THE
HEART DIVIDED

BY

Mumtaz Shah Nawaz

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PREFACE

My daughter Mumtaz Shah Nawaz was born on the 14th of October 1912. I was in my seventeenth year then and as I nursed and brought her up, the joy of motherhood was mine.

She was a good and bright child. While in school and college, she won much praise and when famous men and women in this country and in Europe complimented her on her writing and speaking, my pride in her was great.

She worked with those, who were struggling to free the country from foreign rule. She threw herself heart and soul into the fight and I passed through anxious days when even in prison, she resisted coercion with fearless speech and action.

'Tazi', as she was popularly known, wrote this novel between 1943 and 1948. She put in it much of what she had known of the joy and sorrow of life and its struggle and reward. Before it could be printed, she died in an air-crash in Ireland on the 15th of April 1948 on her way to the United States. I lived on and it was left to me to present this book to the readers for whom she had written it. We are all grateful to Prof. Ashfaq Ali Khan who did so much for the book when it was originally being written and who has since given so much of his valuable time and effort in editing and arranging its publication.

JAHAN ARA SHAH NAWAZ

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Mumtaz Jahan, eldest daughter of Mian Muhammad Shah Nawaz, Barrister-at-Law and Begum Shah Nawaz, M.L.A., was born at Lahore on the14thof October,1912. She received her early instruction in the Islamic religion at home and was educated in Queen Mary's College, Lahore. She matriculated in the First Division, from the Panjab University in 1928, and for a time studied English Poetry with the late Professor E. C. Dickinson. She also took lessons in Arabic from Professor Maulana Tajwar of the Panjab University. During these years music, and drama took up much of her leisure.

In 1930, her grandfather, the late Sir Muhammad Shafi and her mother Begum Shah Nawaz attended the Round Table Conference in London and Miss Shah Nawaz followed them to the United Kingdom. She arrived in London on her eighteenth birthday and was received in the literary circles as a prodigy. *The Spectator* printed a poem by her along with her photograph. The Lyceum Club and the Poets' Club entertained her and applauded her readings of her poems. In the great British Capital Miss Shah Nawaz met famous personalities in the world of art and letters. On one occasion George Bernard Shaw said to her "You are a diabolicaly clever girl: You won't come to a good end!" The crabbed compliment from G.B.S. was to become a tragic prophecy.

In 1932, Miss Shah Nawaz joined the Lady Irwin College, New Delhi, for the Diplama Course in Home Science and Domestic Economy. At the Irwin College, she won a number of prizes for debating, tennis and other extra-curricular activities. In 1935, she topped the list of successful candidates.

The next few years were spent in writing new method of educational books, working on women's committees and organising workers' welfare centres in the Amritsar Factory area.

During this period, Miss Shah Nawaz came to be known as a forceful public speaker and her appearances in public meetings were warmly welcomed by audiences in Lahore and Amritsar.

In 1939, Miss Shah Nawaz travelled extensively in Europe, and was in London during the early days of the Blitz.

In 1942, she joined the All-India Muslim League. A wide circle of her co-workers and followers in the sphere of workers' uplift, who inclined to the socialist ideology, followed her example and definitely aligned themselves with the League with its objectives of Islamic democracy and equality. Miss Shah Nawaz took up her new responsibilities with her customary zeal and within three years set up the Women's wing of the Muslim League in Delhi.

In 1945, she shifted her scene of action as a political worker to Lahore and helped her aunt Begum Bashir Ahmad, who was the President of the Women's Branch of the Muslim League in Lahore, to put new life into the organisation. In 1946, anti-Muslim pogroms broke out in Bihar and Miss Shah Nawaz took a leading part in organising relief work. In 1947, the League clashed with the Unionist Government of the Punjab and Miss Shah Nawaz was arrested and imprisoned along with some other woman workers including her mother.

The Partition of the Sub-continent into India and Pakistan came in 1947 followed by one of the biggest exchanges of population known to history. Miss Shah Nawaz founded the Women's Volunteer Service to deal with the colossal refugee problem and rendered very valuable service at a critical hour in the life of the young nation.

All through her life, Miss Shah Nawaz was to be found where the battle for freedom raged the fiercest. She was in Kashmir when liberation groups resisted the occupation of the valley by Indian troops in 1947. When Indian 'planes rained bombs on Baramula, she risked her life to evacuate the nuns of an American missionary convent to safety.

In her last days, Miss Shah Nawaz was saddened to see the spirit of idealism receding before material self-seeking among those who were expected to strengthen the biggest, though the youngest, Islamic State in the world. She sought to bring back the attention of the intelligentsia in Pakistan and abroad to the historical process that had resulted in the liberation of Pakistan, and to this end decided to hasten the publication of *The Heart Divided*. She also made up her

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mind to write a sequel to the book tracing the story of Pakistan from 1942 and 1947 and after . Her plan was to have *The Heart Divided* and a collection of her poems published in America, but fate ruled otherwise. The Pan-American Airways liner, "The Empress of the Skies" by which she flew, crashed in flames near Shannon airfield in Eire in the early hours of 15th April, 1948, killing all but one aboard. The bodies of the passengers were too badly burned to be identified and twenty-nine of them were interred in a common grave in a village graveyard in County Clare. One of these charred clods was all that was left of the Pakistan poetess and patriot, Mumtaz Jahan Shah Nawaz.

A. A. K.

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CHAPTER I

In later years Zohra often wondered when the change in her life began. The change, that had led her, a young Muslim girl, born and bred behind the purdah, to a life of independence and adventure. It was not easy to define when it began, for the lives of all the girls of her generation had changed so much and they were woven together in such a manner, like many-coloured threads of an intricate pattern, that it was difficult to decide when the change in her particular life began. Perhaps it started on a quiet November evening in 1930.

The family was gathered in the little sitting-room in the ladies' part of the house. Sheikh Jamaluddin had come back from the High Court an hour ago, and was now enjoying his daily cup of tea in the company of his wife and daughters. It was a simple room full of that quiet comfort which is the true sign of a happy home. The furniture was perhaps a little too ornate and there were too many pictures on the walls, but a cheerful log-fire was burning in the grate, and there were deep, cushioned seats into which one could sink comfortably.

Mehrunnissa Begum sat on the sofa with her husband. Her good-natured face and her portly person betokened that ready hospitality which was a characteristic of the house. Her elder daughter Sughra was giving orders to the maids and passing the sweets and savouries to her father and mother, and her younger daughter Zohra, was impatiently turning over the pages of a newspaper, when they heard the telephone bell in the next room.

Zohra dropped the newspaper and ran towards the door, her dopatta trailing behind her; and her mother frowned. "That child is never still, not even for a moment!" she said.

Sheikh Jamaluddin smiled. "The high spirits of youth," he said. "I would not curb them."

"She's grown-up now and should be more lady-like and decorous in her behaviour...." began the mother but Zohra's voice interrupted her.

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"Mother," she said, as she came back to the sitting-room, "may I go out shopping with Surrayya and Lakshmi?"

"Yes, I think you may, but ask your father's permission."

"May I, Father?"

"Certainly, my child."

"And Father, may I have the car?"

"You may, but only for two hours as I have to go to the club at seven."

"Thank you, Father. We shall be back before then. Coming, *Apa*?"

"Not today. I want to finish tacking the border to the *sari* I wish to wear at Lady Ali's purdah-party tomorrow."

"Change your shirt, Zohra," said her mother. "It has an ink stain on one sleeve: and mind you, keep sitting in the car and don't enter into conversation with shop-keepers."

Zohra laughed as she ran away, but her mother sighed. She was always a little afraid for her younger daughter in whom she could see the beginnings of those strange modern ways that had already entered some Muslim families. Besides, she did not quite approve of her friendship with Surrayya whose family had cast off the veil and went to shops and restaurants with their faces uncovered. How shameless they were, and she thought, yet they belong to an old and respectable Muslim family. How could they go about in such a manner, talking freely to strange men, who were not their fathers or their brothers, or their husbands? These Western ways! she sighed again. As if women were not perfectly happy and contented in their homes, serving their husbands and bringing up their children, sheltered and protected from the rough winds of the outside world. She was happy, and she smiled. Yes, she was very happy. Praise be to Allah, she had a good husband and three lovely children. Her happiness would be complete in a few months' time when her Habib would come back from England and she would see his marriage. But first the daughters

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must be married away, or at least Sughra. She looked round, Sughra had just gone out of the room.

"I had a letter from Sughra's mother-in-law-to-be," she said, "She wants us to fix a date for the wedding."

"Not until Habib comes home," said her husband. "He should be back in July, and then we can think of weddings in the family. Meanwhile, the girls are perfectly happy at the Punjab College."

"Yes, but Zohra is getting too many of these new-fangled ideas into her head. I don't like it."

"You mustn't worry about these things, my dear. Youth will be youth. She'll settle down in a few years and be perfectly happy, married to a good man."

"What about confirming her engagement to Anwar Ahmad? I hear the boy is shaping well."

"Not yet. They've proposed and I've given a favourable reply. But I shall not have the engagement until the boy is a graduate. Then I want him to go to England for further education."

"And meanwhile Zohra is to become an old maid?"

"Nonsense: The child is only sixteen. She can wait. Sughra is engaged to your cousin's son, and that engagement I cannot break: although I don't like the boy's having come away from Aitchison College without even taking his diploma. Anyway, I feel that at least one of my sons-in-law must be England-returned. Besides Zohra is very clever and I want her to marry a well-educated young man."

Sheikh Jamaluddin was an admirer of the West. He had been one of the first Muslim youngmen from the Punjab to go to Cambridge, where he had taken a degree in law. Later he had eaten his dinners at the Inner Temple and had been called to the Bar. While in England, he had learned to like the western way of living, and had even fallen in love with a young English girl. But he had been engaged to his cousin, and tradition and the fear of the family had been too strong for him. So he had

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said good-bye to Mary and had consoled himself by writing home to his father and making the strange request that his *flancee* should be taught English. This had created quite a stir in the family, but his uncle had been a wise man and an English governess had been engaged to teach Mehrunnissa and her sister Zaibunnissa the intricacies of the English language.

Young barrister Jamaluddin had come back from England full of admiration for the western way of life and determined to live his life like an 'English gentleman'. He had even thought of bringing his wife out of purdah, and of joining the Gymkhana Club. But once he was home again, the old habits began to reassert themselves. His father, Sheikh Nizamuddin, ruled the family with a rod of iron. He was a scholar of Arabic and Persian and a great patron of Eastern learning. Deeply attached to the old traditions and customs, he prided himself on the pure Arab blood of his family, and was contemptuous of all those who 'aped the West'. His grandfather had been a noble at the Sikh Court and had migrated to Lahore from Multan where the family estates were situated. The rest of the family had remained at Multan. They were a proud and arrogant lot, who traced their descent through hundreds of years to Arab Sheikhs, who came to India with the early Muslim conquerors. In the Moghul times, they had been feudal lords owing allegiance to the paramount power, but leading an independent existence. Many of them had been distinguished soldiers and courtiers at the Court of the Moghuls, and later at the court of the Sikhs, when Raja Ranjit Singh and his descendants ruled the Punjab.

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Sheikh Nizamuddin had soon realized that western education would be a great asset to young men in the future and he had sent both his sons to England. Jamaluddin had justified his father's hopes by becoming one of the foremost lawyers in the Punjab, but his younger brother Fakhruddin had never taken to western ways. He had returned home after spending a year in Europe and now managed the family estates at Multan.

The married life of Sheikh Jamaluddin had been happy. Happier than he had ever dared to hope. He had soon realised that his wife did not want to come out of purdah, that she was quite happy looking after her home, and that clubs and restaurants and cinema-houses held no attraction for her. Besides he knew

that his father and mother would never let their daughter-in-law go about with her face uncovered, and so his desire for a western way of life had been confined to furnishing a sitting-room and a dining-room in the English style in the ladies' part of the house, as well as a magnificient drawing-room, and dining-room in the men's part of the house. His wife was secretly amused at her husband's desire to have his meals at the dining-table and to eat with knives and forks. She thought *it* much cleaner to eat with the fingers and to wash the hands before and after meals. Besides, she felt more comfortable in her own sitting-room where carpets and a *chandni* were spread on the floor and big bolster cushions were strewn around. Here, they could all eat in comfort sitting round the cloth that was spread out at meal times. However, since it pleased her husband, they would eat in the dining-room, whenever he had his evening meal with her. Later, when her daughters grew up, she saw that they, like their father, felt more at home in the rooms which he had furnished according to his more modern taste.

As the years went by, Sheikh Jamaluddin really began to believe that perhaps the old ways were the best. He still had a secret admiration for the West, but he began to think that conditions being what they were, it was best for Muslim ladies to remain in purdah, and that they were happier thus than they would be if they gave up the veil.

Sometimes, not often, he thought of Mary and the old days at Cambridge. He had been romantic then. Now he was content to lead a settled conjugal life with his complacent wife. In the early years of their married life, he had had a few affairs and in his search for romance, once, had even kept a mistress for a short while in a house in the city, but he was essentially a man who loved his home, and as his children grew up, he found with his daughters the companionship he had never found with his wife, and he became more attached to his home, and dance and drink parties ceased to have any attraction for him.

Sughra and Zohra had gone to school. For this their Aunt Zaibunnissa had paved the way. Soon after, his sister Mehr's marriage, encouraged by the English governess and by her brother-in-law, Zaib, had gone to Q—school, which had been opened a few years before for girls of aristocratic families. Sughra and Zohra had followed in their aunt's footsteps. She had gone to school,

when she was fifteen, and had remained there for three years only. Her nieces joined it, when Sughra was nine, and Zohra was seven years old. They had remained there for nearly nine years and both had done extremely well, though Zohra was perhaps the cleverer of the two.

Now the girls were studying at the Punjab College, having joined it a little over a month ago. Zohra was looking forward to becoming the first lady graduate in the family, but Sughra knew, that her parents had other plans for her. Today she had seen from the glances her mother cast at her that she wanted to talk about her and had gone away to the room she shared with her sister. There she sat before the window and took up the *sari* on which she was tacking a border. Somehow, her thoughts wandered away to Multan and to the man she was to marry. It was not often that she thought of him, for she did not know him at all. Years ago, he had been pointed out to her as her betrothed, and she had peeped at him from behind a curtain when he visited her father. He had been a youth of eighteen then and she only thirteen years old. She vaguely remembered a heavily built young man, with a broad fair face and that was all. Yet now in a few months' time, she was to marry him and go away to live with him at Multan. She had been to Multan several times. It was their ancestral home and she knew that the branch of the family that had migrated to Lahore was much morem odern than the rest of then who lived at Multan. She thought of the old aunts there, and their exclamations of shocked surprise, when they heard of the activities of their Lahore cousins and nieces, and she wondered, how she would adjust her life to suit theirs. Here at Lahore, she had become used to the company of her college friends, to drives and picnics and shopping expeditions and to occasional visits to the cinema-houses, where they sat in a purdah box. There would be none of these things at Multan. Life would be confined to the four walls of her husband's house with occasional visits to relatives thrown in. 'Ah well! I must not worry too much,' she thought, 'It will all adjust itself. I'm not the first girl, who's getting married, so why should I be apprehensive about it? I'm sure, he will be charming and kind and I shall love him as a true wife should. Yes, of course, I shall love him'. She suppressed the vague doubt that arose in her mind. 'I shall be happy in my own home for a Muslim woman's kingdom is her home.' She thought and looked up to see the crescent moon in the sky. Strangely enough, the evening star

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was not far from it, and the words of Iqbal came to her mind '*The dagger of the moon is the emblem of our nation*'. 'It is the' flag of Islam', she thought, and her thoughts went back to her childhood. She had been her grandfather's favourite and he had told her wonderful stories, when, as a little girl, she had sat on his knee. She had been thrilled then, when he had related the lives of Omar and Ali, and told her about the victories of Khalid, Tariq and Babar, and even today, she felt a thrill, when she thought of the past glories of Islam, and of the many heroes who lived in the annals of history. She would be true to her heritage, she, who was a proud daughter of a proud race. She looked up once again at the crescent moon with its accompanying star and a joy that was almost like pain welled up within her. She would live up to her ideal of Muslim womanhood. A dutiful daughter, a loving wife, and a devoted mother. That is what she wanted to be. Her menfolk would go into the world to do deeds of valour and daring, and she would be there in the background to encourage and to inspire. Her name would not figure in history books, nor appear on the pages of the newspapers, but her life would have its own significance and a quiet beauty that the turbulent might well envy. Her thoughts were rich and peaceful, as she sat by the window, while the crescent moon sank slowly towards the west.

