

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

Begam's own nose-ring. Heaven knows if the pair of them are worth a thousand rupees or five hundred. As I passed Panna Mal' the jeweller's shop, I showed them to him. He was simply dazed with them, and would have made me take two hundred rupees for them by force. I brought them from the Begam to sell for fifty. *You* take them. You won't get such a chance again.'

Mizájdár said: 'I have not got fifty rupees in cash.'

The Hajjan said: 'What does that matter, child? You can sell your wristlets and buy them, or else—you may take my word for it—they will be sold this very day.'

The Hajjan said this with such an air that Mizájdár immediately brought out her jewel-box, and taking out the wristlets, made them over to the Hajjan. *She* was looking at Mizájdár's jewels the while, and said: 'Dear me! how carelessly you have stowed away your jewellery, as if it were a heap of carrots or radishes! Daughter, why don't you have the beads of your necklace threaded? And here are your earrings, and all their appurtenances, and your armlets, too, all soiled with dirt. Dirt, you know, eats into the gold. Why don't you have them properly burnished?'

Mizájdár said: 'Who is there to get the beads threaded? and who would go and have the things burnished for me? If I ask *him*, he says he has no time.'

The Hajjan said: 'Oho, daughter! that is no great business. See, let the pearls stay here; I will get the necklace threaded in a minute; and if you will pick out the ornaments which are dirty. I will get them burnished for you at the same time.'

Mizájdár made over all the jewels to her. The Hajjan said: 'Send Zulfan with me, too. *She* can stay by the goldsmith while I am getting the string put in by the silk-worker.'

'All right,' said Mizájdár; and she called Zulfan.

When Zulfan came, the Hajjan said: 'My good girl, I want you just to come with me and wait at the goldsmith's shop.'

Then she took the jewels, and Zulfan accompanied her.

When they got out of the lane the Hajjan undid the handker-

<sup>1</sup> Pronounce Punna Mull.

chief, and said to Zulfan: 'Suppose we put the things to be burnished on one side, and the pieces to be threaded on the other.'

All on a sudden, as she was sorting the jewellery, the Hajjan exclaimed: 'Eh! where is the nose-pin?'

Zulfan said: 'It will be among the lot; it is but a tiny little thing; look into this bag.'

Then the Hajjan cried out of her own accord: 'Oh! of course, it was left behind, lying on the lid of the casket. Run, Zulfan, quickly, and fetch it.'

Zulfan came running back, and shouted out at the door: 'Lady, the nose-pin was left behind in the lid of the casket. The Hajjan has sent me for it. Give it me quickly; the Hajjan is at the corner of the lane, sitting in front of Dibyá the banya's shop.'

At these words Mizájdár's forehead began to throb. *She* said to Zulfan: 'Have you gone mad? What pin? Did I ever have one? Have you ever seen it? Bad luck to you! run off at once, and see that the Hajjan does not get away.'

Zulfan took to her heels, and ran back again. *She* looked about everywhere for the Hajjan, but there was no trace of her. Then she came back, and said: 'Lady, I cannot find any trace of the Hajjan, though I looked for her all the way to the bázár. Goodness knows where she has vanished to, all in a minute.'

When she heard this, Mizájdár began to beat her head, and cry out: 'Help, help! I am robbed, I am robbed! Run, good people! for God's sake run!'

The neighbours did run all the way to the Waxmakers' Buildings. There they discovered that some stray woman or other had been living in a hired lodging for the last month, but had given it up and gone away four days previously. What was to be done now?

Muhammad Aqil heard the news when he came home. He beat his head, and said to his wife: 'Oh, you woman! you'll bring the house to utter ruin before you have done with it. I know what sort you are, from the very beginning!'

Mizájdár said: 'Get away with you! out of my sight! Do you

stick yourself up to scold me *now*? When you saw the trouser-cord, did not you say yourself, "Yes, you should certainly have a look at the Begam's things"?"

And so there began a highly-delectable quarrel between the two, husband and wife, which drew all the people of the mohulla together. When they came to compare notes it was found out that this same Hajjan had cheated the wife of Ahmad Bakhsh Khán, in the Kanchani<sup>1</sup> lane, out of all her jewels by saying that she would get them doubled in weight by a Faqír. And the same woman had struck up such a friendship with Miyán Masíta's daughter, in the cotton market, that she had carried off all her jewels on the pretence of borrowing them. In short, the jewels were dead and gone, but plenty of gossip survived them.

All Mizájdár's cooking utensils had already been stolen, and now she was similarly plundered of her jewels. When they examined the two pearls valued at a thousand rupees they were found to be worth three pice. Information was lodged at the police-station, and many private inquiries were made by the neighbours, but all in vain. Nothing more was ever heard of the Hajjan.

Would you like to hear what happened to the clothes which Akbari got in her marriage trousseau? As long as she lived in her mother-in-law's house, her mother-in-law used to take them out and air them in the sun once in every ten or fifteen days. It was in the rains that Akbari set up house for herself. Her box of clothes—it never had a chance of being looked at all through the rainy season—was allowed to remain in the same room, exactly as it was when it was stored away. As winter came on a quilted wrapper happened to be wanted, and then the box was opened. A quantity of the clothes had been eaten by white ants. Rats had gnawed some, and made great holes in them. There was not a single dress which had entirely escaped.

It is always the case. Girls who are perpetually being coddled and indulged when they are little, and who are taught nothing that is useful or practical, invariably reap trouble and sorrow throughout their after lives, just like Akbari. From all that you

<sup>1</sup> Pronounce Kunchunee.

have read about her, you will, I think, have formed some idea of how much misery the petting of her mother and grandmother entailed upon her during her whole life.

In her girlhood Akbari did not learn a single accomplishment, nor were any faults in her temper corrected. When she left her mother-in-law's house to set up for herself, everything had been provided for her—plates, and dishes, and clothes, and jewels. But as she had no practical knowledge of housekeeping, in a short time she let the whole of her possessions go to rack and ruin, and within a single year she was left without an ornament either for her wrist or her ear. If Muhammad Aqil had been equally foolish and bad-tempered, very likely they would have been separated from each other for ever. But Muhammad Aqil throughout adhered to the dictates of reason and the honor of his family.

