The Breadwinner

The Breadwinner by Deborah Ellis follows Parvana, a young girl living under Taliban rule in Afghanistan. Disguised as a boy to support her family, Parvana faces countless challenges while navigating life in a society that oppresses women and girls.

Foreword

Foreword: In the foreword of *The Breadwinner*, Deborah Ellis delves into the extensive history of conflict in Afghanistan, spanning more than thirty-six years since the Soviet Union’s invasion. This period includes the chaos that followed the Soviet departure, the rise of the Taliban, and the dramatic aftermath of the September 11 events. Ellis draws attention to the far-reaching consequences of these conflicts, noting how decisions made by those in positions of safety often lead to catastrophic results for innocent people in Afghanistan. The book emphasizes the human cost of war, focusing on how the people caught in its path, especially in Afghanistan, suffer the most. These individuals, often removed from the decision-making processes, are forced to endure hardships that stem from global conflicts far beyond their control.

Ellis highlights the often-overlooked role of profit-driven individuals or organizations that fuel wars by manufacturing weapons and encouraging violence rather than seeking peaceful solutions. She critiques the decision-makers who contribute to wars without understanding their devastating effects on the innocent, particularly the civilians caught in the crossfire. Through *The Breadwinner*, Ellis paints a picture of the harsh realities that those living in war-torn regions experience daily: the destruction of communities, the loss of infrastructure, and the ongoing struggle of refugees who have no access to life’s most basic needs, such as food and shelter. These victims of war,

forced to live without the essentials, are frequently overlooked or forgotten, and their suffering is a testament to the devastating impact of prolonged conflict on everyday lives.

In contrast to the despair that war brings, Ellis also introduces the stories of ordinary people who embody resilience and hope. She recounts her encounters with teachers, health workers, librarians, and other unsung heroes who continue to serve their communities despite the overwhelming challenges around them. These individuals, who refuse to be beaten down by war, work tirelessly to nurture children, rebuild communities, and maintain some semblance of normalcy in their lives. Their acts of kindness serve as powerful reminders of the strength of the human spirit, even when faced with seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Through these stories, Ellis underscores the importance of hope and humanity in the darkest of times, offering readers an inspiring counterpoint to the grim realities of war.

Ellis also brings to light the devastating statistic that ninety-five percent of those killed in wars are civilians, urging readers to recognize the humanity of those who bear the brunt of conflict. The victims of war are not distant strangers, but people who share many of the same joys and struggles as those unaffected by violence. This statistic serves as a stark reminder that war is not just a series of battles between armies, but an ongoing human tragedy that affects the lives of millions of people, most of whom are innocent civilians. By highlighting the shared humanity between the readers and those suffering in war zones, Ellis calls for greater empathy and a deeper understanding of the true costs of conflict.

In the foreword, Ellis also emphasizes the power of books as a means to foster empathy and connect people from different walks of life. By sharing stories like Parvana’s, she hopes to bridge cultural divides and provide a window into the lives of those who are affected by war. Ellis expresses heartfelt gratitude in the fifteenth-anniversary edition of *The Breadwinner* to readers, educators, and caregivers who have helped bring the story of Parvana and her companions to life. Her appreciation extends to the people of Afghanistan, acknowledging their fundamental right to peace

and a better life, free from the ravages of war. Through this work, Ellis aims not just to tell a story, but to inspire a call to action—a recognition of the global struggle for peace and justice.

Deborah Ellis' words leave a lasting impact as she encourages readers to reflect on the shared human experiences that transcend the borders of conflict. In the face of war’s brutality, she urges readers to recognize that the strength and kindness of the human spirit can never be fully extinguished. Through empathy, we can find common ground with those who endure war, and through understanding, we can work towards a world that embraces peace.

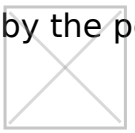
Glossary

Glossary: The glossary included in *Breadwinner* plays a crucial role in helping readers understand the cultural, historical, and linguistic aspects that shape the world of the story. Each term is explained concisely, providing valuable insights into the context in which the narrative unfolds. One important term is "burqa," which is a full-body garment worn by many women in Afghanistan to maintain modesty, covering them entirely except for a mesh screen for the eyes. This piece of clothing symbolizes the social expectations placed on women, contributing to the understanding of the struggles that characters face in the story. Another key term, "chador," refers to a cloth worn by Afghan women to cover their hair and shoulders, further underscoring the emphasis on modesty in Afghan culture.

In addition to clothing, the glossary also includes linguistic and cultural terms. "Dari" and "Pashtu," for example, are two of Afghanistan's major languages, spoken by different ethnic groups across the country. Understanding these languages allows readers to better appreciate the cultural diversity and social dynamics present in the story. Another term featured in the glossary is "Eid," which is a significant Muslim holiday marking the end of Ramadan, a month of fasting. This celebration holds great importance in the lives of the characters, and the glossary helps contextualize the meaning and traditions surrounding it. By explaining these cultural aspects, readers are provided with a deeper understanding of the characters' way of life and the significance of their practices.

The glossary also highlights everyday items that are integral to the lives of the characters, such as "karachi," a hand-pushed cart commonly used in markets, and

"kebab," a popular food dish made by grilling skewers of meat. These items give readers a sense of the daily routine and food culture in Afghanistan, helping to make the setting more relatable and immersive. In terms of safety, the glossary includes the term "land mine," which refers to hidden explosives that pose a danger to anyone who steps on them, providing context for the dangers that the characters face in their environment. The inclusion of such terms deepens the reader's understanding of the challenges faced by the people living in the region and adds a layer of realism to the narrative.



The glossary also offers insights into local attire, such as "nan," the traditional Afghan bread, and "pattu," a woolen shawl worn by men and boys. These items of clothing and food are important elements of Afghan culture, contributing to the authenticity of the setting. The term "shalwar kameez" is explained as a loose-fitting outfit worn by both men and women, with women’s versions often adorned with intricate embroidery, reflecting the gender distinctions in clothing styles. These definitions help readers visualize the environment and the characters, enhancing the emotional connection with the story.

Additionally, the glossary provides historical context, offering explanations for terms like "Soviets" and "Taliban." "Soviets" refers to the former Soviet Union, which had a major influence on Afghanistan during the late 20th century, while "Taliban" refers to the militant group that took control of Afghanistan in the 1990s, providing a backdrop for the story’s setting. By including these historical references, the glossary helps readers understand the political environment that affects the characters and their lives. The final term, "toshak," refers to a narrow mattress used in Afghan homes, providing insight into the modest living conditions of many families in the region.

Overall, the glossary in *Breadwinner* serves as an invaluable resource for readers, offering essential definitions that enrich the narrative and foster a deeper

understanding of Afghan culture and history. By including terms related to clothing, language, food, and safety, the glossary adds depth to the reader’s experience, ensuring they can fully engage with the story's setting. It also helps to contextualize the historical and political backdrop, allowing readers to grasp the complexities of the challenges faced by the characters. Through this glossary, the readers gain a more comprehensive understanding of the world within the book, enabling them to better appreciate the story's themes and the cultural nuances that shape it.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1: In this opening chapter, Parvana, an eleven-year-old girl, is introduced as a resilient and resourceful young soul living in the war-torn city of Kabul, which is under the strict rule of the Taliban. In a society where girls are prohibited from leaving their homes or attending school, Parvana defies these oppressive restrictions when she ventures outside to assist her father, who has been injured. Dressed in her chador, Parvana sits quietly on a blanket, trying to blend into the background, hoping to remain unseen in the bustling marketplace. As she quietly observes the chaos around her, she cannot help but wish for the normalcy of a life without fear and without the constant constraints imposed on her by her gender and the oppressive regime. The weight of her responsibility as a young girl forced to step into an adult world is overwhelming, but she faces it with a mixture of courage and resignation.

