

= A Thousand Splendid Suns =

A Thousand Splendid Suns is a 2007 novel by Afghan @-@ American author Khaled Hosseini . It is his second , following his bestselling 2003 debut , The Kite Runner . Mariam is an illegitimate child , and suffers from both the stigma surrounding her birth along with the abuse she faces throughout her marriage . Laila , born a generation later , is comparatively privileged during her youth until their lives intersect and she is also forced to accept a marriage proposal from Rasheed , Mariam 's husband .

Hosseini has remarked that he regards the novel as a " mother @-@ daughter story " in contrast to The Kite Runner , which he considers a " father @-@ son story " . It continues some of the themes used in his previous work , such as the familial aspects , but focuses primarily on female characters and their roles in Afghan society .

A Thousand Splendid Suns was released on May 22 , 2007 , and received favorable prepublication reviews from Kirkus , Publishers Weekly , Library Journal , and Booklist , becoming a number one New York Times bestseller for fifteen weeks following its release . During its first week on the market , it sold over one million copies . Columbia Pictures purchased film rights in 2007 and confirmed intentions to create a movie adaption of the book .

= = Creation = =

= = = Title = = =

The title of the book comes from a line in the Josephine Davis translation of the poem " Kabul " , by the 17th @-@ century Iranian poet Saib Tabrizi :

" Every street of Kabul is enthralling to the eye

Through the bazaars , caravans of Egypt pass

One could not count the moons that shimmer on her roofs

And the thousand splendid suns that hide behind her walls "

In an interview , Khaled Hosseini explains , " I was searching for English translations of poems about Kabul , for use in a scene where a character bemoans leaving his beloved city , when I found this particular verse . I realized that I had found not only the right line for the scene , but also an evocative title in the phrase ' a thousand splendid suns , ' which appears in the next @-@ to @-@ last stanza . "

= = = Inspiration = = =

When asked what led him to write a novel centered on two Afghan women , Hosseini responded :

" I had been entertaining the idea of writing a story of Afghan women for some time after I 'd finished writing The Kite Runner . That first novel was a male @-@ dominated story . All the major characters , except perhaps for Amir 's wife Soraya , were men . There was a whole facet of Afghan society which I hadn 't touched on in The Kite Runner , an entire landscape that I felt was fertile with story ideas ... In the spring of 2003 , I went to Kabul , and I recall seeing these burqa @-@ clad women sitting at street corners , with four , five , six children , begging for change . I remember watching them walking in pairs up the street , trailed by their children in ragged clothes , and wondering how life had brought them to that point ... I spoke to many of those women in Kabul . Their life stories were truly heartbreaking ... When I began writing A Thousand Splendid Suns , I found myself thinking about those resilient women over and over . Though no one woman that I met in Kabul inspired either Laila or Mariam , their voices , faces , and their incredible stories of survival were always with me , and a good part of my inspiration for this novel came from their collective spirit . "

= = = Writing = = =

Hosseini disclosed that in some ways , A Thousand Splendid Suns was more difficult to write than his first novel , The Kite Runner . This is partly because when he penned The Kite Runner , " no one was waiting for it . " He also found his second novel to be more " ambitious " than the first due to its larger number of characters , its dual focus on Mariam and Laila , and its covering of a multi @-@ generational @-@ period of nearly forty @-@ five @-@ years . However , he stated , " As I began to write , as the story picked up pace and I found myself immersed in the world of Mariam and Laila , these apprehensions vanished on their own . The developing story captured me and enabled me to tune out the background noise and get on with the business of inhabiting the world I was creating . " The characters " took on a life of their own " at this point and " became very real for [ him ] " .

Similar to The Kite Runner , the manuscript had to be extensively revised ; Hosseini divulged that he ultimately wrote the book five times before it was complete . The novel 's anticipated release was first announced in October 2006 , when it was described as a story about " family , friendship , faith and the salvation to be found in love " .

= = Summary = =

The novel centers around two women , Mariam and Laila , how their lives become intertwined after a series of drastic events , and their subsequent friendship and support for each other in the backdrop of Kabul in the 20th and 21st century . It is split into four parts that focus on individual stories : Part one is about Mariam , part two is on Laila , part three is on the relationship between the two women , and Laila 's life with Tariq is in part four . The last section also happens to be the only part written in the present tense .