## CHAPTER VII

Now listen to the story of Asghari. This girl was to her family what a rose in full bloom is to a garden, or the eye to a human body. Every kind of acquired excellence, every kind of natural intelligence was hers. Good sense, self-restraint, modesty, consideration for others—all these qualities God had bestowed upon her. From her childhood she had a distaste for romping and jesting and ill-natured jokes. She loved reading, or doing the work of the house. No one had ever seen her chattering rubbish, or quarrelling with anybody. All the women of the mohulla loved her as they did their own daughters. Blessed indeed was the fate of those parents who owned Asghari for a daughter! and happy was the lot of that family into which Asghari was now to be admitted as a bride!

At this time, by the grace and favour of God, Asghari's age was fully thirteen years. Her betrothal had already been settled, and now there began to be a talk of fixing the day and the month. But on her side, Muhammad Kámil's mother, after her experience of Akbari's ways, had become so frightened—according to the

proverb, 'He who has burnt his lips with milk<sup>1</sup> blows his butter-milk before drinking'—that her hair stood on end at the very thought of her. She had privately set her mind upon getting her son betrothed elsewhere. But Muhammad Aqil by some means got to know of this, and said to her: 'Mother, I have heard that you wish to break off Muhammad Kámil's engagement; is that so?'

His mother said: 'What can I say, my son? I am in great perplexity what to do, and what not to do. As for you, I am ashamed to look you in the face; God has made me such a sinner against you. See, now, what kind of fate is in store for Muhammad Kámil.'

Muhammad Aqil said: 'Mother, believe me, Asghari is one girl out of a thousand. You may take a lamp and search all your life long, and you will not find any girl like her. In outward form and inner nature alike, God has placed her in the foremost rank of His creatures. Do not have the least misgiving, but set about the preparations for the wedding in God's name. And if you are thinking about her elder sister—well, perhaps you have heard the saying of the Persian poet:

"Not every lady is a *lady*, nor every man a *man*.  
God has not made the five fingers all of one pattern."

Everyone has a different constitution, and everyone a different type of character:

"Flowers in plenty, rich and rare,  
Bloom in the garden everywhere.  
Each has a hue none else may share,  
Each has a fragrance all its own."<sup>2</sup>

"There is no power nor might, save in God"; but what comparison is there between your eldest daughter-in-law and Asghari?

"The dust has no alliance with the pure sky."

God prosper us! after the marriage you will realize the truth of what I say.'

<sup>1</sup> In India milk is boiled as soon as it is obtained from the cows, and is often drunk before it has had time to cool thoroughly.

<sup>2</sup> The lines in the original are from a poem by the last King of Dehli.

As a result of Muhammad Aqil's speaking so strongly in praise of Asghari, her betrothal with Muhammad Kámil once more became valid; so that, by the common consent of both parties, it was now agreed that the marriage should take place with due solemnity on the day after the Baqar Eed.

Asghari's father, Dúrandesh Khán, held a Government appointment in the Hills. Formal intimation was sent to him. On receipt of the letter the Khán sáhib was highly delighted, for, of all his children, he was fondest of Asghari. He immediately submitted an application for leave, but it was summarily refused, and all the efforts he made to overcome the resistance were fruitless. The cold weather was approaching, inspection duties were just beginning, so that his superior officer had reason on his side. Dúrandesh Khán was much grieved at not getting his leave, but—'in service one is helpless'—what could he do? 'The poor man's wrath hurts only the poor man's soul.' He resigned himself to his lot in silence. But he had with him his eldest son, Khairandesh Khán. Him he sent home with a sum of 500 rupees, and careful instructions about every detail of the ceremony.

The jewels, clothes, copper vessels, and things of that kind, were in the house all ready in anticipation of the event. When Khairandesh Khán arrived, he made purchases of rice, ghee, wheat, spices, and salt, according to their requirements in each article. The extra trimmings began to be sewn on to Asghari's dresses. It was her mother's desire that Asghari should receive a trousseau considerably in excess of that supplied to her elder sister; that her costumes should be more heavily embroidered, her jewels more in number, and the cooking utensils for her use of greater weight in copper. Of course, anything of this kind could not altogether escape Asghari's knowledge, for, after all, she lived in the same house. When she found out that she was likely to have a larger trousseau than her elder sister, if she had been a silly girl she would have been pleased. Asghari was greatly vexed, and yet quite at a loss for some device by which she could manage to dissuade her mother. At last, with much diffidence, she addressed herself to Tamásha Khánam, her first cousin on the mother's side, to whom she mentioned what she had heard, and said: 'For several days

I have been saying to myself, "Good heavens! what shall I do?" I am so glad you have come round in the very nick of time. I don't mind speaking to you, because we are of the same age. Someone or other must just tell my mother not to give me anything in excess of my sister.'

Tamásha Khánam listened to her, and said: 'Well, sister, I must say you are an extraordinary woman. Why, it is the old saying, *They gave salt to the donkey, and he said, "I have sore eyes."* God bids you take it; why do you refuse?'

Asghari said: 'Have you gone mad? There are several reasons against it. You know my sister's disposition; she is certain to be annoyed. It will create in her a bitter feeling against our mother for no purpose. It will make her suspicious of me also.'

Tamásha Khánam said: 'What ground is there for her annoyance in this, my dear? Every girl has her own luck. And there are a hundred ways of accounting for it. She had a feast at her *bismillah*,<sup>1</sup> her first fasting was kept, her betrothal lasted for four years; what annual ceremony was omitted then? She can find a balance there for any deficit on this side of the account.'

Asghari said: 'True, but there is something in the *name* of a trousseau. If a younger sister gets more, the elder *must* be annoyed. Besides, living in the same mohulla, meeting each other every day—why *should* anything be done which will cause a breach between two hearts?'

Tamásha Khánam said: 'My dear, you are damaging your own interests for no earthly good. Why, in a month or two, she will have forgotten the whole thing.'

Asghari said: 'God pardon you! what are you saying? Is it a question of loss or gain? And does one ever stop at the *totals* of what parents give? And then a trousseau lasts one's lifetime. God grant you are not going to persist in this! If so, I must take some other steps. Nothing will induce me to approve of it.'

The end of it was that this conversation came to the knowledge of Asghari's mother, and she, too, after some reflection, abandoned

<sup>1</sup> When she was first put under a governess to be taught reading.

her project. She said to herself: 'There are a hundred ways of giving; I can make it up in some other quarter.'