As Parvana sits quietly in the market, she reflects on a time before the Taliban seized power. She remembers when her sister, Nooria, went to school and had hopes for a future filled with promise. She recalls her mother’s work at a radio station, both symbols of a more vibrant and hopeful time in their lives. Now, everything has changed. The family is confined to a single room, forced to survive with limited resources, and the sense of security they once had is shattered. Parvana’s mind drifts to the endless days of fear and uncertainty that have become their new normal. Despite the loss of their home and freedom, Parvana helps her father by assisting him in reading and writing letters for those in the market who cannot do so for themselves. These small acts of service, though difficult, offer a sense of purpose in an otherwise bleak existence.

The market, bustling with men haggling for goods and tea boys rushing through the crowds, serves as a backdrop to Parvana’s quiet contemplation. Though the world around her moves at a frantic pace, Parvana’s life remains confined, tethered by the

restrictions placed on her by the Taliban. She dreams of freedom, wishing she could run through the streets, unburdened by the constraints that prevent her from truly experiencing life. Her education, once a source of pride and opportunity, now feels like a distant memory as her parents, both educated, struggle to adapt to a world that no longer offers the same opportunities for their children. Parvana often recalls her father's stories about their rich cultural heritage and the history of Afghanistan, stories that now seem like tales from a forgotten past. The rich tapestry of their cultural history, once a point of pride, is overshadowed by the constant threat of violence and the Taliban's rigid rule, forcing Parvana to question if the future can ever be as bright as the past her parents once described.

As the chapter continues, we are given further insight into Parvana's family history and the devastating effects of the ongoing war on their lives. Parvana's father, once a respected teacher, has been weakened by illness and the hardships of their situation. Their once-thriving life has been reduced to mere survival. The constant bombings and destruction of their home and belongings have left them living in a constant state of fear, unsure of what the future holds. Despite these hardships, Parvana's family holds onto hope and strives to maintain their dignity amidst the chaos. They live day by day, finding small ways to get by, though the strain on them all is undeniable. The chapter ends on a somber note as Parvana and her family navigate the perilous streets of Kabul, their struggle to retain a sense of normalcy amidst a city ravaged by war. Parvana's world, once filled with dreams and aspirations, now seems like a far-off dream that is increasingly difficult to hold on to.

In these early pages, readers are given a glimpse of the profound impact of war on the lives of children like Parvana. Through her eyes, we see a world where innocence is lost, and the simple joys of childhood are replaced by the harsh realities of survival. Parvana, like many children in conflict zones, yearns for the life she once had—a life filled with education, freedom, and the hope of a better future. However, as the chapter reveals, the world she now inhabits is far removed from the carefree days of her childhood. Parvana's story is a stark reminder of the personal costs of war, particularly for the youngest generation, whose futures are shaped by the violence and

chaos around them. As readers, we are forced to confront the painful realities of war, especially its effects on those who are least able to defend themselves—the children.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2: In this chapter, Parvana faces the emotional and physical toll of her family’s daily struggles in war-torn Afghanistan, living under the oppressive rule of the Taliban. The chapter begins with Parvana's family in the midst of their routine—her mother and sister, Nooria, are cleaning, while their father rests after a long, exhausting day of work. Parvana, burdened with the task of fetching water, feels the weight of her growing resentment toward the constant chores she is forced to perform. She becomes increasingly frustrated with her responsibilities, particularly when comparing her own heavy workload to Nooria’s less demanding role. This stark difference between their duties leaves Parvana feeling isolated and overwhelmed, as the unfairness of her situation looms over her thoughts. She recognizes how these burdens restrict her freedom, making her long for a life where she isn't trapped by societal expectations.

As Parvana trudges to the water tap, she is forced to reflect on her situation and the oppressive rules placed on her by the Taliban regime. The harsh restrictions imposed on women, who are forbidden from leaving the house or participating in public life, make Parvana’s world feel small and stifling. The domestic routine, filled with never-ending cleaning and chores, has left her feeling defeated and powerless, as these tasks offer no escape from the grim reality of her life. Despite her frustration, she successfully fills the water tank, a small but necessary accomplishment that brings a fleeting moment of relief. While doing so, she observes her younger sister Maryam, who shows her artistic abilities by drawing. Parvana, inspired by Maryam’s creativity, dares to imagine a different future—one where her sister’s talent is recognized, and she can pursue a life outside the constraints of their current existence. However, this dream of freedom is overshadowed by the relentless oppression they face.

The conversation within the household soon turns to the family's financial struggles. Parvana watches in silence as her mother decides to sell some of their precious

belongings, including Parvana’s treasured shalwar kameez. This painful decision highlights the extent of their hardship, as even the most sentimental and valuable possessions must be sacrificed for survival. These items, once symbols of identity, have now become nothing more than commodities to be traded for basic needs like food. Parvana’s sense of loss deepens as she watches her family’s belongings being set aside for sale, realizing that every sacrifice further erodes their sense of dignity. This moment exemplifies how war not only destroys physical homes but also dismantles emotional and cultural ties to personal belongings that once defined their sense of self.

In the midst of these harsh circumstances, Parvana’s father tries to instill some sense of pride and hope in his children, recounting stories from Afghanistan’s rich history and telling them about the courageous figures who once shaped the country. These tales provide some comfort and a temporary escape from the grim realities of their current life. Parvana clings to these moments of connection with her father, feeling a deep sense of familial love and respect. However, this brief respite is violently interrupted when Taliban soldiers storm their home, bringing an end to the fragile peace they had momentarily found. The atmosphere shifts instantly from one of shared bonding to fear and chaos, as the soldiers demand answers from Parvana’s father about his beliefs and education. In a shocking turn of events, the soldiers physically drag her father from their home, taking him away, leaving the family in a state of emotional devastation.

Parvana, despite feeling powerless, tries to protect her father and defend her family from the soldiers’ violence. Her growing courage is evident as she steps forward, attempting to shield her father from harm. However, her efforts are futile, and the family is left in disarray, shattered by the brutality they have just witnessed. The chapter closes with a sense of hopelessness, as Parvana is forced to confront the absence of her father and the deep uncertainty that now surrounds their family. This pivotal moment marks the beginning of Parvana’s personal struggle, one that will test her resilience and strength as she tries to navigate a world filled with oppression, violence, and fear. The emotional weight of the chapter resonates deeply with the

reader, providing a powerful look at the human cost of war and the toll it takes on children like Parvana, who are left to face unimaginable challenges at such a young age.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3: In this chapter, Parvana and her family are left to deal with the devastating consequences of their father's arrest. The chapter begins with Mother, who, despite her own exhaustion, carefully places her younger children, Ali and Maryam, onto the floor before starting the overwhelming task of cleaning up their home. Parvana, already drained from the emotional weight of the situation, feels the strain of the physical work as her back and legs ache from bending and lifting. She watches her mother's slow movements, which reflect the burden they both carry in the wake of their father's absence. The house, once a place of comfort, now feels like a chaotic reminder of their new harsh reality.

After they manage to restore a semblance of order, the family prepares for bed, but Parvana struggles to find peace. She is haunted by the absence of her father, her mind constantly replaying memories of him—especially the comforting sound of his snore during nights filled with uncertainty. As she lies awake, her imagination races with fearful thoughts about his condition in prison, a grim possibility shaped by the unsettling stories her aunts told about previous incarcerations. Her mother often mentioned that being connected to someone in prison was part of being Afghan, and this idea stays with Parvana, reminding her of the deep emotional toll their family is enduring. Sleep eludes her, and in the quiet of the night, her worries only grow more intense, further straining her already fragile sense of security.

Unable to bear the uncertainty, Parvana suggests lighting a lamp in the hopes of guiding her father's return, an idea that is met with resistance from her mother. Concerned about attracting attention, her mother dismisses the suggestion, aware that the Taliban's oppressive rules make it dangerous for women to be seen in public without a male guardian or official permission. The family's predicament is compounded by these strict restrictions, leaving them feeling trapped and powerless.

Parvana’s desperation to find some way to bring her father home is tempered by the harsh realities of their situation, where every decision is weighed against the ever-present threat of punishment from the authorities. The tension in their home continues to rise, and the burden of their collective grief weighs heavily on them, especially as they navigate the oppressive world the Taliban has imposed on them.