Mariam lives in a kolba on the outskirts of Herat with her embittered mother . Jalil , her father , is a wealthy businessman who owns a cinema and lives in the town with three wives and nine children . Mariam is his illegitimate daughter , and she is prohibited to live with them , but Jalil visits her every Thursday . On her fifteenth birthday , Mariam wants her father to take her to see Pinocchio at his movie theater , against the pleas of her mother . When he does not show up , she hikes into town and goes to his house . He refuses to see her , and she ends up sleeping on the street . In the morning , Mariam returns home to find that her mother has committed suicide out of fear that her daughter had deserted her . Mariam is then taken to live in her father 's house . Jalil arranges for her to be married to Rasheed , a shoemaker from Kabul who is thirty @-@ years her senior . In Kabul , Mariam becomes pregnant seven successive times , but is never able to carry a child to term . This is a sad , disquieting reality for both Rasheed and Mariam . Ultimately Rasheed grows more and more despondent over his wife 's inability to have a child and particularly a son . As their marriage wears on Rasheed gradually becomes more and more abusive .

Part Two introduces Laila . She is a girl growing up in Kabul who is close friends with Tariq , a boy living in her neighborhood . They eventually develop a romantic relationship despite being aware of the social boundaries between men and women in Afghan society . War comes to Afghanistan , and Kabul is bombarded by rocket attacks . Tariq 's family decides to leave the city , and the emotional farewell between Laila and Tariq culminates with them making love . Laila 's family also decides to leave Kabul , but as they are packing a rocket destroys the house , killing her parents and severely injuring Laila . Laila is subsequently taken in by Rasheed and Mariam .

After recovering from her injuries , Laila discovers that she is pregnant with Tariq 's child . After being informed by Abdul Sharif that Tariq has died , she agrees to marry Rasheed , a man eager to have a young and attractive second wife in hopes of having a son with her . When Laila gives birth to a daughter , Aziza , Rasheed is displeased and suspicious . This results in him becoming abusive towards Laila . Mariam and Laila eventually become confidants and best friends . They plan to run away from Rasheed and leave Kabul but are caught at the bus station . Rasheed beats them and deprives them of water for several days , almost killing Aziza .

A few years later , Laila gives birth to Zalmai , Rasheed 's son . The Taliban has risen to power and imposed harsh rules on the Afghan population , prohibiting women from appearing in public without a male relative . There is a drought , and living conditions in Kabul become poor . Rasheed 's

workshop burns down , and he is forced to take jobs for which he is ill @-@ suited . He sends Aziza to an orphanage . Laila endures a number of beatings from the Taliban when caught alone on the streets in attempts to visit her daughter .

Then one day Tariq appears outside the house , and he and Laila are reunited . Laila realizes that Rasheed had hired Abdul Sharif to inform her about Tariq 's fake death , so that he could marry her . When Rasheed returns home from work , Zalmai tells his father about the visitor . Rasheed starts to savagely beat Laila . He nearly strangles her , but Mariam intervenes and kills Rasheed with a shovel . Afterwards , Mariam confesses to killing Rasheed in order to draw attention away from Laila and Tariq . Mariam is publicly executed , allowing Laila and Tariq to leave for Pakistan with Aziza and Zalmai . They spend their days working at a guest house in Murree , a summer retreat .

After the fall of the Taliban , Laila and Tariq return to Afghanistan . They stop in the village where Mariam was raised , and discover a package that Mariam 's father left behind for her : a videotape of Pinocchio , a small sack of money , and a letter . Laila reads the letter and discovers that Jalil had regretted sending Mariam away . Laila and Tariq return to Kabul and use the money to fix up the orphanage , where Laila starts working as a teacher . Laila is pregnant with her third child , and if it is a girl , Laila has already named her Mariam .

= = Characters = =

Mariam is an ethnic Tajik born in Herat , 1959 . She is the illegitimate child of Jalil and Nana . She suffers shame throughout her childhood because of the circumstances of her birth . Khaled Hosseini described her portrayal : " The key word with Mariam is that she is isolated in every sense of the word . She is a woman who is detached from the day @-@ to @-@ day norms of human existence . Really , she just wants connection with another human being . " Despite initially resenting Laila , she becomes a " friend and a doting alternative mother " to her through the " common hardship " of being married to the " abusive , psychologically imposing " Rasheed .

