

SIX

In this chapter, the family devises a plan to disguise Parvana as a boy, to enable her to navigate the market and buy supplies while her father is away. Mother and Mrs. Weera present the idea enthusiastically. Nooria suggests Parvana will be their cousin from Jalalabad, which confuses Parvana. As the conversation unfolds, Parvana realizes the harsh reality that her friends and relatives have scattered, leaving her isolated. Mother plans for Parvana to wear her deceased brother Hossain's clothes, but Parvana protests her long hair, fearing she won't convincingly pass as a boy.

Nooria insists on cutting Parvana's hair, prompting resistance from Parvana, who deflects the blame onto Nooria. Ultimately, the family agrees that to survive, Parvana must embrace this disguise, realizing it's her choice alone. As they prepare to cut her hair, Parvana feels a mix of dread and resignation, yet also a sense of agency in making the decision herself. When the hair falls, she begins to feel transformed. After a quick cut, Mother urges her to change into Hossain's clothes, which feel unfamiliar yet liberating.

Once dressed, Parvana experiences a moment of identity confusion, especially when Nooria criticizes her appearance. However, with encouragement and a few essentials, she gains some confidence. As she steps into the world donning her disguise, she initially fears exposure but soon finds comfort in being just another boy on the street. She successfully shops for tea and rice without attracting attention, which boosts her sense of accomplishment.

Upon returning home, she shares her success with her family, though Mother exhibits signs of distress seeing Parvana in Hossain's clothes. Nooria suggests that to maintain her disguise, Parvana should wear the boy's clothing at home too, which deepens the family's strained dynamics. The chapter concludes with a poignant moment where Mother calls out to Ali, referring to him as "my son," highlighting her emotional struggle with the changes their family is facing.