

## CHAPTER I

THERE was a silly girl whose marriage had taken place, but from sheer want of common-sense she could not manage to spend even a year or two under the roof of her husband's parents. In the fourth or fifth month after the wedding she began pestering her husband to take a separate house for her, because, forsooth, she was 'unable to stand' his mother and sisters.

Her husband said: 'In all of your squabbles with my mother and sisters which I have happened to overhear, it is you who have been in the wrong. Whatever people there are of the commonest sort living in the mohulla,<sup>1</sup> you treat *their* daughters as if they were your sisters. *Chuniya*—the daughter of Bhondu the sutler, and *Zulfan*—the daughter of Bakhshu the tinker, and *Rahmat*—the daughter of Kimmu the water-carrier, and *Sulmati*—the daughter of Maulan the greengrocer,<sup>2</sup> are received by you with open arms at all hours of the day, and you take no account of the fact that these people are not of our family, or connection, nor admitted to our society or friendship. The whole mohulla is talking about it, and saying, "What sort of a bride has come here now? Whenever you see her, only girls of *that* sort are sitting with her." After all there *are* people living in the mohulla—people, too, like Kázi Imám Ali, Hakím Shifá-uddaula, Munshi Mumtáz Ahmad, Maulavi Rúhulláh, Mír Hasan rizá<sup>3</sup>—whose daughters and daughters-in-law are in the habit of visiting us. You don't vouchsafe a word to any of *them*. If my honoured mother warned you against associating with girls of low-bred and vulgar people, what was there improper in her doing so?'

The silly wife replied: 'Affection and friendship depend upon

<sup>1</sup> Our nearest equivalent to 'mohulla' (which is spelt in the English fashion) is 'ward'; it means a collection of houses in a city known by one name.

<sup>2</sup> Pronounce Chooniya, Bhoandoo, Zoolfun, Bukhshoo, Ruhmat, Kimmoo, Soolmuttee, and Mowlun.

<sup>3</sup> Pronounce Hakím as Hukeem, Munshi as Moonshée, Hasan as Husaun. The 'á' with an accent is the long 'a' in 'father'; the 'á' the long 'u' in 'ruler'; 'í' has the value of 'ee.'

the union of hearts. There was a bangle-seller named Básu living next door to my mother's house, whose daughter Banno was my bosom friend.<sup>1</sup> I used to play with her when I was little. Yes, Banno and I made a marriage between our two dolls. Banno, poor thing! was very badly off. I used to steal quantities of things from my mother and give them to her. I would never give up my meetings with Banno, however much my mother forbade them.'

Her husband said: 'A precious idiot you were, then!'

When she heard this, the foolish woman cried out to her husband: 'Look here! by God's oath, I tell you once for all—you must keep a smooth tongue when you speak to me, Sir. Else, I'll dash my brains out, so that you shall have my blood on your head.' And upon that she began crying, and cursing her father and mother. 'Oh God! be it bad for such parents! What a miserable lot they have thrust me into! Everyone knows I am helpless, and so they are bent on persecuting me. Oh God! let me die! Let my bier be carried out!'

And in the height of her passion she kicked over a little pawn-casket<sup>2</sup> which had been left on the bed and upset it. All the catechu and lime was spilt on the mattress. A coverlet of English woollen-stuff had been folded back over the foot of the bed; as soon as the lime touched it, all its colour was taken out. On hearing the clatter of the box falling, her mother-in-law came running from the saloon on the opposite side. The son, when he saw his mother coming, took himself off by another doorway; but he said to himself as he left: 'Well, I *have* stirred up a hornets' nest for my sins!'

When the mother-in-law came in, what does she see? A whole anna's worth of catechu—which she had only put into its cup the day before, after carefully straining and preparing it—all lying spilt, the mattress sticky with it, the coverlet soaked with lime, her daughter-in-law weeping and sobbing convulsively. Directly

<sup>1</sup> Pronounce Barsoo and Bunno.

<sup>2</sup> A box (probably of silver) with compartments containing fresh leaves of the 'piper betel' (paw) and the various ingredients that are put inside the leaf, which is then wrapped up and chewed.

she entered she clasped her daughter-in-law to her neck, and wildly uttered many hard words about her son.

The moral support derived from *this* show of sympathy became a pretext for further action, as irresistible as the proverbial 'a jogger to a nodder.' No amount of entreaty or expostulation on the part of her mother-in-law had the slightest effect upon this hypocritical woman. All the females of the neighbourhood, when they heard the noise of crying and slapping,<sup>1</sup> gathered in a crowd at the door. At last matters came to such a pitch that Zulfan, the daughter of Bakhshu the tinman, ran off to the bride's mother's house, and there rehearsed a story of the affair, in which every incident was magnified fourfold. Now the bride's mother also, by the grace of God, was a very hot-tempered woman. The instant she heard the story she got into her doolie and arrived at the spot. There was a battle royal between the two mothers. In the end, the bride's mother took the bride away with her. For several months all ordinary civilities between the two families were entirely suspended.

In order to make my story intelligible, I must tell you the names of all these people. Akbari Khánam was the proper name of this foolish and deceitful woman, and in her husband's home she had received the title of Mizájdár bahu.<sup>2</sup> Although this Akbari was foolish and ill-educated and bad-tempered, her younger sister Asghari<sup>3</sup> was a very intelligent, sensible, and kindly dispositioned girl. At an early age she had read through the translation of the Qur-án and the vernacular text-books of religious doctrine; and in writing, too, she was not at a loss. Every week she used to send a letter containing the family news to her father. She could do every kind of needlework, and knew how to cook quite a variety of tasty dishes. The whole mohulla sang her praises.

<sup>1</sup> *I.e.*, slapping the breast as a sign of lamentation.

<sup>2</sup> Pronounce Ukburee and Buhoo, with the accent on the first syllable in each case. 'Bahu' means 'bride' or 'daughter-in-law'; 'Mizájdár' may mean in a good sense 'one who has a proper sense of her dignity,' and in a bad sense 'one who has a temper.'

<sup>3</sup> Pronounce Usguree, with accent on the first syllable. The words Akbari and Asghari simply mean 'elder' and 'younger.' Khánam means 'lady.'

All the arrangements of her mother's housekeeping were left in her hands. Whenever her father came home on privilege leave, he would consult her in his management of the family affairs. The ready money, the keys of the store-cupboard and boxes—in fact, everything of the kind was left under her control. Both of her parents were exceedingly fond of her, and, indeed, she was beloved by everyone in the mohulla; but Akbari, for no reason at all, was always on bad terms with her younger sister, and at times used even to strike her when she found her alone. And yet Asghari invariably treated her elder sister with respect, and never told tales of her to her mother.