Well, on the appointed day, at an auspicious hour, the marriage ceremony was performed. Congratulations and good wishes followed. Khairandesh Khán was such an excellent man of business that he managed everything single-handed with the greatest success. The guests, all of them according to their rank, were treated with the most punctilious courtesy. All the people who were entitled to *bakhshish* were amply satisfied. When the time came for Asghari to leave her home there was quite a commotion in the house. Her mother, as you may suppose, felt her departure to be a calamity of the first degree. The ladies of the mohulla were so affected that they came, each of them repeatedly, and placed their arms round Asghari's neck and wept. Blessings from the heart were uttered by all of them. Laden with a trousseau, rich, indeed, of these blessings, Asghari passed into her father-in-law's home.

There all the ceremonies which are customary in the bridegroom's house were duly performed. After the unveiling of the bride, the title of Tamízdár<sup>1</sup> bahu was given to Asghari Khánam.

In the sequel you will learn how Asghari sustained the burden of housekeeping, what difficulties she encountered, and how they vanished before her common-sense. But now, just compare the two cases of Asghari and Akbari. Asghari was her mother's second daughter, and her mother-in-law's second daughter-in-law. On both sides the hopes and ambitions of the family had already been lavished upon Akbari's wedding. Akbari was married at the age of sixteen, and Asghari at the time of her marriage was barely thirteen. When Akbari was married, her husband, Muhammad Aqil, already had an appointment of ten rupees a month, but Asghari's bridegroom, Muhammad Kámil, was still studying. By comparison with Muhammad Aqil, Muhammad Kámil had less knowledge and less natural ability. Akbari remained free from the cares and troubles of a family for two whole years, whereas God made Asghari a mother in the second year of her married life, while she was still of a tender age. It was never Akbari's lot to leave the city, but Asghari spent years of her life

<sup>1</sup> Pronounce Tumcezdár; the word means 'having discretion.'

away from home. Thus, in every way, Asghari's case, in comparison with that of Akbari, was not a favourable one, *save only* that Asghari in her childhood had received a good training, and day by day its blessed influence continued to grow within the family circle. To such an extent, that at this date no one knows Akbari's name, but in the Khánam bázár there is Tamízdár's mansion, so lofty that it seems to hold converse with the sky, and the mohulla itself is called Khánam bázár, after Asghari Khánam. The big mosque in the Jauhari bázár,<sup>1</sup> in which there is a bathing-place and well, was constructed by Tamízdár bahu's orders. Tamíz ganj, near the Lál diggi,<sup>2</sup> after you pass the Kháss bázár,<sup>3</sup> is her property. To this day, twenty poor strangers get leavened bread and dál broth twice a day from her kitchen attached to Maulavi<sup>4</sup> Muhammad Hayát's mosque. The Sarai at the Qutb,<sup>5</sup> alongside of the Auliya<sup>6</sup> mosque, owes its existence to her. At Fattihpuri, 500 copies of the Bombay edition of the Qur-án were distributed by her in one day. And even now a thousand blankets are given to the poor every winter from her house.

### CHAPTER VIII

WHEN Khairandesh Khán announced to his father Dúrandesh Khán that, 'By the gracious favour of God, my dear sister's marriage was solemnized with every circumstance of felicity on the eleventh day of the month Zilhijja, the dowry being that of the blessed Fátima,'<sup>7</sup> Dúrandesh Khán performed two obeisances of prayer as

<sup>1</sup> Pronounce Jowharee; *i.g.* Jewellers' Street.

<sup>2</sup> A tank faced with red stone.

<sup>3</sup> *I.e.*, the quarter occupied by tradesmen to the royal family of Dehli.

<sup>4</sup> Pronounce Mowlavee.

<sup>5</sup> Pronounce Kootab, the name of the famous minaret in old Dehli, about eleven miles from the present city.

<sup>6</sup> Pronounce Owliya. The word means 'saints.'

<sup>7</sup> By 'dowry' is meant that which the husband settles upon his bride, and to which she would be entitled in the event of a divorce. With the view of checking divorces, the practice has arisen of making the husband promise more than he would be able to afford. But this practice is con-

a thank-offering. But grief at the thought of his severance from his daughter haunted him for many a long day. The letter which he wrote to Asghari after her marriage is worth perusing. A copy of it happened to come into my possession. It runs as follows:

'Ease of my heart and soul, my daughter Asghari Khánam! May God Almighty send her peace! After my blessing, and a yearning to kiss your eyes, be it known to you: I have received the account which your brother Khairandesh Khán wrote to me of your departure to your new home. It had been my heart's desire for years that this function should be discharged under my own personal supervision, but since the Government would not give me leave, I had no choice in the matter. It can hardly have escaped your notice that out of all my children I have been particularly drawn towards you; and I do not write this as claiming any gratitude towards myself; on the contrary, it is you, who by your own helpfulness and cheerful obedience, have secured a place—not in my heart only, but in that of everyone. Since you were eight years old, you have taken the whole burden of my family upon your head. I have always realized that the Begam (I mean your mother) has been saved a vast deal of anxiety through you. And whenever I have happened to go home on leave within these years, it has rejoiced my heart to notice your excellent management of the house.

'I learnt also from Khairandesh Khán's letter that you were unwilling to accept a larger trousseau than Akbari's. This shows your disinterestedness and generosity, but the letter I am now sending you is a *quid pro quo* which may please you better. Keep it by you as a rule of conduct, and if you act up to the instructions contained in it, please God every difficulty will become easy to you, and you will pass your lifetime in peace and tranquillity.

'I wish you first to consider what marriage is. A marriage is not merely the putting on of fine clothes, and the assembling of guests, and the getting presents of furniture and jewellery. No; but marriage is the beginning of a new world. You have to deal

denied by the more religious, who follow the precedent of the Prophet when he gave his daughter Fátima to Ali. The sum fixed in her case was ten dinárs, equal to about 100 rupees.

with new people, and live in a new home. It is as when for the first time two young bullocks have a yoke put upon them; this yoke for the scions of the human race is marriage. As soon as the marriage ceremony has been performed, a girl has become a wife, and a boy has become a husband. This means that the pair of them have been caught and yoked to the cart of the world. Henceforth they have to drag that cart together to the final resting-place of the grave. It is evidently better for them that they should submit themselves to pull this heavy burden with stout hearts, and that they should spend the days of their life's journey, be they few or many, with dignity and self-respect, in perfect amity and concord. For what is the alternative? Angry quarrels and disputes and bickerings and clamorous upbraidings and lamentations only make the world's hardships ever more and more distressing. Now, my dear daughter, Asghari Khánam, I want you to consider how great a difference God has placed between husband and wife. It is written in the books of our religion that the patriarch Adam, when he was alone in paradise, was ill at ease, and that God created our mother Eve, who was the first woman in the world, to solace him. Hence the creation of woman was merely to insure the happiness of man, and it is woman's function to keep man happy. It is greatly to be regretted that so few women in the world fulfil this task. God has given to man a somewhat higher status than to woman—not only by His command, for He has also given to men's bodies greater physical strength, and to their mental faculties a greater perspicuity. All the control of the world's affairs is effected by men. They are the *workers* who earn money by their toil, and women are the *guardians* of what men have earned, and spend it from time to time to the best advantage. A family is like a boat, and the men in it like sailors. If there is no sailor in the boat, it will either founder in the waves, or be dashed to pieces against the shore. If there is no man in a family capable of managing it, every kind of mischief may be apprehended.

