

Chapter 9

Chapter 9: In this chapter, Parvana is unexpectedly reunited with her old schoolmate, Shauzia, while working in the market. Initially, Shauzia hesitates and cautiously asks Parvana what she is called, to which Parvana responds with the name “Kaseem” to maintain her disguise. They exchange a few words about their respective work, and Shauzia mentions that she needs to return to her tea shop before she blends back into the bustling crowd. As Parvana watches her friend disappear, she reflects on how distant their relationship was back in school and realizes that many other girls in Kabul are facing similar struggles in their daily lives. This chance encounter makes Parvana more aware of the shared hardships that define the lives of the girls around her, each of them striving for survival in an oppressive environment.

While they walk together, Shauzia offers Parvana some dried apricots, a rare and precious treat in their circumstances. This small act of kindness brings Parvana a sense of comfort, as it reminds her of a simpler time before the harshness of war took over their lives. As they talk, the two girls open up about their families—Shauzia shares the painful news that her brother is missing in Iran and that her father has passed away, while Parvana tells her that her father was arrested by the Taliban. Shauzia’s grim outlook on the fate of those who are arrested leaves Parvana feeling upset, but she refuses to lose hope and clings to the belief that her father will eventually return. Their conversation, filled with shared sorrow, also serves as a reminder of the deep emotional toll that war and repression have taken on their lives, yet they both continue to hold onto their individual threads of hope.

As the conversation continues, Shauzia shifts the focus to ways of making money in a more sustainable way. She suggests that they could sell items from a tray, allowing them to be mobile in the market, a much-needed source of income for both girls. Parvana dreams of continuing her work reading letters for the people of Kabul, feeling

that it gives her a sense of purpose, even in such dark times. As they reminisce about their days in school, they find brief solace in shared memories of a time when their lives were less defined by fear and survival. The sense of camaraderie between them grows stronger as they realize they still have a connection, despite the years that have passed and the changes in their lives. These moments of reflection and shared memories remind them of the humanity that still exists beneath the surface of their struggle.

At Parvana's home, her family warmly welcomes Shauzia, even though she has claimed that her mother is ill and that her family's situation is tumultuous. They talk about the possibility of starting a secret school for girls, a concept that Mrs. Weera is determined to lead, offering a glimmer of hope in the midst of their oppression. Shauzia, known for her sharp wit, adds some much-needed humor to their difficult situation, while Mrs. Weera's resolute determination injects energy into the conversation. The idea of a secret school becomes a symbol of defiance against the Taliban's restrictions on girls' education, representing a small but significant act of rebellion. As the discussion continues, Parvana feels a sense of solidarity and support in the room, knowing that they are all working toward a common goal, despite the overwhelming obstacles they face.

The chapter highlights the ongoing struggle for survival that Parvana and Shauzia must endure in a world where every day is marked by fear and repression. Yet, amid the despair, the conversation about creating a secret school offers a sense of hope for the future, as the girls and their families hold onto the possibility of a better life. The idea of education as a form of resistance against the Taliban's oppressive regime symbolizes their resilience and determination to preserve their humanity in the face of adversity. However, underlying their conversations and aspirations are the fears and uncertainties that still lurk, especially in Shauzia's reluctance to fully embrace their new money-making scheme. As the chapter concludes, Parvana is left feeling uneasy about the future, knowing that the choices they make will be critical in determining their paths forward in such a turbulent and dangerous world.