The next morning, Parvana’s mother announces her decision to attempt to rescue their father from prison. She treats the daunting task with a calmness that contrasts with the fear and anxiety Parvana feels, as if it were no different than going to the market. Parvana, both fearful and intrigued, is struck by the enormity of the task ahead, wondering what it will take to succeed. A note from Nooria provides their mother with some semblance of official permission to be out, though Parvana can’t help but doubt the note’s true effectiveness. The family prepares to face an unknown and intimidating journey, their hopes hanging on a fragile thread of possibility. Parvana’s mind races as she contemplates the danger they will face, unsure whether their actions will lead to a chance at redemption or further despair.

As they make their way through the crowded streets of Kabul, Parvana clings to her mother, aware that losing sight of her in the sea of burqas would be disastrous. They both brave the intimidating atmosphere of the prison, a place that has become synonymous with fear and oppression. Parvana’s anxiety grows with every step, but she also draws strength from the thought of Malali, a woman of great courage, hoping to embody the same bravery. The idea of being strong like Malali, a role model she admires, keeps Parvana moving forward, despite the overwhelming fear she feels. Together, they approach the prison with a sense of determination, though Parvana’s internal struggle continues to simmer beneath the surface. This moment marks a pivotal point in her journey, where her courage and her family’s bond will be tested in the face of overwhelming odds.

When they arrive at the prison, Mother demands to see her husband, but the guards respond with hostility, dismissing her pleas and disrespecting her in the cruelest way. They tear up her husband’s photograph, a symbolic act that further exacerbates the

pain and frustration Parvana and her mother feel. Violence erupts when the guards strike both Parvana and her mother, pushing them to retreat in fear. The rising tension and hostility of the prison create an unbearable atmosphere, but despite the physical and emotional assault, they manage to help each other escape the dangerous situation. Although their attempt to seek justice ends in hardship, the ordeal strengthens the bond between Parvana and her mother, reaffirming their commitment to facing their bleak reality together. This chapter, filled with moments of pain and vulnerability, captures the depths of Parvana’s struggle and the resilience of her family as they continue to fight for a sense of hope in a world that constantly seems to take it away.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4: After a long and exhausting visit to the prison, Parvana and her mother returned home, their bodies weighed down by fatigue. Parvana, drained from the journey, leaned heavily on her mother for support, feeling every ache in her body. As she removed her sandals, Parvana was horrified to see the state of her feet, covered in blisters and blood. Her mother's condition was far worse, and it became clear to Parvana that her mother hadn't stepped outside since the Taliban had taken control of Kabul a year and a half ago. She had chosen to stay inside, comforted by the idea her husband had given her—to stay home and write when she could, rather than risk venturing out into the increasingly hostile world outside.

Parvana's father had always insisted that Fatana, her mother, needed to observe the world around her to capture its essence in her writing. He believed it was crucial for her to stay informed and engaged, despite the growing danger. Despite his gentle encouragement, a truce had emerged between them; he had believed that the educated, like his wife, should stay and help rebuild Afghanistan rather than fleeing the country. Parvana hadn't been aware of the toll that their trek had taken on her mother, nor the emotional strain she had been enduring. Now, as her mother's exhaustion and despair became clear, Parvana realized the weight of her mother's decision to stay, one that had been marked by silent sacrifice and the slow erosion of her spirit.

When they finally reached home, her mother collapsed onto the toshak, too overcome with exhaustion and emotion to even respond to Nooria's attempts to assist her. Parvana, though exhausted herself, was too focused on the concerns surrounding their missing father to pay much attention to her mother's breakdown. Instead, Maryam, Parvana's younger sister, did her best to comfort her, though her efforts seemed insufficient to alleviate Parvana's pain. Parvana shared her worries with Nooria,

confessing that no news had come about their father. The family’s uncertainty about his whereabouts weighed heavily on them all, and Parvana was left to grapple with the immense emotional toll of not knowing if her father was alive or dead. As night fell, Parvana's troubled sleep was filled with dreams of soldiers, their harshness echoing in her mind, while her mother continued to show signs of distress.

The next morning, Parvana was shocked to find her mother still lying on the toshak, unresponsive to the family’s attempts to offer her food. The days passed slowly, with the atmosphere in the house growing more tense as their supplies dwindled. Parvana and Nooria did their best to keep the younger children calm, but the burden of their situation weighed heavily on them. With food becoming scarce, Parvana was forced to confront the harsh reality that they had no more provisions. In an attempt to rouse her mother from her depression, Parvana spoke to her softly, but Nooria stopped her, telling Parvana that their mother was far beyond the reach of comfort or reason. Their mother was in the grip of a deep sadness, one that couldn’t be easily overcome, and Nooria explained that they would need to face the possibility of survival without her immediate help.

Frustration began to build between the sisters as the prospect of starvation loomed closer. Parvana’s feet, still sore from the journey, ached with each step, but the pressing need to feed her family motivated her to act. Seeing the desperate faces of her younger siblings, Parvana made the difficult decision to venture out into the world beyond their home in search of food. This moment marked a significant shift in her role within the family, as the responsibility to provide for their survival began to fall on her shoulders. It was no longer just a matter of survival for her mother and father—it had become Parvana’s responsibility to care for the family, no matter the cost. The weight of this new role was immense, but Parvana knew it was something she had to do to keep her family alive, marking a turning point in her own journey toward independence and resilience.

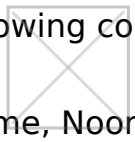
Chapter 5

Chapter 5: In this chapter, Parvana sets out to the marketplace without her father by her side, feeling a sense of unease with every step she takes. The absence of her father weighs heavily on her, and the oppressive restrictions placed by the Taliban only make the situation more daunting. Women are forbidden from entering shops or engaging freely in public life, leaving Parvana with the task of navigating the marketplace while disguised as a boy. She makes the decision to buy bread from the baker, using her chador to conceal her identity as she waits for her order. The hunger she feels is nearly unbearable, and she finds herself longing to consume an entire loaf, her body craving the nourishment it desperately needs. This fleeting moment of peace in the marketplace is overshadowed by the looming sense of danger that follows her every move.

As Parvana waits for her bread, she is suddenly confronted by a Talib soldier, who aggressively challenges her presence and attire. His harsh questioning sends a wave of fear through Parvana, as he demands to know who her male guardians are and threatens her with punishment. Parvana, desperate to protect herself, shouts back at him before fleeing, her heart racing as she tries to escape his wrath. The soldier raises his stick in a menacing gesture, but Parvana runs as fast as she can, knocking over vegetables and creating a chaotic scene as she sprints through the marketplace. Despite her fear, the warmth of the bread in her hands is a small comfort, grounding her in the midst of the terrifying encounter. Her only focus is reaching home safely, her pulse pounding as she weaves through the crowd, determined to outrun the danger that shadows her every move.

In her haste, Parvana accidentally bumps into Mrs. Weera, a familiar face who immediately recognizes her. Mrs. Weera is concerned by Parvana’s hurried and anxious demeanor, and she gently encourages her to calm down. As the two walk

together, Mrs. Weera suggests visiting Parvana's home, as it has been a long time since she had a chance to speak with her mother. Parvana reluctantly agrees, feeling a mix of relief and anxiety at the thought of bringing someone into their home. She leads the way, her mind clouded with worry about her mother's health and the state of their household, unsure of how the visit will unfold. The tension in the air is palpable, yet Mrs. Weera's steady presence offers a sense of reassurance as Parvana tries to push aside her own growing concerns about their future.



Upon arriving home, Nooria notices the bread immediately, a brief moment of normalcy in an otherwise tense situation. Mrs. Weera introduces herself to Nooria, and the younger sister quickly relaxes, grateful for the presence of an adult who can help shoulder some of the family’s burdens. Mrs. Weera wastes no time in stepping in, taking charge as she learns of the family’s struggles, including their mother’s illness and the lack of resources they are constantly battling. She listens intently as Nooria and Parvana describe their difficulties, offering words of comfort and support as the family struggles to stay afloat. Despite the grim reality of their situation, Mrs. Weera’s energetic disposition and practical attitude provide a glimmer of hope, showing them that they don’t have to face their challenges alone. Her resolve to help Parvana’s family is unwavering, and her ability to take control of the situation adds a sense of stability in an otherwise unstable environment.