Laila is an ethnic Tajik . Born in 1978 , to Hakim and Fariba , she is a beautiful and intelligent girl coming from a family in which the father is university @-@ educated and a teacher . Hosseini states that compared to Mariam , Laila " had a much more fulfilling relationship with her father , her girlfriends and her childhood friend , Tariq . She expected to finish school and is looking for personal fulfillment . These are two very different representations of women . " Her life becomes tied to Mariam 's when she becomes the second wife of Rasheed , Mariam 's husband . This originally draws resentment from Mariam , who " [ feels ] her territory infringed upon " . Despite this , " Laila becomes her daughter for all practical purposes " due to Mariam 's childlessness , struggles , and abuse they both face during the marriage . Towards the end of the novel she becomes a schoolteacher at the orphanage where Aziza had stayed .

Rasheed is an ethnic Pashtun , a shoemaker , and the antagonist of the novel . He marries Mariam through an arrangement with Jalil , and later marries Laila as well . After suffering years of domestic abuse at his hands , Mariam bludgeons Rasheed to death with a shovel during a violent struggle . Hosseini stated that he hoped to create a multi @-@ layered character in Rasheed , saying , " Rasheed 's the embodiment of the patriarchal , tribal character . In writing him , I didn 't want to write him as an irredeemable villain . He is a reprehensible person , but there are moments of humanity , such as his love for his son . " He identified an encounter with an Afghan man four years earlier as the foundation for this character ; the man " had a very sweet , subservient wife " and had not yet informed her that he was planning to marry again .

Tariq , an ethnic Pashtun born in 1976 , is a boy who grew up in Kabul with Laila . He lost a leg to a land mine at the age of five . They eventually evolve from best friends to lovers ; after a decade of separation they are married and expecting a child by the end of the novel .

Nana is Mariam 's mother and a former servant of Jalil . Mariam 's birth is the result of an affair between Nana and Jalil . Jalil 's favoritism towards his wives and legitimate children leaves Nana bitter towards Jalil . She hangs herself when Mariam is fifteen after Mariam journeys to Jalil 's house on her birthday . Nana perceives this to be betrayal and regards as an act of desertion .

Mullah Faizullah , a Sufi , is Mariam 's elderly Koran teacher and friend . He dies of natural causes

in 1989 .

Jalil is Mariam 's father , a wealthy man who had three wives before he fathered Mariam . He marries Mariam to Rasheed after Nana 's death , but later regrets sending her away . He dies in 1987 .

Hakim is Laila 's father . He is a well @-@ educated and a progressive schoolteacher . He is killed in a rocket explosion along with Fariba .

Fariba is Laila 's mother . In Part One , during her brief meeting with Mariam , she is depicted as cheerful , but her happy nature is disrupted when her two sons , Ahmad and Noor , leave home to go to war and are later killed . She spends nearly all of her time in bed mourning her sons until the Mujahideen are victorious , and is later killed in a rocket explosion along with Hakim .

Aziza , born in the spring of 1993 , is the daughter of Laila and Tariq , conceived when Laila was fourteen . When the news of Tariq 's alleged death arrives , in order to hide the child 's illegitimacy and provide for herself , Laila decides to marry Rasheed . Aziza 's birth marks the beginning of Laila 's fall from favor with Rasheed and the friendship between Mariam and Laila .

Zalmai , born in September 1997 , to Laila and Rasheed . He serves as a redeeming facet of Rasheed , idolizing him despite the abuse to his mother and Mariam . Zalmai remains unaware of the fact that Mariam killed Rasheed and continuously asks Laila about him , who lies by saying that he simply left for some time . After initially blaming Tariq for his father 's mysterious disappearance , he comes to accept Tariq as a father @-@ figure .

= = Themes = =

= = = Family = = =

When asked about common themes in *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* , Khaled Hosseini replied :

" Both novels are multigenerational , and so the relationship between parent and child , with all of its manifest complexities and contradictions , is a prominent theme . I did not intend this , but I am keenly interested , it appears , in the way parents and children love , disappoint , and in the end honor each other . In one way , the two novels are corollaries : *The Kite Runner* was a father @-@ son story , and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* can be seen as a mother @-@ daughter story . "

He ultimately considers both novels to be " love stories " in that it is love that " draws characters out of their isolation , that gives them the strength to transcend their own limitations , to expose their vulnerabilities , and to perform devastating acts of self @-@ sacrifice " .

= = = Women in Afghanistan = = =

Hosseini visited Afghanistan in 2003 , and " heard so many stories about what happened to women , the tragedies that they had endured , the difficulties , the gender @-@ based violence that they had suffered , the discrimination , the being barred from active life during the Taliban , having their movement restricted , being banned essentially from practicing their legal , social rights , political rights " . This motivated him to write a novel centered on two Afghan women .

