

## A Thousand Splendid Suns

by Khaled Hosseini

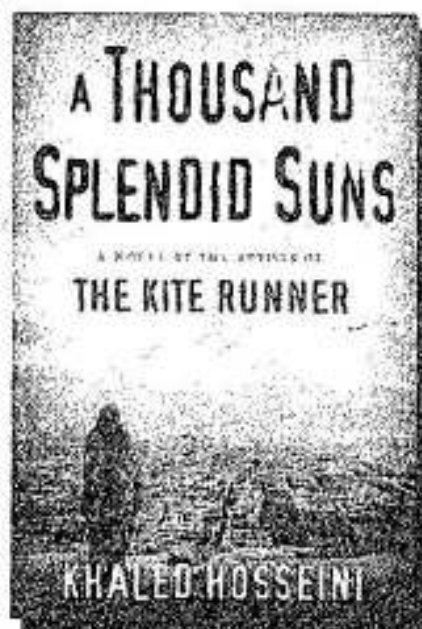
(Bloomsbury)

The title of this latest novel from the author of the international bestseller *The Kite Runner* creates illusionary warmth. It begins with simple language and a structure easy to follow, easily drawing you in, but then you recoil with horror as the nasty details begins to emerge, leaving a metallic taste in the mouth – especially if you are a woman.

Hosseini allows his readers a glimpse of the painful and devastating effects of war – hunger, anarchy and oppression – on the lives of the ordinary people of Afghanistan during Russia's invasion, the Taliban's brief rule and America's retribution after 9/11.

The main protagonist, Mariam, never had a chance nor any level playing field: she had the misfortune of being born a harami (illegitimate child) in a patriarchal society already heavily laden with the strict Islamic code for living, where women walk through life as a shadow.

Disowned by her family and rejected by society, Mariam lives with her mother Nana in a small hovel in the wilds of Herat kindly



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provided by Mariam's father, who comes to visit her weekly without fail until her 15th birthday, when he suddenly fails to turn up. Convinced that something untoward must have happened, Mariam goes out to look for him against the entreaties of her mother.

So begins a series of tragedies that mark the stages of Mariam's life as she and other women in her life struggle to survive against the starvation, brutality and fear prevalent in their lives in 1980s Afghanistan – a misogynistic environment that still echoes today.

Hosseini's masterful narrative is merciless, the scenery hard to stomach and the atmosphere steeped in blood and dust in his attempt to bring to the fore how a society can be ripped apart by political, religious and power struggles for hegemony – a case of the grass bearing the brunt of elephants' fighting.

'Where is the hope?' you might ask after such a description. But as you grit your teeth through Mariam's struggles, there is a hope for a better tomorrow that shines through as bright as the suns of the book's title – making this one a winner.

You'll certainly vow to complain less in the face of life's daunting obstacles.



Ifedinma Dimbo, originally from Nigeria, is the author of a soon-to-be-published women's novel *She Was Foolish?* More details about the author, her work and the Irish Writers' Exchange can be found online at [www.irishwriters-exchange.com](http://www.irishwriters-exchange.com)

Review by Ifedinma Dimbo