

# NINE

In this chapter, Parvana is surprised to encounter her old schoolmate, Shauzia, while working in the market. Initially hesitant, Shauzia asks Parvana what she's called, to which Parvana responds with "Kaseem." They share a brief conversation about their work, where Shauzia mentions needing to return to the tea shop before blending back into the crowd. Parvana reflects on their distant relationship in school and is struck by the realization that there are other girls in Kabul who share similar struggles.

As they walk together, Shauzia gifts Parvana some dried apricots, a rare delight for her. They exchange stories about their families; Shauzia's brother is missing in Iran, and her father has passed away, while Parvana reveals her father's arrest. Shauzia's grim statement about the fate of many who are arrested leaves Parvana upset, but she clings to hope that her father will return.

Their conversation shifts to business as Shauzia suggests they consider new ways of making money. Shauzia expresses her desire to sell items from a tray, allowing her to be mobile in the market, while Parvana dreams of continuing with her letter reading. They reminisce about school, finding solace in shared memories.

At Parvana's home, her family welcomes Shauzia warmly, despite her claims that her mother is ill and her family dynamic is tumultuous. Their discussion includes the possibility of creating a secret school for girls, spearheaded by Mrs. Weera. Shauzia's sharp wit and Mrs. Weera's determination inject some levity into the grim reality they face.

The chapter highlights the girls' ongoing struggle for survival, punctuated by consistent interaction and hopeful discussions about education, community support, and shared aspirations for a better future. Nonetheless, looming fears about the Taliban's oppressive regime remain ever-present, as demonstrated through Shauzia's reluctance about their new money-making scheme. The chapter concludes with Parvana feeling uneasy about the prospect presented by Shauzia, paving the way for further conflict and decisions ahead.