As the day wears on, Parvana continues to take on her responsibilities, even though exhaustion is beginning to take its toll on her. She goes outside to fetch water, her body aching with every step, but she pushes through, knowing that it is necessary to care for her family. However, when she tries to drink some of the untreated water she has collected, Nooria scolds her for not boiling it first, reminding her of the dangers of drinking such water in their harsh reality. The tension in the house is palpable as Parvana and Nooria try to keep the younger children quiet while the family deals with the emotional and physical strain of their situation. As the chapter closes, there is a sense of tentative hope as Mrs. Weera stays the night with them, suggesting that they might need to come up with new strategies to cope with their ongoing struggles. While the future remains uncertain, the support of Mrs. Weera provides a small but important

sense of stability for Parvana and her family, who continue to endure in a world fraught with hardship and danger. Despite the overwhelming challenges, there is a glimmer of possibility that they might find a way to navigate their way through the turmoil that surrounds them.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6: In this chapter, the family comes together to devise a plan to disguise Parvana as a boy so she can safely navigate the market and buy necessary supplies while her father remains absent. The idea is enthusiastically presented by both her mother and Mrs. Weera, though Parvana feels uneasy about the implications of such a transformation. Nooria suggests that Parvana pretend to be their cousin from Jalalabad, which initially confuses Parvana as she tries to understand the reasoning behind the plan. As the discussion progresses, Parvana is struck by the harsh reality that her friends and relatives have scattered, leaving her feeling increasingly isolated. In an attempt to create a convincing disguise, Mother decides that Parvana should wear the clothes of her deceased brother Hossain, though Parvana protests due to her long hair, fearing it will make her less believable as a boy.

Nooria, insistent on cutting Parvana’s hair to complete the disguise, is met with resistance from Parvana, who tries to avoid responsibility by shifting the blame to her sister. Despite her protests, Parvana ultimately agrees, understanding that in order to survive in the increasingly hostile environment, she must accept the disguise. This realization marks a turning point for Parvana, as she understands that the choice is hers alone, even though it comes with deep emotional conflict. As the hair is cut, Parvana feels a combination of dread, uncertainty, and resignation, but also begins to sense a newfound sense of agency in making the decision herself. When the last strands fall, Parvana begins to feel a transformation take place, not just physically but mentally as well. Afterward, her mother urges her to change into Hossain’s clothes, which feel unfamiliar and slightly awkward at first but also offer a sense of freedom, a small but significant change in her life.

Once dressed, Parvana experiences a moment of disorientation as she looks at herself in the mirror, no longer recognizing the reflection staring back at her. Nooria’s criticism

of her appearance only deepens her sense of confusion, yet with a few encouraging words from her family, Parvana begins to feel more confident in her new disguise. As she steps out into the world for the first time, she is initially overwhelmed by the fear of being exposed. However, as she walks through the streets, Parvana finds comfort in blending in, realizing that she is just another boy among many on the bustling streets of Kabul. Successfully purchasing tea and rice without drawing attention to herself brings a sense of accomplishment, boosting her confidence in the decision she made. This small victory helps Parvana see that she can adapt to her new role, navigating the world in a way that keeps her safe and protected.

Upon returning home, Parvana eagerly shares her success with her family, proud of her accomplishment, but she soon notices that her mother reacts with visible distress when she sees Parvana dressed in Hossain’s clothes. The sight of her daughter in the deceased son’s clothes is a poignant reminder of the loss their family has endured. Nooria suggests that Parvana wear the boy’s clothing at home as well, a proposal that only adds to the already strained dynamics within the family. The chapter ends with a heart-wrenching moment when Mother, in an emotional slip, calls out to Parvana as “Ali, my son,” underscoring her inner turmoil and emotional struggle with the changes they are all going through. This moment of confusion highlights the emotional weight of the family’s transformation, as they grapple with the loss of their former lives and adapt to the harsh new realities they must face together.

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.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8: In this chapter, the arrival of Mrs. Weera brings a renewed sense of energy and purpose to the household, as she announces her decision to move in with Parvana and her family. Her presence invigorates Mother, creating a shift in the family's dynamic and prompting a new sense of organization. Together, Mrs. Weera and Mother make plans to start a magazine, with each family member being assigned specific tasks to contribute. Nooria is tasked with caring for the younger children, while Parvana takes on the responsibility of working outside. Parvana, eager to contribute, shows her mother the money she has earned, bringing a moment of joy to their home, despite Nooria's sarcastic comment about their father having earned more. This brief exchange emphasizes the challenges and strained relationships within the family, yet also highlights their efforts to adapt to a new way of life.

After lunch, Parvana accompanies Mrs. Weera, who, despite wearing a burqa, walks with a distinctive stride that allows Parvana to keep up. As they walk, they discuss the dangers posed by the Taliban and the fear they both live with every day. Mrs. Weera, however, remains confident in her ability to handle whatever comes her way, showing a quiet resilience that Parvana admires. During their conversation, Parvana learns of Mrs. Weera's tragic losses; many of her family members have been killed in the ongoing violence. Despite these hardships, Mrs. Weera does not seek sympathy, and her strength in the face of such loss becomes a source of inspiration for Parvana. Mrs. Weera's story serves as a reminder of the deep and pervasive toll that the war has taken on families, but also of the strength that is found in survival and perseverance.

Later, Parvana helps Mrs. Weera gather her belongings, and they load them into a karachi, a cart commonly used in the markets. Among the few possessions, Mrs. Weera proudly shows a medal she received for her achievements in athletics, a symbol of her past successes and a connection to her former life. This simple yet powerful

moment reveals that Mrs. Weera holds onto her past with pride, using it as a reminder of her strength and capabilities. After their busy day, Parvana suggests taking her younger sister, Maryam, to fetch water, which requires some coaxing from their mother, who is hesitant to let them go outside. Maryam, unused to being outside the house, finds joy in even the smallest things, such as splashing water on her face, highlighting the innocence and wonder of childhood amid such a harsh environment. This moment offers a brief respite from the constant struggle for survival, showing that even in times of hardship, small joys can provide moments of relief.

As the days pass, a new routine begins to settle into their lives. Parvana continues her work at the market, earning just enough to sustain her family while trying to keep Nooria engaged and involved in household activities. Parvana also proposes taking her mother and Nooria outside to enjoy the sunlight, a suggestion that meets some resistance but is eventually accepted by Nooria. The siblings venture outside together, grateful for the opportunity to experience the fresh air and sunlight, which offers a sense of normalcy amidst the challenges they face. These small moments of freedom and connection are essential in maintaining hope, as they provide a temporary escape from the oppression they live under. The growing bond between Parvana and Nooria, alongside their shared experiences, reflects the importance of family support during such trying times.

Despite the ongoing difficulties, Parvana continues to earn a modest income, and although the family does not openly mourn their father, the children show subtle signs of their sadness. One day, while working in the market, Parvana experiences a brief moment of hope when she believes she sees her father. However, as she approaches, she realizes it is only a stranger. This moment of confusion highlights Parvana’s emotional vulnerability and her longing for the return of her father. Shortly after, Parvana finds a piece of cloth and a bracelet, seemingly connected to a nearby window, hinting at a potential link to someone important. This discovery adds a layer of mystery to the narrative, suggesting that there may be more to uncover in the unfolding story. In a lighter, humorous moment, Parvana encounters a tea boy who

turns out to be a girl from her class, adding an unexpected twist to her daily experiences. This encounter introduces a touch of humor and surprise into the otherwise heavy chapter, providing Parvana with a new perspective on the world around her.

