

The kite flying over
the sky, the
nightingale singing at
night

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Would you do everything for a person who saved your life? Would you save your friends when you find them in danger? It seems that it is easy to simply answer “ yes” to these questions.

However, what if the social hierarchy becomes the barrier between you and the one you care about? What if you can get something you have been longed for only if your friend of a lower social class gets hurt? These contradictions are exactly what Takeo and Amir encounter in the novels *Across the Nightingale Floor* by Lian Hearn and *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini respectively. The two characters are trying to discover their identities and gain acceptance, either from their love interest, family, or friends. Although Takeo and Amir both seek acceptance and a sense of security when growing up, they are distinct in how the social hierarchy impacts them and in their ability to feel whole. Even though Takeo initially feels uncomfortable about killing in general, he seeks revenge against Iida for himself and demonstrates his loyalty. Up until the massacre, Takeo “[has] spent [his] whole life among the Hidden, who are forbidden to kill and taught to forgive each other” (Hearn, 7). Iida’s appearance, however, changes Takeo’s values as he witnesses horrifying cruelty against member of the Hidden.

When encountering Iida, “[s]omething stirred [Takeo’s] blood, telling [him] [he] would not die before Iida” (6). At that moment, “ Revenge took [him] as a pupil” (7). Unfortunately, Takeo is discovered by Iida and almost killed—but thanks to Lord Shigeru, Takeo’s life is saved. While Takeo “ disliked cruelty and shrank from the idea of killing,” as he “ learned more about Shigeru’s desire for revenge” (76), Takeo convinces himself that “[he] could kill,” (77) <https://assignbuster.com/the-kite-flying-over-the-sky-the-nightingale-singing-at-night-essay-samples/>

and that “[he] will kill [Iida],” “[he] will learn how” (77). While Takeo has been trained to kill and is supposed to kill anyone who might know his identity, he fails to kill the drunk old man who recognizes him.

At this point, Takeo thinks that “ There is no need to kill him. [The man]’s decided [he’s] not Tomasu, and even if he has his doubts, he will never dare voice them to anyone. He is one of the Hidden, after all” (96). Takeo is unwilling to kill innocent people, even if they may be a threat to him. Yet as time moves on, he recognizes the need to kill those who threaten him or those he loves. Once Takeo discovers that Iida has killed Lord Shigeru, Takeo “ felt the weight of Jato against [his] flank” (263).

Takeo is ready to fight against Iida on behalf of Lord Shigeru. After entering the castle of Iida, Takeo admits that “[he] [is] the boy from Mino” (265), and he is ready to kill Ando without any hesitation “ for [his] people,” “[a]nd for Lord Otori” (265). Even though Kaede ends up killing Iida before Takeo gets there, he has “ Jato ready” (266) to use to end Iida’s life. Because of the massacre of his family, Takeo embraces the idea of seeking revenge and follows through with it. Because of the clan feuds and the rigid social hierarchy in this fictional society, Takeo struggles to reconcile his desires with the injustices and social inequalities of the country.

Takeo and Kaede fall in love with each other the first time they meet. In one scenario, Takeo and Kaede along with Lord Shigeru and Lady Maruyama spend a night among the Tohan clan. While talking with Takeo alone, Kaede admits her love to him. Nevertheless, Kaede points out that “ marriages are

made for reasons of duty and alliance” (164). Therefore, she clearly knows “that love is not for [their] class” (165).

At the end of the fictional story, Kaede is “ begging [Takeo] to marry [her]” (284) because “[she] [is] only safe with [him]” (284). This is exactly how Takeo feels. Nevertheless, Takeo refuses her request since he knows that “[t]he Tribe will kill [him]” (284) if he stays with Kaede. Moreover, Kaede’s arranged marriage with Otori Shigeru and the fact that Takeo does not belong the clan even complicate their ability to marry. Also because of the restrictions set by different clans and social classes, and Takeo’s divided loyalties, the love between Takeo and Kaede cannot yet lead to marriage. Although Takeo struggles to reconcile the three strands of his identities, he has to embrace one at the end, which leaves him not feeling whole, with several issues unresolved.

After saving Tomasu from Iida and his men, Lord Shigeru changes Tomasu’s name to Takeo because “[t]hat’s a common name among the Hidden” and Tomasu had better “ get rid of it” (10). More importantly, this marks a significant turning point in Takeo’s life as he has to deny his old identity. Then when visiting Lord Shigeru, Kenji reveals to Takeo that his father is actually Kikuta Isamu, whose “ parents were cousins and he combined the strongest gifts of the Kikuta” (68). This makes Takeo “ look at [his] own long fingers” and wonder if their purpose is “ to kill” (70). Takeo has been raised among the Hidden, who are taught to forgive and not to kill. As he is exposed to the values of the Kikuta, he finds them extremely disturbing but also intriguing in contrast to those of the Hidden.

Even more unexpectedly, the Tribe members “ have an interest in this boy, which [they] will not relinquish” because of his outstanding potential (72).

This struggle of identity continues throughout the story. Initially, Takeo asserts that his loyalty is to Shigeru. Following his death, however, and Takeo’s contract with the Tribe, Takeo accepts that his duty is to the Tribe. Takeo’s decision to refuse Lord Shigeru’s inheritance angers Arai.

Takeo then admits that something “ commands [him]”— “[he] [is] under an obligation” (278). Finally, even though Takeo’s “ choice” is to join the Tribe regardless of his ties to Lord Shigeru and Kaede, it is not completely voluntary. While Takeo develops his powers and his courage with the help of mentors as he faces great dangers, Amir in *The Kite Runner* lacks courage initially and sacrifices Hassan for the blue kite in an attempt to gain his father’s approval. Enlightened by his mentors such as Lord Shigeru and Kenji, Takeo gains courage and power as a teenager. In contrast, driven by his own misdeeds, Amir’s coming-of-age story concludes when he redeems himself at the age of forty. Since early childhood, Amir has felt insecure because of his lack of affection from Baba.