It so happened that both sisters became betrothed into the same family. Muhammad Aqil<sup>1</sup> and Muhammad Kámil<sup>2</sup> were two brothers. Akbari had already been married to the elder brother, Muhammad Aqil, and Asghari's engagement to Muhammad Kámil had been definitely arranged, but the marriage had not yet taken place. In consequence of Akbari's display of bad temper, Asghari's betrothal was very nearly being broken off; but there was an aunt on the mother's side of the two girls, who lived close by Muhammad Aqil's house, and she always exerted a good influence over them. Although Akbari had left her husband after a regular quarrel, her aunt denounced her conduct in very plain terms, and lost no opportunity of admonishing her. And, finally, after several months, she took the opportunity of the Ramazán<sup>3</sup> to bring her niece back, and get her received in her father-in-law's house. For some days, indeed, Muhammad Aqil continued to view his wife with displeasure, but at length the good aunt got both husband and wife to be reconciled to each other. Still, when there is no real harmony in the dispositions of two people, occasions for umbrage are to be found in all kinds of little things.

One day, Muhammad Aqil said to his mother: 'I have invited a friend to come in. It would be as well if the food at fast-

<sup>1</sup> Pronounce Moommud, with accent on the second syllable, and Arkill.

<sup>2</sup> Pronounce Karmil.

<sup>3</sup> Pronounce Rummuzarn, with accent on the last syllable.

breaking time<sup>1</sup> and supper were served up with a little extra care.'

His mother replied: 'Heaven knows what I suffer in cooking even the bread for our supper. At fast-breaking time, for the last three days, I have been seized with ague, so as not even to know what I am about. God bless the woman next door for cooking that, even as well as she does! You really ought to have made some inquiry in the house before inviting anyone.'

Muhammad Aqil glanced towards his wife with a look of amazement, and said: 'What! is she not even fit to help you in that?'

Don't suppose that his wife had sufficient self-control to keep silent when she heard such a remark as this was. No sooner had the words caught her ear than she called out: 'Ask this old mother of yours whether she got her son married, or purchased a slave-girl for him. What! toil over a kitchen fire in fast time? Not I, Sir.'

Muhammad Aqil thought to himself: 'Now, if I make any kind of reply, there will be the same disgraceful scene as before.'

With a look of blank disappointment he held his peace, and fetched in some things for the fast-breaking from the bázár. So that matter was got over.

## CHAPTER II

BUT Muhammad Aqil was now confronted by a new calamity—namely, the Eed.<sup>2</sup> The poor man had commenced his preparations for Mizájdár bahu's new outfit a whole week before. Every day he brought home cloths of different kinds, bangles of different colours, embroidered shoes of this or that pattern; nothing met with Mizájdár's approval, until at last there was only one day left before the Eed. In despair he went off and called at the house of Akbari khánam's aunt.

<sup>1</sup> During the fast a very light meal is taken directly after sunset.

<sup>2</sup> *I.e.*, the great feast on the first day after the Ramazán. It is a day of thanksgiving and reconciliation, and all who can afford to do so wear new clothes. The word is spelt here according to the English pronunciation of it.

As soon as she heard his voice, she summoned him in to the ladies' apartments, and greeting him with blessings, affectionately made him sit down by her. Then she prepared some pawn, and having handed a leaf to him, she said: 'Tell me, is Akbari all well?'

Muhammad Aqil replied: 'Madam, your sister's daughter is a woman of a marvellous constitution; she quite takes my breath away. Her vivacity is something extraordinary, and her conversation is made up of contradictions.'

His Aunt said: 'My dear son, don't worry yourself about it. She is quite young now. When she has children, when she feels the burden of keeping house, her temper will get right of itself. And, after all, good people do manage to get on with bad people. God has endowed you, my son, with every kind of advantage. Don't let anything happen at which people might jeer. After all, it is your own honor which is at stake.'

Muhammad Aqil said: 'Yes, your honor, and simply on that consideration I do try to overlook a great deal. But just think of this: to-morrow is the Eed, and up to this moment she has not tried on her new bangles, nor made up her new costume. Would you come over for a moment and bring her to her senses? I have said all I could, my mother has entreated her, but she won't listen to a word.'

His Aunt said: 'Very well. Your uncle has just gone to the mosque for prayers, but as soon as he returns I will ask him, and come over.'

Accordingly, the good aunt came to the house, and made the girl put on her new bangles, and did the cutting-out of the clothes. For greater speed, all the women sat down together to sew. The aunt said: 'Daughter, do you put the frills on to the trousers. Your mother-in-law will cut the trimmings, and, meanwhile, I will stitch the edging on to your mantle.'

When Akbari had finished putting on the frills, she said to her Aunt with a consequential air: 'Here, Lady, you have still two sides left, and I have already finished putting the frills on both legs.'

Her Aunt looked at the frills; they were put on upside down.

Out of respect for Akbari's mother-in-law she did not say anything out loud, but she managed quietly to give Akbari two or three pinches, which brought tears into her eyes, and she made a gesture as much as to say: 'Good for nothing! Can't you see? You have put the frills on upside down.'

Akbari undid all her sewing, and began putting the frills on again. When she had done, her Aunt looked, and they were all in puckers. This time the Aunt lost her temper, and without letting Akbari's mother-in-law see, she ran the point of her needle into Akbari's hand; and after undoing the frills a second time, she put them on herself. In the end, after many groans and supplications,<sup>1</sup> Madam Mizájdár bahu's new costume was at last sewn together and completed. A good part of the night had gone. Akbari's aunt departed to her own home, and the people of the house, too, wished each other good-night and went to bed.

For joy of the Eed, the children woke up betimes in the morning. One took off the henna wrappings of the night, another shouted out for oilcake and gram flour,<sup>2</sup> another began demanding the Eed presents the instant he arose. Muhammad Aqil, too, as soon as his morning prayers were over, went off to the *hammadm*<sup>3</sup> for a bath, and came back, clean and spruce, shortly after day-break. He found all the boys sitting ready, with their new clothes on, to go to the Eedgáh.<sup>4</sup> But Mizájdár bahu, according to her usual custom, was fast asleep. Muhammad Aqil said to his little sister Mahmúda: 'Go, Mahmúda, and wake up your sister-in-law.'

At first Mahmúda hesitated; she was very much afraid of Mizájdár bahu, who, from the day she was married, had never once spoken kindly to her little sister-in-law, or let her come near her, or sit by her side. But in the joy of the Eed, at her brother's request, Mahmúda ran off, and said: 'Sister-in-law! Get up!'

Her sister-in-law did get up, and simultaneously caught Mahmúda a slap full in the face. Mahmúda began to cry. Her brother, hearing her voice, ran in and asked what had happened:

<sup>1</sup> Lit., 'after many a Lord! Lord!'

<sup>2</sup> For washing.

<sup>3</sup> Pronounce hummarm. The bath is what is known as 'a Turkish bath.'

<sup>4</sup> A wide enclosure generally built outside a town, at which all the Muslims assemble for prayer on the Eed.

'Sister-in-law struck me,' said Mahmúda, still crying.

Mizájdár called out: 'Oh what a liar! Oh what a good-for-nothing! She fell of herself as she was running, and puts it upon me!'

I need hardly say that Muhammad Aqil was very angry; but thinking it the best plan at the time, he restrained his indignation, and quieted Mahmúda with kisses and caresses. Then he said to his wife: 'Well! get up and bathe, and put your new clothes on. The day is far advanced; I am going to the Eedgáh.'