As the car shot out of the gate, Zohra suddenly remembered that she had left the top half or cape of her burqah behind. The lower half is worn as a coat, and it is the top half that fits over the head and has a veil attached to it to cover the face. She had not put on the cape of her burqah, because the car had come to the private entrance in the ladies' part of the house, where there were no men servants, and she knew that the driver habitually turned his face away when the young ladies appeared. She had thought, she had the cape in her hand as she hurriedly jumped into the car, but discovered to her dismay that she had left it behind. Meanwhile, the car was travelling down Empress road and it was getting late. 'It doesn't really matter,' she thought, 'The car's curtained. For once I can remain in it as mother told me to and not go out into the shops. The things I wish to see can be brought to me.'

The car drove into Surrayya's house, and Zohra asked the driver to blow the horn. A tall and stately girl clad in a *sari* came out on to the verandah. Zohra admired the way in which she walked, erect and self-possessed. She wore no veil of any sort.

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There were two men servants on the verandah who bowed as the young lady passed and she gave them some orders. Then stepping into the car she said "Hello, Zori." Zohra's face beamed with pleasure. Surrayya had been two years senior to her at school and she had always looked up to her. She was one of the few Muslim girls out of purdah, and belonged to a well-known family, whose ladies were the first in the Punjab to discard the veil. She had been a brilliant student at Q—school and was now in her third year at the Punjab College. She had won several prizes at inter-university debates, where she often beat the boys with her eloquence. Zohra longed to be like her, but dared not go against the more conservative ideas of her own family.

They picked Lakshmi from her home on Egerton road and then went down the Mall. Suddenly, there was a loud hiss, the car gave a lurch and then came to standstill.

"What's the matter?" Zohra asked the driver.

"Nothing much, *Bibi*", he replied, "We 've punctured a tyre."

"Well hurry up then and change it."

"I'm sorry *Bibi* but I've no spare tyre. Don't worry it'll only take me 20 minutes to fix this one."

"Oh dear!" said Zohra, "Father wants the car at seven and it's already a quarter to six."

"Listen Zohra," said Surrayya, "Let's go in a tonga to Commercial Buildings, where I have to buy a few things, and then our car can catch us up before we go on to Anarkali."

"I can't."

"Why not. You've been in a tonga before, when we went out for picnic from school."

"I remember," said Lakshmi, "The days when you graced the ranks of the Shuttlecocks!" A white burqa made in a single piece makes a girl look extraordinarily like a shuttlecock, and that was what the purdah girls had been called at school by their more lucky

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school fellows. It was because of this name that Zohra had taken to wearing a two-piece burqah.

"You see I've left the cape of my burqah behind," she said.

"That's too bad," said Surrayya. "It means that we shall not be able to go to Anarkali today."

"Listen Zohra," exclaimed Lakshmi, "Come as you are. No one will recognize you."

"That's an idea," Surrayya was quite excited. "Come along Zohra. Let's get into a tonga."

Zohra did not know what to do. On the one hand, she knew that she would incur the severe displeasure of her family, and on the other, she did not wish to appear timid and full of fear before the girls, especially before Surrayya. Besides, it would be fun. It would be great fun going along the Mall in a tonga with no cumbersome veil to hamper her. She would feel as free as a bird. Surely no one would know. The driver? She could square him with a tip. They would not find out. But what if they did? She could smoothe away her father's displeasure, but mother and grandfather? Grandfather? She hesitated....

"I didn't know you were such a frightened goose," said Surrayya.

That decided her. "Call a tonga!" She cried gaily, and stepped out of the car.

CHAPTER 2

On Empress Road, in Lahore, was an old garden that had belonged to the Sheikh family for many generations. Its lawns were always green and in the beds, there were flowers all the year round, for pansies and roses and jasmine, chrysanthemums and narcissus bloomed in succession, and even in the hottest months of the year, the air was saturated with gardenia perfume. Old trees, twisted and curved their giant limbs, in a million intricacies and the leaves mingled their many greens to cast a deep shade summer and winter. The garden was not laid out in formal pattern, it had

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just grown with the years and in many a corner the shrubbery mixed with the flowers to give it all the charm of the woods.

In this garden Sheikh Amiruddin, the father of Sheikh Nizamuddin, had built Nishat Manzil—the house of the Sheikh family and just as the roots of the trees had sunk deeper into the soil with each passing year so had the ties that bound the family to the city of Lahore grown stronger and closer, until their name had become associated with Lahore in such a way that any talk of the one recalled the other.

The Sheikhs were popular and well-beloved by their fellow citizens, and all day long cars and carriages of visitors could be seen driving up to the porch of the red and white building. It was a curious architectural mixture with Moghul arches and flat roofs, but it was a mixture that was pleasing to the eye. Inside, its many large rooms were sumptuously furnished, and liveried men-servants moved about on noiseless feet across the marble and tile floors that were covered with rich carpets.

All cars that came to Nishat Manzil, did not drive up to the porch, for the curtained cars would always pass along a side road and stop in front of a door in the back wall. Then the ladies would step out, and passing through the little door enter a small walled-in garden from which steps led up to a raised brick platform that in turn, led to a verandah. This was the ladies' part of the house.

Nishat Manzil was built round a square courtyard, in the centre of which a fountain cast its graceful jets of water into the air. It was this courtyard, that separated the men's part of the house from the ladies' part, and beyond it the men-servants dared not go, for there the maids reigned supreme and a large number of them served the ladies of the family. There was always a lively rivalry between the men-servants and the maids, and stories and gossip would be carried to and fro across the courtyard that separated the two parts of the house—the two parts that were almost like two different worlds, one a man's world reflecting in its myriad activities all the rush and turmoil of the world outside, and the other, a serene and sheltered domain, a woman's world where none, but the closest of male relatives, could enter and where clothes and food and children were the chief interest and the main topic of conversation. Lately, however, hther interests and new thoughts were beginning to enter this

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secluded domain, and its peace was disturbed by a flood of ideas from the surging world outside, a flood that could no longer be held back by its old walls and ancient traditions.

Anwar Jahan Begum was Sheikh Nizamuddin's only daughter and had been her mother's spoilt darling, but fate had not spoilt her, and for this she bore the whole world a grudge. She felt that a good, religious and extremely conscientious person like herself should have had a better deal in life than to have been left a widow at the age of thirty-five, especially, when her cousin and sister--in-law Mehrunnissa was so happy and prosperous. In what way was she inferior to Mehr, she often wondered, that death should have snatched away her husband and left her a widow: while Mehr, the stupid and careless Mehr, enjoyed continued marital bliss. If only he had lived. Then she would have shown the world what she was capable of doing, she often thought, forgetting that while he lived she had never had a good word for her husband and had always bemoaned her fate for being married to such a good-for-nothing. While he, poor man, had been a little afraid of his domineering wife, and had spent as much time away from home as possible. To begin with, he had belonged to a poorer branch of the family, and it had been thought that Sheikh Nizamuddin had bestowed a great favour upon him by giving him his only daughter in marriage, and by bringing him to live in the house as one of the sons rather than as a son-in-law. His wife had always impressed this fact upon him and the whole household had maintained a patronizing attitude that had driven the young man further and further away from them and from her. He had been intelligent and sensitive, but no one had discovered these virtues except, perhaps, some of the courtesans, whom he visited, in order to escape his wife's sharp tongue. He had two children, a son and a daughter, but he had no voice in their upbringing, and they idolized their grandfather and their uncles, looking upon their father almost as a stranger. Finally, in despair, he had found consolation in drink and had died at the young age of forty.

After his death, Anwari suddenly discovered that her husband had been a paragon of all the virtues and bemoaned his loss as loudly, as she bemoaned his frequent infidelities. She often talked of the happy days, they had spent together and forgot that the poor victim of her constant nagging had drowned his woes in drink.

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Anwari had always been jealous of Mehr. She had been a plain plump girl with no pretentions to beauty, while Mehr when young had been a slim flower-like creature, whom all had admired. Fate seemed always to have favoured Mehr and showered all the good things of life upon her, while she, poor Anwari, was born for suffering. But then the good always suffered in this life, she thought, the evil flourished like the green bay tree while the good bore patiently all the afflictions that were sent to them as a test of their faith. They would get their reward in Paradise, while the wicked burned in the fires of Hell. Whenever she thought of the fires of Hell, Anwari could not help thinking of Mehr, but she would quickly put away the thought, lest she 'lessen the sins' of her sister-in-law by thinking evil of her.

One thing, however, she knew, and it was this, that no good could come of black magic, and surely, Mehr must have used some potent charms on Jamaluddin to make him such a slave. Anwari often asked Chagan, her maid and confident, what those charms could have been and Chagan told her amazing stories of the efficacies of black magic.

Anwari was sitting on the carpet, wrapped up in a quilt, warming her hands, before a brazier, when Chagan came in with a smile on her lips.

"Have you heard the latest, *Bibiji*?" she asked.

"No, what is it?" Anwari enquired eagerly, she was hungry for the spicy tit-bits of gossip that Chagan always brought her.

"I really don't know, whether I should speak of it," Chagan was tantalizing, "Zohra Bibi gave strict instructions to the driver."

"Strict instructions about what? Why are you hesitating, woman? Go on."

"After all, she is your niece and I cannot talk against her."

"If Zohra's done wrong, I, as her aunt, should be told. It is I, who have to guard the morals of my nieces. Their easy-going mother is incapable of doing so."

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"Of course times are changing, but *Bibi*, who would have thought of a girl of your family going with her face uncovered, and in the bazaars too!"

"Her face uncovered and in the bazaars? Woman, you must be mad!"

"Oh no, I'm not mad. It's the world that's going mad now-a-days."

"But what happened? Be more explicit for heaven's sake."

"Well, it's like this. You know Ghulam Muhammad, the driver? He's married to my mother's third cousin, and this makes him a kinsman, so to speak. Naturally, he wouldn't have spoken to an out-sider, but this evening, after we had finished our meal in the kitchen, he took me aside and told me a strange story" she paused again.

"Go on." Anwari cried impatiently, "What happened?"

"It appears that one of the tyres of the car punctured, while Zohra Bibi was out shopping."

"So she went out shopping again! With whom?"

"That Surrayya, who goes about like a Farangan *mem*, and some Hindu girl. Well, it seems, upon being told, it would take 20 minutes to get the car going, all three of them jumped out of the car, called a tonga, and drove away in it. God knows, where they went. And, mind you, Zohra Bibi was without her burqah."

"*Ya Allah*! What a disgrace!" shouted Anwari. "It's all that Mehr's doing. She has no control over the girls and they will learn bad ways." She bent closer to Chagan "Do you think they went out to meet boys?" she whispered.

"How should I know?" replied Chagan. "All I know is that Ghulam Muhammad picked them up somewhere in the bazaar after half-an-hour. Anything could have happened!"

"My father....my father must be told. Bring me my shawl, Chagan, I shall go to him at once."

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Sughra and Zohra were having an after-dinner chat in their room. They had drawn up two easy chairs before the fire and were busy eating nuts Every now and then, Zohra cracked an almond or a walnut and threw the shells into the fire, where they crackled merrily. The two sisters made a pretty picture, as they sat there, with the light from the flames, playing upon their faces. Zohra was wearing a white *salwar* and a shirt of pale green silk with a *dopatta* to match. She had inherited her mother's slim flower-like quality and glowing complexion, but, unlike her mother's calm face, was never still for a moment, and had an elfin look with its shining eyes and mobile mouth. Although, most people thought Zohra the prettier of the two, there were some, who said that Sughra was much better looking, for Zohra was slim to the point of being thin and her figure was under-developed for a Punjabi girl of sixteen, while the lissom curves of Sughra's body showed to great advantage, in her Punjabi dress and her serene face had large heavily fringed eyes, that sometimes glowed with a haunting light. Her skin was inclined to be pale and sallow and there was nothing striking about her nose or her mouth, in fact one never noticed them until she smiled and, then a row of pearly white teeth and two little dimples, on either side of the mouth, lit up the face and one wondered how anyone could ever had thought her plain. Sughra was not pretty, but there were times when she was beautiful.

"Tell me, *Apa*," Zohra was saying, "Why is Surrayya so sad sometimes? Today I told her how lucky I thought she was to be out of purdah and to meet so many interesting people, and she said, 'Yes Zohra, I am lucky, but remember those, who take to new ways, must pay the price'. What did she mean, do you know?"

"Well I don't know if it's true but I did hear, that Surrayya was engaged to a youngman, and they were fond of each other, but, that his people made him break it off because they thought Surrayya was too modern."

"Oh what a shame! Poor Surrayya. What a fool the man must have been to give up a girl like her. *Apa*, I wish — — I wish that Habib could marry her."

"That's impossible. Habib is almost engaged to Akhtari and she being uncle Fakhruddin's daughter, he will, probably, have to marry her."

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"If you ask me, aunt Anwari has designs on Habib for her Bilquis."

Just then the door opened and their mother came in. "Zobra," she said sternly, "Come here."

Zohra looked up in surprise. Seldom had she seen her good-natured mother so angry. "What's the matter, mother?" she asked.

"You've disgraced the family! You've brought shame upon us! Would that I had died rather than lived to hear that my daughter had done such a thing! Tell me at once who are the boys whom you are meeting on the sly?"

"The boys?" Zohra was mystified, "What boys? I don't know any."

"Don't lie to me!" her mother almost shrieked. "Ghulam Muhammad had told us everything. Give me their names at once."

"Believe me, Mother, someone has made up a tale. I don't know any boys."

"You persist in lying to me," Mehrunnissa had lost her temper completely. Anwari had carried a well-embroidered story to her father and Mehrunnissa had felt thoroughly humiliated, when her father-in-law's wrath had been let loose on her, now she, in turn, was trying to soothe her own hurt pride by taking it out on her daughter. "You shameless hussy!" she cried and gave Zohra a slap.

Zohra had not been hit by her mother since she was eight years old, and since punishment of this type was forbidden in her school, she was not used to being slapped. She stood there with blazing eyes, and Mehrunnissa, looking at her daughter, realized, that Zohra had been telling the truth. She moved towards her with a word of reconciliation on her lips, but Zohra did not say another word; she turned her back on her mother, walked into the bedroom and slammed the door. Proud and wilful and rather spoilt by her father, she felt that she could never forgive her mother the indignity of that slap.

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Meanwhile, Sughra tried to calm Mehrunnissa, and by gentle questioning, found out the tale that Anwari had carried to Sheikh Nizamuddin.

"Zohra is meeting boys stealthily, she had told the old man." If you don't believe me, ask Ghulam Muhammad the driver. Why even today when Zohra went out with that Surrayya, the shameless unveiled one, they made an excuse to leave the car, met three boys and went off with them. Ghulam Muhammad was told to pick them up after half-an-hour. Anything could have happened! *Hai*! *Hai*! What a disgrace for us!"

"I tell you, Mother, that it's absolutely untrue," said Sughra. "Zohra knows no boys, nor has Surrayya introduced her to any. I assure you, they had no assignation. All that happened was that one of the tyres of the car punctured and the girls got into a tonga and went on to Commercial Buildings to save time and there the car caught them up: that was all."

"Are you sure Sughra?"

"Of course."

