

**A Friend for George**  
by

Harriet Barbir

EXT. JUNIOR SCHOOL. PLAYGROUND - DAY

O.S sounds of CHILDREN, playful - happy noises as  
AMIR, an Arabic boy aged 8, ambles towards the gate.  
Hand on gate, he hesitates before opening. It SQUEAKS.

JACK, 11, looks up from his book, raises his hand to  
wave to Amir, but sees

JOSEPH, 12, a thickset, thug of a kid, scowling at him,  
and that raised hand in particular.

Jack makes like he's straightening his hair with his  
hand, hurries away.

Joseph, glares at Amir nudges...

ROGER, 11, who wipes a hand over his running nose. He  
nudges TOMMY, 11, who is enjoying torturing an ant.

Joseph, Roger and Tommy, their arms folded, stare at  
Amir, waiting for him to make a move.

The SCHOOL BELL RINGS. Children begin to file inside.

Amir runs for the school entrance but is cornered.

Joseph holds Amir in a half-nelson.

Amir, hands over his lunch money - routine.

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

Joseph drags Amir into the toilets.

Tommy and Roger rifle through his schoolbag, find a  
sketch book. Amir tries to grab it.

AMIR

Give it to me.

JOSEPH

You want it? Go get it.

Joseph throws the pages into the toilet, holds Amir by  
the neck, about to plunge his head under the water.

Amir inhales deeply, and holds his breath.

INT. BATHROOM - EVENING

Amir's hair sways like seaweed as it float under water -  
his face, still, beneath it, holding his breath.

Amir emerges from the water, exhales loudly.

INT. AMIR'S BEDROOM - LONDON - DAY

A Clock ticks the seconds away. It's 11.15.

AMIR (8) still in pyjamas, sits on his bed, twiddling with the ribbons on a birthday present, and listens to

The raised VOICES of his father AHMED and mother RANA, that seep through the thin walls into his room.

RANA (O.S.)

But what if something happens to Amir?

AHMED (O.S.)

Life happens. We cannot control it.

INT. AMIR'S BEDROOM - DAY

Amir leans back against the wall, on which his colourful drawings of fish and seascapes are pinned.

He shuts his eyes until his parents' voices are drowned out.

INT. ADJOINING ROOM

Worry beads shuffle briskly through his fingers as AHMED, 40, goes to the window.

He studies an invitation card under the light.

CARD - AMIR, you are invited to a SWIMMING PARTY, 12 O'clock, September 24th.

A veil of smoke surrounds RANA (30) as she exhales. She sets the cigarette on an ashtray on the coffee table.

On the table is a box.

Rana opens it and removes a pair of the latest trainers, for Amir.

The slits of a blind cast their shadow over Ahmed as he looks out the window at the busy street below.

AHMED

Bullies pick on those who don't fit in  
- Amir will fit in.

RANA

But...

AHMED

What? You prefer he should stay here?  
Here, with his best friend George?

(exasperated)

Ya Habibti! George is a goldfish!

INT. AMIR'S BEDROOM

Amir's face, seen through the fish bowl, is distorted - his brown eyes, more huge. He smiles as George swims.

The goldfish bowl rests on the desk beside Amir as he sits drawing a fish on a small pad of paper.

Amir adds a tail, the finishing touch, to his goldfish, picks up the pad and flicks rapidly through the pages.

The goldfish appears to swim.

Amir, pleased, shows the flicker book to George.

AMIR

Look, George. You have a friend.

George darts away, then, curious, swims to the drawing.

RANA enters, and hands Amir the new trainers.

She places a necklace with a blue "evil eye" pendant around his neck to ward off bad luck.

RANA

Y'allah, get ready, Amir. We must be there at noon.

Amir glances at the clock - it's 11.19.

Amir looks at the trainers, then at his drawing of the goldfish, and the tail fin.

He has an idea. He goes to the wardrobe.

RANA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Come, Amir. It's not polite to be late.