Mizájdár turned up her nose and frowned, and said: 'I don't bathe so early as this; it is cold. Go to your Eedgáh; have I said anything to the contrary?'

At this cross speech Muhammad Aqil was extremely annoyed; but Mizájdár was by nature so unlucky that she was for ever keeping her husband in a state of vexation with her.

Meanwhile, Muhammad Aqil's mother called to him: 'Son, dear, just go and fetch some milk from the bázár. You can easily go to the Eedgáh afterwards.'

Muhammad Aqil said: 'All right, give me the money, and I will bring the milk; but if by the time I come back this girl has not changed her clothes, I will put them all on the kitchen fire.'

So saying, he went off to the bázár for the milk. But his mother had observed that his temper was very much disturbed. Moreover, his disposition was of that nature that, in the first place, he rarely yielded to passion; but when he did yield, he was apt to lose his reason completely. She must beware lest in very truth he should burn up all the new clothes. She hurried to her daughter-in-law, and said: 'Daughter, for God's sake, don't do anything to spoil the happiness of this one day of the whole year! Get up, and have your bath, and put on your new clothes.'

Mizájdár said: 'No, lady; I never bathe at this time. I will bathe later.'

But in the end, after many entreaties and protestations, the mother-in-law got her to bathe; and having dressed her hair, and put on her clothes, she had her set up like a bride before Muhammad Aqil came back:

When Muhammad Aqil saw what had been done, he was made

happy again ; and as he was starting for the Eedgáh, he asked Mahmúda what toy he should bring back with him for her from the bázár. Mahmúda said : ' Bring me a nice pretty book-rest—I will put my daily portion of scripture on it—and a tiny little box to hold my reed-pen and inkpot.'

Here Mizájdár called out of her own accord : ' And for me ?'

Muhammad Aqil said : ' Whatever you desire I am ready to bring.'

Mizájdár said : ' Maize cobs, and water-chestnuts, and berries of the jujube-tree, and some roasted pease-pods, and a whole lot of oranges, a drum, and a tambourine——'

Muhammad Aqil burst out laughing, and said : ' What will you do with a drum and a tambourine ?'

The silly Mizájdár replied : ' Play upon them. What else ?'

Then Muhammad Aqil understood that, even at her age, the silly girl was just like infants without discretion, having no higher ideas than those of eating and playing. All the pleasure he had experienced at her having put on her new clothes was turned to dust, and in that state of despondency he went to the Eedgáh.

No sooner was he gone than Mizájdár made a new move. She said to her mother-in-law : ' Send for a doolie for me ; I want to go to my mother's house.'

Her mother-in-law said : ' Goodness me ! What time is this for you to go ? It is only eight days since you came back from your mother's house after four months' absence. And to go away on the very day of the Eed is absolutely improper.'

Mizájdár said : ' I am feeling very agitated to-day. My heart is coming up the wrong way. My old friend Banno, the daughter of Básu the bangle-maker, is always in my thoughts.'

Her mother-in-law said : ' God help you, daughter ! Was there ever such a passion as you have for Banno ? If you want her so badly as all that, send for her to come here.'

Mizájdár said : ' Ah yes, you are a good hand at inviting when you can't help yourself. If she was to be invited at all, you might have sent for her yesterday to see me put on my new bangles.'

Her mother-in-law said : ' Goodness, child ! how was I to know

that you would be tickled with the thought of her all on a sudden ?'

Mizájdár said : ' Well, it's no good arguing. If you are going to send for a doolie, send for it. If not, I will get one brought by dear little Sulmati's father.'

Her mother-in-law said : ' Child ! has your reason been smitten ? You have not even asked your husband's leave. If you go, it's your own doing. I am not going to have my aged locks shorn off that I should send for a doolie without my son's permission.'

Mizájdár said : ' Husband, indeed ! and permission ! What ? Is no one nowadays to go and see her parents on the Eed, or the Baqar Eed ?'<sup>1</sup>

With these words, having procured a doolie through Maulan the greengrocer, she was off, and at her own home in no time.

Shortly afterwards Muhammad Aqil came back from the Eedgáh. As he burst into the house he called out : ' Here, Lady ! take your drum and your tambourine, and play upon them.' Then he looked round ; everyone was silent. He asked his mother : ' What has happened ? Is all well ?'

Mahmúda said : ' Sister-in-law has gone away.'

Muhammad Aqil was overwhelmed with amazement, and said : ' Eh ? How did she go ? Where has she gone to ? Why did you let her go ?'

His mother answered : ' All on a sudden, without a word from anyone, she began saying : " I am going to my mother's." She would not listen to any of my remonstrances, but got Maulan to fetch her a doolie, and off she went. I did all I could to stop her, but it was no use.'

While she was speaking Muhammad Aqil stood quivering with rage. His first impulse was to go off at once to his wife's home and chastize the good-for-nothing woman, and with this idea he moved towards the door ; but his mother, divining his intention, called to him as he was leaving. When he returned no answer, she said : ' Well done, son ! well done ! Here am I calling you,

<sup>1</sup> The other great festival of the year, instituted to commemorate the sacrifice of *Ishmael* (not Isaac) by Abraham. Baqar is pronounced Buckur.

and you hear me, and give no answer! Is *this* all the respect which is left to mothers in this thirteenth century ?<sup>1</sup>

As soon as he heard this, Muhammad Aqil retraced his steps. His mother said to him: 'Tell me, at least, my son, where you are going in this heat. You have only just come from the Eedgáh, and are you going outside again? By my life, you will make yourself ill.'

Muhammad Aqil said: 'Madam, I am not going anywhere; only to the mosque to see the caretaker.'

His mother said: 'Don't be so silly, boy. I have not bleached my hair in the sun. What, Sir! do you dare invent stories to me? If you are going to see the caretaker, take off your jacket and scarf, and leave them here, and then you can sit in the mosque at your ease.'

Muhammad Aqil began to smile at these words, and his mother, taking his hand, made him sit down by her; and then, looking at his head, she said: 'Your hair has got full of dust from your going all that way to the Eedgáh and back. Lie down for a minute and put your head on this cushion, and I will make it tidy for you.'

In obedience to his mother, Muhammad Aqil lay down just for a little while; and Mahmúda, seeing him in that position, began to fan him. Partly from the fatigue of his walk to and from the Eedgáh, and now the pleasant cool air of the fan, but, above all, the delightful sensation of his mother's kind hand wandering over his head—however it was, Muhammad Aqil went fast to sleep.

When he woke up the sun had begun its downward course, and his own anger of the morning, too, had abated. His mother said to him: 'Now, wash your hands and face, and then say your afternoon prayers. The time is getting short. When you come back, I will tell you what I want you to do.'

<sup>1</sup> The year 1869 A.D., in which the story was written, corresponded with 1285-86 of the Hegira, or Muhammadan era.

## CHAPTER III

WHEN Muhammad Aqil came back, after saying his prayers, his mother said: 'Now, I want you to go to your mother-in-law's house; and mind, I adjure you by my life not to create any disturbance or quarrel there.'