"Thank God. I was so worried." Mehrunnissa was so relieved at the story about the boys being false that she forgot to be angry with Zohra for going off in a tonga. She began to regret having hit the girl and walking up to the bathroom door, asked Zohra to come out, but Zohra made no reply and the door remained locked.

Just then Sheikh Jamaluddin walked into the room. He had dined at the club and had only just come back. *Anna*, the old nurse, had rushed to him with tears in her eyes to tell him that the Begam Sahiba was beating Zohra Bibi. Sheikh Jamaluddin could hardly believe his ears and hurried to the girl's room, to find his wife standing in front of the bathroom door entreating Zohra to come out.

"What on earth has happened?" he asked, and Sughra told him all about Anwari's mischief-mongering.

"What a monstrous tale!" he exclaimed "Of course it's a lie. You should never have believed such a thing of Zohra." he said

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to his wife. "You know, that she would never do a thing like that."

"It's all your sister's doing," Mehr retorted, "She hates me and my daughters. She has always hated us."

"I shall speak to Anwari. Meanwhile let's get the child out of there. You should never have slapped her."

"You don't know what things uncle said to me." It was Mehr's turn to be tearful.

Meanwhile, Jamaluddin had gone to the bathroom door. "Zohra", he said gently, "It's your father speaking. Come out child." The door opened and Zohra appeared with flushed cheeks and dry angry eyes.

"Come my child. You should not behave thus. Ask your mother's pardon," said her father and passed a caressing hand on her curls. This sign of tenderness was too much for her and she burst into tears.

"Mother called me a liar and a shameless hussy," she sobbed. From being the accused, she became the accuser.

"There, there, it was all a misunderstanding." Jamaluddin led Zohra up to her mother who, full of remorse, clasped her in her arms and soon Zohra was crying peacefully on her mother's shoulder and all was well.

In the confusion of the moment, they all forgot about Zohra's having gone out shopping in a tonga with no veil to cover her face, and when, she told her father the next day, what she had done, he only said, "You shouldn't have gone without a burqah, but it doesn't really matter, since no one recognized you. Anyway, I should not tell grandfather," he added. To Zohra, this was a tacit permission to go out shopping in her car without a burqah, as long as no one recognized her, and her grandfather did not know. Next time, when Surrayya took her out for shopping in her car, she folded away the burqah, went gaily into the shops, spent a pleasant hour, and only put on the burqah when, on their way back, they entered the drive that led to Nishat Manzil.

Thus she took her first step towards a free and independent life, but she did not know it then.

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CHAPTER 3

In the days when Raja Ranjit Singh ruled the Punjab, there were two young nobles at his court, who were close friends. One was Sheikh Jamaluddin, a Muslim, whose family had migrated to Lahore from Multan, in the days of the Moghul Emperors: and the other was Diwan Kailash Nath Kaul, a Hindu Kashmiri Pandit. An ancestor of the Kauls had come down from Kahmir during the reign of the Emperor Shah Jahan, and had taken up an appointment at the Moghul Court at Delhi. Later, he had been given an appointment at Lahore with a small jagir or estate near that town and the title of Diwan.

The two friends Sheikh Jamaluddin and Diwan Kailash Nath Kaul had exchanged turbans and taken the vow of brotherhood and the friendship thus established between the two families, had continued from generation to generation until the present day. Sheikh Nizamuddin and Diwan Jawala Prashad Kaul, the present head of the Kaul family, were proud of the old ties that bound their two families together. They met almost every evening, Diwan Jawala Prashad Kaul would come to Nishat Manzil in his smart new gig or Sheikh Nizamuddin would get into his two-horse carriage and drive to Shanti Niwas, a rambling two storied bungalow, on Mozang Road, the home of the Kauls. Here, in the beautiful old library full of rare manuscripts and old pictures, they would sit on a divan smoking the hooka, talking about the old days and reciting the verses of Hafiz, Saadi or Ghalib.

Diwan Jawala Prashad was reclining on the divan in the library one day, talking to a nephew, who had just returned from Germany, and his granddaughter Mohini sat on a stool at her feet, wide-eyed and intent, pondering over every word that he spoke in his perfect Urdu.

"You want me to tell you all about the political events in the country while you have been away," said Diwan Jawala Prashad, "and so much has happened, that it is difficult to relate—but I'll try. Let me see, you left us two years ago, and about a month after you left, the Indian National Congress held its session at Calcutta. At that time, there were two groups in the Congress, the more moderate element wanted to ask the Government to accept the constitution drafted by the Nehru Committee wherein

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an immediate grant of Dominion Status was asked for, and the other wished to press for complete Independence. When a compromise was adopted, the Congress decided to accept the report of the Nehru Committee, but intimated that if the British did not agree to that constitution within a year, the Congress would revert to the demand for complete independence."

"I suppose Pandit Motilal Nehru led the moderate group and Jawaharlal the extremists. It must have been interesting to see father and son on opposite sides."

"Not exactly opposite, for the compromise was accepted. However, it soon became clear, that the Government would not give in to the ultimatum and accept the demand, and as the months went by, political fervour began to rise, and all could see that a struggle between the Government and the Congress had become inevitable. The Congress was due to hold another session at Lahore in December in the following year, and as the date drew near, the Government began to display some nervousness .... then in an effort to check the march of events, it, at last, took a step forward, and announced that a Round Table Conference of Indian leaders would be held in the near future. Upon this various parties, including the Congress and others held a conference and passed a joint resolution putting forward some demands that should form the basis of the Round Table Conference, then there was a meeting between the Viceroy and some Congress leaders and others—But it all came to nothing. The Government and the Congress were still as far apart as ever....."

"The British Government is, as obstinate as a mule and refuses to see things that are under its nose."

"Quite. Well, then came the Lahore Session of the Congress..."

Mohini was still listening to her grandfather but when he mentioned the Lahore Session of the Congress, her mind raced away into the past and she saw, once again, the President's magnificent procession wind its way through the decorated streets of Lahore, while the people showered flowers and tinsel and their enthusiasm knew no bounds. And, she saw herself a girl volunteer marching among the others, a soldier of freedom....

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"Yes, that was a wonderful occasion," her grandfather went on, "a huge city of huts, with beautifully decorated gates, was set up in Ravi Park and was called Congress-Nagar....."

Here, she had heard, for the first time, the leaders of the nation.....Mahatama Gandhi.... and the President-elect Jawaharlal Nehru .... and the scene flashed before her eyes anew and their voices rang in her ears..... and here she had served as a volunteer.... and it had all recurred in her mind again and again and she had vowed to remain a soldier of freedom.... for ever and ever .....

"Political enthusiasm was at fever pitch," continued Diwan Jawala Parshad, "For the one year's ultimatum had expired and the country awaited a new lead from the Congress. Then the session passed the Independence resolution and called for action to be taken for the attainment of freedom.... and the ardour of the people found expression .....

Events marched swiftly after that. Independence day was celebrated on Jan. 26th all over the country."

Mohini saw herself standing among a host of other girl students facing the Congress flag and taking the independence pledge ..... her heart swelling with pride and determination.

"The Congress members of the Central and Provincial legislatures resigned and the struggle drew nearer ..... Gandhiji had been asked to take charge of the coming Civil Disobedience movement and he wrote to the Viceroy again, voicing the demands of the people .... of course, these were rejected ....and, then, he announced, that the hated Salt Laws would be broken."

"A grand idea that," said his nephew "Salt is a common symbol of life, and the salt-tax is hard on the poor....."

"Yes."

"What happened then?"

"Then began the famous Dandi Salt March. Gandhiji and his small band of workers set out for Dandi and the sea with the

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avowed object of defying the Government and breaking the salt laws. Day after day, this band of pilgrims marched ahead and each day the enthusiasm in the country reached a higher pitch. . . ."

Mohini remembered how she had hardly slept at night and how she had been up at an absurdly early hour every morning, hungrily scanning the newspapers ....

"At last they arrived at Dandi, on the west coast, where the waters of the Arabian Sea wash the shores of our land and here on the 6th of April, Gandhiji and the chosen band began to break the salt laws ....."

His nephew drew a deep breath. "Wonderful moment," he whispered, and Mohini recalled how in far Punjab, people had waited with bated breath .....

"A few days later, Congress organizations all over the country began to break the salt laws. Here, in the Punjab, Civil Disobedience began and batches of workers came forth to break the law and to be arrested. Sham Lal was among the first. . . ."

How proud and joyful she had been on the day of her father's arrest, and how the people had garlanded and acclaimed him .... and how happily, they had sent him to jail .... She too had been busy those days and the hours had passed all too quickly, as she had worked among the students, organizing meetings and processions and volunteers.....

"And then the movement flared up?" asked his nephew and Diwan Jawala Prashad replied:

"Yes, the people's desire for freedom had been like a great river that was dammed and held in check by the oppressive laws of an alien Government. Now, it found an outlet and the spirit of freedom enveloped the people like a life-giving flood. Salt became the emblem of liberty, and all over the country, in town and village; in mansion and hamlet, salt was manufactured and it was, as if the salt laws had ceased to exist."

"The whole world was amazed. Even the Continental papers featured the news from India. What did the Government do?"

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"The Government could not remain idle, for in every town meetings were held, processions taken out, the Congress flag was hoisted here, there and everywhere and national songs resounded in the streets .... Then the leaders of the Congress were arrested, but with the arrest of each popular leader the movement grew in intensity and spread like wild fire. The people would celebrate their arrests, they would observe hartals and close their shops and there would be strikes among the students and the workers. The Viceroy promulgated ordinance after ordinance, but as each such ordinance or prohibition came into force, it was promptly and spontaneously broken by thousands ...."

"The Government must have been paralysed?"

"Ah, they had their methods too: *Lathi*-charges were made by the police, processions were dispersed and Congress flags torn down. Thousands were in jail and more and more were being arrested everyday. The hand of repression became heavier and heavier, police firings on unarmed crowds became frequent and often the soldiers were called out. Then the Congress was declared to be an unlawful body and more arrests followed .... but the fever that gripped the country did not abate."

"What about our own family?"

"Oh, we were in the thick of it. As you know, Sham Lal's ideas have influenced us all. He was an ardent Congressite when he was still a student at Cambridge and has remained so ever since .... so now he's looked up to by all zealous Congressmen. Naturally, the family has been drawn into politics. Almost all of us .... even this little minx here ...." and he patted Mohini's hair.

'What about Hira *Bhai*?"

"Oh, Hira Lal is different to his brother. In fact, two more different people than my two sons would be hard to find .... except perhaps Nizamuddin's two sons .... and so, it's not strange that Hira and Fakhruddin are friends and have their dance and song parties together .... while Sham Lal and Jamaluddin have a great affection for each other. Hira took no actual part in politics, but he actually put on clothes of the purest hand-woven handspun *khadi* like the rest of the family! But .... it's our women who

have been amazing .... in fact, Indian women have been amazing altogether."

"Oh yes, the whole world has marvelled at the way they have come forth to play their part in this struggle. I saw pictures even in the papers abroad ...."

"They've been remarkable. Women, who led secluded lives in their homes, have come forth in their thousands to stand shoulder to shoulder with the men. They have discarded their silks and satins to put on plain home spun clothes. They have enlisted as volunteers, picketed shops and frequently led processions, and in many districts have been chosen as heads of the Congress and directed the movement."

"Wonderful!"

"Our own women have been in the vanguard. Padma, who was picketing liquor shops, followed her father to jail and her husband was arrested soon after. This little one here has been working day and night and she too would like to be in jail with her sister .... but I've told her that it wouldn't be fair to her mother and she has promised not to court arrest."

Mohini bowed her head and there was a wistful look in her eyes.

"However, she is working among the students, her cousins are also doing some political work now, though, formerly, they worked only for social and educational uplift as members of the All-India Women's Conference."

"And so it has gone on all these months?"

"Yes."

"And the movement continues with unabated vigour?"

"Oh yes. The Round Table Conference has assembled in London, but without the Congress, it's a farce."

"Quite. Is the Punjab in the vanguard of the movement as it was in 1919?"

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"Er .... no .... I wouldn't say that. There have been arrests and convictions, *lathi*-charges and police firings, but the movement had not reached the pitch that it has reached in the neighbouring provinces of the U.P. and the Frontier."

"The Frontier?"

"Yes, the fierce and warlike Pathans are carrying on a non-violent struggle against the violent might of the rulers. The movement's so intense there, that once some Indian soldiers refused to fire on the crowd .... they were court-martialled and received vicious sentences .... but, it just shows you .... "

"What about the other Muslims?"

"I can tell you more about that ...." said a voice from the doorway and they looked up to see Jamaluddin.

"Oh come in, Jamal," said Diwan Jawala Prashad and Mohini offered him a chair.

"I heard your question," he said "and, I think, I can give a better answer than your uncle. Alas! the majority of Muslims are not in it this time."

"Oh, Why?"

"It's like this .... the Nehru report was rejected by almost all Muslims, but Congress gave an ultimatum for its acceptance.... and then you went into the struggle alone .... you had no pact with the League as in 1919 ...."

Mohini could bear no more, and she left the room and wandered on to the verandah tried to forget his words, but they continued to recur in her mind .... 'We are not in this .... we are not in this ....' And then she remembered how some months ago, she had begun to wonder why her beloved Punjab was not in the vanguard of the movement and that she had never known the reason until she had gone to Nishat Manzil one day..... She had taken a small packet of salt to sell to her friends, and walked into the sitting-room one summer evening. The family had been gathered there, sipping tea and Mehr's sister Zaibunnissa and her husband Saeed

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Ahmad had come on a visit. To Mohini, the quiet and comfortable atmosphere of the room, had seemed strange after the continual rush and hubbub of her own home.

Zohra had come forward eagerly to receive her. "At last," she had cried "why you stranger, we never see you now-a-days."

"I know, but then I'm very busy with work that I have no time for friends."

"I know. You are wonderful. Oh Mohini, great things are happening around us."

"The day of liberty is dawning. See, I have brought you some contraband salt."

"Have you? How marvellous? Quick, give it to me."

"Not yet. What will you pay for it?"

"All my month's pocket money," and she had snatched a packet out of Mohini's hand. "Look Father," she had cried, "contraband salt, you too must buy some."

"Yes, Uncle," said Mohini, "I want a big sum from you."

Sheikh Jamaluddin had hesitated, while he looked at Saeed Ahmad, who was frowning.

"Well child," he had said, "I'll take a packet and give you ten rupees, since you have brought it to me .... but .... "

"Ten rupees!" Mohini had been aghast. "From you? Never! You must pay me at least a hundred."

"It's not the money that I hesitate to give, but .... you see Mohini, we are not in this."

"Not in this? But it's the fight for India's liberty!" she had cried and turned to Saeed Ahmad "You Uncle, you, who went to jail in 1919, surely, you cannot say this?"

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"Sit down my child," Saeed Ahmad had said quietly, "and let me explain. We admire you greatly; you have our sympathies, but we are not in it this time. In 1919, the Hindus and the Muslims went into the fight together as brothers and the movement shook the world. This time, alas, the Congress has gone into it alone. Had there been a settlement between the Congress and the Muslim League then? We should have gone into it together and no one could have withstood us."

"But why does the Muslim League remain out. We are fighting for freedom, for the freedom of all of us."

"That is just it. Freedom for the country must mean freedom for all, and the Muslims feel that unless their rights are safeguarded, it will not mean freedom for them, that is why they are not in it."

"But, of course, the Muslims are in it. Look at the Frontier."

"The Red Shirts of the Frontier are in it, because of their peculiar circumstances, but look elsewhere, my child. Look at the Punjab. Why, the sword arm is hardly awake...." Mohini was silent. "Where are the Muslim warriors of 1919? Where are Muhammad Ali and Shaukat Ali? Why are they not in the movement and why does not Muhammad Ali Jinnah support it? The Muslims of the Punjab are apathetic, those of the United Provinces half-hearted, and Bengal, that Bengal where the spirit of freedom was born, the majority of people there are quiet."