\* Do not for an instant suppose that happiness in this world is obtained from wealth and large possessions. Although there is no doubt that wealth is often a cause of happiness, yet in many great

and wealthy families I find strife and misery prevailing beyond measure. Happiness in domestic life arises solely from unanimity and goodwill. I see poor men, whose income is of the smallest, earning their living by severe toil all day long, and at night their family, all seated together, appease their hunger with bread and pulse, and are happy and contented one with another. Without a doubt these people, by reason of their kindly feelings for each other, are better off with their bread and pulse, and their coarse and scanty clothing, than the Nawábs and Begams, whose luxurious living is throughout embittered by their selfish antagonisms. My dear Asghari Khánam! cultivate unanimity, and count the greatest prize in domestic life to be mutual kindness.

'And now, consider by what means unanimity is to be secured. It is not enough by itself that a woman should *love* her husband; in addition to love, she is bound to show him respect. It is great folly in a woman to suppose that her husband is on the same level with herself. But worse than that: in these days women have adopted a horrible attitude which is altogether subversive of good manners. When half a dozen of the sisterhood are sitting gossiping together, the talk is generally about what kind of treatment "So-and-so" expects from her *husband*. One says, "Sister, I have subdued him to that extent he never dares to interrupt me or answer me back." Another makes her boast, "I never touch my food until he has coaxed me for ever so long." A third clenches her superiority by saying, "When he asks me the same question ten times over, I barely mutter an answer." A fourth chimes in, "He may sit on the floor for hours together, your humble servant makes a point of not leaving the sofa." And a fifth sums up her importance with the remark, "Whatever my tongue utters, I get done to my liking, or else I leave him." And all the charms and spells that have been invented for marriages have but this one object—that the husband should remain humble and obedient to his wife's orders. Some collect lampblack upon the sole of a shoe, and use it for the husband's collyrium; that means that he is to get shoebeaten all his life, and never say a word. Some make up a pawn, and put it under the great-toe when they are bathing, and afterwards give it to the husband to eat,

that means that he is to be always at her feet. It is clear enough from such practices as these that women are on the alert to lower the dignity and authority of men ; but this doctrine is a very evil doctrine, and its result will never be free from evil. God has given to men a nature like that of tigers ; whoever tries to tame them by force and domineering will find it impossible. A very simple receipt for taming them is being agreeable and submissive ; and every silly woman who aims at bringing her husband under subjection by the violent assertion of her own authority makes a great mistake. She is sowing the seeds of strife from the very beginning, and, though she may not think so at first, strife will inevitably be the ultimate result. My advice to you, my dear Asghari, is that you should make a point of treating your husband with respect, even in your conversation and demeanour.

'Again, why is it that weddings are celebrated with such exuberant rejoicing, and yet after the fourth day there begins to be ill blood between the bride and her mother and sisters-in-law ? Here is a question which demands anxious consideration. All the time before marriage the boy is under his parents' authority, and his affections are centred in them alone. His parents have brought him up, and cherished the hope that in their old age he will minister to their wants. *After* marriage the bride, from the very moment that she sets foot in the house, begins manœuvring in order that her husband may quit his parents' home at once. Thus, the quarrel always originates from the side of the bride. If she would make herself at home in the family, and not let the mother-in-law feel that she is trying to rob her of her son, no trouble whatever would arise. Everyone knows that after marriage the parents' hold upon their son is but temporary ; sooner or later he will leave them, and the young couple will set up house for themselves ; it always has been so in the world. But brides (bad luck to them!) have such an impatient spirit—Heaven knows how—that whatever is to be must be *this very moment*.

'One common fault of brides, which causes a lot of mischief, is tale-bearing. I mean that, whenever they go home to their mothers, they report every little thing that takes place in their mother-in-law's house ; and their mothers also are only too apt on

their part to question them on such matters. But nothing comes of all this asking and telling, except that ill-will is engendered and quarrels arise. Some brides are so supercilious that, however good the food and the clothes may be which they get in their mother-in-law's house, they look upon them with contempt. Naturally the husband is mortified by such conduct. I trust that you, Asghari, will be very circumspect in this matter. You can find out *some* merit in everything at your mother-in-law's house, and you ought to show your cheerfulness visibly after eating your meals or when you put on new clothes, so that people may know that you are pleased with them.

'There is another thing which a new bride should be careful to remember in her mother-in-law's house—namely, not to give way to low spirits the whole time she is there. Although one does not always feel at ease among strangers, from the very fact of not knowing them, still, you should try to command your feelings, and not, as they say, "went there crying, stayed there crying ; no sooner gone than she longed to come back." The bride's periodical visits to her mother<sup>1</sup> are an excellent institution for helping her gradually to form new ties ; but to exhibit a constant yearning for the mother's home, in excess of that custom, is sure to be resented by the bridegroom's relations.

'In your conversation let the golden mean be your rule ; that is to say, do not be so forward as to be constantly prattling apropos of nothing, nor so backward that your silence should be put down to pride. Incessant chattering often results in causing pain to somebody ; for where there is such a propensity, a thousand different subjects of discourse will crop up, and who knows in which of them what words may escape your lips ? And yet you ought not to preserve such a reticence that people should be driven at last to entreat and beseech you just to say something.