Muhammad Aqil said: 'In that case, don't send me there.'

His mother said: 'Nay, my boy; ask God for kinder thoughts. Heavens! what a cruel tongue you have! Whom else *can* I send to your own wife's house? See, here is a rupee, which I want you to give as an Eed present to your sister-in-law Asghari; and here is an eight-anna piece for your aunt's son, Miyán Muslim<sup>1</sup>; and you had better take half of the toys, too. Mámá Azmat<sup>2</sup> will carry a tray of *siwaiyán*<sup>3</sup> and milk, and a basket of sweetmeats, and you must take her with you. Now, mind! not a word.'

Muhammad Aqil said: 'And the drum, mother, and the tambourine? Shall I take them, too?'

His mother said: 'Hush! that's enough. Be off, now, and don't say a word on the subject when you get there.'

In due course Muhammad Aqil arrived at his mother-in-law's house. Akbari khánam and her girl friends were playing high jinks inside, so that the noise of their voices penetrated into the street. Mámá Azmat went inside.

As soon as Asghari caught sight of her, she said in a low voice: 'Sister dear! sister dear! be quiet; the Mámá from your husband's home has come.'

Azmat called out to Muhammad Aqil after she had gone inside: 'You may come in, young gentleman.'

Then Muhammad Aqil went into the house, and made his salaam to his mother-in-law, who wished him health and long life. Presently, Asghari also, having adjusted her veil, came out of her

<sup>1</sup> Pronounce Meeyán Mooslim, the final 'n' of Meeyán like the French 'n' in 'rien,' or 'viande.'

<sup>2</sup> Pronounce Uzmüt.

<sup>3</sup> A dish resembling vermicelli, always eaten on the Eed. It is boiled without milk, but eaten with milk as oatmeal porridge is in England. The final 'n' of *siwaiyán* is pronounced like the French 'n.'

chamber, and, curtsying with the utmost grace, salaamed to her brother-in-law, who made her sit upon his lap and gave her the rupee. Asghari began to look towards her mother, but her mother said: 'Yes, you may take it; your brother-in-law makes you a present for the Eed.'

Asghari took the rupee and salaamed a second time, and then, getting off his lap, sat down at a respectful distance. But presently she got up again, and with admirable self-possession she spread a bright clean table-cloth in front of her brother-in-law, and then fetched a dish of *siwaiydn*, a jug of milk, a little plate of sugar, and a spoon, all of which she placed before him. His mother-in-law then invited him to eat. Muhammad Aqil excused himself by saying: 'I was late in returning from the Eedgáh to-day, and so it is but a short time since I had my meal.'

His mother-in-law said: 'What does that matter? *Siwaiydn* is not more substantial than water. Eat a little.'

While Muhammad Aqil was eating the *siwaiydn* Asghari made up a delicious *pawn*<sup>1</sup> with cardamoms in it, which she brought him. After his repast there was some general conversation. By-and-by Muhammad Aqil said: 'Your honor! I am ready to take leave.'

His mother-in-law said: 'Where will you be going now? You must sleep here.'

Muhammad Aqil said: 'To-day is the Eed. There are visitors to be received, and, secondly, there are ceremonial presents to be seen to and despatched. Besides, I said nothing to my mother about staying for the night when I came away.'

His mother-in-law said: 'The time for receiving visitors has gone by now; it is nearly evening; and as for sending off the presents, your mother can manage that.' And then she laughed and said: 'You are no longer a baby; besides, Azmat will go back, and let your mother know.'

In fine, although Muhammad Aqil made many excuses, his mother-in-law would listen to nothing he said, and he was perforce obliged to remain.

An hour or so after nightfall, when the last meal of the day was

<sup>1</sup> Pawn is chewed after every meal, being supposed to assist digestion.

over, Asghari put away the plates and the dishes, and whatever else there was lying about—all into their proper places. She chained up the door of the house, put the padlocks on the store-closets, and handed the keys to her mother; extinguished the lamps in the outer saloon and in the kitchen, provided enough pawn for her mother and sister and brother-in-law, and, having seen that everything was right, went off comfortably to bed.

Then his mother-in-law addressed Muhammad Aqil as follows: 'Now, my son, I want to ask you what are these daily quarrels I hear of between you two, husband and wife. Not that Akbari has said anything. It is a wretched habit of hers that she never by any chance lets me know anything about her new home. The custom of the whole world is for daughters to tell their mothers every little thing that goes on in their husband's family, but—however God has chastened her is a mystery to me—you may go on asking and asking her till your tongue is weary—don't expect her to say a word. Still, what is the talk of the mohulla does get round to one's ears somehow; and, sitting at home all day as I do, I hear a good deal from people who drop in.'

When his mother-in-law had finished speaking, Muhammad Aqil took some time for reflection. His sense of propriety made it difficult for him to frame an answer. But he thought to himself that, since the opportunity he had so long waited for had now arrived, and she herself had broached the question, it would be altogether inadvisable for him to be silent under the circumstances; that he had far better get rid once for all of the poison that had so long been brewing; and that possibly out of the present conversation some good result might arise for the future. Accordingly he replied, with much bashfulness: 'Your honor's lady daughter is present; will not your honor inquire from her what annoyance she has been put to in our home—whether there has been anything lacking on our part in courtesy or consideration for her; whether anyone has quarrelled with her, or spoken unkindly of her? Your honor is aware how many there are of us in the house to count. My revered mother, the whole mohulla knows, is so great a peace-lover that such a thing as a quarrel with anyone has never happened to her in her life. Even if people

so forget themselves as to speak rudely to her, she bears it in silence. Muhammad Kámil is engaged all day long in his studies; when he has gone out in the morning he does not return till the evening, and then has his supper and goes to bed. I have never even seen him talking to her. Mahmúda is frightened by the very sight of her. The only other person is myself, who am now sitting in her presence. If she have any complaint to make of me, let her state it frankly.'

On this his mother-in-law turned to address her daughter, and said: 'Now *you*, my dear, speak out plainly whatever you have on your mind. When a thing stays on the mind it does not improve. The longer you keep it there the more it worries you, and its evil influences grow apace.'

Now, although Akbari was most audacious in lying, at that particular moment, face to face with her husband, she could find nothing whatever to say. Indeed, in her heart of hearts she was greatly alarmed lest the many falsehoods which she had dinned into her mother's ears whenever she came home should be summarily exposed. After much anxious reflection, she evaded the real question at issue. All she could say was: 'What I want is a separate establishment.'

The mother said to her son-in-law: 'And *you*? What objection have you to your living by yourselves? God be thanked! you have an appointment. You earn your own living; you are not dependent for any of your wants on your parents; you can feed yourself and clothe yourself. What advantage is there in living under other people's protection? Son, I tell you, however much a bride may be petted in her father-in-law's house, she does not get the same comfort there that she has in a house of her own, where she can eat when she wants to eat, and cook what she wishes. And there is just this to consider: as long as you live with your own people you may earn lakhs of rupees and get no credit for it. Who is to know whether you are maintaining yourself or living on your parents' bounty?'