"Oh! you can't say that. Bengal is aflame and thousands are in jail."

"True, but how many of them are Muslims? Mohini, the Muslims are in a majority there and the movement cannot be sustained unless they join it whole-heartedly."

"Oh! uncle, why don't the Muslims join whole-heartedly? Do they not want freedom? she had warmed up. "Surely they are not cowards, they are not *toadies?*"

Hush! my child. Do not use such words" he had said sternly. "No one has yet called the Muslim a coward. No one can dub men like Muhammad Ali Jinnah *toadies*."

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"Then why?"

"Ask your leaders," he had broken in. "How many times have we pressed for a settlement and they did not agree to our modest demands. Why have Muhammad Ali and Shaukat Ali left the Congress ? Why has Jinnah despaired of it?"

"Why? I see no reason."

"Have you heard of Mr. Jinnah's Fourteen Points?"

"Yes."

"If Congress had only agreed to them, and then started the movement, we too would have been in it and then freedom would have been ours."

"Freedom will still be ours!" said Mohini spiritedly.

"Some day, surely, after we have achieved unity and fought together against the foreigners."

"We are fighting now," she had cried and Sheikh Jamaluddin, seeing the beginning of a dispute, had come forward and tactfully changed the subject.

"What news of your father?" he had asked. "We were distressed at his arrest."

"He is well, thank you, and full of spirit."

"Give him my *salams* when you see him. Goodnight my child and God bless you." He had passed his hand affectionately over her hair and gone out of the room making a sign to Saeed Ahmad to follow him.

"The fight is on," Zohra had said "We cannot remain out of it."

"The fight cannot succeed without us," Sughra had retorted.

"All the more reason for us to join in."

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"Freedom must mean freedom for all."

"What have we to fear?"

"What good is freedom if it means only a change of masters—the Hindus instead of the British?"

"The Hindus won't enslave us."

"If they have no such intentions, why do they not agree to our reasonable demands?"

"Oh *Apa*, stop quibbling. Many of the younger Muslims don't agree with you. I wish, I wish we were in this. Look at Mohini. Look at other Hindu women. How they are working and suffering while we sit idle in our homes. They are marching ahead and we are still entangled in the toils of purdah. And it isn't as if we are not capable of service and sacrifice, for some Muslim women, who are in the Congress, have worked valiantly and even gone to jail."

"Of course we are as capable as anyone" Sughra had said with spirit. "We too shall fight for our nation, when the time comes. Have no fear Zohra, we will not lag behind in service or in sacrifice."

Then Mohini, suddenly apprehensive, had walked away, but in the rush of work, she had forgotten the words that had jarred on her, certain in her own mind, that freedom would come soon in spite of those, who doubted or hindered. Today that scene came back to her and she sighed in the starlight.

CHAPTER IV

"Mohini, are you coming with us tomorrow?"

"No, I'm afraid not" Mohini bowed her head and sighed. Tomorrow was a special day. It was the fourteenth of November, the birthday of their beloved leader Jawahar Lal Nehru, who was in jail, and the students had decided to hold a demonstration. All

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the colleges were going on strike, and many students, both boys and girls were, to picket them.

"You must come with us," another of her friends exclaimed. "You have a tremendous influence among the students and your presence will make all the difference."

Two of the boys came in. "Which college is your batch going to picket, Mohini?" one of them asked.

"Sorry Suraj, but I'm not coming."

"Not coming! But why?"

"Well I've promised my grandfather not to court arrest."

"But Mohini" cried another girl, "Tomorrow is a very special occasion, besides as you know," she lowered her voice. "So many of the parents of the girl students object to their taking part in such activities, and if it leaked out that you had refrained because of the objections of your family, many of the others would fall out."

"But you have about thirty girl volunteers."

"Yes, but not all of them are students, and very few come from such well-known families as yours."

"I think your participation is essential," said Suraj "but of course, it is for you to decide."

"Oh Mohini, do come!" some of the girls exclaimed, and "It's so unlike you to be afraid" one of them added.

Mohini raised her head. There was a flush upon her cheeks and her eyes were shining. "If you all think I should take part in the demonstration then, of course I must. But please, keep it quiet until tomorrow. What's the programme?"

"We all meet at Gol Bagh at 9 o'clock in the morning," said Suraj, "and hold a demonstration. Then, we divide into batches, and go to picket the various colleges. Which college will you picket?"

"Government College, I think."

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"That'll be grand. See you tomorrow, Mohini."

Upon her return to Shanti Niwas, she found her mother standing in the verandah.

"Where have you been, Mohini?" she asked.

"Oh, just to a students' meeting."

Kailash Kumari's eyes looked troubled, "Be careful dear," she said, "and don't forget your promise."

Mohini said nothing and followed her mother into the hall. Her aunt Rattan Kumari sat near the telephone and she looked at her sharply.

"Mohini," she said, "You look paler than ever. Why don't you rest a little?"

"Rest in these days? Oh auntie, how can anyone rest when the struggle is on!"

"I don't see what a chit of a girl like you can do. Hasn't your mother worries enough with your father and your sister in jail? Let our leaders carry on the struggle .... and for heavens' sake, let us have some peace in the house."

"We must all carry on the struggle, auntie," she said in her ringing voice, and her eyes were like twin candles, "for this is a revolution, the revolution of an unarmed people against the mailed fist of a foreign power."

Rattan Kumari scowled and grunted and taking her sister-in-law by the arm whispered something in her ear "Yes, yes," said Kailash, "I know .... she's not strong .... " The two ladies were as great a contrast as their husbands, for Rattan Kumari was ill-tempered and domineering, as her husband, Hira Lal, was easy-going and indolent and Kailash Kumari, with her sweet and gentle nature, was a worthy wife for the high principled and energetic Sham Lal.

The Kaul family led a quiet and dignified life under the gentle rule of Diwan Jawala Prashad. They had always prided themselves upon their culture and learning and they spoke the pure

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Urdu of Delhi and Lucknow and with the correct accent and idiom, often put to shame their Punjabi friends who spoke Urdu with the guttural accent of the Punjab. In Shanti Niwas, writers and artists were always welcome, and the Kauls' collection of rare manuscripts and paintings was famous. The women of the family were all well-educated and though none of them kept purdah, yet they were not over-fond of a gay social life or visits to clubs and restaurants, and the tempo of their life was gentle and slow, but twice the peace of the house had been completely disrupted, once in 1919, when Pandit Sham Lal had gone to jail for the first time, and now even more so for not only had Sham Lal and his son-in-law gone to jail, but the women were taking an active part in the movement. Sham Lal's elder daughter, Padma, was in jail and Mohini was one of the most energetic young workers among the students. Hira Lal's daughter, Saraswati, and daughter-in-law, Swarup, went from house to house, selling salt for fancy prices and collecting funds for the Congress.

There was a continual rush and hubbub in the house and Diwan Jawala Prashad often sighed for the quiet days that were no more, but his heart was in the struggle too and his old eyes lighted up whenever he talked of it, only, he was fearful for Mohini, who was his favourite and never very strong, but who worked harder than anyone, growing more slim and delicate every day until she looked as frail as an ivory statue. That is why he was worried, when Kailash Kumari came to him and said, "I'm anxious about Mohini. She's continually going to these meetings and she will get into trouble. It's now 9 o'clock and she has been out all day .... and has only just come back ...."

"I'll speak to her tomorrow," said the old man.

That night Mohini could not sleep, and as she tossed upon her bed, conflicting thoughts would come into her mind. Was she doing right in thus disobeying the behests of her family? Surely, yes: for if she faltered now in the path that she was following, whatever the sentimental reasons, others would waver in their resolve. She was a soldier in the cause of freedom and a soldier should forget the problems of hearth and home. She was giving pain to her family only in order to ease the pain of that larger family—the nation. Thus she argued with herself, but, the thought of her mother's tear-filled eyes would not let her sleep.

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By 7-30 in the morning, she was dressed and ready to depart. She went into her mother's room and her face was wistful as she bent her brow for her mother's kiss. Then, she went to her grandfather and said her *Namaskar* to him and to her grandmother, and received their blessings.

"Where are you going so early in the morning?" the old man asked her. His suspicions were aroused by the look in her eyes. "be careful, we don't want you to get into trouble."

"It's alright, grandfather," she said "trust me to do what is right," and she hurriedly walked out of the room. Her young brother, Vijay, was standing on the verandah, talking to one of the servants. Tenderly she kissed him good-bye, and then stepping into the car, told the driver to take her to Gol Bagh.

By 9-30 some four hundred students had assembled in Gol Bagh. The meeting had been summoned by means of a private circular and the police, being unaware of it, had not yet arrived on the scene. A small crowd that was growing larger every moment, had gathered around the students. The town of Lahore had been declared by the district authorities to be under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code. Thus, no meeting of more than five persons was allowed. Those that came to join this demonstration, knew that they were breaking the law, but this did not matter to them at all. Such was the spirit of the times.

Two policemen watched the people from a distance: they had telephoned the central police station and more police was expected any moment. The organizers of the meeting knew this and they hurried up the proceedings. Suraj stood up on a small improvised platform. "The batches of picketers for Dyal Singh College will now leave," he shouted and immediately a batch of men students and one of girl students came out of the crowd and stood on the road. Each was carrying a national flag "*Gandhiji ki jai*". "*Jawaharlalji ki jai*" shouted the crowd as the batches marched away towards Dyal Singh College singing, "*Jhanda Ooncha rahe hamara*".

The next to march away were the batches for Islamia College and Sanatan Dharam College, and then a batch of ten girls moved out towards the Punjab College for Girls.

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Mohini was waiting impatiently with her batch of girls. At last, Suraj shouted "The picketers for Government College will now leave," and flag in hand, she walked out with her comrades to stand on the road. Just then, Police whistles were heard and a car was seen coming into the gardens, followed by three lorries full of policemen. Immediately, the crowd closed around the picketers and began to shout slogans.

Robert Clyde, a young Englishman, and an I.C.S. officer, was posted as Additional District Magistrate in Lahore. As soon as a message reached the central police station, to the effect that a students' demonstration was being held in Gol Bagh, and a crowd had collected in contravention of Section 144, the Inspector of Police telephoned Mr. Clyde, who had rushed to the police station. Three, lorries , full of policemen, were ready and waiting. Half of the men were armed with *lathis* and the other half with rifles. Robert Clyde and the Inspector of Police sat in a police car and drove towards Gol Bagh followed by the three police lorries.

Here they beheld a large and hostile crowd, in the centre of which were students, both boys and girls. The policemen were ordered to take their positions round the crowd, while Robert Clyde, the Inspector and two policemen pushed their way towards the centre, where a group of girls were standing, one of whom was holding the Congress flag.

"This is an unlawful assembly," cried Robert Clyde, "I order you to disperse." He looked at the young girl holding the flag and she looked back at him eyes flashing—the very spirit of freedom. Then she smiled, and in a clear and lovely voice, she began to sing "*Jhanda Ooncha Rahe Hamara*!" Immediately, the crowd took up the song with great enthusiasm.

The Inspector of Police was annoyed by the girl's audacity. "Take away that flag" he ordered. A burly policeman rushed towards her and tried to snatch away the flag. She resisted and in the scuffle that followed, she fell to the ground. Some instinct prompted Robert Clyde to rush towards her and help to pick her up, and thus they stood a moment, looking at each other, while the crowd shouted and surged around them.

To the young Englishman, she appeared to be like a picture of the Madonna by Michael Angelo. Small she was, and frail with delicate, chiselled features and lustrous eyes, eyes that were glowing now as though a flame had lit them up while the sensitive nostrils trembled with pride. Then, suddenly, he was sick of it all. The daily routine of *lathi*-charges and arrests and convictions. Long ago, in England, it had seemed a wonderful idea to come out to one of the outposts of the Empire and to protect it from its enemies, but it did not seem so wonderful now. He had longed to fight for his country, but to fight against whom? Surely, not against unarmed crowds and eager boys and girls that looked, as though they had stepped out of a dream. "O, England, my England, this is not what I thought to do for thee:" He sighed and then ordered the policemen to arrest the women. Some ten girls, including Mohini, were arrested and taken away to a police lorry. Meanwhile, the crowd was growing angry. Slogans were shouted and words of abuse were flung at the policemen. Here and there, *lathis* were brandished and a brick-bat was thrown at a police officer. The few Congress workers left in the meeting were urging the crowd to remain peaceful, but their voices were drowned in the din.

Robert Clyde saw the lorry containing the girls depart and, then, sick at heart, asked the Inspector to order a *lathi*-charge upon the crowd.

That evening, at the club, young Clyde surprised them all by his spirited defence of the nationalists. The Chief Secretary was very displeased. 'These young whipper-snappers from Oxford and Cambridge are the wrong type' he thought. 'certainly the wrong type. They can never live up to the traditions of the Indian Civil Service. Too sentimental, you know, and carried away by catch phrases.'

Aloud he said, "You don't know, what you're talking about. When you've been as long in this country as we have, you will be in a position to express an opinion. Law and order must be maintained and we must deal with these breakers of the law with a firm hand or the Empire will go to the dogs. Yes, to the dogs!" And, he looked severely at young Clyde.

That night Robert Clyde had a strange dream. He dreamt that he was standing on a hill looking down upon a city, where a crowd

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had assembled. There was a fire in the distance, and khaki-clad figures, with raised *lathis*, were charging the crowd. Suddenly, the girl, he had seen in the morning, the lovely girl, with the Congress flag in her hand, stood before him and pointed towards the city and the words of Omar Khayyam flashed in his mind.

"Ah love could thou and I with fate conspire . . . ."

In the morning, he cursed himself for being over-sentimental, but he went to the office with a heavy heart.

The Kaul family were having their mid-day meal, generally referred to as "brunch" because it was taken at 11-30 in the morning—somewhere between the usual times for the English breakfast and lunch. Pandit Jawala Prashad sat at the head of the table and his wife sat near him. The rest of the family was grouped round the table.

The servants were passing round the rice dish when Dr. Kaul, son of Pandit Hira Lal, rushed into the room and hurriedly whispered something in his grandfather's ear. Pandit Jawala Parshad was visibly distressed. "I thought she was up to something, when I saw the look on her face this morning," he said, "When did it happen?"

"Over an hour ago."

"Over an hour ago, and we have not been told until now?"

"Soon after the women were arrested, there was a *lathi*-charge. Several people were injured and great confusion prevailed for sometime."

The grandmother was alarmed, "What has happened?" she cried, "Don't talk in riddles, tell us at once."

Kailash Kumari had stopped eating. Instinctively, she knew that something had happened to Mohini and her heart was beating with painful intensity.

"That young fool Mohini has gone and got herself arrested" said Dr. Kaul. Kailash Kumari drew a deep breath. "Oh . . . ." was the only sound that escaped her, but her eyes were eloquent with pain.

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"That girl has no sense of responsibility," Rattan Kumari was angry. "We have enough distress in the family, and now she has gone and done this. It's sheer selfishness. Whoever heard of school-girls, still in their teens, taking part in political movements?"

"I think, Mohini has done right," said Swarup spiritedly. "You should admire her instead of talking against her in such a way."

"Ah, and I suppose, you would like to be in jail instead of looking after your husband and child?" asked Rattan Kumari sarcastically.

"If it became necessary for me to go to jail, I would do so," retorted Swarup.

"And so would I," said Saraswati.

"You keep quiet," exclaimed her mother.

"Hush, hush, this is no time for bickering," said Pandit Jawala Prashad. "We have to think of all that has to be done to help her."

Meanwhile, the grandmother had begun to weep "*Hai, hai*, what is the world coming to! My innocent, unmarried girl in the hands of the police."

Dr. Kaul consoled her. "Don't worry grandmother," he said, "She will only join Padma in the female jail. Swarup is right, we should all be proud of her."