'Contrariness and obstinacy in any matter are not becoming. Even if anything should happen which offends your taste, let it pass at the time ; you will be able to deal with it satisfactorily at some other opportunity. Do not dictate your own desires in any

<sup>1</sup> For some time after the wedding the bride pays visits to her mother at fixed intervals by an arrangement between the two families.



matter; by doing this, people lower themselves in the eyes of others, and their words lose their effect. Do not think it beneath you to do with your own hands any work in the house which your mother and sisters-in-law are in the habit of doing. Kindness to your juniors, reverence to your seniors—that is the cardinal maxim for ingratiating yourself with all. Do not shift any work of your own on to the shoulders of others, and do not leave anything of your own lying about for others to pick up. When two persons are talking together in a low voice, withdraw yourself from them, and do not trouble your head about what they were saying; above all, do not jump to the conclusion that it was you whom they were talking of. In your intercourse with those of your own age, be prudent and reserved at the first start. People who form intense friendships with great alacrity are always liable to take offence with equal rapidity. It is my wish that you should read this letter through every day, even when there is no necessity for it, so that its purport may always be kept in your view. And now God bless you! Written by Dúrandesh Khán.'

### CHAPTER IX

THE receipt of her father's letter produced a burst of emotion in Asghari's loving heart of no ordinary kind. She would gladly have given way to tears, but as a newly-wedded bride, in her mother-in-law's house, that was impossible. She exerted all her powers of self-control, and, after pressing her father's letter to her eyes, she placed it very carefully in her book of daily lessons, and made it her practice to read it and meditate upon its contents regularly every day.

In the earlier days of her wedded life Asghari did feel very ill at ease, as was only natural after suddenly quitting her mother's house to live among entire strangers. She had become inured to a life of constant activity and supervision; she could not bear to be without employment for a quarter of an hour. And now she was condemned to sit demurely, confined to one room, with

nothing going on, for months together. The liberty which she enjoyed in her parents' home was no longer hers. As soon as she arrived in her mother-in-law's house, everyone was intent on watching her, and scrutinizing her every action. One scans her features; another appraises the length of her hair; another guesses her height; another examines her jewels; and another takes stock of her clothes. If she eats anything, each morsel is observed. What sized bit did she take? How wide did she open her mouth? How did she masticate it? And how did she gulp it down? If she rises from her seat, they look to see how she robes herself in her mantle, how she holds up her skirts. And if she sleeps, they count the hours; what time did she go to sleep? When did she get up? In short, every phase of her deportment was under observation.

All this was terribly distressing to poor Asghari; but since she was endowed with common-sense and a good education, she emerged with credit even from this ordeal, and her manners in general were approved of by her husband's relations. When she talked, it was not to such an extent as that people should say, 'Bless the girl! only married four days, and she keeps up such a tremendous rattle!' nor was she so sparing of her words as to be set down as surly and ill-tempered. At her meals she did not eat so much as to be the talk of the mohulla, nor so little that her mother- and sisters-in-law might be tired out with pressing her, and she take no notice of them. She did not retire so early that it was a case of, 'As soon as the wick was in the lamp, so soon my darling was on the couch'; nor did she lie in bed so long that you might suppose she was sleeping for a wager against the dead.

It is in the order of things that a new bride is besieged by all the young girls of the mohulla. Asghari, too, you might have seen surrounded by half a dozen of these at any time. But Asghari exhibited no partiality in respect of any of them. If a girl sat with her the whole day long, she did not say, 'Sister, must not you be going home now?' And if any one of them had missed coming, she did not ask, 'Where were you, sister? How is it you did not come?' Under this method of entertainment and manner of complaisance adopted by her, the crowd of girls gradually became

smaller, and especially those of the lower classes in the mohulla, who were actuated by cupboard love; when they found there was nothing to be got out of her—and no talk of sly purchases from the sweet-shops—in five or six days they dispersed like foul humours, and left her alone.

The first person whose friendship Asghari cultivated was her sister-in-law Mahmúda;<sup>1</sup> and since Mahmúda was but a child, she was easily won over by a little attention. All day long she was at Asghari's elbow; indeed, her mother sometimes exclaimed, 'How is it you are so fond of this sister-in-law? You used to run away from your elder sister-in-law's shadow.' And Mahmúda would reply, 'She used to beat me; my dear younger sister-in-law loves me.' From Mahmúda's society Asghari reaped no small advantage. In the first place, she gradually learnt all the history of the household, nay, of the whole family, and even of the mohulla. And then, if there was any matter which from shyness or etiquette as a new-comer she could not mention herself, she made Mahmúda her mouthpiece. It was in this way that she began, by degrees, to take part in the work of the house. At evening time she would ask Mahmúda for some cotton, and twist the wicks for the lamps. She would prepare the vegetables for cooking. She would mend any of Mahmúda's clothes that were torn or had come unstitched. She would prepare the pawn for her mother-in-law and her husband. As time went on, she penetrated even into the kitchen, and gave Mámá Azmat some hints about the way to fry and to brown, until at last the meals were regularly cooked under her advice. As soon as Asghari began to have a finger in the cooking, the inmates of the house made the discovery that food too is a marvellous blessing. After a while it was the fact that, if by any chance Asghari was not at hand to look after Mámá Azmat, the dishes that day would go round untasted.

The feuds between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law have become a by-word. Since Asghari was incapable of quarrelling, her very accomplishments became the cause of ill-will. Mámá Azmat had acquired such a right of occupancy in the house that she was now the pivot upon which everything turned. All the

<sup>1</sup> Pronounce Mehmooda.

purchases for the household—clothes, grain, whatever came from the bázár—passed through her hands. Even the family jewels were entrusted to her for repairs or alteration; and if any loan was required, it was raised through her agency. In short, Mámá Azmat ruled the house, as if she had been a man. Directly Asghari's influence penetrated as far as the kitchen, Mámá Azmat's speculations began to be discovered. One day a dish of minced *kabábs* was being cooked, and Asghari, sitting in the kitchen, was giving Mámá Azmat directions. When the meat was ready minced, and it was time to add the curds and spices, Asghari said to the Mámá, 'Let me taste the curds; if they are stale and sour, the *kabáb* will be spoilt.' The Mámá brought out the cup of curds, and gave it to Asghari. When Asghari tasted them, they were as sour as sorrel leaves; they had been kept for days, and were resolved into blobs of matter floating in a greenish liquid. Asghari said: 'Oh dear! what horrid curds! These will never do to put into *kabábs*. Be quick, Mámá, and go and fetch half an anna's worth of good curds, and see that they are sweet and fresh.'

The Mámá said: 'Lor', madam! what good will half an anna's worth of curds be for two pounds of meat?—"a carroway seed in a camel's mouth." These curds you disapprove of cost an anna.'

Asghari was amazed at this, and said: 'Why, at home we had *kabábs* nearly every day, and always for two pounds of meat we used one and a half pice worth of curds. At that rate, I asked you to get two pice worth<sup>1</sup>—thinking it rather more—so that the *kabábs* should be particularly juicy and brown.'

