

FIVE

In this chapter, Parvana ventures into the marketplace without her father, feeling unsettled by his absence. Women aren't allowed in shops, and Parvana grapples with the restrictions imposed by the Taliban. She ultimately decides to buy bread from the baker, covering her face with her chador to maintain some anonymity. While waiting for her order, she reflects on how hungry she is, almost yearning to devour a whole loaf.

Parvana's moment of peace is shattered when a Talib confronts her aggressively, questioning her presence and attire. The soldier demands to know her male guardians and threatens punishment for her behavior. In an act of desperation, Parvana defends herself, yelling at him and running away as he raises his stick against her. During her hurried escape, she knocks over vegetables in her path, clutching the warm bread as she dashes through the streets, determined to evade the soldier.

She collides with a familiar woman, Mrs. Weera, who recognizes Parvana. The woman questions her hurried demeanor and reassures her, encouraging her to calm down. They walk together, with Mrs. Weera visiting Parvana's home for a long-overdue chat with her mother. Parvana reluctantly leads the way, feeling apprehensive about her mother's condition.

Upon their arrival, Nooria, Parvana's sister, initially only notices the bread. After Mrs. Weera identifies herself, relief washes over Nooria, who is relieved to have another adult in the household to help shoulder their burdens. Despite the chaos, Mrs. Weera steps in with authority, taking charge as she learns about the family's struggles, from their mother's illness to the lack of resources.

Mrs. Weera's energetic disposition contrasts with the family's somber mood and shows an unwavering resolve to support Parvana and her family. Despite the hardships, Parvana carries water from outside, fulfilling her responsibilities even as exhaustion sets in. She experiences a particularly tense moment when she tries to drink unboiled water, only to be scolded by Nooria. The chapter concludes with a sense of tentative hope as they share a meal and Mrs. Weera comes to stay for the night, suggesting they may need new strategies to cope with their circumstances .