Kailash Kumari could bear it no longer. Her eyes were dry, but there was a choking feeling at her throat. "My little Mohini, my pretty baby in jail. *Parmatama* be with my little one'" she silently prayed as she left the table and went to her room.

"Go with her Swarup," said Pandit Jawala Prashad, "and you Hira and Anand come into the library, we must have a consultation about what is to be done."

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Meanwhile, the news of Mohini's arrest had spread over the town like wild fire. Zohra had not gone to college that morning because most of the students had decided to go on strike. She did not like to tell her family why she was not going, so she pleaded a headache and even persuaded Sughra to stay away from lectures.

It was nearly 12 o'clock, when one of the maids came into the girl's room to announce, that Bibi Surrayya had come to see them. Zohra was surprised because she had not been expecting Surrayya. She sprang from the bed, picked up her *dopatta* and went out to receive her friend.

As soon as she had paid her respects to Zohra's mother and aunt, Surrayya asked to be taken to the girls' room and Zohra gussed that something had happened and Surrayya had come to tell her.

"What's happened Surrayya?" She asked, as soon as they were alone. "You seem agitated."

"Mohini is arrested."

"I don't believe it. Who told you?"

"Her cousin Saraswati on the telephone."

"Then, it must be true."

"Of course."

"What happened?"

"As you knew, there was to be a students' demonstration today, and all the colleges had decided to go on strike."

"Of course. That's why we're not at college."

"Well, the demonstration was held at Gol Bagh. Batches of volunteers went out to picket the various colleges. Mohini and her batch were just starting for Government College when the police appeared, arrested the women and *lathi*-charged the crowd."

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"Mohini told us, she was going to refrain from courting arrest."

"I know. But she seems to have been persuaded to join this demonstration. The worst of it is, that one of the policemen tried to take the flag away from Mohini, and he seems to have handled her roughly for she fell to the ground."

"The brute! Surrayya, Mohini is not very strong. Will she be able to stand jail-life? I'm afraid, her health will break down."

"That's just it. Saraswati was quite hysterical on the telephone, and I hear Mohini's poor mother is distraught."

"No wonder." For a few moments, the two girls were silent. Their sympathies had been with the Civil Disobedience movement all along, and at times, they had both felt quite unhappy at not being able to join it. For, Surrayya's family did not share her radical views, and, in spite of being out of purdah, she had not dared to openly flaunt their more moderate views and join the struggle. While Zohra being in purdah could not possibly take any part in political activities though she often sulked over this fact. However, both of them had secretly collected money for the Congress and given it to Mohini, and they had held private meetings and discussions among the students at their college. Yet, because of their comparatively restricted life, they were not in the hub of things, and although they had followed the events in the newspapers and heard more vivid accounts from Mohini, yet the impact of the movement was not close or direct, because, neither they nor their families were involved in it. Now, for the first time, she, who was a close friend, almost a sister, had been arrested; and it had a profound effect on them both. It brought home to them the grim realities of the situation. They seemed to have come closer to the struggle—almost to be in it.

"Surrayya, what are we going to do?"

"What can we do?"

"We must do something."

"There is nothing that we can do."

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"It's unlike you to talk like that. Just think Mohini's in jail. Aren't we going to do anything?"

"What do you suggest?"

"Let's, at least, hold an open meeting of the students of our college to protest against the arrest."

"In the college?"

"In the college. Tomorrow morning, during the recess hour."

"It's against the rules."

"Since when have you become so timid?"

"I don't mind. But you know, what Miss Brown is like. Besides, at times like these, excitement runs high and many girls will want to make speeches."

"Of course: and so they should."

"Girls like you and me, Zohra, whose families may not approve. I'm prepared to face their wrath. Are you?"

Zohra was surprised. Being one of the first-year students, she had never spoken in the college debating union, and she did not think Surrayya would expect her to make a speech. What she did not know was that Surrayya was very cleverly inciting her to make a speech at this particular meeting, because she sensed Zohra's capabilities and thought the time had come for her to throw off the fear of the family to some extent.

"I wouldn't mind the disapproval of my family if I wished to speak" said Zohra spiritedly.

"Good, but don't you wish to speak?"

"Well—you see—it's like this. I've never made a speech in college yet and I don't know, if I shall be any good."

"That's all nonsense. I'm told, you have spoken half a dozen times in the debating union of our old school, and spoken jolly well too. Surely, you're not afraid to speak at this meeting.

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"Certainly not." Zohra was quite excited now.

"Even, if it's against the rules?"

"Even, if it's against the rules. Who cares? The best people are against the rules now-a-days!"

"Tomorrow then."

"Tomorrow."

CHAPTER V

Zohra came back from College in high spirits. The meeting had been a great success and hers had been the best speech. Congratulations had been showered upon her and Surrayya had said, "Why, you treasure, you are an orator and you should not hide your light under a bushel."

As the meeting was in progress, the Principal and some of the staff had tried to disperse it, but the girls had openly defied their orders and shouted them down and they had left in disgust. Afterwards, the Principal had called the ring-leaders into her office and given them a severe scolding, threatening to tell their parents and to expel them from the college, but the girls had persisted in their defiant attitude and had even shouted some Congress slogans, right there in her office.

A flushed and happy Zohra had come home eager to tell the whole tale to Sughra, who was down with a mild attack of fever and had not gone to college that day. No sooner had she entered her room however, when *Anna* came up to her and whispered in a frightened voice "Sheikh Sahib has sent for you. He seems very angry. Go quickly."

Zohra knew at once that her father had been told and guessed that the Principal had telephoned him. Exhilarated by her success, she entered her father's room without fear in her heart and with a smile on her lips.

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He sat in his chair like a judge about to deliver a sentence. His face was stern and Zohra looked in vain for the indulgent father she was used to.

"Miss Brown has just telephoned me," he said in a stern voice, "and I've been surprised to hear of today's happenings in the college and of your part in them. I have begun to realize that your mother has been right to some extent and that I have been too lenient with you."

"But father," protested Zohra "I've done nothing wrong."

"I think, I made it clear to you the day Mohini came here to sell salt that we were not in this. Besides, as I have often told you, you are only sixteen and far too young to understand political matters, yet you have openly defied my opinions and my orders."

"I only followed the dictates of my conscience, and did what I thought was right."

"Your conscience .... What you thought was right!" He was very angry now. "And how does a chit of a girl like you know what is right and what is not? I've spoilt you by my indulgence and you are getting out of hand. This will have to stop."

"Oh father," Zohra appealed to him "I too want to play my part in the liberation of my country. When you were young, you had the same ideas, why do you stop me?"

"As I have already told you, you are far too young to understand these things". His voice was gentler.

"Then explain them to me," Zohra insisted. "Why are we not in this? Why is it not our fight. And why, oh why am I even prevented from these activities that a purdah student can take part in?"

"Sit down Zohra," he said. "I see that I shall have to explain. When I was young as you rightly point out, I was all afire with nationalism and ready to join the Congress to do my bit, yet as I have grown older, my ardour has cooled down. Why? Not because I'm a coward and certainly not because, I am a toady.

True, your grandfather is a supporter of the Government, but then he belongs to the old school that cannot understand the breaking of the law under any circumstances. True, your uncle Fakhruddin is a spineless yes-man of the authorities, and is always throwing parties for the Deputy Commissioner and trying to please British officials, but I have neither the ideas of my father nor do I like the ways of my brother. You have grown up to despise cowardice and toadyism and to have a love for freedom and I have always encouraged you in this."

"Then why .... ?" began Zohra.

"Wait," he said, "let me explain it all in my own way. I too love freedom. I love it and desire it as much as you do. But Congress is not going the right way to win it."

"How can you say that?"

"India is a vast land, my child, it's almost a Continent and it is inhabited by many peoples, each of whom has its own religion, language, culture and way of life; and each is anxious to be free to live and develop in its own way. Among these many peoples, two major communities stand out. There are the Hindus and the Muslims, and, unless the freedom we aim at, means freedom for all people and unless these two major communities join together to win it, freedom cannot and will not come to this vast Sub-Continent.

"Some Muslims are fighting in this struggle, why don't the others join in?"

"It's a long story, my child, and you will hear it many times. It is so far a sad story too, but let us hope that it will have a happy ending some day."

"Tell me something of it."

"Its roots go back into the history you studied in your school. You know, how we Muslims came here; the first of our ancestors as far back as 712 A.D. You know, how we ruled here for nearly 800 years, and you know how the country prospered and art and culture flourished in that period. You also know, the way by which the British came here first, as traders and then at a time when India

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was weak, how they exploited our weakness to become our rulers. You also know that the Indian people realized this too late, that when they did, they rose up in revolt, and it was Muslims, who led that rebellion, which your school-books call the Mutiny of 1857?

"Yes, yes, go on, father, please."

"So much your history books tell you, but they forget to mention how the Muslims were crushed and beaten after the revolt of 1857. The white rulers, realizing the latent strength of the Muslims, oppressed and weakened them in every way, their lands were confiscated, their well-known families obliterated, their irdustries destroyed, and in some cases, even the thumbs of the skilled workers cut off.

"How horrible! Yet, the history-books say nothing about it?"

"Of course not, you are only taught what our rulers wish you to know. However, to continue, as a first step to their policy of 'divide and rule', the British encouraged the Hindus and at the ports and in the Presidency provinces, the re-awakening of the Hindus began. Then slowly, but surely, other parts of the country took it up. With re-awakening came political consciousness and the birth of nationalist aspirations. The Indian National Congress was founded by a sympathetic Englishman, and it grew rapidly to become anti-British, especially, after the partition of Bengal in the early part of this century."

"And the Muslims?"

" Crushed and bitter, angry, yet beaten for a long time, they hated the British and shunned all that was Western. But a great man was born among them, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, and he explained to them the necessity of modern education. Later, political consciousness began to develop, and the Muslim League was founded in 1906."

"Did not the British help the League at first."

"Yes, just as they had helped the Congress. The Muslim was now the weaker of the two and it was only a continuation of their 'divide and rule' policy to help him."

"Didn't the Muslims see it?"

"Very soon. It began when Turkey was ranged against Britain in the World War. Then, the Congress and the League came to terms under the Lucknow pact of 1916."

"How wonderful!"

"This unity was further cemented in 1919 during the days when a joint struggle, for the freedom of India and for the Khilafat of the Muslims, was launched."

"May I come in," it was the voice of Saeed Ahmad.

"Yes, yes come in Saeed," said Jamaluddin. "You can help me explain a few things to Zohra."

"I heard about her speech today and hurried hither. She did wrong, but, don't be too harsh with her, brother.

"Am I ever harsh? No. It's better to explain than to condemn. I'm giving her a lesson in history and you can help. Tell her about 1919."

"Those were wonderfu days Zohra," said Saeed, "For Hindus and Muslims fought together shoulder to shoulder and the British were obliged to bow to their will."

"But what happened? Why did the movement stop."

"The movement grew so rapidly that it was getting out of hand and losing its non-violent character. Then Gandhi called it off. Some of us thought, he should have let it continue, but he was afraid of a violent revolution. However, our strength had been demonstrated to the British and the world, and partial responsibility was given to us. Congress continued the fight in the legislature, but the situation in the country deteriorated!"

"Why?"

"The unity forged in battle began to break-down. Hindus, who were still educationally and politically ahead of us, began to want all the power for themselves and to grudge their share

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to the Muslims. Under pressure from the growing communal Hindu Mahashabha, Congress took a stiffer and stiffer attitude towards Muslims. In 1929 we had another chance to unite, for Congress boycotted the all-British Simon Commission that had come to India, and while some Muslims did not join them, others under Mr. Jinnah joined the boycott and made it a success. But again Congress failed us, and they brought out the Nehru Report, which contained a proposed constitution for the country that did grave injustice to the Muslims.

"How"?

"In many ways, one of the most important of which was the reduction of our majorities in the Provinces of Punjab and Bengal, to such an extent that, we, who form 56% and 55% of the population there, were actually reduced to minorities in the proposed legislatures."

"The Muslim protested?"

"Of course. They rejected the Nehru report, held an All-Parties Conference, and Mr. Jinnah's Fourteen Points were formulated. Congress would not accept these and the deadlock was complete. That is why Muslims did not join the present movement and that is why men like Maulana Muhammad Ali and Shaukat Ali, who had led the struggle of 1919, left the Congress."

"And now?"

"Our accredited leaders have gone to the Round Table Conference. Congress should go there too, make a pact with the League and then the British cannot refuse the united demand. If they do, we can launch a struggle together and it will be successful in a week."

"But how can the Congress go to London when the struggle is on?"

"They can suspend it."

"That would be a sign of weakness."

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our trial.. I have seen some of my relations, but not alone, and so was unable to pass the statement to them. Zohra, it must get to the press. Our house is watched by the secret police, so I am arranging to send it to Nishat Manzil. Don't fail us dear, get in touch with Surrayya and she will help you to get it into the newspapers.

Now for my story. As you must have heard, we were arrested at the meeting, ten of us girls and fifty boys. We girls were put into a lorry and taken to the magistrate's bungalow and here we waited for about an hour. Meanwhile, two more lorries came bringing batches of girls from other parts of the city, where they had been picketting schools and colleges. In all, we were now about thirty strong and we were stuffed into one lorry and taken to the Female Jail. Along the route, a huge crowd had collected, and as our lorry passed through, slogans were shouted and flowers showered us, while several people jumped on to the mudguards of the lorry, to be pushed off by the police. While our lorry stood at the prison gate, the crowd, getting more and more excited began to throw stones at the police. Then the police made a *lathi*-charge, but while this resulted in pushing the crowd back, the people did not disperse. We were taken out of the lorry and pushed through the gate into the outer courtyard of the prison. I had a sudden idea and began singing our national song and the other girls joined in. The crowd outside heard us and waves of infuriated men pressed against the gates shouting slogans, this encouraged us and we began to shout slogans too. Upon this, the Jail Superintendent appeared and hastily ordered us to be taken inside. We all crowded into his office, and he appeared to be shaken and embarrassed, not knowing what to do with us. We heard him tell a junior official that he had not expected so many "females" and did not know where to put them. Finally, he decided to allot us all one barrack in the inner courtyard making us C. class prisoners. At this, there was some indignation among the girls as C. class is only given to the worst criminals and not girls of respectable families, but we were all in high spirits and each new humiliation only added to our fervour.

The barrack had no doors, but only arches barred with iron rods, and the cold air seemed to penetrate to our bones. We sat on the bare floor as no arrangements for cots or bedding had been made. But we huddled together for warmth, laughing and talking, our enthusiasm undimmed and we spent the night singing songs and shouting slogans, there in the jail with the armed might of the government manifest all around us.

Tajfoundation

The next day was the day of our trial. We were told that the trial would be held in the jail and were conducted to the outer-yard. Outside the gates, a huge crowd had collected again. We could see them from a gap in the side of the huge iron gate, behind which we stood. Then, we began to shout slogans and the people outside shouted back. Uncle Hira Lal, Anand Bhai and several of the other girls' relations were standing at the far end of the courtyard waiting to attend the trial. We were not allowed to talk to them but we heard an official tell them that there was no court-room in the prison, large enough to hold the prisoners as well as their relations, who were entitled to attend the trial and the police staff. Upon this, the relatives began to argue and insisted upon their right to be present. Meanwhile, the special magistrate, Mr. Sunder Lal, arrived in his car. As you know, he is one of those Indians that are a blot on our national honour. He is more loyal to the Government than a loyal Englishman, and has no scruples, where his personal ambitions are concerned. His arrival was a signal for further demonstrations on the part of the crowd. Meanwhile, the Superintendent of the Jail was locked up in his office, refusing to face the crowd. He sent word to Sunder Lal to do whatever he thought best. Sunder Lal ordered a barrack to be turned into a court-room, and when this was done, ordered us to go in. We refused to go unless our relatives were also allowed. He first tried to persuade us by talking civilly and then threatened and shouted, but we had only contempt for him in our hearts and we stood there defying him and the authority he represented.

