

The Breadwinner

Deborah Ellis

Reviewed by Rachel Johnson, 42

Teen Star Book Reviewer of Be the Star You Are! Charity

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Parvana is 11-years old and lives with her father, mother, brother, and two sisters in Kabal, Afghanistan. Parvana's parents are educated and before war times her family lived in a nice house, her parents had careers, and Parvana went to school. They have moved many times since the war broke out and now live in one room of a partially destroyed building due to bombings. The Taliban has taken over and enforce strict rules, most that affect women. Women are not allowed to leave the house without being completely covered and having a male escort or note from their husbands. They are not allowed to work or go to school. There's a curfew and windows must be painted black.

Parvana's father makes money in the market by reading and writing letters for people. He also sells some of the family's things. Parvana is allowed to go to the market with her father each day because he has trouble walking but she must sit in the back of their spot with her head covered. One day the Taliban comes into Parvana's home and arrests her father for being educated in another country. The family has no source of income, and a plan is hatched to disguise Parvana as a boy so she can go to the market and work in her father's place.

The Breadwinner is a story about surviving oppression. It is sad yet realistic and informative. Deborah Ellis has written an easy-to-read version of a tough subject. I loved the characters in this book, the girls and women are strong willed and resilient. My favorite part of the book was the women starting a magazine to publish their struggles even though it put their lives in danger. I also like the strong emphasis on family. Reading this book showed me how easily it is to forget about appreciating the small things in life. Things that people in other part of the world are being denied, like the ability to simply go outside. This book does have some violence. There are some dreadful events like children digging up bones in a graveyard to sell for food and the Taliban cutting off the arms of citizens in an arena. Although the content of this book is heartbreaking, it is a great learning tool and gives you a glimpse into a world completely different from our own. This is the first book in a series of four and would make a great gift, I would recommend this book to all readers age 10+.

Recommended Titles

When My Name Was Keoko, by Linda Sue Parks

Esperanza Rising, by Pam Munoz Ryan

A Place to Belong, by Cynthia Kadohata