This chapter intricately weaves together moments of resilience, hope, and mystery, offering readers a glimpse into the emotional complexities of Parvana’s life. Through her interactions with Mrs. Weera and Shauzia, and her evolving role within her family, Parvana navigates a changing family dynamic while dealing with the emotional weight of her father’s absence. The chapter reflects the ongoing struggle for survival amid the harsh realities of Kabul, but it also highlights the importance of family support, small joys, and the ever-present hope for a better future.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9: In this chapter, Parvana is unexpectedly reunited with her old schoolmate, Shauzia, while working in the market. Initially, Shauzia hesitates and cautiously asks Parvana what she is called, to which Parvana responds with the name “Kaseem” to maintain her disguise. They exchange a few words about their respective work, and Shauzia mentions that she needs to return to her tea shop before she blends back into the bustling crowd. As Parvana watches her friend disappear, she reflects on how distant their relationship was back in school and realizes that many other girls in Kabul are facing similar struggles in their daily lives. This chance encounter makes Parvana more aware of the shared hardships that define the lives of the girls around her, each of them striving for survival in an oppressive environment.

While they walk together, Shauzia offers Parvana some dried apricots, a rare and precious treat in their circumstances. This small act of kindness brings Parvana a sense of comfort, as it reminds her of a simpler time before the harshness of war took over their lives. As they talk, the two girls open up about their families—Shauzia shares the painful news that her brother is missing in Iran and that her father has passed away, while Parvana tells her that her father was arrested by the Taliban. Shauzia’s grim outlook on the fate of those who are arrested leaves Parvana feeling upset, but she refuses to lose hope and clings to the belief that her father will eventually return. Their conversation, filled with shared sorrow, also serves as a reminder of the deep emotional toll that war and repression have taken on their lives, yet they both continue to hold onto their individual threads of hope.

As the conversation continues, Shauzia shifts the focus to ways of making money in a more sustainable way. She suggests that they could sell items from a tray, allowing them to be mobile in the market, a much-needed source of income for both girls. Parvana dreams of continuing her work reading letters for the people of Kabul, feeling

that it gives her a sense of purpose, even in such dark times. As they reminisce about their days in school, they find brief solace in shared memories of a time when their lives were less defined by fear and survival. The sense of camaraderie between them grows stronger as they realize they still have a connection, despite the years that have passed and the changes in their lives. These moments of reflection and shared memories remind them of the humanity that still exists beneath the surface of their struggle.

At Parvana's home, her family warmly welcomes Shauzia, even though she has claimed that her mother is ill and that her family’s situation is tumultuous. They talk about the possibility of starting a secret school for girls, a concept that Mrs. Weera is determined to lead, offering a glimmer of hope in the midst of their oppression. Shauzia, known for her sharp wit, adds some much-needed humor to their difficult situation, while Mrs. Weera's resolute determination injects energy into the conversation. The idea of a secret school becomes a symbol of defiance against the Taliban’s restrictions on girls’ education, representing a small but significant act of rebellion. As the discussion continues, Parvana feels a sense of solidarity and support in the room, knowing that they are all working toward a common goal, despite the overwhelming obstacles they face.

The chapter highlights the ongoing struggle for survival that Parvana and Shauzia must endure in a world where every day is marked by fear and repression. Yet, amid the despair, the conversation about creating a secret school offers a sense of hope for the future, as the girls and their families hold onto the possibility of a better life. The idea of education as a form of resistance against the Taliban’s oppressive regime symbolizes their resilience and determination to preserve their humanity in the face of adversity. However, underlying their conversations and aspirations are the fears and uncertainties that still lurk, especially in Shauzia’s reluctance to fully embrace their new money-making scheme. As the chapter concludes, Parvana is left feeling uneasy about the future, knowing that the choices they make will be critical in determining their paths forward in such a turbulent and dangerous world.

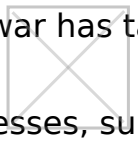
Chapter 10

Chapter 10: In this chapter, Parvana faces a deeply troubling decision when Shauzia persuades her to join in a grim task: digging up bones from a graveyard to sell. Parvana struggles with the morality of their actions but ultimately agrees, knowing that the dire circumstances they live in leave few options for survival. They travel to a graveyard in Kabul, where the devastation caused by bombs has left the earth exposed, revealing the bones of the deceased. Parvana’s heart is heavy with doubt as she contemplates what they are doing, but the need for money to survive weighs more heavily on her mind than the troubling nature of their task. In this moment, Parvana must come to terms with the harsh reality of survival in a war-torn world, where desperate measures become necessary to endure.

Upon arriving at the graveyard, Parvana is struck by the somber surroundings: piles of rubble are scattered throughout the area, and the air is filled with the stench of decay. In this grim setting, she learns about a bone broker who purchases the remains they dig up, further highlighting the darkness of their situation. Although Parvana is horrified by the idea of uncovering human bones, the urgency of their financial need forces her to push aside her discomfort. As they begin their work, Parvana voices her fear of encountering remains, but the necessity of earning money to survive in such a hostile environment trumps her fears. This chapter highlights the desperation Parvana feels, and her moral conflict reflects the toll the war has taken on her sense of right and wrong, forcing her to make decisions she would never have imagined before the conflict.

While they work, the task becomes even more unsettling as they dig up bones, some of which include skulls. Despite the macabre nature of their task, Parvana and Shauzia attempt to lighten the mood by joking, referring to the skulls as "mascots." The levity in their humor is a way to cope with the horror of their situation. At one point, the girls

are interrupted by the need for bathroom breaks, and Parvana’s anxiety about the potential danger of land mines surfaces. However, despite the fear of land mines hidden in the ground, she bravely steps into what she knows could be a hazardous area. She returns unharmed, and this brief moment of courage serves as a reminder of the constant danger they face in Kabul, where every step carries the risk of disaster. The chapter illustrates Parvana’s growing resilience, despite the emotional and physical toll the war has taken on her and her peers.



As the day progresses, sunlight breaks through the clouds, casting a strange light on their unusual task, and Parvana reflects on how strange it is that they are engaged in such work. The sunlight offers a brief sense of hope, and the girls realize they will likely remember these moments for the rest of their lives. Their bond deepens as they earn a significant amount of money—more than Parvana could make in three days. Despite their success, the girls agree to hide the full extent of their earnings from their families, choosing to secretly stash away part of the money. This decision reflects the harsh realities of their world, where survival often requires secrecy and choices that might not be understood by those around them. The girls' ability to maintain some control over their earnings highlights their desire to assert some autonomy in a life marked by loss of freedom and personal agency.

By the end of the chapter, Parvana and Shauzia plan to return to the graveyard the following day to continue their work. Despite the financial gain, the physical act of digging up bones weighs heavily on Parvana’s conscience. She struggles to shake off the emotional impact of their work as she heads home, trying to wash away the memories of what she has just done. The chapter poignantly highlights the loss of innocence that Parvana experiences as a child in a war-torn country, forced to engage in disturbing actions for the sake of survival. It is a powerful commentary on the impact of conflict on children, stripping them of their childhood and forcing them to confront the grim realities of their environment. Through Parvana’s journey, the reader is reminded of the resilience required to navigate such extreme circumstances, where morality and survival often collide in complex and difficult ways.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11: In this chapter, Parvana comes home, drenched from the rain and emotionally exhausted, her heart weighed down by the distress of the day. As she steps through the door, her mother, noticing the change in her demeanor, immediately asks what has happened. After a moment of hesitation and inner turmoil, Parvana admits to spending the day digging up graves, a revelation that leaves her family in shock. This action, driven by their desperate need for money, forces Parvana and her family to confront the grim reality of survival in a country torn apart by war. Parvana’s admission sparks a profound discussion on the dire state of their lives in Afghanistan, where the dead are no longer safe from exploitation in the battle for basic survival. While Mother expresses deep sorrow over the loss of dignity in such actions, Mrs. Weera, ever practical, reminds them that the bones have value and can be repurposed for survival. This pragmatic approach to their situation highlights the emotional conflict Parvana feels—caught between morality and the undeniable need to survive.