The Mámá said: 'Lady, you just leave the reckonings of your mohulla alone. Where is the Chandnee Chowk, I should like to know? and where is the Turkoman gate?<sup>2</sup> What costs a pice there, you cannot get for an anna here. This God-forsaken mohulla is "a ruined township with its barren land." All the year round there is nothing but loss, nothing but scarcity.'

<sup>1</sup> There are four pice in an anna, and three *pics* in a pice.

<sup>2</sup> The Chandnee Chowk is the main thoroughfare in Dehli, at one time famous over all Asia. The Turkoman gate is the name of a mohulla on the outskirts of the city.

Since the dinner was being delayed, Asghari listened to this in silence, and only said to the Mámá: 'Well, fetch it at once, whatever the price may be.'

But she was not so simple as to accept the Mámá's explanation. She said to herself: 'There is "something black in the dáI" here, for certain. A difference of a few cowries would be no great matter, but when it comes to *twice* and *four times* the price, in two mohullas of the same city, it is scandalous.'

After this Asghari was on the look-out. Next day the Mámá brought in some pawn-leaves. When Asghari saw them, she said: 'Mámá, you always manage to bring home light-coloured leaves; there is no taste nor flavour in these: Now that the cold weather is commencing, you ought to look about for well-grown and mellowed leaves to bring home.'

The Mámá said: 'Mellowed leaves are selling at two for a pice; and in this family (God protect it!) the consumption is half a bundle a day. That is why I bring young leaves.'

Just at this moment Asghari's own Mámá, Kifáyat Nisá,<sup>1</sup> came in from Asghari's home to inquire after her. The question of the pawn was still under discussion. Asghari turned to her own Mámá, and said: 'Kifáyat Nisá, at what rate are you buying pawn now?'

Kifáyat Nisá said: 'Sixteen for the pice, Lady.'

Asghari opened her desk, and, putting two pice into Kifáyat Nisá's hand, said: 'Go and get some from a pawn-seller of this mohulla.'

Kifáyat Nisá went, and brought back forty large, thick, succulent leaves.

Asghari said: 'Why, you have got four more in the pice than even in the Chandnee Chowk!'

Kifáyat Nisá said: 'Lady, this mohulla is the gate of the city. Whatever comes into it comes by this approach. Meat, grain, pawn—all these things can be bought cheap in this mohulla.'

<sup>1</sup> Pronounce Kifáyut, with accent on the second syllable, and Nissa. The name means 'economy among womankind.'

Fresh vegetables, indeed, which come from the Sabzimandi,<sup>1</sup> enter the city by the Kábuli gate. Very likely they are a little dearer. I got old leaves at forty; if I had taken young leaves, I could have had sixty.'

Asghari said: 'This good-for-nothing Azmat sets fire to everything alike. Kifáyat Nisá, I wish you would stay here for two or three days. I will send a message to my mother. Anyone can look after the work there just for a day or two.'

Kifáyat Nisá said: 'Here I am, lady, at your service; God deal better with us! are you and yours two families?'

For four days the purchases of all kinds from the bázár were made through Kifáyat Nisá, and in everything there was conclusive evidence of Mámá Azmat's dishonesty. But this was all managed in such a way that Asghari's mother-in-law had no inkling of it. Asghari knew of it, or Kifáyat Nisá, or Mámá Azmat. For Asghari was a woman of great generosity and regard for the feelings of others, and she thought to herself, 'What is the use of bringing an old servant like her into disgrace and contumely?'

One night, after she had finished supper, Asghari was sitting on the flat roof of the house chewing pawn. Kifáyat Nisá, too, was seated near her. Mámá Azmat happened to come up. Kifáyat Nisá spoke to her and said: 'Say, sister Azmat, what goings-on are these? Every servant makes her pickings; no one denies that. Look you, the mistress of the house is present whom I served for seven years on end. She had the entire management of the house—and a rich man's house, too; God keep it so!—and a rich man's expenditure. Thousands of rupees' worth of purchases have been carried home in these hands of mine. The regular percentage of course I took; why deny it? We servants think *that* our duty, whether God pardon us or punish us for it, eh? But anything *beyond* that one cannot digest. Going further amounts to treason.'

<sup>1</sup> Pronounce Subzee Mundee; a village outside Dehli inhabited by market gardeners. Pawn-leaves are grown only on special soils, and under mat houses. They used to be sent distances of 300 or 400 miles by relays of foot-runners.

Azmat said: 'Sister, is there anyone who does not know all about me? Do you think I care to conceal it? Granted, I steal and I plunder. It is nothing new; I have always done the same. But please to consider how I am placed—what a tremendous amount of work there is in this house. Inside and outside I am the only person. The work of four servants falls upon me single-handed. I tell you, sister, one does not give one's bones to be crushed in this way all for nothing. The mistress has dismissed me before this several times over, but she always had to send for me again in the end. It is the way in which you look at a thing; one looks at it one way, and another another. If I am here all by myself in the place of four servants, I ought to get the wages of four servants all to myself.'

Now, the fact about Mámá Azmat was this: she had been in the family for twenty-five years, and the whole of that time she had been intent upon plundering it. A thing which happens once can be hushed up, but in her case some fraud or other was discovered every day. She had been turned out of the house repeatedly; the instant she was dismissed the banya,<sup>1</sup> the cloth-merchant, the goldsmith, the butcher, the greengrocer—everyone from whom any purchases had been made by her upon credit—came to the house, and stood there dunning for their money. To be rid of this horror, she was always sent for again. Thus it was that theft and impudence alike were inscribed in Mámá Azmat's lines of fate. She would take things before your face, and let you know she was robbing you. She would show you a thing, and make away with it, and have it written down, and then deny it. The income of the family was small, and their habits extravagant. Their food must be of the best, their clothes suitable to their rank. The whole establishment was kept going on borrowed money, and Mámá Azmat was the agent in all the negotiations. Hence the doors of the keep were open. She used to say, 'Turning me off is no easy business. Before I leave, I will have the house sold up; and if I go, it will be to the tune of falling bricks.'