Mid-day came and went and we were hungry, for we had hardly eaten for the last 24 hours. At night, we had been served with an unsavoury mixture that the jail warder called "*curry*" and some hard bread, which we had found difficult to swallow, and in the morning, we had each been given a piece of stale bread and some strong tea in dirty glasses. We had thrown away the bread and swallowed the tea and now we were hungry, but we had no thought of food. We squatted there in the outer-yard refusing to move, while the crowd, outside the gates, grew larger and larger. Once again, I began to sing and the girls joined me. The crowd outside took up the song and as their enthusiasm mounted higher, they began to push the gates threatening to break them down, and the female warders hastily pushed us from the outer into the inner yard.

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Sunder Lal was furious. This 'black Britisher' had actually gone without lunch and his 'Mem Sahib' must have been waiting. He came up to us again to ask us to go into the court-room and alternately cajoled and threatened, but we only laughed at him. Finally at four o'clock, he postponed the trial and decided to go home.

That evening the Superintendent came to us and told us that he had decided to divide us into two batches and to put us into two barracks, but we refused to be separated. Upon this, he threatened us with handcuffs and solitary confinement, but we stuck to our resolution. Then he threatened to bring 60 women warders to drag half of us away, but we all linked arms and sat down on the floor shouting slogans and defying him to separate us. Through the arches of the barracks, we could see the other female prisoners, fluttering around and whispering to one another. They were not "politicals" but criminals, who had been thrown into jail for some offence or another. Yet their patriotic spirit was not dead for when we began to sing national songs, several of them joined in. The jail authorities were obviously non-plussed, by now even the sympathies of the wardens were with us and so they decided to let us all remain in one barracks. Again we had no beds, but only mats to sleep on and rough blankets to cover ourselves with. But we were tired and slept the undisturbed sleep of exhaustion.

Another day dawned in the prison and again we were taken to the outer-yard and again the crowd had collected outside. But, this time, we were hastily taken into the court-room and two of the relatives of each one of us were allowed to enter. I saw uncle Hira Lal and Anand Bhai, but was not allowed to talk to them.

As we entered the court-room in a batch, singing our national song, there sat Mr. Sunder Lal in the magistrate's seat, with a scowl upon his face. We began to shout slogans and our relatives joined in and for fully ten minutes nothing else could be heard. Finally, the trial began.

All of us prisoners were standing as the prosecuting Sub-Inspector read out the charge, and imagine our surprise and indignation, when we found that we were accused under a section of the Criminal Procedure Code, which is known as the 'Goonda Section', and is generally used only for vagrants and bad characters. For some

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minutes, again there was shouting and confusion. Then, I began to speak, and instantly there was silence. I said that as we did not recognize the present Government of the country as our legal Government, we refused to defend ourselves. Upon this, the prosecuting Sub-Inspector said that the case would proceed undefended. A few police witnesses were summoned and questioned summarily. They all said the same thing that we were disturbers of the peace, that we had broken the law and incited the mob against the lawful Government of the country.

Finally, the magistrate said, "Do the prisoners wish to say anything?" and I made the enclosed statement on behalf of all of us. As I finished, I could see that the enthusaism of the prisoners and their relatives had reached fever pitch and they began to shout Congress slogans again. The magistrate shouted "I disallow this statement" and, "We do not recognize your authority" we shouted back at him. At last, the magistrate called for order and began to read the sentence. He convicted us all and sentenced each one of us to six months' rigorous imprisonment.

I was given a form to fill in and a convict number, allotted class A, and was taken to the European cells. They always have the best my dear, even in prison! Here, I met Padma and you can imagine, how happy we both were, and how much we had to tell each other.

I am a prisoner now, Zori. There are four small rooms in this part of the building and four of us are crowded into each. There is a narrow verandah that is barred and we are locked in every evening. It is strange and oppressive to be locked in and one has a desire to grow wings and to fly away, far far away into the sky and freedom.

I have a bed and table and a tiny cupboard and some clothes have been sent from home. We have to cook our own food and to bathe under a tap of cold water. Yet, I am strangely happy and I have a feeling of exultation which nothing can dim.

Beyond the courtyards, the walls stand high between us and the world. We have no garden, only the bare brown earth. How I miss the flowers Zori, and the trees and the birds.

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Once a fortnight, we shall be allowed to interview our relatives, and only four relatives at a time. I shall not see you for many days, for so very many days, my dear, yet you are constantly in my thoughts.

Please get the statement to the papers for the sake of—

Your loving
Mohini.

P.S.—I have found a sympathetic female warden and she will give this to her son. Please pay him ten rupees.

M.

Zohra turned to the statement. "We, citizens of Hindustan and members of the Indian National Congress, have only this to say. We don't recognize this alien Government that has enslaved and imprisoned our people, and any laws, made by it are not binding upon us. We do not recognize this court nor has it any authority to judge us. Freedom is our birth-right and for freedom, we shall continue to fight come what may. As members of the Congress, non-violence is our creed and our struggle shall be non-violent, nor can the harsh oppression or the violent might of the Government stop the march of freedom. Onward into battle, sons and daughters of Hindustan! Long live our Mother-Land. The day of freedom is dawning."

Zohra folded the statement, put it into a hand-bag and rushed to the telephone. She was too elated and excited to think coherently. She telephoned Surrayya and told the astonished girl to come over at once.

"At this hour? Why it is nearly ten o'clock!" she protested.

"I cannot explain," cried Zohra, "But come, come at once, please, oh please."

"All-right," said Surrayya, "Be calm. I'm coming."

She must have hurried for she was at Nishat Manzil within fifteen minutes. Zohra was wearing her *burqah* ready to go out.

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"Come," she whispered, "Let's get into your car. I've told mother, that Lakshmi is very ill and we have been asked to go and see her."

"But what's it all about?" asked Surrayya.

"I'll tell you in the car. Hurry up now."

"Where shall I tell him to take us?"

"To the office of the *Herald*. That's the best nationalist newspaper, is it not?"

"Zori, are you going mad?"

"No, no, only hurry up!" she said, and as the car moved out, she handed Mohini's letter and statement to Surrayya.

When Surrayya finished reading these, she was as excited as Zohra.

We'll get it into the press," she cried, "It's great, it's wonderful."

By this time, the car had reached the office of the *Herald* and telling Zohra to remain in the car, Surrayya jumped out and ran into the building.

Zohra waited impatiently. The minutes seemed like hours, and she hated her *burqah* that prevented her from being as active as Surraya.

At last Surrayya was back. "It will be on the front page," she whispered eagerly. "Oh, it was so difficult Zori. The night editor was surprised, almost shocked to see me. When I explained and showed him the statement, he would not at first believe me. Then he rang up the editor and luckily the editor knows my uncle, so I talked to him on the phone and convinced him that the statement was genuine. He was very nice, and even promised to have it sent to the Urdu and Hindi papers. I didn't tell him, how it came into my hands as I didn't want to get you into trouble, and he was good enough to promise not to tell anyone that I had given it to him. So that's that." She sighed with relief and Zohra pressed her hand gratefully.

Next day Mohini's statement was featured by all the nationalist newspapers: but how it got into the press was a great mystery which no one could solve.

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CHAPTER VI

As the train moved out of Amritsar station a strange feeling of excitement began to steal over Habib. "The next stop is Lahore", he heard one fellow passenger say to another and his heart began to beat a little faster. In less than an hour, he would be home again after an absence of five years. Five years—yet, sometimes it seemed, but yesterday that he had said good-bye to friends and relations, and begun his journey westwards. Then again a life time seemed to have passed between then and now. Long years that had turned the boy into the man. He looked out of the window to see the small station of Chehartta flash pass as the mail thundered through without stopping. A few factory buildings had sprung up and chimneys were belching smoke towards the sky. 'So industry is coming to the Punjab,' he thought. 'Will things be very different to what they were when I left? Surely, great changes must have taken place for these have been stirring years.' And his thoughts went back to the spring and summer of 1930, when the young Indian students in England had been deeply moved by reports of the events at home. The struggle of the Indian people had filled them with enthusiasm, and afire with patriotism, many of them had wanted to come back to take part in the fight. Habib had written home expressing this wish to his father, but his father's stern counsel to 'finish his education before thinking of taking part in politics' had prevailed and he had stayed on. Meanwhile, Zohra's letters had given him a picture of all that had been happening at home. She had described events vividly, and her descriptions of how they had effected the lives of her friends and acquaintances had touched him deeply and brought home to his mind, the hopes and sufferings of his compatriots in a way because that bare newspaper reports could not have done. The first Round Table Conference had met in London, but the Indian students in England had viewed it sceptically because for them, these table-talks where the Indian National Congress was not represented, had seemed so useless when a gigantic struggle was going on in their country. 1931 had dawned, but the struggle had gone on; until late in January came the welcome news of the release of the members of the Congress Working Committee. Habib knew full well that the British Government was fully aware of the fact that the Round Table Conference had fallen "flat" and that British commercial interests, alarmed by the growth of the popular mass movement in India, had been pressing for a "truce". As anticipated, some of the Indian Liberals, who had been delegates

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to the Round Table Conference on their return to India, had met Gandhi and the members of the Congress Working Committee, then in February, Gandhi had had several meetings with the Viceroy. Finally, on March 4th the Gandhi-Irwin Pact had been signed, Civil Disobedience discontinued and prisoners released. Although, many young students in England were disappointed by the terms of the pact, and thought that Congress had "given in" too much yet they could not help being elated by it for it seemed to them, that now, at least, there was a strong Indian political party, which was treated as an equal by the Government, and above all a party, with whom the Government had found it necessary to make a pact: and as such, it seemed to be a tacit recognition of Indian Independence. Now Gandhi had left India to attend the Second Round Table Conference, which was about to be held in London, and since all political parties were now represented there, the country had great hopes from it.

Since there was no longer any reason for a speedy return to India, after taking his final Law examination, Habib decided to stay on in Europe for a few months and he spent this time travelling over the Continent.

Scenes from the last few years, now recurred in his mind, like the changing pictures of a kaleidoscope.

It was a golden afternoon during May week and he was lying in a boat on the river Carn. A gramophone was playing and Hazel was sitting next to him, Hazel with her green eyes and lissom figure.

He was sitting on the terrace of the Grand Hotel at Cobenzal, looking down on Vienna with the Prince Eugene statue silhouetted against the Hoffburg. The silver streak of the Danube wound its way in the distance. While the orchestra played "Wie, wie nur du alien . . . . "

He was drinking with the students at Perkeo at Heidelberg, while a massive Fraulein held about twenty bear glasses in one hand and half the students were completely tight ——.

Then the scene shifted, and he was dancing with Claudette in the La Coupal at Paris —— and yet again, and he was standing in the flood-lit Colosseum under the Roman sky—— He sighed,

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he would miss Europe, but perhaps, most of all, he would miss the undulating English country-side with its gentle green slopes, its orderly hedges and well-kept fields. He sighed again and looked out of the window. Flat as far as the eye could see, the fair fields of the Punjab lay before him. Brown earth over-turned by the plough, rich earth ready for the early autumn sowings, and here and there a well among a grove of trees. Villages flashed by, some near the railway track, others clusters of mud houses in the distance. Nothing seemed to have changed, all was as before, as it had been for hundreds and hundreds of years. Yet surely below the unchanging surface, changes were taking place, he thought. That peasant standing there, beside his plough looking towards the morning sun. What was he thinking? His thoughts must be different from those of his father and his grandfather before him, for he had seen the railway train and the motor-car and heard the roar of air-planes in the sky. That woman, clad in her red *shalwar* and yellow shirt, walking gracefully with her *ghara* balanced on her head and her *dopatta* fluttering in the breeze, was coming to the well to fetch water as her mother had done before her and her grandmother, but they had not seen nor heard of iron giants, that wove cloth or ground the corn. Surely, these things had changed her.

The train rumbled by another small station. Wagha! It brought back memories of pleasant hours spent in the garden of the dak bungalow by the Canal. How often they had come here, in their cars from Lahore, only eighteen miles away. Picnics in the winter, lying on the grass with the sun warm on the body and the smell of flowers in the air. Picnics in the summer, bathing in the canal or singing songs in the rich moonlight. They all came back to him now and crowded out the thoughts of Europe until it seemed shadowy and far away. Familiar fields brought comfort and loved landmarks a sense of peace. He was home again.

'It will be good to see them all again,' he thought, 'Father and mother and the children.' And then he smiled, for his sisters must be grown up young ladies now. Sughra had been a shy maiden of fourteen and Zohra a bright kid of twelve, when he left. And now?

The train came to a brief halt at Moghalpura, a suburb of Lahore, and then passed over the canal, the ruined dome of the tomb of Ali Mardan Khan flashed by, the railway lines multiplied,

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the engine gave a sharp whistle and then steamed into Lahore station.

A state of excitement had prevailed at Nishat Manzil for over a fortnight. From drawing-room to kitchen animated conversations had gone on. The probable date of the young Sheikh Sahib's arrival was discussed, invitations were sent out for the huge feast that Sheikh Nizamuddin was giving to celebrate his grandson's safe return after a successful academic career abroad, and everyone, from Mehrunnissa Begum to the youngest maid in the house, was having new clothes made for the great occasion. A week before the joyful day relations from Multan began to arrive. The first to come were Fakhruddin's wife Zobeidah and her daughter Akhtari. Then came Anwari's son together with his son and two small children and a day before Habib's arrival Karimunnissa Begum, Sughra's mother-in-law-to-be, arrived, bringing with her large trays full of sweets and fruits, and saying that she had come to welcome Habib and to fix a date for Sughra's wedding.

On the same day as Karimunnissa, a brass-band led by one of the old family retainers arrived from Multan. All the bands man belonged to one of the largest villages on the family estate. Stalwart young men clad in red shirts and khaki trousers, they marched into the house, drums beating and trumpets blowing, and all the servants, the maids and the children rushed out to see them.

That night no one slept at Nishat Manzil. Till midnight, the band played village songs or strange versions of military marches. In the ladies' part of the house, the ladies sat in the sitting room while *doomnies* sang songs of welcome for the young Sheikh Sahib and of congratulations for his parents and relations and received tips from the appreciative ladies.

The telephone bell was continually ringing. Friends and relations in Lahore rang up to ask what time the train was coming in next morning, whether there was to be a reception at the station and if they could do anything to help in the arrangements for the feast.

The young girls in the house were full of excitement. For Sughra and Zohra, the hours passed all too slowly. Habib was coming home again. Habib the big-brother, who had teased them

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and brought them sweets and news of the outside world and whom they had missed so terribly for five long years. New *saris* had been made for them to wear on the morrow—white *saris* with Indori borders. Ordinarily, they wore their Punjabi clothes, and *saris* were worn at occasions and were considered very fashionable. Zohra had worn her first *sari* only a year before and for her, they were new enough to be exciting.

Very different were the thoughts that stirred in the mind of Bilquis and Akhtari. They knew, that in all probability, Habib would marry one of them and each wanted to look her best on the morrow. Bilquis was short and rather stout, and like her mother had no pretensions to good looks, Akhtari, on the other hand, was tall and slim and with her fair complexion and sharp features, was considered quite a beauty. Besides, she was Sheikh Fakhruddin's only child and would inherit his share of the property, and so it was generally assumed in the family that Habib would marry her, although there had been no actual engagement. Bilquis ordered a pink *sari* for the occasion and bought herself a pair of high-heeled shoes. Moreover, she had obtained a box of powder and some lipstick from one of her friends and she thought that these judiciously applied, together with her better education, should help to make her more attractive in the eyes of Habib. Akhtari's mother, having heard of the pink *sari*, had quickly ordered one for her daughter and had asked Sughra to teach her how to wear it. It amused Zohra to watch the two girls. Personally, she thought both of them unsuitable for Habib. Bilquis was too like her mother and Akhtari far too stupid to make him happy. Secretly, she hoped that he would refuse to marry either of them and then perhaps, one day, he might marry her friend Surrayya.