Nooria, Parvana’s older sister, takes everyone by surprise when she argues in favor of Parvana continuing this work, emphasizing that the family is struggling to make ends meet. The income Parvana earns from reading letters is not enough to sustain them, and Nooria sees the grave-digging work as a necessary evil in their harsh environment. Though their mother initially resists the idea of her daughter continuing such a grim task, Nooria and Mrs. Weera convince her that they are living in exceptional circumstances where the usual moral boundaries must be reevaluated. Ultimately, they reach a compromise—Parvana will continue to work as long as she also writes about her experiences for a magazine. This solution provides a way for Parvana to contribute financially to the family without being fully submerged in the morally troubling work. The family's decision reflects the impossible choices they must make in a world where survival often requires sacrificing personal values in order to stay afloat.

In the days that follow, Parvana dives into her new venture with Shauzia. Together, they manage to earn enough money to buy small trays for selling lightweight goods in the market. Items like cigarettes and chewing gum, though trivial, begin to offer them a steady stream of income. Parvana feels a sense of relief as she moves away from the grave-digging work, gaining confidence and independence as she learns to navigate the market streets of Kabul. The sense of liberation she feels from no longer needing to unearth bones is profound, as she begins to find a rhythm in her new life. Despite the hardships, this new work gives her a glimpse of a life outside the shadows of the war, one where she can take on responsibilities that are less grotesque but still necessary for survival. The opportunity to engage with the outside world, even in such a small way, feels like a step toward reclaiming a sense of normalcy amidst the chaos.

One day, while Parvana and Shauzia are selling their goods in the streets, they notice a crowd gathering in the direction of a nearby sports stadium. Intrigued by the potential for business, they decide to join the crowd, hoping to sell more items to the people attending the event. However, when they arrive at the stadium, they are struck by an eerie silence, the usual buzz of excitement completely absent. As they move closer, they realize that the event is not a celebration, but rather a grotesque display of punishment orchestrated by the Taliban. What was supposed to be a public spectacle of sports has turned into a chilling show of terror, with the Taliban using the event to publicly execute thieves. The crowd watches in a tense, uncomfortable silence as the severed hands of the thieves are displayed, a brutal reminder of the regime’s merciless approach to justice.

This horrifying scene deeply unsettles Parvana and Shauzia, leaving them shaken and fearful of the danger that constantly looms over them. They manage to blend into the crowd, trying to remain unnoticed, but the cruelty of what they’ve just witnessed lingers in their minds. Thankfully, kind strangers notice their distress and discreetly help them escape the scene, guiding them out of harm’s way. As they leave the stadium, the image of the young Talib man flaunting his grisly trophies stays with them, a chilling reminder of the brutality of the regime they live under. The episode marks a turning point for Parvana, further deepening her understanding of the harsh

realities of the world she now inhabits. The cruelty, which has been normalized in Kabul, leaves an indelible mark on her, reminding her that safety is never guaranteed in a place ruled by terror and fear. The chapter ends on this haunting note, as Parvana and Shauzia are left to process the traumatic experience and reflect on the dangerous world around them.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12: In this chapter, Parvana finds herself seeking a brief escape from her demanding and harsh reality. After the unsettling events at the stadium, she feels emotionally drained and looks for comfort within the walls of her home. Parvana expresses her need for a break, overwhelmed by the constant tension surrounding her. The atmosphere at home is thick with anxiety, especially when her mother and Mrs. Weera discuss the increasing violence and oppressive events happening at the stadium, a symbol of the cruelty that has infiltrated their lives. The weight of these ongoing struggles hangs heavily on them, underscoring the bleak existence they are forced to navigate each day. Despite these challenges, Parvana yearns for some peace and normalcy amidst the chaos.

At home, Parvana finds solace in small, nurturing tasks that help her reconnect with her family and her own sense of purpose. She teaches her younger sister, Maryam, to count, and learns basic mending skills from her older sister, Nooria. These simple, domestic activities provide a brief reprieve from the outside world, offering Parvana a chance to focus on her family’s immediate needs. However, as time passes, she finds herself missing the stories her father used to tell, which had once brought comfort and a sense of connection to the world beyond their struggles. In the midst of this yearning, Parvana also finds a semblance of excitement in the stories Mrs. Weera shares, particularly those about sports, which provide a glimpse into a world of normalcy and enjoyment amidst the harshness of their lives. But as supplies run low, Parvana knows that she must return to the market to provide for her family, and her sense of responsibility drives her to continue working.

Returning to the market, Parvana has a chance encounter with her friend Shauzia, who reveals her plan to escape their circumstances. Shauzia shares her determination to save enough money to flee to France, hoping for a life of freedom far removed from

the oppressive atmosphere of Kabul. She confides in Parvana about her decision to continue dressing as a boy for the time being, fearing that if she grows too much, she will be forced to return to her female identity, which would confine her to the domestic life she is desperate to escape. This conversation opens a window into the dreams of both girls, filled with desires for freedom and a life outside the walls of Kabul. Shauzia's vision of France as a land of opportunity is a sharp contrast to the harsh environment they currently endure. Parvana listens carefully, grappling with her own conflicting feelings about leaving her family behind. While she understands the risks of such a journey, she is also drawn to the idea of escaping the suffocating reality of war and returning to a life of normalcy. This inner conflict speaks to Parvana's deep desire for a better life, one that is free from the constant violence and fear they face.

As the girls continue their work in the market, Parvana's dissatisfaction with life in Kabul becomes increasingly evident. She observes the struggles of the people around her, feeling a growing fatigue from the constant hardships that seem endless. Yet, amid the bleakness, there are small moments of joy that offer brief relief, such as the arrival of summer fruit in the market, which brings a sense of freshness and life to the otherwise grim surroundings. These moments, though fleeting, remind Parvana of the world outside the war, where things could be different. She also feels a sense of accomplishment when Nooria begins teaching a secret school for girls, a small act of rebellion against the Taliban's restrictions. This act of defiance highlights the resilience of the community and Parvana's hope that change, no matter how small, is possible. Despite these glimpses of hope, the ongoing struggles they face remain at the forefront of Parvana's mind. The chapter concludes with the unexpected news of Nooria's impending marriage, a development that adds another layer of complexity to Parvana's already complicated emotions. The marriage, while offering Nooria a chance at a different life, also represents the sacrifices that Parvana and her family must make in their search for survival.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13: In this chapter, Parvana and her sister Nooria engage in a heartfelt conversation about Nooria’s upcoming wedding and her plans to relocate to Mazar-e-Sharif, a city where girls are still able to attend school and experience more freedom under the restrictive rule of the Taliban. Parvana is initially taken aback by Nooria’s decision, particularly because she feels Nooria barely knows her intended groom, a childhood neighbor. Nooria, however, expresses her intense desire to escape the confines of Kabul, where she has been restricted by the oppressive social norms that prevent her from pursuing her education or working. She is frustrated by the daily responsibilities she faces, such as caring for her younger siblings, and views this marriage as her only opportunity to find a new life with greater possibilities. The prospect of a life filled with independence, education, and opportunity excites Nooria, despite the difficult path she must take.

As the family begins to discuss the preparations for the wedding and their plans to travel to Mazar, Parvana becomes increasingly anxious and upset. She fears that, in their absence, her father may return from prison and face the challenges of reintegrating into a family that is not present to support him. Parvana’s concerns are compounded by her deep emotional attachment to her father and the uncertainty about his condition, given the abuse he likely endured while imprisoned. Although she fervently protests the idea of being left behind, her mother reassures her, explaining that Mrs. Weera will stay in Kabul to look after Parvana. She also assures her that Mrs. Weera will keep their father informed about their whereabouts. Despite this explanation, Parvana remains disheartened and frustrated by the situation, her feelings manifesting through her anger and a sense of helplessness. The thought of being excluded from the family’s journey and the fear of her father’s potential return in such a vulnerable state weigh heavily on her heart.

