Chp 1

Parvana is an eleven-year-old girl living in Afghanistan. Because the Taliban has taken over, women are not allowed outside the home, although Parvana is allowed to help her father to the local market each day. Father needs help because he lost his leg from a bomb. Parvana’s father and mother were college educated and both held high-paying jobs before the Taliban took control. Their family lived in a big house and even had servants. Now, father sits in the market and sells the family’s remaining belongings and reads and writes letters for those who don’t know how. Parvana and her older sister Nooria had also been in school and are also quite educated. Parvana has a 5-year-old sister Maryam and a 2-year-old brother, Ali. Her entire family lives in one small room in a bombed out apartment building.

Chp 2

Parvana and her sister Nooria do not get along. Nooria is very beautiful and has taken to bossing Parvana around. Parvana is resentful and proud that she is the only one in the family that can fetch water for their home. Her younger siblings and father aren’t strong enough and it would not be safe for her mother or sister to go outside without a man. Parvana used to have an older brother, Hossain, but he was killed by a landmine when he was 14. Her family does not talk about him very often. The family is having dinner when Taliban soldiers come in and take Father. When her mother protests, they hit her with their guns. To keep the soldiers from finding her father’s hidden books, Parvana throws herself at them and they hit her as well.

Chp 3

After a sleepless night, Mother announces that she and Parvana are going to get Father out of jail. Since women are not supposed to travel alone, Nooria writes a fake note that is supposed to be from Father explaining why his wife is out of the house without him. They have to walk, as women are not allowed to ride buses without their husbands. At the prison, Mother and Parvana call out to the guards, asking for Father to be released. The guards beat Mother and Parvana with sticks so they leave.

Chp 4

Parvana and her mother arrive home very bruised and their feet, not used to walking such distances, bloody and blistered. The next day, Mother just sleeps. Parvana sleeps a lot and needs help to walk. Mother sleeps for several days and finally, without Father to provide for them, the family runs out of food. Although she doesn’t want to and is frightened, Parvana must go to the market to buy food.

Chp 5

In the market Parvana is able to buy some bread, however soon a Taliban soldier questions why she is there and hits her. As she is running away she is stopped by a family friend, Mrs. Weera, who decides to come home with Parvana to see Mother. Mother had been a writer and Mrs. Weera wants her to start a magazine. When Mrs. Weera sees that mother has not gotten up in days she takes control and gets the house, including mother, cleaned up.
Chp 6

The older women of the family have decided to make Parvana look like a boy. If anyone asks they will say they sent Parvana to live with relatives and that the This is their visiting cousin. They cut off all of Parvana’s hair and dress her in her dead brother, Hossain’s, clothes. Parvana is not used to having her face exposed and worries people in the market will realize she is a girl. Bravely, she goes to the market and successfully buys all the groceries her family needs. However, Mother is very upset because she looks so much like Hossain, although Nooria says that Mother will just have to get used to it because this is the only way for the family to survive.

Chp 7

The next day Parvana is sent to the market to do her father’s job of selling household items and reading, since most people cannot read. Her first customer is a Taliban soldier who wants her to read a letter that was sent to his deceased wife. It is a letter from the woman’s aunt, wishing her well in her new marriage and sending her wishes for her future. The soldier becomes very sad when Parvana reads the letter. She is shocked because she has never seen a Taliban soldier show any caring emotions, especially toward women. As Parvana is about to leave she thinks she sees someone from a window above her selling blanket watching her.

Chp 8

Mrs. Weera announces she and her baby granddaughter are moving in with Parvana’s family, and her and Mother will start a magazine. Mrs. Weera and her granddaughter are the only family each other has left. The rest of their family has been killed from bombs and sickness. Mrs. Weera insists the entire family starts to get some exercise, so with Parvana dressed as a boy, she acts as their escort and they are able to take walks outside. One day in the market Parvana chases after a man she thinks is her father, but it is not him and she is disappointed. Another day she finds a small piece of embroidered fabric left on her selling blanket. A few days later she finds a beaded bracelet on her blanket. When she looks up at the window above, she sees a woman’s face. The woman smiles at her and then shuts the window. As Parvana is about to leave she crashes into a boy who serves tea at the market...and realizes it is a girl from her class!