INT/EXT. CAR

Worry beads hang like a noose, swing from the rear-view mirror as the Rana drives.

Amir fidgets with the "evil eye" pedant, pointing it towards the window as he looks out.

The "eye" looks too.

The leisure centre looms up ahead of them.

Rana stops at a traffic light, next to another car.

In the other car is Joseph, who wraps his towel over his head, mocking the Arabs.

Amir, aware he's holding it, sets his towel on the seat.

EXT. LEISURE CENTRE

The car pulls to a halt in the parking area. Rana switches off the engine.

They look towards the building. Neither makes a move for a few seconds, until Amir musters a smile, and gets out of the car - he's wearing flippers.

INT. LEISURE CENTRE

Amir, head held high, wearing his flippers, walks past the pool towards the changing room, carrying his trunks and goggles. Kids notice, and snigger.

INT. CAR

Rana notices Amir's towel on the back seat.

INT. POOL.

The POOL ATTENDANT, 28, seated on a deck chair by the diving board, surveys the pool from his vantage point.

Jack walks along the poolside.

The pool is packed but he spots Amir on a float, heading towards the deep end.

Joseph and his cronies circle Amir, like sharks.

A child's CRY diverts Jack's attention for only a moment, but when he looks back at the pool Amir's float is empty.

UNDER WATER

Amir's hair floats like seaweed around his face.

From the bottom of the pool the sound of children screaming is muffled.

Amir swims towards something bright and shining, and in his mind's eye.

HE SEES

The seascapes and fish of his drawings become animated. Air bubbles dance and he sees George, his pet goldfish, and other fish, all in a myriad of colours.

They swim with Amir who is happy, in his element, until...

...a dark shadow appears.

Amir turns, and sees Joseph.

Joseph reaches out and grabs hold of Amir, breaking the chain from his neck.

The "evil eye" pendant sinks, and stares up from the bottom of the pool.

ABOVE WATER

The children's screams become almost deafening as

Jack races along the side scanning the pool, as he heads towards the Pool Attendant.

The Pool Attendant is preoccupied, flirting with a young woman.

UNDER WATER

Amir is being dragged down, but struggles free of Joseph.

ABOVE WATER

Jack climbs up and grabs the Pool Attendant by the arm and tells him something.

The Pool Attendant, jumps to his feet.

Rana arrives, holding Amir's towel, senses something's wrong, looks around for Amir. Jack goes to her.

UNDER WATER

Helped by the flippers Amir swims speedily, leaving Joseph behind.

At a safe distance, Amir looks back at Joseph.  
Bubbles are coming from his mouth. He's in trouble.  
Amir looks at his bully, and doesn't act for a moment  
He swims away from Joseph towards the top of the pool.

ABOVE WATER

Amir emerges from the water, and inhales very deeply,  
then disappears again, back into the deep end.  
The Pool Attendant sees Amir gasp for air, dives in.

UNDER WATER

Amir swims down, grabs Joseph, tries to help him to  
safety. He's too heavy, he pulls Amir down.

ABOVE WATER

Silence now - deafening silence - as the others look  
towards the surface of the water for movement.

UNDER WATER

The pool attendant sees their struggle, takes hold of  
Joseph.

ABOVE WATER

The Pool attendant carries Joseph out of the water,  
places him on his side.

Seconds later Joseph splutters, and coughs up water.

Rana scans the water for Amir, no sign.

Jack nudges her as sees Amir climb out of the pool.

Jack begins to clap his hands and the others join in.

LATER

Amir, dressed for the party, sits happily next to Jack  
eating cake. Along the table, the bullies are subdued.

The Pool Attendant comes along and places a ribbon  
around Amir's neck, and raises Amir's arm, like a  
champion.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Amir leans his head against the wall, on which his colourful drawings of fish and seascapes are pinned.

He closes his eyes and twiddles with the ribbon of a medal "for bravery" hanging around his neck.

Amir smiles and shows the medal to George.

FADE OUT.