As the days pass and the family’s departure approaches, Parvana’s emotions fluctuate between relief and sorrow. While part of her feels a sense of comfort knowing she will remain in her home, the thought of missing the wedding and being left behind in a city filled with uncertainty leaves her unsettled. The weeks that follow are filled with a strange mix of loneliness and independence. Parvana takes advantage of the time alone to focus on her studies, enjoying the quiet moments to read and learn with Mrs. Weera’s support. Mrs. Weera’s presence is a steady source of comfort for Parvana, offering her a sense of stability amid the chaos. However, despite the time for reflection and growth, Parvana cannot shake the sense of longing for the companionship of her family. The absence of the familiar family dynamics, the daily exchanges, and the warmth of shared experiences leave Parvana feeling more isolated than she anticipated. While she embraces the freedom to focus on her studies, she also learns how much her family’s presence means to her, and the emotional gap they leave behind is a painful reminder of how much she has lost.

While Parvana is selling items in the market, she encounters a sudden rainstorm, forcing her to seek shelter in a bombed-out building that serves as a haunting reminder of Kabul’s devastation. The building, once a structure of purpose and community, now stands as a desolate ruin, filled with remnants of destruction from the ongoing conflict. As she waits out the storm, Parvana is left with nothing but her own thoughts and the oppressive silence of the war-torn city. The darkness of the building mirrors the emotional state Parvana feels, as she is once again reminded of the harsh realities of life in Kabul. As she drifts off to sleep, a woman’s cry pierces the silence, pulling Parvana from her rest. The sound of the crying woman fills the air with tension and uncertainty, leaving readers with a lingering sense of suspense. Who is this woman, and what has led her to this point of despair? This encounter deepens the mystery surrounding Parvana’s world, leaving readers to wonder about the lives of those around her and the stories of struggle and survival that remain untold. It is a chilling reminder of the ongoing suffering faced by so many in Kabul, where the quiet moments are often broken by the sounds of pain and loss.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14: In this chapter, Parvana stumbles upon a woman who is softly crying in the shadows of a darkened alley, her sobs echoing through the quiet night. Initially unsure, Parvana cautiously calls out to her, lighting several matches to illuminate the area and find the source of the distress. She discovers the woman huddled against the wall, her fear evident, and in an act of empathy, Parvana introduces herself, explaining that she is pretending to be a boy named Kaseem in order to survive in the city. The woman's silence and vulnerability resonate with Parvana, compelling her to invite the woman to her home, offering a temporary refuge from the dangers of being outside without a burqa, which could result in severe punishment under the Taliban’s strict laws. This encounter highlights the harsh realities faced by women in Kabul, as Parvana risks her own safety to assist someone in need.

Once they reach Parvana’s home, the two women sit together in quiet reflection as Parvana forms a plan to help her new friend stay safe. Parvana, knowing the importance of blending in with society’s expectations, decides to borrow a burqa from Mrs. Weera to conceal the woman’s identity. As they wait for nightfall, Parvana shares a bag of dried fruit and nuts with the woman, ensuring she has some nourishment before they embark on their plan to leave. They quietly discuss their strategy for escaping the oppressive streets of Kabul and blending into the darkness of the night, far from the prying eyes of the Taliban. In this quiet moment, Parvana reflects on how much Kabul has changed since her parents once spoke of the city’s bustling, vibrant past, before the Taliban’s control turned it into a place of fear and oppression. The streets, once full of life, now echo with silence and danger, and Parvana’s sense of loss and longing for a time before the regime’s rise is palpable.

The journey through the dark, nearly empty streets of Kabul is fraught with anxiety and danger as Parvana stays alert to the ever-present threat of Taliban patrols. As

they cautiously make their way through the city, the tension rises when they encounter a truck filled with Taliban soldiers, a moment that amplifies Parvana's fear and unease. The presence of the soldiers makes her acutely aware of how little control they have over their safety and the grave risks they face in simply trying to survive. After navigating the tense streets, they finally reach Parvana's home, where Mrs. Weera welcomes them with warmth, though her concern for the woman's lack of appropriate attire is evident. Parvana carefully explains the events of the night, emphasizing how crucial it is to protect Homa and ensure her safety. Mrs. Weera listens attentively, understanding the gravity of the situation but also recognizing the strength and courage that Parvana has shown in helping a stranger in need.

The following day, as Homa rests and recovers from the traumatic ordeal of her escape, she opens up to Parvana about the horrific loss of her family. Homa shares her experience of fleeing Mazar-e-Sharif, describing the violent actions of the Taliban and the devastating toll it took on her family. Parvana listens in disbelief, her heart heavy with the weight of Homa's words. The thought of her own family possibly facing similar dangers fills Parvana with dread, and the emotional burden of this new reality weighs heavily on her. Despite Mrs. Weera's attempts to offer words of hope and solace, Parvana retreats into herself, overwhelmed by the grief and fear that now consume her. She isolates herself for two days, unable to escape the crushing sense of loss and helplessness.

Just when Parvana seems to have lost all hope, her friend Shauzia arrives to visit, offering a much-needed spark of energy. Shauzia encourages Parvana to step outside of her grief and re-engage with life, reminding her of the strength she has shown in the past. Parvana, fueled by Shauzia's encouragement, decides to rise above her despair and begin facing her responsibilities once again. This renewed sense of purpose leads to a growing bond between Parvana and Homa, as they form a connection born from their shared experiences of hardship and survival. Together, they begin to navigate the challenges of Kabul, finding moments of solace in their friendship. In a dramatic turn of events, Parvana returns home one afternoon to find her father alive, a sight that marks a pivotal moment in her journey. This unexpected reunion brings a surge of

relief and hope, offering a much-needed turning point in the emotional turmoil that has enveloped her life. Parvana, with her father’s return, is reminded that even in the darkest moments, there is always a possibility for light, and the hope for a better future begins to take root.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15: In this chapter of *The Breadwinner*, Parvana experiences a deeply emotional reunion with her father after his release from prison. His appearance has dramatically changed—his once-white shalwar kameez is now worn and torn, and his face is pale and gaunt. Despite these changes, Parvana immediately recognizes him, and her reaction is filled with overwhelming joy and relief as she clings to him. The men who bring him home explain to Mrs. Weera that they found him outside the prison, barely able to move, and thank her for the effort she had made to secure his release. This reunion brings a sense of hope to Parvana, but it also highlights the toll that her father's time in prison has taken on him, both physically and emotionally.

Over the following days, Parvana becomes her father's primary caregiver, attending to his needs as he begins to recover from the physical abuse he endured in prison. With Mrs. Weera's gentle care and support, his health improves slowly, though it is clear that he remains fragile. Parvana takes comfort in the fact that her father, despite his weakened state, is finally able to see her for who she has become. Her father notices the changes in her, acknowledging both her role as his daughter and the role she has had to take on as the family's provider. As she continues to work and provide for them, she brings him food and helps care for him, fulfilling both her familial duties and responsibilities as a young girl forced to grow up quickly in a harsh environment.

Parvana's life is further brightened by the presence of her friend Homa, who has started learning English at school. Homa shares moments of lightness with Parvana's father, engaging him in conversation and causing him to laugh—a rare moment of joy amid the constant struggles they face. The bond between the two girls deepens, and Parvana begins to feel a glimmer of hope for her future, imagining the possibility of a unified family once again. However, her hope is short-lived when her friend Shauzia reveals that her family plans to marry her off, triggering Parvana's deep fears of losing

yet another close friend. The chapter paints a picture of emotional contrast, where fleeting moments of joy are overshadowed by the looming threats of societal pressures and personal loss.

Amidst the uncertainty of her circumstances, Parvana becomes determined to reconnect with her mother and siblings, who have been displaced in Mazar. She hears about the refugee camps, which gives her the hope of reuniting with her family, despite the uncertainty of the journey ahead. She discusses the possibility with her father, who, though still weakened from his time in prison, agrees that they should attempt the journey. The decision to search for her family is fraught with challenges, but Parvana is steadfast in her resolve, fueled by the desire to bring her loved ones back together. The chapter encapsulates themes of hope and resilience, as Parvana takes on a leadership role within her family while also grappling with the responsibility of caring for her father.

