

Chapter 7

Chapter 7: In this chapter, Parvana embarks on a new journey after breakfast, feeling both nervous and excited as her mother encourages her to take her father's writing supplies to the marketplace. The opportunity to earn money excites her, offering a brief escape from the daily responsibilities of housework. Once again, Parvana dons her disguise as a boy, removing the constraints of her chador and hair, which gives her a sense of freedom. She steps out into the bustling market, carrying her father's shoulder bag filled with his writing tools, an outfit to sell, and a blanket to sit on. As she navigates through the busy streets, she heads toward a familiar spot in the marketplace where her father had previously set up his stand. This place, once filled with memories of her father's work, brings Parvana a sense of continuity, as she knows it is a spot where her father had built a small but reliable customer base through his consistent service.

Once settled in her spot, Parvana arranges her materials carefully, reflecting on the lessons her father taught her about establishing connections with customers. As she sets up, she recalls his advice on the importance of consistency and reliability in building a steady stream of business. A passerby stops and questions her about her identity, but Parvana, having been well-prepared by her mother, quickly responds that she is Kaseem, her father's nephew, and that her father is currently ill, not imprisoned. She feels a mixture of fear and relief as she speaks, knowing that revealing her true identity would put her in danger. Despite her unease about working as a girl in a male-dominated environment, Parvana draws strength from her education. She knows that her ability to read and write is a rare skill in a society where many men cannot access such opportunities, and this realization begins to boost her confidence. Parvana settles into her role, eager to start her work, though the first hour passes slowly, with no customers approaching her stand.

As the first hour drags on without any customers, Parvana's anxiety deepens. Just as her nerves are starting to get the better of her, a Taliban soldier walks up to her stand. Parvana trembles with fear, but she takes a deep breath and confirms that she is indeed the letter reader, offering her service to help him. The soldier, though intimidating, requests her assistance in reading an old letter addressed to his deceased wife, Fatima Azima. Parvana reads the letter aloud, her voice steady despite the emotions she feels as the words are revealed. The letter contains heartfelt sentiments from the woman's aunt, who expresses her love and best wishes for Fatima's future. The soldier, visibly moved by the letter, thanks Parvana for her help and asks her to write a response, though he ultimately decides against sending it. He leaves her with payment for her service, and Parvana is left to reflect on this unexpected encounter. This meeting challenges her initial perceptions of the Taliban, as she realizes that even those who embody the oppressive regime may experience complex human emotions. The soldier's sadness over his wife's passing shows her that everyone has their own story, and not all Taliban soldiers are immune to sorrow.

As the day continues, Parvana begins to find a sense of rhythm in the marketplace. She makes a sale of her shalwar kameez, a piece of clothing that has sentimental value to her, but she recognizes that parting with it is necessary to support her family. The transaction is bittersweet, as it marks another step in her journey of survival, but it also demonstrates her growing bargaining skills. Although the loss of the garment tugs at her heart, Parvana understands that her actions are essential to keeping her family fed. After working for several hours, she feels the need to take a break and clean up. The physical exertion of the day weighs on her, and she longs for her father's presence and approval. However, despite the sadness she feels from missing him, Parvana is uplifted by the money she has earned and the small sense of accomplishment that comes with it. She feels proud of her ability to successfully navigate the marketplace and complete a task that once seemed insurmountable. As she heads home, her heart swells with pride, knowing that her efforts have been fruitful. This chapter highlights the internal growth Parvana experiences as she adapts to her new life, learning to navigate the complexities of survival and family responsibility in a world defined by

constant struggle. Her journey, though fraught with challenges, also demonstrates her resilience and determination to provide for those she loves.

