



“One can only hope,” he said, reaching for another, “that Dacca’s refugees are as heartily fed. Which reminds me.” He reached into his suit pocket and gave me a small plastic egg filled with cinnamon hearts. “For the lady of the house,” he said with an almost **imperceptible** splay-footed bow.

150 “Really, Mr. Pirzada,” my mother protested. “Night after night. You spoil her.”

“I only spoil children who are incapable of spoiling.” **F**

It was an awkward moment for me, one which I awaited in part with dread, in part with delight. I was charmed by the presence of Mr. Pirzada’s rotund elegance, and flattered by the faint theatricality of his attentions, yet unsettled by the superb ease of his gestures, which made me feel, for an instant, like a stranger in my own home. It had become our ritual, and for several weeks, before we grew more comfortable with one another, it was the only time he spoke to me directly. I had no response, offered no comment, betrayed no
160 visible reaction to the steady stream of honey-filled lozenges, the raspberry truffles, the slender rolls of sour pastilles. I could not even thank him, for once, when I did, for an especially spectacular peppermint lollipop wrapped in a spray of purple cellophane, he had demanded, “What is this thank-you? The lady at the bank thanks me, the cashier at the shop thanks me, the librarian thanks me when I return an overdue book, the overseas operator thanks me as she tries to connect me to Dacca and fails. If I am buried in this country I will be thanked, no doubt, at my funeral.”

It was inappropriate, in my opinion, to consume the candy Mr. Pirzada gave me in a casual manner. I coveted each evening’s treasure as I would a jewel, or
170 a coin from a buried kingdom, and I would place it in a small keepsake box

imperceptible

(im'per-səp'tə-bel) *adj.*
impossible or difficult
to notice

F DRAW CONCLUSIONS

What do Mr. Pirzada’s words and actions reveal about his feelings for the people of Dacca?