay nayste!* [This town ain't big enough for the two of us!]

(HASSAN charges directly at AMIR, but AMIR manages to trip him, and HASSAN stumbles and falls.)

HASSAN. *Kho, kho, g'rifteem, g'rifteem! Bas ast! Ma goftom ke girifteem!* [OK, OK, you got me, you got me! Stop! I said you got me!]

(Beat.)

HASSAN *(cont'd)*. *Ey, bee'been, ma chee dawrom.* [Hey, look what I got.] *(He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a small mirror.)*

AMIR. *To aw'wurdeesh!* [You brought it!]

HASSAN. *Be-yaw, borayme sar e darakht balaw shawame!*

[Come, let's go climb the tree!]

AMIR. *Ma paysh az too mayrasom!* [Beat you to the top!]

(They climb high into a tree and, sitting on a branch, attempt to reflect the stage lights off the mirror into the eyes of the audience.)

AMIR *(cont'd, to us)*. When we were kids growing up in Kabul, Hassan and I used to climb the poplar trees in the driveway of my father's estate. We'd annoy our neighbors by reflecting sunlight into their homes with a mirror. Sometimes I'd talk Hassan into firing walnuts with his slingshot at the neighbor's one-eyed German shepherd.

HASSAN. *Ma na maykhawyom.* [I don't want to.]

AMIR *(to HASSAN)*. *Be-yaw, sawt e maw tayre maysha.*

[Come on, it'll be fun.]

HASSAN. *Nay.* [No.]

AMIR. *Lotfan. Yak dafa.* [Please. Just once.]

HASSAN. *Ma goftom nay.* [I said no.]

AMIR. *Hassan, bar e ma bokoo.* [Then do it for me, Hassan.]

(HASSAN hesitates.)

AMIR *(cont'd)*. *Yawdit bawsha ke nokar-e kee hastee.*

[Remember whose servant you are.]

HASSAN. *Kho, ama tanaw baraa'i to may'konom.* [Well, OK. But only for you.]

(HASSAN takes out his slingshot and points it in the direction of the audience. HASSAN is about to shoot the dog when ALI enters. He's doing laundry and carries a sheet over his arm.)

ALI. *Hassan, da oo balaw chee may'konee?! Az darakht paw'yeen show!* [Hassan, what are you doing up there?! Come down from that tree!]

HASSAN. *Bobakhshee Padar.* [Sorry, Father.]

AMIR (*to us, as the boys descend from the tree*). Hassan's father, Ali, was my father's servant. They'd been together for over forty years.

ALI. *Shaytawn ham ayna rah may'rokhshana ke mousul'mawnaw rah dar wakhtay namawz awzawr beta, wa dar ayn-e zaman khanda maykona. Beyaw daroon-e khana, mara bah rakht-shoyee komak ko.* [The devil shines mirrors, too, shines them to distract Muslims during prayer. And he laughs while he does it. Now, come into the house and help me with this laundry.]

HASSAN. *Kho Padar.* [Yes, Father.]

AMIR. *Ali, majbor ast ke bora? Maytaname yakzara zyard tar bazee koname? Babame qawr namaysha.* [Does he have to, Ali? Can't we play just a little while longer? I'm sure Father wouldn't mind.]

ALI EH. *Kho, bad az ee ke bazee'tawn khalas shood. Ama yak daqeeqa zeyat tar nay!* [Well ... OK, when you're done playing. But not one moment after!]

AMIR. Ali, *tashakur.* [Thanks, Ali.]

(*ALI exits.*)

AMIR (*cont'd, touching HASSAN as in tag*). You're it!

(*HASSAN tags AMIR back. AMIR chases after HASSAN, who exits. AMIR remains onstage.*)

AMIR (*cont'd, to us*). I spent my entire childhood playing with Hassan on the grounds of my father's estate. My baba was one of the richest merchants in all of Kabul, and everyone agreed he had built the most beautiful house in the

Wazir Akbar Khan, the city's most affluent neighborhood. A redbrick driveway flanked by rosebushes led to a house of marble floors and wide windows. Gold-stitched tapestries lined the walls and crystal chandeliers hung from the ceiling. A terrace overlooked a garden and rows of cherry trees. And on the edge of the garden was the servants' shack where Hassan and his father lived.

(HASSAN returns to the stage and faces out, as if frozen in memory.)