Muhammad Aqil said: 'If your honor makes the question one of comfort, then the value of the comfort which we actually enjoy will be appreciated after we have left our home more than

it is now. We eat our meals ready cooked for us morning and evening, and have no anxiety to disturb our leisure. After we have set up house for ourselves there will be all the worry of thinking about the meal, the pulse, the meat, the vegetables, the fuel for cooking, and what not. Your honor knows better than I what a lot of worries there are in managing a house. And it does not seem to me that there would be much sense in anyone's bringing all these troubles upon himself without cause. What your honor says about the liberty of eating what we like, and cooking when we like—that is exactly what we enjoy now. Ask *her* whether she has ever expressed a wish for anything which has not been gratified. In large families, no doubt, this kind of inconvenience does arise. One person has a fancy for sweetened rice, while another wants browned *khichri*,<sup>1</sup> and a third demands *pulh-o*<sup>2</sup> and a fourth is bent on having *khorma*,<sup>3</sup> while a fifth has been prescribed a low diet by the doctor's order. Ten dishes for ten people every day are not forthcoming. But at our place there is no such big family. Who is there to bespeak anything but ourselves? or to object to anything except ourselves? However, let that pass. If she is so particular about it, let her undertake the ordering of the meals herself. My mother has often said as much; ask your daughter there whether she has not. And as for what your honor mentioned about the *name* of the thing, in my humble opinion that, too, is no sound argument. A man has to consider his own peace and comfort; other people may imagine what suits their fancy. But suppose people have arrived at the conclusion that I am living on my parents' bounty, what disgrace is there for me in that? They are my *parents*, not strangers. They brought me up, and gave me shelter and food and clothes, and had me educated, and provided me with a wife. In all this I incurred no loss of honor. What red-goose-feather have I got in my cap now that my living under their protection should be supposed to be derogatory to my dignity?'

His mother-in-law replied: 'If everyone thought as you do, how is it that people *have* separate establishments? It is the

<sup>1</sup> A dish of mixed rice and pulse flavoured with burnt onions.

<sup>2</sup> Meat stewed with rice.

<sup>3</sup> Strong soup.



custom of the whole world. It always has been the way, and always will be, for sons to leave their parents; and, whatever you may say, I know for a fact that no bride whose husband earns his own living will be content to live with her mother and sisters-in-law.'

Muhammad Aqil said: 'What your honor says is perfectly true. If sons did not leave their parents' homes, how should there be so many houses in the city? But the case of every individual is different. In *my* case, living separately does not appear to me advisable from any point of view. True, I have an appointment, but only of ten rupees a month. To keep up a separate establishment on that income strikes me at once as very difficult. But there is no certainty about my appointment. God grant it be not so! but suppose I lost it after quitting my parents, it would be a great blow for me to come back again to them afterwards. *Then I should* feel some degradation, when people say: "Young master set up house for himself, but when he had played the fool long enough he came back to share his father's crumbs." Fashion is no safe guide in a matter of this kind. One must consider one's own circumstances. No doubt, your honor has heard the story how a man purchased a lot of salt and cotton in the market, and put the salt upon a mule's back, and the cotton upon a donkey. There happened to be a stream to cross on the journey home which was fordable, and the man drove the mule and the donkey laden as they were, down into the water. When they were half-way across the mule dived, and as he brought his head up again some seconds after the donkey asked him: "Friend mule, what is this you have done?" The mule replied: "Brother, you may thank your good luck that you are laden with cotton, so light as it is to carry. I, poor wretch, am packed with salt, and my loins have got cut under the weight of it, so that they are streaming with blood. This master of ours is so unmerciful that he has not the slightest regard for our sufferings, but puts just as much as he likes upon our backs without considering the weight. I thought to myself, by the time we reach our destination my loins will be *nil*; suppose I take a dive. When the salt gets soaked, some of it, at least, will melt away. Whatever is lightened of it will be a gain

to me. The master can but give me a few more blows of his stick, and, as it is, I get beaten all the way. See, now, my burden is only half what it was." The donkey, like a fool, was eager to follow the mule's example, and made a plunge into the water. The cotton became all the heavier for soaking, and, when he lifted his head out, he could hardly move. The mule laughed, and said: "Brother donkey, how fares it?" The donkey said: "Comrade, I am dying." "Oho," said the mule, "you *are* a stupid. You thought to follow my lead, but you might have known you had cotton on your back, and not salt." I do not wish, dear mother, to bring myself into the donkey's condition by following the fashion.'

His mother-in-law said: 'My friend, it is no use expecting you to agree with anyone, and I have never learnt logic, as you have. I only understand the plain fact that you are earning ten rupees a month. By God's grace, times are cheap, and you have no children. Two persons, husband and wife—God keep you!—can very well feed yourselves on bread and meat, and wear fine calico and muslin. If people worried themselves about the future as you do, the world would come to a standstill. Let alone your appointment, there is no *certainty* about your life. But the days that you have to live you may just as well pass cheerfully and happily.'

Muhammad Aqil said: 'That is just what I am debating in my mind, whether happiness is to be secured in living apart, or with my parents.'

His mother-in-law said: 'What is the object of all this puzzling and quibbling? Why don't you say straight out that you don't choose to leave your mother? Your wife has told you the one thing she wishes, and you make this tremendous demur in agreeing to it; and then you say that you never fail to consult her feelings. What *are* peace and happiness? Why, what makes your wife happy, and what she considers peace.'

After this a tone of bitterness began to be apparent in her remarks, and Muhammad Aqil deliberately kept silence. The night, too, was by this time far advanced. Muhammad Aqil said to his mother-in-law: 'Your honor had now better retire. I will think over the matter again.'

## CHAPTER IV

WHILE the people of the house were sound asleep, Muhammad Aqil spent the whole night long in revolving the question, and reproducing all the arguments for and against it in his own mind. In the morning, when he got up, the first thing he noticed was that Asghari was sweeping the house. When she saw him she salaamed, and said : ' Honored brother, there is some warm water ready for ablution, if you are going to say your prayers.'

Muhammad Aqil said : ' No, my dear ! I shall say my prayers at the mosque with the congregation.'

Asghari said : ' You won't go *away* yet, brother, will you ? I have made some tea for you ; but do you take it plain or with milk ?'

Muhammad Aqil said : ' Just as you please.'

' Your voice seems rather husky,' said Asghari ; ' perhaps it is the beginning of a cold, and milk will be bad for you.'

' No,' said Muhammad Aqil ; ' I am not going to have a cold. I was up very late last night talking to your mother. I did not have a good night's rest certainly.'

Muhammad Aqil went to say his prayers, and when he came back he found his mother-in-law, who had finished her devotions, chewing pawn. He salaamed to her, and sat down.

Asghari brought in a small tray and laid it in front of him—hot tea in the teapot, two cups, two spoons, and sugar in a little bowl. The tea which he drank had a delicious flavour, and a lovely colour, and was as fragrant as you might wish. After drinking it he felt quite invigorated. Akbari, according to her wont, was still in bed and asleep. Muhammad Aqil remarked : ' Mother, dear, I wish you would insist on *her* saying her prayers.'