Perhaps, the happiest person in the house was Mehrunnissa Begam. For her these five years of waiting had been very long. How often had she longed to see her darling son, how often had she been worried about his health and happiness. And sometimes, horrid thoughts —— she had imagined him in love with some western hussy: entangled by her wiles and perhaps even married to her. How she had prayed for his safe return, for his happy home-coming across the 'seven seas'! So that she might hold him to her heart again, so that she might arrange his marriage and see her grand-children playing in the house. Now at last, the separation would soon be over. Praise be to *Allah*, who had heard

a mother's prayer and brought her son back from a foreign land to his hearth and home and to his mother's loving arms again.

Dawn came at last and there was such a bustle in the house that all seemed confusion. Servants ran to and fro, maids shouted excitedly, and every now and then one of the children began to howl.

Visitors arrived. The men went to the front entrance,, while the ladies came through the private entrance to the ladies' part of the house. At last a fleet of cars was ready to go to the station. The servants had already gone in tongas as had the bandsmen.

Ready to enter the first car, Sheikh Nizamuddin stood in the porch, giving last minute instructions about the feast that would begin with Habib's arrival home, and go on all day. He was a fine figure of a man. Tall he was, and wide shouldered and his seventy years sat lightly upon his brow. His long black coat and white *shalwar* set off to advantage a figure, that was straight and graceful even now and his turban, with its still *turrah*, admirably suited his distinguished face with its sharp aquiline features, its flowing white beard and its still-young eyes. Sheikh Jamaluddin, with his thick-set figure, inclined to corpulence and his English clothes looked insignificant and before his father, Fakhruddin, looked non-descript in spite of his smart grey *achkan* with turban to match and his waxed moustache.

Sheikh Nizamuddin and his sons sat in the first car and the fleet of cars began to move out of the house. Other friends would be meeting them at the station and they all carried garlands of flowers or tinsel. Habib would have a right royal welcome as befitted a son of his house.

The Frontier Mail rumbled into the station and the crowd on the platform swayed towards the train. Ah! there he was, standing in the door of his compartment. And he was good to look upon, this young son of the Sheikh family. Of medium height and graceful build, he had inherited his grandfather's distinguished features and flashing eyes. But, whereas, the old man's face was inclined to be thin-lipped and harsh, Habib's had an attractive gentleness, for he had inherited his mother's curving lips. He was dressed in a grey English suit, but, instead of wearing a hat, he had tied a grey turban on his head. "Good boy,"

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thought his grandfather, as he saw the turban. "He has not forgotten the ways of his own land."

The train came to standstill. Habib jumped out and the crowd made way for his grandfather and father who came forward to greet him. He embraced them shoulder to shoulder in the eastern way, before turning round to greet his friends. Suddenly, to his horror, he heard a band strike up 'God save the King.' "What is that?" he cried.

"Oh just a band that has come from our village to greet you" said his father. But Habib had already rushed towards the leader of the band. "Stop this" he cried. There was a sudden silence. "Why are you playing this tune?" Another silence met this question, they did not know what he was talking about.

"Do you know, what you are playing?" he asked angrily. The leader of the band explained that they were playing the tune they had heard the police and military bands play on ceremonious occasions in Multan. It was a tune much loved by the Sahibs and so it must be good. Did they know what it meant? No, of course not, how could they know, what a "tune" meant?

Sheikh Jamaluddin came up. He was somewhat annoyed with Habib. "Come along son," he said, "Everyone is waiting to meet you. This is no time for scolding these poor villagers. They don't understand these things. They just meant to greet you."

But Habib's joy had been marred by this little incident. 'Allah, he thought 'have we changed so little in spite of all the struggle and the suffering'. Then, he consoled himself by thinking, that these were only villagers from a remote village in Multan, and they did not know what they were playing. It was no symbol of slavery for them, but only a gay little tune. Yes, just a gay little tune, that did not matter at all. So, he pushed away all thoughts of this incident, and felt his heart leap with eagerness, as the car in which he sat, entered the grounds of Nishat Manzil. And then, he was clasped in his mother's arms and all unpleasant thoughts vanished, as he saw two lovely young girls dressed in smart white *saris* come forward to greet him and realized with a feeling of surprise and joy, that they were his sisters.

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CHAPTER VII

"Habib, I want to have a talk with you. Will you come into my study,—?"

"Certainly, father."

They moved on from the verandah into Sheikh Jamaluddin's office, which was a businesslike, but, comfortable room. The walls were lined with almirahs full of legal books. On one side there was a large knee-hole desk, and several leather-covered arm-chairs were neatly arranged round a small table in the centre. Behind the desk was a wide fire-place with a mantle-shelf and on the wall, above this, was a large portrait of Sheikh Amiruddin, the grandfather of Sheikh Jamaluddin.

Sheikh Jamaluddin sank into one of the arm-chairs, picked up a silver box from the table, took a cigarette from it and offered one to his son. These were times, when it was not considered polite for sons to smoke in front of their fathers, so Habib was somewhat surprised but he knew at once that on his father's part this was a gesture, a gesture to show his son, that henceforth they were to be friends. So he smiled, as he took a cigarette from the box and striking a match, lit first his father's cigarette and then his own.

Sheikh Jamaluddin appeared to be a little thoughtful, he asked Habib to sit down, and then was silent for some moments.

"There is a matter which concerns you, and for which I wish to ask your consent, my son," he said at last.

"What is it, father?"

"As you know, it is your grandfather's great wish to see your marriage, and he is getting on in years. Although, he looks quite strong and is very active for his age, I have been worried about his health for some time. Today, he called me and expressed the wish that your marriage should take place at the same time as Sughra's. Do you agree?"

"At Christmas?" asked Habib and his father nodded. Habib was completely surprised. He was only twenty-four and had no

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wish to get married for some time yet. In fact, he had never given the matter a thought. He firmly believed, that a man should not marry until he was earning enough to support a wife, besides, whenever he found a wife, it would be someone of his own choosing, and he did not know any girls. Of course, he knew that his family wanted him to marry his cousin, but, he had been away for five years, and he had thought, that they must have realized by now, that a man of his education and ideas would not agree to an arranged marriage.

"But, father," he said "I'm only twenty-four and I have been home for just a month, it is much too early to think of marriage."

"I was your age, when I married, my son, and it has turned out well. Yes, very well indeed."

"I know, but times have changed. Besides, I don't know any girls, who am I to marry?"

"But, son, it has always been understood that you would marry Akhtari one day."

"Surely, father, that was never settled."

"Well, we have never had a formal engagement, but it has always been understood. You are a lucky young man. She is a girl in a million. Young, lovely and well brought-up. Besides, I have seen to it that, she has been suitably educated. She spent four years at Q—School with your sisters and after that a governess was kept for her at Multan. What more can a young man want?"

Habib was at a loss. This had come upon him quite suddenly. Of course, he had known, that he would have to face the problem of marriage one day, but, he had not thought it would be so soon. And now to be presented with a *fait accompli* in such a manner, he felt quite angry, but he controlled himself, as he did not wish to annoy or hurt his father in any way. He was quite certain he did not want to marry Akhtari—or any other girl, but he thought it best to be tactful and to play for time.

"But I don't know whether I want to marry Akhtari," he said.

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"What?" His father was obviously surprised. "You mean to say ——" he looked quite worried, and was silent for a while. Drawing his chair closer to Habib he said "I understand, son: but listen to one who has had more experience than you. I am now going to tell you something about my own life, when I was young and full of romantic ideas, I too formed an attachment in Europe: but, I realized that such marriages are never a success, never—so, I put away all such thoughts and married your mother on my return from Europe, and thank God we have been wonderfully happy."

Habib was smiling. "You are wrong, father," he said, "I have formed no attachment in Europe."

Sheikh Jamaluddin was obviously relieved. "Ah, that is good. Very good," he said and beamed at his son. "In that case, you have no special reason for not wanting to marry Akhtari."

"But I don't love her, surely that is reason enough."

"Now you are talking like a school-boy. A wife is different to er —— other women. You don't have to be infatuated with a woman to marry her. The best marriages are made by those, who choose judiciously and with a cool head. Love comes afterwards, and grows with the years."

"I don't even know Akhtari. She was a child when I left and I have exchanged half a dozen sentences with her, since my return—and that is all."

"Well, since you put it that way, perhaps, we can persuade grandfather to let there be an engagement at Christmas, instead of a marriage and you can be married in April, you see, I want your happiness, and am prepared to be reasonable. Since, she is your cousin, I may even persuade Fakhruddin not to keep her in purdah from you after the engagement as is customary, then, you can go to visit them and have quite enough time to get to know her before you marry."

Habib felt as though he were being cornered, but, he tried to put the matter to his father in another way.

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"There is another reason for my not wishing to get married. I have only just begun practising at the Bar and am earning next to nothing: I cannot support a wife."

"You don't have to," smiled his father, "I shall make you a liberal allowance. You will not find me niggardly, my son."

"I know how generous you are, father, but, on principle, I don't want to marry as long as I'm not financially independent, and, I'm afraid, you cannot change my ideas on this point." Habib spoke in a low voice, but there was a firm note in it and his father realized that it would not be easy to persuade him.

"Is there any other girl here, that you are interested in?" he asked. "Perhaps Bilquis?"

"No, no. There is no one. I just don't wish to marry —— yet."

"Then it's just a question of time?"

"Yes." This was not strictly true, but, again Habib felt that it would be best to postpone the issue.

Sheikh Jamaluddin was a tactful man. He had realized that it would be impossible to persuade his son straightaway, and he too thought it best to postpone the issue, lest matters be completely ruined by a quarrel. They had all set their heart upon this marriage, and he did not wish to spoil everything by being hasty and dictatorial.

"Well, son, take your time then," he said, "but remember, it is our dearest wish that you marry Akhtari. Besides, as you know, she is Fakhruddin's only child and if she were to marry someone else, our estate would be divided and part of it would go out of the family. This would be a disaster. Leave me now, but remember what I have said." 'Time' he thought as Habib left the room 'will soften his ideas: He is too full of Europe now. Yes I shall give him a few months and during that time I shall keep Fakhruddin and his family here. Akhtari is beautiful and Habib will learn to appreciate her.'

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Chagan was quite excited, as she came into Anwar Jahan Begum's room "I have great news, *Bibiji*" she said.

"What is it?" Asked Anwari quickly.

"Well—you know Ghulam Muhammad, the driver, who is married to my mother's third cousin —— ?"

"Yes, yes. Go on."

"He knows a little English. He has been hearing the Sheikh Sahib and his friends talk for so many years, that he can understand it quite well now. He called me just now and told me some wonderful things." She paused. Anwari was thrilled. "Tell me quickly," she cried.

"Ha! First, give me something to sweeten my mouth, *Bibi*. It is great news," and she put out her hand. Anwari produced a rupee and placed it on her palm. "Tell me at once" she said and her voice was hoarse with excitement.

"It concerns the young master. Today, Sheikh Sahib called him into the office and asked him if he would marry Akhtari Bibi."

"That's not good news, woman!"

"Ah, but, wait, until you hear the rest. Habib Sahib refused."

"Really? Are you sure? Did Ghulam Muhammad understand it all right?"

"Of course. Sheikh Sahib was quite annoyed for a moment—but ...." she paused again.

"Go on woman! Why do you hesitate? Tell me?"

Chagan had really nothing more to tell except that Ghulam Muhammad had heard Bilquis' name mentioned, but she knew how to earn a tip.

"Well then Sheikh Sahib asked Habib Sahib, if he would rather marry our Bilquis *Bibi*."

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"Really? Truly? Are you sure you are not lying to me?"

"Of course, I'm not lying," Chagan was indignant.

"And what did Habib say?"

"Well Ghulam Muhammad says, he kept on saying, he did not want to marry yet, but his 'no' was far less emphatic than it had been when Akhtari was mentioned. In fact, he seemed altogether more favourably inclined towards our *Bibi*."

"This is really wonderful news!"

"Where is my tip, *Bibiji*."

"Ah, you are a greedy old woman but you deserve a tip this time. Here is another rupee for you and one for Ghulam Muhammad. Tell him to be sure to bring me all the news he can." Anwari was delighted. She sat down on the carpet and leaning on a cushion, saw rosy visions of the future. Her darling, her little Bilquis, would be married to Habib and all the vast wealth of Sheikh Nizamuddin would come to her and to her children. It would be a wonderful match. Habib was a boy in a million. Sughra and Zohra would never make such advantageous marriages. For once she would score over Mehr and her daughters. And as for that proud Zobeidah and her cow-like daughter Akhtari, she would show them that she, Anwari, was more powerful after all. ....

The news, that Habib had refused to marry Akhtari, spread all over the house. It was discussed quite openly in the kitchen when the servants were having their mid-day meal. As soon as she heard it Zobeidah Begum's maid, Nur, came running to her mistress and told her what had happened. Zobeidah was quite indignant. How dare Habib insult them in such a way, she thought, who did he think he was? As if her daughter did not have other proposals. Why only last month two proposals had come for her. One from a Nawab's son and the other from an I.C.S. officer. Akhtari was one of the prettiest and most sought-after girls in the Punjab. She, for one, had never been favourably inclined towards Habib. She thought, she was too proud and stuck up: and she much preferred her own brother's son. But, all the same, it would be a dreadful insult, if Habib refused now, because he and Akhtari had

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been almost betrothed, since they were children, and, if the news, that he had refused to marry her leaked out, people would begin to wonder, if something was wrong with the girl. Yes, decidedly, she must talk to her husband. So she asked Nur to call him. "Have you heard the rumour that *Bhai Sahib* asked Habib if he would marry Akhtari and Habib refused?" she asked him, when he came to her room.

"I have not, and what is more I don't believe it. It must be the servants' idle gossip or some wild tale started by Anwari."

"In any case, you must speak to your brother, for, if it is true, it's an insult."

"But, how can I speak to Jamaluddin? After all, I cannot ask him, if his son wants to marry my daughter!"

"Of course not: but, you can mention the fact, that two proposals have recently come for Akhtari and .... and ask his advice."

"Hm —— I might do that."

Jamaluddin was surprised, when his brother told him, that he had something of importance to discuss with him, but, he took him into the study and asked him what it was.

"Well Jamal, it's like this. Akhtari is now nineteen years old and I must decide about her future. Recently, Nawab Shabir Hussain has proposed for his son and Mian Muhammad Ismail has sent in a proposal for his son who is an I.C.S. officer: besides, these boys, there is my brother-in-law's son and he is a good lad. I'm thinking of betrothing Akhtari to one of these boys and I want your advice."

"But, *Bhai Sahib*, how can you ever think of these boys? Has it not always been understood that Habib and Akhtari would one day marry each other?" Jamaluddin knew he was committing his son, but, he felt there was no help for it.

"Nothing could give greater pleasure, but seriously Jamal, I have to think of my daughter's happiness, and I don't want this match if Habib is reluctant."

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This was a chance for Jamaluddin to tell his brother the truth, but, he had set his heart upon this marriage, and he said, "Who says Habib is reluctant?"

"Oh, I heard rumours."

"Those are idle tales. Akhtari is a wonderful girl, whom any man would be proud to marry and Habib knows this. But, they are both very young and we should not hurry things. Habib has just begun practising at the Bar and I want him to work hard for a few months without any distractions. After all, the boy's career is important. I'm sure you agree with me, *Bhai Sahib*."

Fakhruddin was not a shrewd man and his clever brother soon convinced him that Habib was in favour of the match but that an early engagement would be undesirable. So, he left the study quite satisfied and told his wife, that the rumours she had heard, were baseless , and that Habib's engagement with Akhtari was practically settled.

Zohra was full of excitement when she came back from College that day. She threw her books on her bed, and ran into her brother's room to find him sitting in an arm-chair smoking a cigarette and gazing moodily at nothing.

"Habib *Bhaiya*, you must help me" she cried.

"What is it, little one?"