AMIR *(cont'd, to us)*. Every day when we were done playing, I would go to Baba's mansion, Hassan would go to his mud shack. It was there that Hassan was born, just one year after my mother died giving birth to me. Hassan's mother suffered a fate most Afghans consider far worse than death—she ran off with a troop of actors and musicians. So Baba hired the same woman who had nursed me to nurse Hassan. We fed from the same breast. We took our first steps on the same lawn. And under the same roof, we spoke our first words. Mine was “Baba.” His was—

HASSAN *(to AMIR)*. Amir!

AMIR *(to us)*. My name.

HASSAN *(tagging AMIR)*. You're it!

AMIR *(as he runs)*. We'd play tag, hide-and-seek, cops and robbers. We spent entire winters flying kites. And we saw our first Western together: *Rio Bravo* with John Wayne.

Scene 3

(BABA's study. ALI holds a large hatbox, around which he and BABA are standing. ALI removes the top of the box and takes out a brand new leather cowboy hat, which he presents to BABA. BABA looks over the hat, checking for imperfections.)

HASSAN. Ask him, *agha*. Go on, ask him.

AMIR. Baba, can I come in?

BABA. No. This is grownups' time.

AMIR. But Hassan and I were wondering something.

BABA (*quickly putting the cowboy hat back in the box*). What do you want, Amir?

AMIR (*entering BABA's study*). Will you take us to Iran to meet John Wayne? Please.

BABA. What?

AMIR. We want to go to Iran to meet John Wayne. He lives there. So will you take us?

BABA. What makes you think John Wayne lives in Iran?

AMIR. He's in all the movies we see at the Iranian cinema.

BABA (*laughing*). John Wayne doesn't live in Iran. Is Hassan with you?

AMIR. No.

(BABA turns and sees HASSAN lingering outside the study.)

BABA. There he is. Come in here, Hassan. Come on.

(HASSAN enters the study and approaches BABA, who puts his arm around HASSAN's shoulders.)

BABA (*cont'd*). I'll tell you how these films are made.

AMIR (*to us*). Then he explained the concept of voice dubbing.

BABA. So you see, John Wayne doesn't speak Farsi and he isn't Iranian. He's American.

(BABA laughs, pats HASSAN on the head.)

AMIR (*to us*). We saw *Rio Bravo* three times and *The Magnificent Seven* with Charles Bronson thirteen times. Turned out, Charles Bronson wasn't Iranian either.

BABA. Hassan, I have something for you.

(BABA takes the leather cowboy hat out of the box.)

BABA *(cont'd)*. It's your birthday tomorrow and I may as well give you this now. *(Presents the hat to HASSAN.)*

AMIR *(to us)*. He never missed Hassan's birthday.

HASSAN. Wow!

BABA. Just like the one Clint Eastwood wore in *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*.

HASSAN *(impressed)*. Thank you, *agha sahib!*

(HASSAN puts the hat on his head, but he puts it on backward and it doesn't fit right. BABA laughs and turns the hat around, straightening it.)

BABA. Happy birthday, Hassan.

(BABA hugs HASSAN.)

BABA *(cont'd)*. Run along, boys.

(BABA and ALI exit. As soon as they are a safe distance away, AMIR steals the hat from HASSAN and puts it on his own head.)

HASSAN. Hey!

Scene 4

(A street in Kabul. ASSEF enters. AMIR and HASSAN watch him with apprehension.)

ASSEF. Why, look who it is, it's fuck face and faggot!

AMIR. What do you want, Assef?

ASSEF. I just want to talk, faggot. That OK?

(AMIR shrugs.)

ASSEF *(cont'd)*. You plan to be in the kite-fighting tournament this winter?

AMIR. Maybe.

ASSEF. And is your Hazara here going to be your kite runner?

AMIR. Yeah.

ASSEF. Well, you better watch out, because I run all the best kites. They're mine, you hear?

(AMIR nods.)

ASSEF *(cont'd)*. Answer me when I ask you a question!
(Shoving AMIR.) You hear me?

AMIR. Yes, Assef.

ASSEF. You know why they call me "Assef the Ear Eater," don't you? I really did bite that kid's ear off. And I'll do the same to you, or worse if you cross me. Got it?

AMIR. Yes.

ASSEF. Give me that!

(ASSEF takes the cowboy hat from AMIR and puts it on his head.)