His mother-in-law replied : ' Son, she was her grandmother's spoilt pet. It was her grandmother's fondness for her which ruined her temper, and her habits, and everything else. When she was quite a child, if I happened to scold her for anything, she would not speak to me for days together ; and that anyone should dare to punish Grandmama's Akbari was quite out of the question.'

She would disobey every order ; she would smash all the things in the house to bits ; no one could say a word to her for fear of Grandmama. I was always getting into trouble with her father on that very account.'

Muhammad Aqil now prepared to take leave. As he was going, his mother-in-law said : ' Son, remember last night's talk, and be sure you make some arrangement to carry out our plan.'

All the way home Muhammad Aqil was haunted with this one thought. When he arrived, his mother saw there were lines of care on his face. She thought to herself : ' There has been a quarrel with his wife's people for certain.' She asked him : ' Well ! did you disobey me, after all ?'

Muhammad Aqil said : ' Believe me, mother, there was no kind of quarrel whatever.'

His mother said : ' Then what makes you so downcast ?'

Muhammad Aqil said : ' Nothing. I came away directly I got up ;<sup>1</sup> perhaps my face looks a little glum on that account.'

His mother said : ' Nonsense ! as if I had not seen you just after getting up plenty of times. Tell me the truth ; what is it ?'

Having no alternative, Muhammad Aqil gave his mother a full account of all that had happened the night before. As she listened to him, she became so pale that it seemed as if no blood were left in her body. But she was a woman of a very philosophic temperament. She began saying : ' No doubt, it was my one desire that I should keep you all close to my own heart as long as there is any life left in this body, and that you two brothers should dwell together in fast friendship ; but whichever way I look, all the chances seem dead against me. I tell you, as sure as I sit here this very day, Mizájdár has been bent on having a separate establishment ever since the second month after the wedding: Your giving *me* the ten rupees you bring home every month annoys her to the last degree. Day after day I hear her girl friends talking about it. " The bride," they say, " is going to take a house in the Birdcatchers' ward ;<sup>2</sup> she will take Zulfan along with her." This is the constant theme of their conversation whenever

<sup>1</sup> *I.e.*, without making his usual toilet.

<sup>2</sup> One of the best residential quarters in Dehli at the time.

they are seated together. One day I said to her aunt straight out: "If Mizájdár does not like living as one of the family, let them stay on in our house, and arrange for their own food and clothing separately"; but I found out from her aunt that even that would not be acceptable to Mizájdár. People get married to be happy, and enjoy themselves. Can anything be worse than continual discord and daily quarrels? If nothing will satisfy your wife but a separate establishment, and she thinks *that* will make her happy, let it be so, in God's name! I make no objection. Wherever you live, live happy and be prosperous! It is only this mother's fondness for her own offspring which God has laid upon my shoulders.—But you will come round now and again; I shall have a look at you, and be contented; or, sometimes, when I get a little leisure from the work of the house, I shall go round myself and see you.'

At these words, Muhammad Aqil's heart became full to overflowing. He could not restrain himself from shedding tears, and it seemed to him then as if he were already bereaved of his mother. She, too, wept. Presently Muhammad Aqil said: 'My wife may go or stay; I will not leave my own home.'

His mother said: 'Son, you do not know what it is you are saying. Are wives ever divorced in respectable families? It is with her that you will have to spend the whole of your life. And what is there left of me? I am only waiting with my feet hanging over my grave. My dying to-day will not prevent the sun rising to-morrow. My advice to you is to do just what she says. From the very day when I gave you in marriage, I knew you were parted from me. Neither you nor I are exceptions to the rule. What son has ever passed his life in his mother's house?'

Muhammad Aqil next consulted his own friends. They, too, all gave him the same advice, and said: 'The chief thing is to avoid any scandal; and, as for your filial obligations, they are not bound up in your living at home. You may have your own house, and still yield to your mother the service and obedience which are her due.'

Finding that everyone gave him the same counsel, Muhammad Aqil, too, said to himself: 'Well, we will try how living separately

does. If the girl will only come to her senses, and look upon her home as a home—if she will give up her bad temper, and disobedient ways, and rude language, living separately is no *crime*, there is nothing wrong in it. There will be all the worry of house-keeping, and we shall be badly off, that is all. But while one lives in this world, there is no freedom from care in any state of life. Say that, as it is, I am free from *care*, this daily strife of itself is a torture to me. Besides, it is not right to be overanxious about living on narrow means; whatever portion has been decreed to us by God's providence is certain to reach us in any case. There is no loophole in that for the labour or contrivance of man.'

Buoyed up by these considerations, Muhammad Aqil finally resolved to leave his parents' house.

It so happened that there was a house vacant close to his home. He got the landlord to agree to a rent of one rupee a month for it, and went so far as to pay entrance-money in advance, and sign an agreement. He then brought away the key, and sent a verbal message to his wife's home: 'A house has been arranged for; we can move into our new home as soon as you come.' And he said to his mother: 'I have taken the wire-drawer's house close by.'

His mother collected all the things belonging to Mizájdár bahu—the boxes of clothes, plates, carpets, mosquito-curtains, beds, whatever there was—and had them put into a separate room. In the evening, Mizájdár bahu herself arrived. Early next morning his mother unlocked the room, and said to Muhammad Aqil: 'Now, then, I want you both, husband and wife, to take stock of your things.'

Muhammad Aqil said: 'Mother, dear! what are you saying? As if it were a stranger's house!'

His mother said: 'I don't mean that, my son; but I don't want any of the things to get mixed up or mislaid in the moving of them.' Then she called the Mámá, and said: 'Azmat, do you and the woman next door carry over all these things to the wire-drawer's house.'

But by this time Akbari's comrades, Chuniya, Rahmat, Zulfan, and Sulmati, had arrived, and in less than no time they transferred

all the things from the one house to the other. Mizájdár bahu entered upon possession with the utmost glee.

For three days Muhammad Aqil's mother sent over their meals morning and evening. On the fourth day Muhammad Aqil said to his wife : ' Now, Madam, I think you might begin to make some arrangements for our food.'

Mizájdár said : ' The things are all in disorder at present ; when they are arranged, I shall be able to look after the cooking at my leisure, but I have no time now.'

Accordingly, for seven days their bread<sup>1</sup> was baked in the baker's oven, and by sending to the bázár for *kababs*<sup>2</sup> in the evening and curds in the daytime husband and wife managed to make their meals. At length, after harping on the subject every day, Muhammad Aqil induced Mizájdár to prepare a meal herself.