As they prepare for their journey, Parvana takes a moment to honor a symbol of shared humanity and hope amidst the despair. In the market, she plants wildflowers to pay tribute to "the Window Woman," a figure representing the strength and beauty that can exist even in the darkest of times. An elderly man assists her in this act, reminding Parvana of the importance of finding beauty in the midst of hardship. This simple, yet profound gesture underscores the theme of finding solace and meaning in the smallest acts of kindness, even when the world around them is harsh and unforgiving. It serves as a reminder that, even in the most challenging circumstances, hope and beauty can still emerge.

The chapter ends with a bittersweet farewell as Shauzia shares her plans to leave for Pakistan, while Parvana dreams of a future reunion in Paris many years down the line. As their paths diverge, Parvana is left with mixed emotions—hope for the future, but uncertainty about what lies ahead. She contemplates her journey, now embarking on a new chapter with her father by her side, prepared to face the challenges of an uncertain future. The complexity of her feelings—hopeful yet unsure—reflects the emotional depth of her journey, one that combines strength, resilience, and the

unknown. Parvana’s ability to find hope amid the turmoil of her life speaks to the resilience of the human spirit, even in the most trying times. With a sense of purpose and the love of her father, she steps forward into an uncertain future, ready to face whatever challenges come her way.

Author's Note

Author's Note: Afghanistan, a pivotal country situated between Central Asia and South Asia, has long been a target for invasions from various world powers due to its strategic location. Over the centuries, Afghanistan has witnessed invasions from renowned historical forces, including Alexander the Great, the Mongol Empire, and more recently, the British and Soviet Empires. The Soviet invasion in 1979 stands out as a particularly devastating event, as it led to a decade of intense and brutal warfare. During this period, Afghan resistance groups, supported by the United States, fought against the Soviet-backed government. However, despite receiving military support, these resistance factions showed little regard for the human rights of the Afghan people, leaving many civilians suffering through the violence and instability that plagued the country.

After the Soviets withdrew in 1989, the country descended further into chaos, as various factions fought for dominance in a civil war that displaced millions of Afghans. Many refugees fled to neighboring countries like Pakistan, Iran, and Russia, where they were forced to live in overcrowded and poverty-stricken camps. The toll on the Afghan population was immense, with countless individuals either killed, maimed, or psychologically scarred by the constant violence. The social fabric of the country was shredded as families and communities faced unbearable hardship, and the psychological toll of the conflict left many Afghans in a state of profound despair. The war not only decimated lives but also left the nation in ruins, struggling to rebuild both physically and emotionally from the years of violence.

In 1996, the Taliban, a radical militant group, took control of Kabul and imposed a reign of strict laws that severely limited the rights of women and girls. Under the Taliban's rule, girls' schools were shut down, women were excluded from the workforce, and society was subjected to harsh regulations. These included the

destruction of cultural items such as books and televisions, and prohibitions on music, all of which created an oppressive environment where freedom and personal expression were heavily restricted. The Taliban's regime further deepened the suffering of the Afghan people, particularly women, whose rights and freedoms were severely curtailed during this period. This harsh rule marked a period of regression for Afghan society, erasing the gains that had been made in previous decades in education and civil liberties.

In the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, which were orchestrated by the al-Qaeda group that had found refuge in Afghanistan, the United States and its allies launched a military campaign to overthrow the Taliban. The bombing campaign led to the removal of the Taliban from power, resulting in the establishment of a new government and a new constitution. These changes brought about significant reforms, including the reopening of schools for both boys and girls and the return of women to the workforce, signaling a positive shift for many citizens. However, despite these reforms, Afghanistan remained a nation grappling with deep-seated instability, a fractured political landscape, and a population haunted by years of conflict. The challenges facing Afghanistan were far from over, as the country struggled to build a stable, peaceful future amidst the aftermath of decades of violence.

Despite the fall of the Taliban, Afghanistan continued to face significant challenges, with the group's resurgence and ongoing guerrilla warfare destabilizing the country. Additionally, the country became notorious for its role in the global opium trade, contributing to its reputation as a center of illicit drug production. The corruption that plagues the Afghan government has also hindered efforts to rebuild the country and improve living conditions for its people. Women's rights, which had seen some improvement in the early 2000s, are once again under threat, with girls' schools and female activists becoming frequent targets of violence and intimidation. These developments have further entrenched Afghanistan's struggles, and the road to achieving lasting peace and gender equality remains fraught with obstacles.

Understanding Afghanistan’s complex history is crucial for grasping the underlying causes of its ongoing strife. The country’s history of foreign intervention and internal conflict has shaped its present reality, and the mistakes made by external powers have contributed significantly to the country’s continuing instability. Afghanistan’s rich cultural heritage and resilient people are often overshadowed by the violence and political unrest that have dominated the nation’s recent history. Nevertheless, the strength of the Afghan people in the face of adversity continues to inspire hope for a brighter future. The road to peace in Afghanistan must be paved by the Afghan people themselves, with their voices guiding the way toward a more peaceful, prosperous, and just future.

Also by Deborah Ellis

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About the Author

About the Author: Deborah Ellis is a highly regarded author who has made a remarkable contribution to children's literature, writing nearly thirty books aimed at young readers. Her work spans across various genres, yet she is best known for her *Breadwinner* series, which has resonated deeply with readers worldwide. The series, which explores the challenges faced by young girls in war-torn regions, has been translated into twenty-five languages, making it accessible to a global audience. This series not only highlights the hardships of its characters but also offers readers a way to connect with the realities faced by children in conflict zones. The success of the *Breadwinner* series has led to over $1 million in royalties, with all proceeds benefiting causes like Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan and Street Kids International, providing vital resources and support for women and children in need.

Ellis's achievements are not just confined to her literary success, but also reflect her deep commitment to social justice. Her writing has earned numerous prestigious accolades, including the Jane Addams Children’s Book Award, which celebrates books that promote peace and social justice. Furthermore, Ellis was recognized with the University of California’s Middle East Book Award, underscoring her ability to illuminate critical global issues. The awards she has received, including the Governor General’s Award and the Ruth Schwartz Award, serve as a testament to her profound impact on children's literature. In recognition of her work on a global scale, Ellis has also received the Vicky Metcalf Award for a Body of Work and Sweden’s Peter Pan Prize, honoring her ability to inspire young readers to think critically and empathetically about the world around them.

Deborah Ellis's influence extends beyond her literary accomplishments, as she is equally committed to advocating for marginalized communities. She has been awarded the Ontario Library Association’s President’s Award for Exceptional

Achievement, which acknowledges her far-reaching impact within the literary world and beyond. Additionally, Ellis's appointment to the Order of Ontario reflects her extensive work as an advocate for those in need. Her writing continues to shine a light on the lives of women and children facing adversity, and she uses her platform to raise awareness about important issues such as gender equality and child welfare. Through her work, Ellis emphasizes the power of storytelling to create change, helping readers of all ages develop a deeper understanding of the struggles that people face in different parts of the world.

Currently residing in Simcoe, Ontario, Deborah Ellis continues to be an influential figure in both literature and advocacy. She remains dedicated to her mission of improving the lives of marginalized individuals, particularly women and children in conflict areas. Ellis’s ongoing involvement in various humanitarian efforts and social initiatives further demonstrates her passion for creating a better world. She participates in projects that focus on providing resources, education, and opportunities for those in need, ensuring that her influence reaches far beyond her books. Through her work, Ellis encourages readers, especially young ones, to be more aware of the world’s issues and to take action in whatever way they can to bring about positive change.

For those interested in learning more about Deborah Ellis and her work, her official website offers a wealth of information about her latest books and advocacy initiatives. Visitors to deborahellis.com can find out about her upcoming events, read about her activism, and explore her written works. Ellis is also active on social media, where she engages with her readers and shares updates on her latest projects. Fans can follow her on her Facebook page at facebook.com/deborahellisauthor, where she continues to foster a strong connection with her audience. Through her writing and advocacy, Deborah Ellis remains a significant voice in contemporary children's literature, using her platform to educate, inspire, and promote change.