

FOUR

Parvana and her mother returned home late from visiting the prison, with exhaustion consuming them. Parvana, weakened from the long journey, leaned on her mother for support, her body aching from head to toe. Upon removing her sandals, Parvana was horrified to see her blistered, bloody feet, and her mother's condition was even worse. It dawned on Parvana that her mother hadn't stepped outside since the Taliban seized control in Kabul a year and a half ago—she had chosen to remain inside, comforted by her husband's encouragement to stay home and write when she could have ventured out.

Their father had often insisted that Fatana, Parvana's mother, needed to observe the world to capture its essence in her writing. Despite his supportive nature, a truce had emerged during their conversations; he believed the educated should stay and help rebuild Afghanistan rather than flee. Parvana remained oblivious to her mother's suffering during their arduous trek.

When they finally reached home, instead of being active about her condition, her mother collapsed into tears on the toshak, ignoring Nooria's attempts to help. Parvana was then cared for by Maryam, who struggled to provide comfort as her sister faced the physical and emotional toll of their situation. With concern for their missing father, Parvana confided in her sister that they had received no news about him.

As night fell, Parvana dreamt of soldiers, their harshness while her mother seemed in distress. The next morning, Parvana realized her mother lay on the toshak, unresponsive to offers for food. The days dragged painfully, with Parvana and Nooria keeping the younger kids quiet while their mother continued to sleep. The atmosphere grew tense as their food supply dwindled, leading Parvana to confront her mother with the disheartening reality that they were out of food. Unable to awaken her, Nooria stopped her, asserting their mother was in a deep depression.

Frustration brewed among the sisters as the prospect of starvation loomed. Parvana hesitated, her feet still sore and tired, yet the burden of feeding the family weighed heavily. Ultimately, seeing the desperation in her siblings' faces, she decided to brave the outside world for food, symbolizing her shifting role within the family as the responsibility to provide began to fall upon her shoulders.