

Chapter 11

Chapter 11: In this chapter, Parvana comes home, drenched from the rain and emotionally exhausted, her heart weighed down by the distress of the day. As she steps through the door, her mother, noticing the change in her demeanor, immediately asks what has happened. After a moment of hesitation and inner turmoil, Parvana admits to spending the day digging up graves, a revelation that leaves her family in shock. This action, driven by their desperate need for money, forces Parvana and her family to confront the grim reality of survival in a country torn apart by war. Parvana's admission sparks a profound discussion on the dire state of their lives in Afghanistan, where the dead are no longer safe from exploitation in the battle for basic survival. While Mother expresses deep sorrow over the loss of dignity in such actions, Mrs. Weera, ever practical, reminds them that the bones have value and can be repurposed for survival. This pragmatic approach to their situation highlights the emotional conflict Parvana feels—caught between morality and the undeniable need to survive.

Nooria, Parvana's older sister, takes everyone by surprise when she argues in favor of Parvana continuing this work, emphasizing that the family is struggling to make ends meet. The income Parvana earns from reading letters is not enough to sustain them, and Nooria sees the grave-digging work as a necessary evil in their harsh environment. Though their mother initially resists the idea of her daughter continuing such a grim task, Nooria and Mrs. Weera convince her that they are living in exceptional circumstances where the usual moral boundaries must be reevaluated. Ultimately, they reach a compromise—Parvana will continue to work as long as she also writes about her experiences for a magazine. This solution provides a way for Parvana to contribute financially to the family without being fully submerged in the morally troubling work. The family's decision reflects the impossible choices they must make in a world where survival often requires sacrificing personal values in order to stay afloat.

In the days that follow, Parvana dives into her new venture with Shauzia. Together, they manage to earn enough money to buy small trays for selling lightweight goods in the market. Items like cigarettes and chewing gum, though trivial, begin to offer them a steady stream of income. Parvana feels a sense of relief as she moves away from the grave-digging work, gaining confidence and independence as she learns to navigate the market streets of Kabul. The sense of liberation she feels from no longer needing to unearth bones is profound, as she begins to find a rhythm in her new life. Despite the hardships, this new work gives her a glimpse of a life outside the shadows of the war, one where she can take on responsibilities that are less grotesque but still necessary for survival. The opportunity to engage with the outside world, even in such a small way, feels like a step toward reclaiming a sense of normalcy amidst the chaos.

One day, while Parvana and Shauzia are selling their goods in the streets, they notice a crowd gathering in the direction of a nearby sports stadium. Intrigued by the potential for business, they decide to join the crowd, hoping to sell more items to the people attending the event. However, when they arrive at the stadium, they are struck by an eerie silence, the usual buzz of excitement completely absent. As they move closer, they realize that the event is not a celebration, but rather a grotesque display of punishment orchestrated by the Taliban. What was supposed to be a public spectacle of sports has turned into a chilling show of terror, with the Taliban using the event to publicly execute thieves. The crowd watches in a tense, uncomfortable silence as the severed hands of the thieves are displayed, a brutal reminder of the regime's merciless approach to justice.

This horrifying scene deeply unsettles Parvana and Shauzia, leaving them shaken and fearful of the danger that constantly looms over them. They manage to blend into the crowd, trying to remain unnoticed, but the cruelty of what they've just witnessed lingers in their minds. Thankfully, kind strangers notice their distress and discreetly help them escape the scene, guiding them out of harm's way. As they leave the stadium, the image of the young Talib man flaunting his grisly trophies stays with them, a chilling reminder of the brutality of the regime they live under. The episode marks a turning point for Parvana, further deepening her understanding of the harsh

realities of the world she now inhabits. The cruelty, which has been normalized in Kabul, leaves an indelible mark on her, reminding her that safety is never guaranteed in a place ruled by terror and fear. The chapter ends on this haunting note, as Parvana and Shauzia are left to process the traumatic experience and reflect on the dangerous world around them.