Now, Mizájdár had never done any cooking in her life. Her first *chupattie*<sup>3</sup> was of a marvellous appearance ; neither round nor square ; one corner sticking out here, and four corners there ; the edges thick, the centre like a wafer ; burnt on one side, not baked on the other, but all black with smoke. And the *dál*<sup>4</sup> was boiled so as to be half pulse and half water. In short, Mizájdár prepared a meal so delicious and exquisite that any appetite would be scared away by the very sight of it. And as for the sauce,<sup>5</sup> it was as nasty to look at as to taste. If she put any salt in, there was enough to kill one, and at other times it was a tasteless fluid. Muhammad Aqil exercised his patience for two or three days ; after that he began to take his meals regularly at his mother's house. Mizájdár, too, consulted her own ideas of comfort, and used to make her meals off *kachauris*<sup>6</sup> and cream, or curds, or porridge, or *kababs*, which she obtained morning and evening from the bázár. Whatever she cooked herself was eaten by Zulfan and

<sup>1</sup> That is, they lived upon baker's bread instead of on the unleavened cakes called *chupatties*, which are ordinarily cooked every day at home.

<sup>2</sup> Bits of meat roasted on a skewer.

<sup>3</sup> A *chupattie* in shape and size resembles an old-fashioned 'pancake.' It is made of kneaded meal (not flour) and water, and eaten while still warm.

<sup>4</sup> *Dál* is made of split pulse boiled with clarified butter.

<sup>5</sup> The sauce (*sálan*) would be made of some green vegetable.

<sup>6</sup> Cakes fried in clarified butter.

her tribe, who got fat upon it. These were the cats to whom ' Luck sent the larder.' But how were such luxuries possible on ten rupees a month ? Silently and surreptitiously articles of furniture began to find their way to the bázár. Muhammad Aqil, however, was kept in absolute ignorance of this.

## CHAPTER V

ONE day, when Muhammad Aqil had gone off to his office, Mizájdár took a mid-day siesta. Chuniya happened to come in, and, finding her fast asleep, at once went off and told her brother Miran.<sup>1</sup> Now Miran was a thorough scoundrel, up to all kinds of villainy. While Mizájdár was still sleeping soundly, he entered the house in broad daylight, and carried off all her copper vessels. When Mizájdár got up at last, and looked round, the house had been clean swept. The things in the store-room, which were under lock and key, had escaped ; but, with that exception, he had taken away every single thing he could lay hands on. There was not even a cup left to drink out of. When Muhammad Aqil came back from his office, he was sorely grieved ; but of what use was fretting now, *when the birds had left the field bare ?* He quarrelled fiercely with his wife, and beat his own head soundly, but sobered down at last after much lamentation. By dint of raising money from his friends he bought two second-hand copper pans, and he borrowed some smaller vessels from his mother. A kneading-pan, a griddle, and a platter were sent by his mother-in-law, and so they managed to get on somehow or other.

It was just about this time that a female sharper paid a visit to the city, and created a considerable stir among all the inhabitants. Muhammad Aqil, like other people, took the precaution of warning his wife, and said : ' By no means allow any strange woman to come into the house. There is a female sharper who has lately come here, and robbed several families.'

But Mizájdár was incorrigibly silly. It was a regular habit of hers to admit anyone to her confidence at a moment's notice.

<sup>1</sup> Pronounce Meerun.

One day the female sharper came into the lane on which Mizájdár's house abutted dressed up in the guise of a Hajjan,<sup>1</sup> for in that character the designing wretch used to carry about with her a lot of sacred relics and things of a hundred different kinds suitable for the purpose of hoaxing silly women, such as rosaries of the sacred earth of Karbala, and flasks of the water of Zamzam ; dates from sunny Medina, and antimony from Mount Sinai ; shreds from the black pall of the Caaba, beads of agate and coral, Nád Alis and Panjsúras,<sup>2</sup> and a whole quantity of drugs. When she came into the lane and spread out her articles for sale, a good number of girls collected round her. Mizájdár, too, heard of her coming, and said to Zulfan : ' As soon as the Hajjan is ready to go, make her come in here. I, too, would like to pay my respects to her sacred relics.'

Accordingly Zulfan went and stood over the Hajjan, and brought her back with her.

Mizájdár gave the woman a warm reception. She made her sit down by her side, and inspected all the things, out of which she selected two—viz., some antimony and a Nád Ali. The Hajjan had guessed from her conversation that Mizájdár was just the kind of woman to fall into her trap. She let her have the Nád Ali for two annas, and weighed her out quite a large quantity of the antimony for one pice ; besides which she gave her a turquoise ring as a present for nothing. Mizájdár was enraptured.

Then the Hajjan told her all about the sea, and life in Arabia, and some things entirely of her own invention, but such that Mizájdár listened to them with consummate delight, and regarded her with a special attraction. The Hajjan inquired of her : ' Lady, have you no children ?'

Mizájdár said : ' No such luck as that for poor me !'

The Hajjan asked : ' How long have you been married ?'

' Not a whole year has passed yet,' replied Mizájdár.

The Hajjan was now fully convinced of Mizájdár's stupidity, and said to herself : ' Why, she heaved such a sigh when I men-

<sup>1</sup> Hajjan (pronounced Hujjun) is an Indian-made feminine of the Arabic Háji, a title given to a man who has performed the pilgrimage to Mecca.

<sup>2</sup> These are small tablets of stone inscribed with prayers or sacred texts.

tioned the word children, as if she had been pining for them for years.' Then she said : ' There is no reason to be despondent ; *you*—why, you will have more children than you will know what to do with. Just at present, no doubt, you feel depressed at being all alone in the house. What sort of a man is your husband ?'

Mizájdár said : ' He is always displeased with me.'

In short, at their very first meeting, Mizájdár was so unreserved with the Hajjan that she told her anything she asked about herself ; and with a little catechizing the Hajjan found out all her secrets. The Hajjan sat there fully three hours, and when she took her leave, Mizájdár besought her : ' Dear lady Hajjan, when will you come here again ?'

The Hajjan said : ' I have a niece living in the Waxmakers' Buildings who is very ill. It was to nurse her that I came here from Agra. What with tending her, and giving her medicine, I don't get much spare time ; but, please God ! I will manage to look in and see you every other day or so.'

However, the very next day she presented herself again, and this time she brought with her a silk trouser-cord. Mizájdár was rejoiced to see her again, and asked : ' What is this trouser-cord for ?'

' It is for sale,' said the Hajjan.

' How much is it ?' asked Mizájdár.

The Hajjan replied : ' It is going for four annas. There is a Begam<sup>1</sup> living in the mohulla who has now become poor, and she has to sell her things, one after another, in order to live. I am in the way of selling lots of things for her.'

The mere sight of such a cheap trouser-cord made Mizájdár long to possess it. She got out the money in no time and gave it to the Hajjan, and said with great earnestness : ' Dear lady, whatever things there may be for sale, let me always have the first look at them.'

' Very well,' said the Hajjan ; ' you first, and the rest afterwards.'