Chp 9

The girl who is disguised as a tea boy is Shauzia, a girl from Parvana’s school. She has been in disguise for 6 months after her brother went to Iran for work and her father died. She lives with her mother, two younger sisters, and her father’s parents and sister. It is not a pleasant situation as everyone fights. Shauzia comes home with Parvana to say hello and Mother and Mrs. Weera say they are thinking of starting a secret school for the girls. Nooria will help teacher. Mother and Mrs. Weera are also working on the magazine. One day at the market, the woman in the window drops down a beautiful white handkerchief. Then, Shauzia tells her she has a new plan on how they can make money.

Chp 10

Shauzia hears that the girls can dig up bones from old graves to sell to a bone broker. The girls do not tell their families what they are doing. While digging the girls go into an old abandoned building to use the restroom and are worried about stepping on a landmine. They had even been taught in school by the UN about the different types and how to avoid stepping on them. The girls do not give all of their earnings to their families because the families would be suspicious and they are saving up for trays to sell goods on, which they think will also help them earn money.
Chp 11

When Parvana arrives home her mother is upset and worried because Parvana did not come home for lunch. Parvana cries and admits to what she was doing. At first mother says Parvana must not do it again, however the other members of the family argue with Mother, saying the family needs the money. At the end of two weeks, Parvana and Shauzia had enough money to start their new business: selling items off trays. Parvana returns to sitting on her blanket at the market, and the woman in the window above her drops down a red wooden bead. That afternoon, Parvana and Shauzia go to the soccer stadium to sell items off their trays. Instead of a soccer game, the girls discover that the Taliban is making people watch them torture prisoners. The soldiers cut off the hands of the people they claim are thieves. Parvana and Shauzia are shocked and disgusted.

Chp 12

Parvana stayed home for a few days after witnessing the horror of the soccer stadium. When she returns to work Shauzia tells her that she has been secretly saving up money and she wants to leave. She is worried that her body is changing and she won’t be able to hide as a boy much longer. Parvana tells Shauzia about the woman in the window who has been giving her gifts. As life continues on, Parvana grows tired of the market but even more intrigued by the woman in the window above who keeps dropping down gifts. One day she hears the woman screaming and a man yelling at her and beating her. At home, Mother and Mrs. Weera have started a secret school for a few girls and Nooria is the teacher. One day when Parvana arrives home, Mother greets her with some shocking news: Nooria is getting married.

Chp 13

Parvana is concerned because Nooria does not know the man she is to marry, however Nooria is excited because she will be moving to a part of Afghanistan where the Taliban is not in control. Parvana is also upset because Mother announces they will all leave town to attend the wedding and Parvana is worried Father will return and won’t be able to find them. Finally, Mother agrees to leave Parvana behind with Mrs. Weera. In the night, Parvana wakes up to hear crying.

Chp 14

Parvana follows the sound of crying and discovers a woman hiding. She does not speak and does not have her burqa so they wait until it is very dark and then Parvana leads her home. After helping the woman clean up and dress her in clothes of Mother, the woman explains she has run away from the same town that Mother and Nooria were going for the wedding. The Taliban has taken over the city and killed many people. She hid in the back of a truck and escaped. Parvana is very upset and worried about what has happened to her family. She becomes depressed and lays down and does not go to work. After a couple days Shauzia comes to find Parvana and asks her to come back to the market, so she does. One day when she comes home she discovers Father being helped up the stairs by two men.

Chp 15

Father is very weak and sick from being in prison. He has also been beaten. One day Shauzia tells Parvana she must soon leave, as her family has started to look for a husband for her. A visitor tells Parvana’s family that many people from the town that Nooria and Mother had gone to are camping in a refugee camp. Father says they must go try to find Mother and Nooria. Mrs. Weera has decided to go to Pakistan to live with a cousin. Before Parvana and Father and leave, Mrs. Weera gives them copies of Mother’s magazine to bring to Mother and other women. As she sits in the back of a truck on her way to find her family, Parvana wonders what the future will hold.