When Asghari began to try and check the accounts, Mámá Azmat became her deadly enemy, and her one thought was how

<sup>1</sup> Pronounce bunnya; a corn-seller and money-lender.

to make mischief against Asghari with Muhammad Kámil and his mother; but Asghari had no notion of her design, and, in fact, when she saw that Azmat was all-powerful in the house, and that there was no chance either of her mending her ways or of her being turned out, she said to herself, 'Well, in that case, what is to be gained by useless nagging? and why should I make myself objectionable to the Mámá for nothing?' And accordingly she left off going into the kitchen and interfering with the food altogether.

The inmates of the house, however, had got to know the taste of Asghari's handiwork by this time, and immediately began to make wry faces. One would say, 'Dear me! the meat is all gritty, like dust in the mouth;' and another, 'There is salt enough in the dál to kill one; my tongue won't stand it.' But no one dared to say to Asghari, 'Won't you cook the dinner?' Whatever Mámá Azmat served up to them, they were forced to eat, good or bad, just as she had cooked it.

## CHAPTER X

ONE day in the rainy season—there was a thick mass of clouds overhead, and tiny, tiny drops of rain were falling amid cold gusts of wind—Muhammad Kámil said: 'I should so like a *karhá-i* to-day, but only on condition that Tamízdár bahu superintends the cooking.'

Now, Asghari spent most of her time upon the roof;<sup>2</sup> she had not the slightest notion that Muhammad Kámil had expressed a wish for the *karhá-i*. Mámá Azmat went out and procured the ghee, the sugar, the gram-flour, and other ingredients, and said to Muhammad Kámil: 'Here you are, young master; I have brought in all the purchases. Shall I go now, and summon the lady bride?' Then she went up on to the roof, but she did not so

<sup>1</sup> A '*karhá-i*' means originally 'a large stew-pan,' and has become the name of a particular kind of stew.

<sup>2</sup> The roofs of Indian houses are flat, and surrounded by a parapet, so that women can enjoy the air without violating their privacy.

much as mention the *karhá-i* to Asghari; she came down again without a word, and reported: 'The bride says she has got a headache.'

Mámá Azmat herself could not cook an ordinary dish decently; what earthly chance was there of her cooking a *karhá-i*? She served up the ingredients all messed together and utterly spoilt. Muhammad Kámil had been looking forward, I can't tell you how much, to his wish being gratified. After eating his nasty meal, he was proportionately disappointed. When he went up on to the roof, he found his wife engaged in sewing a pair of *paijamas*<sup>1</sup> for herself. He felt aggrieved, and said to himself, 'Eh, she is not too ill to be sewing, and yet when I asked for a *karhá-i*, she made the excuse of a headache.'

This was the first time that Muhammad Kámil had ever been annoyed with his wife, and it is just from petty little things like these that ill-feeling between husbands and wives ordinarily arises. Since marriages usually take place at a very early age, it follows, by God's grace, that sweet counselling reason is to be found neither in the husband nor in the wife. If either of them has taken offence at any little thing, you find the husband sitting sulking by himself, and the wife by herself lying on the sofa with her face averted. Considering that they have to live together, always in the same place, what wonder is it if very trifling matters in which they disagree with each other are of constant occurrence? But this antagonism, increasing with every instance of its repetition, produces in time a great collapse in their attachment and mutual friendship. Deference and loyalty disappear on either side, and the two pass the rest of their lives as if they were walking with peas in their shoes: The safest plan is for husband and wife to preserve their intercourse with each other unclouded from the very commencement, and not to allow even petty grievances to be formed; for otherwise, out of the accumulation of these petty grievances a huge amount of ill-will and misery is eventually created. And the secret of preventing any grievance from being formed is this: whenever anything occurs, however small, which gives you offence, not to bury it in your mind, but to speak it out

<sup>1</sup> *Pajamas—i.e.*, trousers.

face to face, and get clear of it. If Muhammad Kámil had known of this maxim, and been possessed of common-sense, he would infallibly have taken his wife to task, and asked her *why* she could not do such a little job for him, but must needs tell a lie, and plead a headache. In that case the whole business would have been settled at once by a few words, and Mámá Azmat's roguery would have come to light. But Muhammad Kámil put a seal on his lips, and inscribed a whole volume of complaint upon his heart. Muhammad Kámil's coldness of manner made Asghari alarmed. She thought to herself, 'God help us! here is the beginning of a quarrel in prospect.' When she saw her mother-in-law, she found her too looking gloomy. She was still more amazed at this, and said to herself, 'Good Heavens! what can it be?'

But before this matter could be explained, Mámá Azmat had aimed another blow. It was near the Ramazán. Muhammad Kámil's mother said to Mámá Azmat: 'Mámá, the Ramazán is coming on; you must begin at once to make preparations. All the copper vessels, big and little, want tinning; it is a whole year since the house was whitewashed. Tell Hazári Mal,<sup>1</sup> the banker, that he must manage somehow or other to let me have fifty rupees, since all the expenses of the Eed are falling on my head.'

Mámá Azmat said: 'Tamízdár bahu will be invited to her mother's house, and I have heard the Tahsildár,<sup>2</sup> too, is coming home; of course, he will send to fetch both his daughters. Besides, I did hear somewhere that it is Tamízdár bahu's intention to go back with her father; if she goes, no doubt the young master will go too. In that case, lady, you will be all alone in the house; what will you want with whitewashing? and what good will it be to have the vessels tinned? As for Hazári Mal, bad luck to him! He has got so crusty that his man waits at the door every day dunning for his money; how should he lend any more?'

When Muhammad Kámil's mother heard this, she was chilled to the heart, and the facts were enough to make her so. From the day when her husband went to Lahore he had not returned

<sup>1</sup> Pronounce Huzarse Mull.

<sup>2</sup> *I.e.*, Asghari's father, a (subordinate) 'collector.'

even to see what his home was like. Once in six months—once in a year, when he happened to think of it—he used to send her a remittance; but, except for that, he had ceased to trouble himself about her. Muhammad Aqil, as we have seen, had left his mother. The only one who remained to keep the house going was Muhammad Kámil. After *his* departure, the prospect was blank.<sup>1</sup> She asked the Mámá abruptly: 'Eh! Tell me the truth; are you sure Tamízdár bahu will go?'

The Mámá said: 'Lady, as to her going or not God knows; I only told you what I heard.'

Muhammad Kámil's mother asked: 'Eh? Bad luck to you! From whom did you hear? How was it discovered?'