For example, once when Amir hears the conversation between Baba and Rahim Khan, Baba says that “[i]f [he] hadn’t seen the doctor pull [Amir] out of [his] wife with [his] own eyes, [he’d] never believe [Amir’s] [his] son” (Hosseini, 25). Likewise, when Baba finds a doctor to cure Hassan’s harelip, Amir “[wishes] that [he] too had some kind of scar that would beget Baba’s sympathy” (46). The sense of insecurity and jealousy drives Amir to find ways to win Baba’s heart. Yet he wrongly thinks that winning the kite

tournament and bringing home the kite would be “[his] key to Baba’s heart” (78). Right before Amir sees Hassan getting raped, “[Amir] opened [his] mouth, almost said something,” but “[he] just watched. Paralyzed” (80).

Greatly driven by selfishness and an eagerness to win Baba’s love, Amir chooses not to save Hassan, his closest friend, from Assef. Amir’s decision later leads to feelings of an overwhelming guilt, which plagues him into adulthood. While the feudal society’s demands and Takeo’s ties to the Tribe keep him from following his desires, Afghani society places Amir in a higher social class than Hassan and in charge of Hassan, making Amir’s disloyalty to Hassan immoral and therefore more egregious than Takeo’s decision to leave Kaede. When Assef is contemplating raping Hassan, he calls Hassan “a lucky Hazara” (79), because “it’s only going to cost [him] that blue kite” (79). The scorn in Assef’s tone shows how individuals discriminate against other ethnic groups, in this case the Hazaras. Moreover, Assef as a member of the majority group the Pashtans, humiliates Hassan by asking him if Amir would “do the same for [Hassan]” (79).

Assef points out that “[Hassan’s] nothing but an ugly pet,” “[s]omething [Amir] can play with when he’s bored,” and “something Amir can kick when he’s angry” (79). Because of the social hierarchy, Amir does not treat Hassan as his real friend consistently. Even when Hassan responds to Assef’s questions, “[h]e looked flushed” when he claims that “Amir agha and [him] are friends” (80). Hassan is brave enough to express his loyalty despite the lower social class he is in. Yet Amir is unwilling to treat him as a real friend in public because of the social gap between them.

Therefore, while Takeo cannot change the rules of society, Amir has the power to do whatever he wants, making him responsible for Hassan's well-being. Because of his multiple identities, Takeo eventually has to choose one, leaving him feeling conflicted, while Amir is eventually able to redeem his and his father's misdeeds and find contentment. After learning about the brotherhood between him and Hassan, Amir starts to reflect upon his behavior that drove Hassan out of his house. He thinks that if he had not acted on his childish jealousy, "[m]aybe Baba would have brought them along to America" and "Hassan would have had a home of his own now, a job, a family, a life in a country where no one cared that he was a Hazara, where most people didn't even know what a Hazara was" (244). After his reflections, Amir decides to act on Sohrab's behalf and redeem himself.

In order to secure Sohrab from the Taliban Regime, Amir decides to fight against Assef. "[Amir's] body was broken", "but [he] felt healed. Healed at last. [Amir] laughed" (289) as he thinks that he should have received the beating of Assef years ago so as to protect Hassan. Thus, while being beaten by Assef, Amir feels relief.

Later, when Amir tries to get Sohrab out of Afghanistan, Sohrab is actually afraid and "[doesn't] want to go to another orphanage" (349). Amir promises that he "won't ever let that happen" (349). Even though some governmental hold up becomes the obstacle of their plan, and Sohrab even tries to commit suicide, Amir proves his determination by protecting Sohrab to the best of his ability. At the end of the story, Sohrab finally decides to fly the kite with Amir and shows him an innocent smile. "It was only a smile," but Amir would

take it “ with open arms” (349). For Amir, Sohrab’s smile is the best present he could ever receive as it symbolizes Sohrab’s happiness and forgiveness.

And the kite they fly together symbolizes the key that will open Sohrab up to the idea of a trusting relationship with Amir. More importantly, Amir’s actions demonstrate his maturity and commitment to a new code of conduct. In contrast to Takeo who is still conflicted about his identity and unresolved issues, Amir essentially succeeds in achieving redemption, finding his identity, and gaining Sohrab’s trust. The journey to self-awareness, often referred to as “ coming of age”, can be full of anxiety and doubt. Despite starting his new life with a new identity, Takeo is mentored by Lord Shigeru and Kenji, and successfully gains courage and demonstrates his willingness to make sacrifices for the sake of Lord Shigeru. Yet after Takeo gets Shigeru down off the wall, he must return to the Tribe, and leave Kaede.

While tracking Amir’s growth, his maturity starts with misfortune—the disapproval of his father and his failure to consistently treat his closest friend well. When discrimination derived from the social hierarchy comes into play, Assef ruthlessly rapes Hassan, a “ humble Hazara” in the Afghani society. This event essentially becomes the turning point of Amir’s life that seeks redemption and wholeness. Fortunately, as Amir steps into his adulthood, he has the chance to redeem himself from his earlier betrayals. Even though similar factors are affecting the lives of both protagonists Takeo and Amir, the tracks of their lives turn out to take somewhat different routes.

Amir turns out to be a more loyal and responsible person, and Takeo becomes a more courageous and capable “ samurai”. However, while Amir

starts to feel trusted and whole at the end of the novel, Takeo gives the Jato to Makoto, still leaving issues of his identity unresolved.