After this they went on talking on different subjects for some

<sup>1</sup> Pronounce Baygum. The word means ' Lady' (of rank), and is the feminine of Beg, as Khánam is of Khán.

time. As she prepared to go, the Hajjan produced a little purse, inside of which, wrapped up in several folds of paper, there were a few cloves. She took out two of them, which she gave to Mizájdár, and said: 'Friendship exists in the world simply for this reason, that each one of us should be a help to someone else. I give you these two cloves. Tie one of them into your top-knot, and the other—it would be better if it could stay in your husband's turban, but perhaps he might suspect something—well, sew it into his pillow, and watch the effect of it from to-day. But take care of one thing; see that the place they are kept in is always clean and pure. And let me have a piece of yarn of the measure of your height; I will get a charm made of it and bring it you. When I went on the pilgrimage to Mecca, a great lady of Bhopál—perhaps you, too, may have heard her name, Balqís Jaháni Begam<sup>1</sup>—was a passenger on board the same ship. God had given her everything she could want. There was no end to her wealth; servants and officers, handmaids and pages, pálkis and nálkis<sup>2</sup>—every single thing but one. She had no child, and for that want she passed her days in sorrow. Moreover, the Nawáb, her husband, did not trouble himself in the least to please her; and, maybe, it was on account of her having no children that he did not love her, for otherwise the Begam, as far as grace and beauty go, was *now the sun and now the moon*; and with all her beauty and riches she had a nature so simple as to let insignificant people like me sit opposite to her and be concerned about our welfare. The Begam had the greatest faith in Faqírs.<sup>3</sup> One day she heard that a very eminent saint was staying six miles off from where she was. She went all the way on foot in the middle of the night to visit him, and for three hours she stood in front of him with her hands clasped. You may stake your life on the fame of Faqírs! The great king, lifting up his eyes for one moment, looked at her, and said: "Go, mother; this night your orders will come." In her sleep there came the divine message: "Go to Mecca, and fetch up from the sea the pearl of your desire." As soon as she woke

<sup>1</sup> Pronounce Bulkees.

<sup>2</sup> Pálki and náلكi are different names for what we call palankeen.

<sup>3</sup> Persons vowed to poverty; pronounce Fukeer.

she commenced her preparations for the pilgrimage. She took with her on board ship five hundred poor persons whose passage she paid for, and of these I was one. Constantly with her as I was, the Begam sáhib (God make her face bright in both worlds!) began to treat me with great kindness, and used to address me as "Comrade." Ten whole days the ship moved over the waters. On the eleventh day there appeared a great mountain in the middle of the sea. The Captain said: "This is Abyssinia, and on that mountain there dwells a very eminent Faqír. Whoever goes to him obtains the wish of his heart." The Begam said to the Captain: "Set me down upon that mountain at all costs." The Captain said: "Your highness, the ship cannot sail close to the mountain; but if it be your pleasure, I will anchor the ship and take you there in a boat." The Begam said: "Be it so then." Five women went with the Begam to the Abyssinian mountain—myself, and four others. When we reached it, a wonderful fragrance filled the air. On we went till at last we reached the great king.<sup>1</sup> It was an awful spot. No man, nor any child of man, save the great king alone, dwelling in a cave. And what a splendid apparition! like an angel of light. Looking upon all of us, he pronounced a blessing. To the Begam he gave twelve cloves, and after reciting some words, he breathed upon her. To me he said: "Go, make people's business prosper in Agra and in Dehli." Daughter, out of those twelve cloves these are two. When we returned from the pilgrimage, we found that the Nawáb, who at one time never even asked after the Begam's health, had been waiting—mark the difference!—a whole month in Bombay for the express purpose of receiving her. As soon as she stepped on shore he laid his head at her feet, and with the utmost contrition entreated her forgiveness. I stayed at Bhopál for six years after we returned; and before I left, through the Faqír's blessing, the Begam already had four sons (God keep them!), one after another, without a break. At last I remembered my own country, and asked the Begam's permission to depart. She did all she could to keep me, but I said: "*The King* enjoined me to serve Agra and Dehli. Go there I must."

<sup>1</sup> That is, the Fukeer. The title Sháh is commonly applied to saints.

When she heard that, the Begam had no choice but to let me go.'

Two cloves, and a lovely romance of four pages in addition! Mizájdár was converted, heart and soul. The Hajjan left the cloves and took her departure. Mizájdár had a bath, changed her clothes, scented herself, and, with a prayer to God, tied one of the cloves into her top-knot. Then, after changing the sheets and pillow-cases of her husband's bed, she placed one clove inside one of the pillows.

When Muhammad Aqil came home, he found his wife clean and nicely dressed, the bed with clean sheets on it, without a word from himself. He was delighted, and began talking to his wife with genuine affection. Mizájdár said: 'See, I have bought something to-day'; and she showed him the trouser-cord.

Muhammad Aqil said: 'What did you give for it?'

She replied: 'You must guess that. How much is it worth?'

Now, the trouser-cord was of real Lahore make, and extremely fine; broad, and thick woven; and with knotted tassels of silk and gold thread. Muhammad Aqil said: 'Certainly, it is not worth less than two rupees.'

Mizájdár said: 'I got it for four annas.'<sup>1</sup>

'No,' said Muhammad Aqil; 'you are joking.'

Mizájdár said: 'I swear by your head, I got it for only four annas.'

Muhammad Aqil said: 'It is very cheap. Where did you pick it up?'

Mizájdár said: 'There is a Hajjan who comes into the lane, and has done so for a long time—a most excellent woman. The trouser-cord belongs to some Begam, but *she* brought it for sale.'

And then Mizájdár showed him the antimony, and the Nád Ali, and the turquoise ring.

So evil a thing is covetousness, that the very wisest of us are apt to be beguiled by it. Even wild animals—the maina, the parrot, the amadavat, the nightingale, who fly away at man's appearance—still, from greed of the scattered grain, allow themselves to be

<sup>1</sup> At the time of the story two rupees were worth four shillings, and four annas equalled sixpence.

caught in the net, and pass their whole lives shut up in a cage. In the same way, when Muhammad Aqil saw some profit for himself, he was delighted; and on Mizájdár's telling him that the Hajjan had made her a promise to bring her all the things which the Begam might give her to sell, he replied: 'Certainly, you ought to see them. Only take care they are not stolen goods; that would mean ruin hereafter. And, another thing, are you quite sure the Hajjan is not an impostor?'

Mizájdár said: 'Ask God for pardon! The Hajjan is not one of that sort.'

And so the matter ended.

From the pleasant way in which her husband conversed with her on this particular day, Mizájdár's faith in the virtue of the cloves was confirmed. The next morning she sent Zulfan to invite the Hajjan to her house, and that day she treated her as a mother, and behaved herself like a daughter to her. In the evening she spoke of the Hajjan again to Muhammad Aqil, and again he said: 'Look out; be careful. There are numbers of bad characters who adopt this disguise.'

But covetousness had cast such a film over Muhammad Aqil's own common-sense that he quite failed to consider the very obvious question: 'Does anyone give two-rupees' worth of property in exchange for four annas without some good reason?' By rights, Muhammad Aqil should have put a stop once for all to the Hajjan's coming to the house, and he should have had all her things returned to her forthwith. As for Mizájdár, she had not the sense to fathom such deep problems.

## CHAPTER VI

A FEW days afterwards, Mizájdár asked the Hajjan how it was she had left off bringing any of the Begam's things. The Hajjan perceived that she had swallowed the bait, and said: 'If anything in your style turns up, be sure I will bring it.'

Two or three days after this she brought a couple of false pearls with her, and said: 'See, lady; these pearls belonged to the