Washington Post writer Jonathan Yardley suggests that " the central theme of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is the place of women in Afghan society " , pointing to a passage in which Mariam 's mother states , " Learn this now and learn it well , my daughter : Like a compass needle that points north , a man 's accusing finger always finds a woman . Always . You remember that , Mariam . "

In the book , both Mariam and Laila are forced into accepting a marriage to Rasheed , who requires them to wear a burqa before it is implemented by law under the Taliban . He later becomes increasingly abusive . A *Riverhead Trades Weekly* review states that the novel consistently shows the " patriarchal despotism where women are agonizingly dependent on fathers , husbands and especially sons , the bearing of male children being their sole path to social status . "

= = Critical reception = =

In the first week following its release , A Thousand Splendid Suns sold over one million copies , becoming a number @-@ one New York Times bestseller for fifteen weeks . Time magazine 's Lev Grossman placed it at number three in the Top 10 Fiction Books of 2007 , and praised it as a " dense , rich , pressure @-@ packed guide to enduring the unendurable . " Jonathan Yardley said in the Washington Post " Book World " , " Just in case you 're wondering whether Khaled Hosseini 's A Thousand Splendid Suns is as good as The Kite Runner , here 's the answer : No . It 's better . "

A Thousand Splendid Suns received significant praise from reviewers , with Publishers Weekly calling it " a powerful , harrowing depiction of Afghanistan " and USA Today describing the prose as " achingly beautiful " . Lisa See of The New York Times attributed the book 's success to Hosseini " [ understanding ] the power of emotion as few other popular writers do " . Natasha Walter from The Guardian wrote , " Hosseini is skilled at telling a certain kind of story , in which events that may seem unbearable - violence , misery and abuse - are made readable . He doesn 't gloss over the horrors his characters live through , but something about his direct , explanatory style and the sense that you are moving towards a redemptive ending makes the whole narrative , for all its tragedies , slip down rather easily . "

Cathleen Medwick gave the novel a highly positive review in O , the Oprah Magazine :

" Love may not be the first thing that comes to mind when you consider the war @-@ ravaged landscape of Afghanistan . But that is the emotion ? subterranean , powerful , beautiful , illicit , and infinitely patient ? that suffuses the pages of Khaled Hosseini 's A Thousand Splendid Suns . As in his best @-@ selling first novel , The Kite Runner , Hosseini movingly examines the connections between unlikely friends , the fissures that open up between parents and children , the intransigence of quiet hearts . "

The New York Times writer Michiko Kakutani wrote a more critical review , describing the opening as " heavy @-@ handed " and early events in the novel as " soap @-@ opera @-@ ish " . Despite these objections , she concluded , " Gradually , however , Mr. Hosseini 's instinctive storytelling skills take over , mowing down the reader 's objections through sheer momentum and will . He succeeds in making the emotional reality of Mariam and Laila 's lives tangible to us , and by conjuring their day @-@ to @-@ day routines , he is able to give us a sense of what daily life was like in Kabul ? both before and during the harsh reign of the Taliban . " Similarly , Yvonne Zipp of The Christian Science Monitor concluded that A Thousand Splendid Suns was ultimately " a little shaky as a work of literature " .

The depictions of the lead female characters , Mariam and Laila , were praised by several commentators . John Freeman from The Houston Chronicle found them " enormously winning " while Carol Memmott from USA Today further described them as " stunningly heroic characters whose spirits somehow grasp the dimmest rays of hope " . Medwick summed up the portrayals : " Mariam , branded as a harami , or bastard , and forced into an abusive marriage at the age of fifteen , and Laila , a beauty groomed for success but shrouded almost beyond recognition by repressive sharia law and the husband she and Mariam share . The story , epic in scope and spanning three decades , follows these two indomitable women whose fortunes mirror those of their beloved and battered country ? ' nothing pretty to look at , but still standing ' ? and who find in each other the strength they need to survive . "

Jennifer Reese from Entertainment Weekly dubbed Rasheed " one of the most repulsive males in recent literature " . Lisa See said that , with the exception of Tariq , " the male characters seem either unrelentingly evil or pathetically weak " and opinionated , " If a woman wrote these things about her male characters , she would probably be labeled a man @-@ hater . "

= = Film = =

Columbia Pictures owns the movie rights to the novel . Steven Zaillian finished writing the first draft of the screenplay in 2009 and is also slated to direct ; Scott Rudin has signed on as a producer . In May 2013 , studios confirmed a tentative release date of 2015 .