The Mámá said: 'How did I come to hear? Well, I asked Kifáyat Nisá to lend me two rupees, and she said she would let me have them, but she was likely to be going to the hills. Then I inquired all about it, and found that everything had been settled to a 'T.' They are waiting till the Tahsildár comes—that's all; the morning after the Eed all these folk will start off. And why wait for hearing? "Though God be unseen, man's reason discovers Him." Do you mean to say, Lady, that you draw no conclusions from Tamízdár bahu's own proceedings? Don't you see how she used to be always looking after the house-work at first, and now one would think her under an oath never to come down from the roof. Letter after letter is despatched to her father's address. What other business is there between them of such importance unless it be her going away?'

After this talk Muhammad Kámil's mother was left in a state of consternation, and she was still sitting wrapt in thought when Muhammad Kámil came home. She called him to her, and said: 'Kámil, I have something to ask you; will you promise to tell me the truth?'

Muhammad Kámil said: 'Goodness, mother! is there anything I should be likely to conceal from you?'

His mother then repeated to him word for word all that she had heard from the Mámá.

Muhammad Kámil said: 'Mother, I tell you truly that I have

<sup>1</sup> Lit., 'the horizon was clear.'

no knowledge whatever of this, nor has Tamízdár bahu ever mentioned the subject.'

His mother said: 'Go away, you hypocrite; do you try to impose upon me? A matter of that importance, and you to know nothing about it!'

Muhammad Kámil said: 'Well, if you won't be convinced, I swear by your head that I know nothing about it.'

Just then the Mámá, too, came in. Muhammad Kámil's mother said: 'How is this, you Azmat? Kámil says he knows nothing about it.'

The Mámá said: 'Young master, you may like it or lump it; your lady is making her preparations to go. Very likely she is keeping it dark from you. *She* is no Mizájdár, who could keep nothing to herself; this is Tamízdár bahu, who lets no one into her secrets.'

Muhammad Kámil's mother then asked him: 'Well, Kámil, if this thing should be true, what do you intend to do?'

Muhammad Kámil replied: 'Why, you don't suppose it possible, do you, that I should go away and leave you all alone? And Tamízdár bahu too—it is altogether out of the question that she should go away without saying anything or asking permission. I shall inquire of Tamízdár bahu this very day what is the meaning of it all.'

His mother said: 'Can we trust this wretched Mámá's words? Don't say anything to your wife about it as yet; when we are quite certain, we will see.'

By tricks of this kind, Mámá Azmat hoped to render Asghari obnoxious to her mother-in-law and husband; and, although neither of them said anything about it to Asghari in so many words, yet even she could not help perceiving from their looks that there was some embarrassment. In Mahmúda Asghari had an admirable scout on her side. From little things that Mahmúda told her, Asghari gradually unravelled the whole of Mámá Azmat's villainy. But Asghari was not so silly as to give way at once to idle resentment; the conclusion she came to was that it would be unbecoming for her to initiate any discussion upon the subject; for, after all, the truth would be known some day, and then she

could trust herself how to act. In her own heart she said : ' Just you wait a bit, Azmat ; please God ! even you shall see how smooth I will make you. Your brains have taken such a high range now that you think to set the whole family at enmity with each other. Please God ! I will smite you where no water is ;<sup>1</sup> and I will so cast you out that never again shall any luck bring you into this mohulla.'

## CHAPTER XI

MÁMÁ AZMAT'S evil genius was now well astride of her. She delivered a third blow at Asghari. It was Hazári Mal's custom, whenever he saw Azmat passing by in front of his shop, to call out to her in a fussy way, 'How now, Mámá ! have you any thought of paying my account?' and once a week or so he would send some dunning message to the house. One day, when Mámá Azmat was on her way to the bázár to make her purchases, as usual, Házari Mal hailed her.

Mámá Azmat said : ' Lála !<sup>2</sup> what new custom is this you have adopted of molesting me ? Whenever you see me, you begin dunning *me*. Why don't you ask those you lent the money to ? They are the people to dun. What have I, poor wretch ! a lone woman, with two pice a day to live on—what have I to do with great bankers' accounts ?'

Hazári Mal said : ' What's that you say ? Nothing to do with it ! You take the money from the shop. "The hand knows the hand." It is you, whom I know, and it is on your assurance that I lend the money. What do I know of the people of the house ?'

The Mámá said : ' Oh, Lála, stop that nonsense ; you are not such a born fool as that. What did you ever see in *me* to assure you ? I have no lands ; I have no money. And you have given me hundreds of rupees with your eyes shut ! Well, if you gave

<sup>1</sup> A proverbial expression for taking a person at a time when he can make no resistance.

<sup>2</sup> The meaning of 'Lála' is something equivalent to the slang term 'Duckie' but it has long since become a term for addressing men of sedentary occupations, such as money-lenders and shop-keepers and clerks.

them to *me*, go on, and get them from me. Sell up my mansions—wherever they are standing. Stop the issue of my pension from the palace—if I have any.'

Hazári Mal was quite taken aback at the Mámá's outburst of temper. He endeavoured to pacify her by saying, ' It seems that you have had a quarrel with someone to-day before you came out. Tell me what it is. Has your mistress said anything ? or has the young master been angry ? Come in, won't you ?' And while he spoke thus to the Mámá, he put a pice into the hand of the boy who was looking after the shop, and said : ' Run and get two leaves of pawn made up, with some dry tobacco in them, and bring them here at once.' Then, when the Mámá was seated, he said to her again, with a laugh : ' You have certainly been quarrelling with someone ; that is plain enough.'

The Mámá said : ' God forbid ! Why should I begin to quarrel ? You spoke, and I answered accordingly. When a thing is true, why do you take offence at it ?'

Hazári Mal said : ' Sure enough, my *account* for the money is with the master ; but does it pass through your hands, or does it not ? I have neither note nor receipt ; whatever you asked me for in your master's name, I gave you.'

The Mámá said : ' Yes, stick to that ; when am I likely to deny it ? I will vouch for whatever I have taken before any number of people ; and my mistress too (blessings on her from every hair of my body !), she, poor dear ! never disputes anything.'

Hazári Mal said : ' You are right there, Mámá ; the Begam sáhib is a most noble lady. Bless her ! there is no doubt of that.' And then in a low voice he asked : ' Tell me about the young bride ; what is *she* like ? Is she of the same complexion as her elder sister, or of a different disposition ?'

The Mámá said : ' Don't ask me about her, Lála. The girl is of a noble family—true ; but she is very stingy at heart. Even a farthing's worth of anything she won't approve until she has returned it four times. Ah, yes, in talent and accomplishments, God keep her ! she is far ahead of most married girls. Her cooking is better than the best, and in needlework she could beat