ASSEF *(cont'd)*. How do I look, boys? Just like John Wayne, huh?

(He begins shooting imaginary guns at AMIR and HASSAN, a glimpse of the sociopath to come.)

ASSEF *(cont'd)*. Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!
Bang! Bang! Bang! BANG! ...

(He continues at full volume and an increasing pace until he is out of breath.)

ASSEF *(cont'd, laughing)*. I just killed you both!

(He blows the smoke from the ends of his imaginary guns.)

HASSAN *(turning to ASSEF)*. Please leave us alone, *agha*.

ASSEF. Ooh, please leave us alone, he says. *(To AMIR.)* You let your Hazara stand up for you, is that it, Amir? *(To HASSAN.)* Hey, Hazara, I knew your mother, knew her real well. When I took her from behind, she said the same thing, please leave me alone, *agha*. What a tight little sugary cunt she had.

(ALI enters.)

ALI. What's going on here, boys?

ASSEF. Nothing ... I was just complimenting your son on what a beautiful family he comes from.

ALI. Amir, your father wants you home. Come on.

(AMIR moves quickly to join ALI. As ALI exits, HASSAN remains onstage, holding his ground with ASSEF. Tension builds. Suddenly, HASSAN snatches the cowboy hat from ASSEF's head and runs to join ALI offstage. ASSEF makes a quick move, but he is too slow. His impulse is to run after HASSAN, but ALI's presence makes him stop short.)

ASSEF. Yeah, you better run! Get out of here while you still can! *(Watching them leave and then exiting in the other direction.)* See you around, fuck face! You, too, faggot!

Scene 5

AMIR (*to us*). Assef wasn't the only one who called Hassan names. There were many derogatory words for Hazaras. My people, the Pashtuns, persecuted the Hazaras in the nineteenth century. They drove them from their land and burned their homes, because Pashtuns are Sunni Muslims whereas Hazaras are Shia. I spent the first twelve years of my life playing with Hassan, but back then, I never really thought of him as a friend. History and religion aren't easy to overcome, and in the end, I was Pashtun, he was Hazara. I was Sunni, he was Shia. Nothing was ever going to change that. But we were kids who had learned to crawl together, and nothing was going to change that either.

(Beat.)

AMIR (*cont'd*). There was a pomegranate tree on the hill behind my father's property. One day I carved our names into it.

(HASSAN enters, and AMIR joins him. Shift to the hill behind BABA's mansion. They stop running at the base of a tree, and AMIR begins carving into it with the knife.)

HASSAN. What does it say, Amir *agha*?

AMIR. It says "Amir and Hassan, the sultans of Kabul!"

HASSAN. That makes it official then. This tree belongs to us!

(Beat.) Did you bring the book?

AMIR (*pulls out a leather-bound book*). Right here.

(AMIR and HASSAN sit on the ground and start reading the book.)

AMIR (*cont'd, to us*). That Hassan would grow up illiterate like most servants was decided the minute he was born. So I read to him. Sometimes, we'd come across a word he didn't know.

HASSAN. Amir *agha*, what does that word mean?

AMIR. Which one?

HASSAN. Imbecile.

AMIR. Imbecile? You don't know what imbecile means?

HASSAN. No.

AMIR. But it's such a common word, everyone knows what it means. It means ... smart, intelligent. I'll use it in a sentence. "When it comes to words, Hassan is an imbecile."

HASSAN. Ah, I see, thanks Amir *agha*.

AMIR. You're welcome.

HASSAN. Go on, read the story!

AMIR (*to us*). Hassan's favorite book was the *Shahnamah*, the tenth-century epic of ancient Persian heroes. And his favorite story was "Rostam and Sohrab." In the story, the great warrior Rostam mortally wounds his nemesis, Sohrab, only to discover that Sohrab is his long-lost son. (*To HASSAN.*) With his dying breath, Sohrab looked up at Rostam and said, "Thou art indeed my father, and thou hast stained thy sword in the life-blood of thy son."

HASSAN. Read it again, *agha*.

AMIR. No more today.

HASSAN. *Please*, read it again!

AMIR. We should be getting home. Come on.

(*HASSAN exits.*)

AMIR (*cont'd, to us*). Hassan loved that story. But personally, I didn't see the tragedy of Rostam's fate. Don't all fathers harbor a desire to kill their sons?