She sat down on the arm of his chair and put her arm round his shoulders. "A wonderful thing has happened, but I need your help."

"You shall have it, baby. Tell me about the wonderful thing."

"I wish you would not call me, 'baby'! Oh *Bhaiya*! just imagine I have been asked to represent my college at the inter-university debate."

"So my little sister has become a star speaker. Since when have you taken to debating?"

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"I wrote and told you about Mohini's arrest, and my speech and the awful row there was at home. Don't you remember?"

"Of course."

"Well since then I have spoken quite regularly in the college debating union, and now I've been asked to represent our college together with Surrayya. Oh I'm so happy! If only the family will let me. You must persuade them, *Bhaiya*. You must! You must!"

"Now, now don't get so excited. I shall do my best: but it will be very difficult. Grandfather will never hear of your competing with all the men students and speaking on a public platform. After all, you are still in purdah, you know."

"I know .... But things are different from what they used to be. I go out shopping now, and to the pictures without a *burqah*, and, I am sure, father knows it, and he has never scolded me."

"Yes. It was my pleasant duty to escort my pretty sister to the pictures last night, and it was quite difficult to put off my friends who wished to be introduced to the mysterious lady."

"Don't tease. Help me now. You've got to persuade father?"

"I'll try, little one. But, to tell you the truth, it will not be easy. I'm not in his good books just now."

"Nonsense. You are quite the family favourite nowadays. Father simply dotes on you."

"I'm afraid I've offended him today."

"What happened?"

"He wanted me to marry Akhtari in December."

"Ah, I knew that was coming. What did you say?"

"I refused. I've no intention of marrying Akhtari."

"Did you say that?"

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"Not exactly. I said I did not wish to marry—yet."

"That was a mistake. You should have been more emphatic. Now they'll manoeuvre you into it."

"I did not want to hurt or annoy father. But, no one will manoeuvre me into anything. You can be sure of that. I shall gradually bring them round to my way of thinking."

"I hope so. Come and talk to father now."

"All-right. But, I warn you, I haven't much hope," he said, and they walked across the courtyard towards the ladies' sitting-room.

"Don't be a pessimist. You shall yet hear me make a wonderful speech in the university hall. Oh how I wish Mohini were here."

"That is the name of your friend, who was arrested, isn't it? What happened to her, and where is she now?"

"She was released with the rest in March, but she was not at all well. She was never very strong and the discomfort, bad food and harsh treatment of prison life weakened her further. Then, in February, she caught a chill and it developed into pleurisy. She was very ill for sometime and, even, after she recovered, the temperature persisted and they were afraid, she would come in for tuberculosis. Luckily, she was released just then and her family sent her to Kashmir. She is still there and she tells me that she has recovered completely."

"Good! She seems to be rather a wonderful person, this friend of yours. When I saw her last, she was still a kid—a slim little thing with large eyes. I must meet her again."

"Yes you must. She's lovely now. Look *Bhaiya*, there's father sitting on the sofa. Mother has gone to a purdah party, so she won't be there to prevent him from giving me permission to speak. Do talk to him tactfully."

Tea was laid in the sitting-room and Sheikh Jamaluddin and Sughra was already there. Sughra poured out the tea and passed

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the cups round. When they were all peacefully settled, Habib very cautiously brought up the subject of the debate.

"Father" he said "Zohra wants to ask you something."

"What is it, Zori?"

Zohra came and sat close to her father and put her hand, on his arm. "I —— I've been making speeches —— in the college union for —— for some months," she was all confused and did not know how to begin.

"Ah well, there is no harm in that. In fact it's a good thing for a girl to be able to express herself fluently.

"Now I have been asked to speak on behalf of my college."

"To speak on behalf of your college? Then you must be quite good, little one."

Zohra's face brightened. "Oh then —— may I father?"

"Yes I think you may. I take it of course that the debate or declamation contest, or whatever it is , is being held between all the women's colleges."

"Well no. Not exactly —— I —— you see —— *Bhaiya* you tell father what it is.

"It is an inter-university debate, father," said Habib. "The men's colleges are competing as well as the women's colleges, and there are many students coming from other universities as well."

"Ah, then it is a public affair. In that case, of course, Zohra cannot possibly take part in it."

"Oh father —— please," pleaded Zohra.

"But, my child, it's impossible. You are still in purdah you know."

"But, —— but I've been out for shopping and to the pictures without a *burqah*."

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"I know, and I have said nothing about it because I don't believe in being too strict with you. But what you ask now, is impossible."

"It is such a great honour for a girl to be asked to represent her college." Zohra's voice was trembling now, and the tears were not far away.

"Yes, of course it is," said Habib; "and Zohra must be a very good speaker to be asked to speak for her college, for, I hear, they have many good speakers. They won the debating shield last year. Really, father, it's a pity to let the child's talent remain undeveloped."

"You don't understand the difficulties, my son. We are Muslims and our community is very conservative ——"

"But father," cut in Zohra "Two other Muslim girls are speaking, Surrayya, who is from our college and Musarat Muhammad Ali, who is coming from one of the Lucknow colleges."

"The ladies of Surrayya's family are out of purdah, my child. Personally, I think, it is very brave of them, and very creditable, but our family is much more conservative."

"Times are changing" said Habib for the second time that day, "Some Muslim ladies in other parts of India actually took part in the Civil Disobedience movement last year, and even from our own Province, a Muslim lady has gone to the Round Table Conference. I remember all the English papers praising her speeches last year. Our women must come out of purdah now for we shall never make any progress until they do."

"I used to think as you do when I was your age, and even now I'm not against women coming out of purdah, but, it must be done gradually —— yes, very gradually."

"Then let us begin in our own home."

"Oh father!" cried Zohra "Let us."

Just then Sheikh Nizamuddin came into the room. "What is all the discussion about?" he asked. They were all silent.

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"Well what is it about?" he repeated.

"Nothing, nothing father." said Jamaluddin. "Zohra had a silly idea and I was just trying to explain to her how impossible it was for us to allow anything of that sort."

"Anything of what sort?"

"Well, she —— er —— it was just a girlish notion of hers. I'm afraid she did not understand what she was talking about."

"What was she talking about. Will someone tell me?"

They were all silent again.

Sheikh Nizamuddin was getting annoyed, he began to suspect that something was being hidden from him "Don't hide things." he exclaimed. "Tell me at once."

Jamaluddin still hesitated but Habib was somewhat irritated by his grandfather's tone, after all they were not school-boys any longer. "Zohra has been asked to represent her college at an inter-university debate and we were trying to persuade father to allow her to participate."

"You were trying to persuade your father to allow her —— Why, you young idiot, have you lost your senses? Is that what an English education has done to you?" His face became the colour of a brick, as he towered over Habib. Jamaluddin tried to pacify him. "Of course, she is not taking any part in such things father," he said.

"Is it not bad enough that she should come with such a request? How dare she have the audacity? We are proud of the seclusion of our women. I warn you Jamal, for some time I have been noticing the fact that your daughters, especially Zohra, are becoming too fond of these new-fangled ways. I will not have any daughter of my house going about in public with her face uncovered. Not as long as I am alive. And as for you, Sir," he shouted turning to Habib, "keep your ideas to yourself. It appears, you have no shame. Asking your father to allow your sister to make an exhibit of herself before all those men —— why you should go and drown yourself.

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The purdah of our women is sacred. I tell you, no woman of our family shall break it, while I live —— yes, while I live."

At these words something happened to Zohra. Afterwards, she could not explain it to herself. Perhaps, it was the sudden disappointment caused by the frustration of her hopes just as she was beginning to think her father might allow her to take part in the debate, that prompted her to act as she did. Perhaps it was all the accumulated frustration of the many times when she had wanted to do this or that and had been stopped by the family, or by the fear of the family, that lay behind her words. In any case a little devil seemed to have suddenly entered her for she exclaimed "I don't care what you all say, you can stop me now, but one day I shall come out of purdah. Yes I will". Sughra rushed forward to stop her, but it was too late, she had said what she wanted to.

For a few moments they were all too surprised to speak. For a girl to speak thus before her elders was unheard of. Then Sheikh Nizamuddin stepped forward. "Why you —— you need to be thrashed!" he cried "Get out of my sight!"

"Take her to her room, Sughra," said Jamaluddin.

"That it should have come to this," continued Sheikh Nizamuddin "that my own children should defy me thus. First Habib refuses to get married and then this —— this —— why —— I ——" his voice grew fainter and fainter and then suddenly he tottered and fell to the ground. His face was ashen. Jamaluddin uttered a cry, while Habib quickly knelt beside him and felt his pulse, it was weak and irregular and scarcely perceptible. He ran to the telephone to call the doctor. Meanwhile, Jamaluddin called two men-servants and between them they carried the old man to the nearest bed-room.

The doctor arrived and pronounced Sheikh Nizamuddin to be seriously ill with a heart attack. He said, that he had told the old man months ago that his heart was not what it used to be, and asked him to lead a quiet life and not to upset himself in any way.

In her room Zohra lay sobbing on her bed. She felt it was all her fault. She would never forget the things her mother had said to her—never. For she had been accused of causing her grandfather's illness. "If he dies, it will be your fault" her mother had

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said, and Zohra had felt this to be true. In vain Habib had tried to comfort her by telling her, that it was nobody's fault and that they had known for sometime that the old man's heart was weak. She was disconsolate. "O, God," she prayed "Don't let him die, don't let him die, and I promise never to rebel against my family again."

CHAPTER VIII

Sheikh Nizamuddin did not die, but Zohra soon forgot her promise. As her grandfather got better, her spirits rose again and she began to feel that everything was all right, and that, she had not been the one to blame —— 'At least not much,' she thought. 'After all his heart had been weak for a long time, and if he was upset, it was partly Habib's fault for not agreeing to the engagement. Anyway, the attack has passed and we should forget all about it, all's well that ends well!'

As the shadow of death passed away from the house, the preparations for Sughra's wedding were resumed. All the best known drapers and jewellers of the town knew, that there was to be a wedding in Sheikh Nizamuddin's family, and every day they would send their best and smartest wares to Nishat Manzil. All day long shop assistants could be seen coming down the drive in tongas or carriages bringing with them bundles and boxes full of clothes or jewels. They would be made to wait in the courtyard, while the maids carried their goods to and fro from the courtyard to the ladies' sitting-room. In the sitting-room, lively discussions went on among the ladies over the relative merits of velvets and satins and georgettes and their suitability for dresses and *saris*. Sughra was to have a hundred and one dresses as was the custom among all the best families. In addition to these, forty dresses were being made for the bridegroom's relations, twenty for the men and twenty for the women. Sheikh Nizamuddin was having a special set of emeralds and diamonds made for his favourite grand daughter: and her father was giving her three sets of jewellery, one of pearls and rubies, one of Naurattan—the nine lucky stones, diamonds, emeralds, rubies, pearls, opals, sapphires, turquoise, and one of old-fashioned jewellery made of gold and set with uncut stones, which had been left for her by her grandmother. Besides these clothes and jewels, she was to have enough furniture to furnish

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a whole house, together with all the household silver and linen and kitchen utensils.

Sheikh Jamaluddin had ordered smart modern furniture for her drawing-room, her dining-room and her bedrooms, and carpets for these rooms were being woven on the looms of the carpet factories of Amritsar. Sughra was to be married in the traditional way with all the pomp, the show and the ceremony.

The days were full of excitement. Several of her girl friends would drop in each day and some of them would go with Zohra on expeditions to the various bazaars, looking for borders or shoes or bags and a hundred and one other things that make up a trousseau. Sometimes, they would all sit down and stitch borders on the *saris*, sew *gota* on her dresses or embroider them with threads of silk and gold and silver. In the evenings, there would be laughter and revelry and the girls would gather round the *dholki* to sing folk songs and to dance folk dances. They were happy days and they passed all too quickly.

Sughra could not help being thrilled and exhilarated by all that was going on. She was the most important person in the house these days and everyone tried to please her. She had her choice of all that money could buy and what girl does not feel elated at the sight of pretty clothes and costly jewels? The happy smiles of her mother, the jests of her friends and the general atmosphere of joy and revelry cast a halo of romance round her marriage and she began to respond to the stimulus. She would blush and cast down her eyes, when the name of the bridegroom was mentioned, and there would be a tender smile on her lips. Often she would sit by her window, gazing at the stars and there would be a dreamy look in her eyes. She began to endow Mansur with all the qualities she loved in a man and her visions of the future were bright though hazy.

The wedding was fixed for the last week-end in December as this was the holiday season and all the friends and relations of the family would be able to attend. By the 20th of December many of the relations from Multan had arrived and Nishat Manzil was crowded. The store-rooms were full of provisions for the feasts and parties that were to be held. The trousseau was ready. The invitations had been sent out, in short, all the preparations

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for the wedding were complete. Sughra was made to wear plain clothes and she no longer appeared before the many many visitors that came to the house, but remained quietly in her room for this was the period of *mayun*. She was still the centre of interest, her friends were still there to tease her and to cheer her up, her mother still painted a rosy picture of the future for her, but, somehow, her thoughts were no longer as bright and happy, as they had been for the last two months. Try as she may, she could not suppress the little voice of doubt, that strange feeling of dread that arose within her. She was going away from her parents' home, from the familiar scenes that she loved so well, away from the family and her friends, whose ways she knew and understood, and who, in turn, knew and understood her ways. She was going away with a man, who was a complete stranger, to a new environment, among another set of people and she could not still the little voice that whispered within her, 'You are leaving all you love for a new life, a new life you know nothing of —— will you be happy? Will you be able to adjust yourself to your surroundings?' And she could not answer her own questions. Married life would be so different. It was the difference that worried her. She would need love and tenderness and understanding to help her to adjust herself to the new ways and the man who could give these to her—she did not know at all. 'And will you be able to make him happy' the voice would whisper again 'how can you know? How can you know, when you don't know him?' 'I shall make him happy,' she would tell herself, by love and devotion and service! 'But, how can you be sure?' the other maddening voice would retort.

These last few days of waiting were the most difficult, because all the excitement of the preparations for the wedding was over, and one was supposed to spend these days of *mayun* quietly and dressed in simple clothes so that she may feel and look well at the time of marriage. Her doubts and dreads would not be suppressed and continued to haunt her, but she found consolation in prayer. Neither she nor Zohra had been regular about saying their five daily prayers, although they had made it a point to say their *namaz* at least once a day. Now, she would pray five times a day and sometimes read the Quran late into the night, for it brought her great solace and helped her to face the future with confidence. She was supposed to spend these days in quiet meditation, but, whenever she was alone, the maddening uncertainty would recur in her mind, so she would surround herself with her many friends. She would not go into the

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sitting-room which was full of visitors, but the girls would all gather in her room and the sound of their songs and their laughter would bring smiles to the faces of the older women gathered in the sitting-room. Every evening the girls would sit around the *dholki*, and one of them would beat the *dholki* with her left hand while another kept time by striking a stone against the wood. One evening, two days before the wedding, they all sat round the *dholki*, as usual, and one of them began to sing. Some of the others joined in and they all sang the chorus together. It was a plaintive song full of the wistful sadness of a girl leaving her father's home and it brought tears to Sughra's eyes. Zohra saw them: "Stop this sloppy stuff, she cried and looking mischievously at a friend, who came from Rawalpindi, she began to sing in a cheerful voice:

Wed me not in 'Pindi
Mother mine
Where the days are wet and windy
And the boys they love to roam.

Immediately the girl took up the challenge and sang:

Wed me not in Lahore
Mother mine
Where the men are fond of war
But they fight their battles at home.

There was loud laughter and then one of the girls gave Sughra a playful nudge as she sang:—

Oh wed me in Multan
Mother mine
Find me a fair *jawan*
For I'm tired of being alone.

The others took up this verse and sang it again and again until Sughra could not help smiling. "Come on girls, let's sing a love song," said one of her friends and she began to sing the famous verses of Sohni Mahinwal, the great love epic of the Punjab.

Sohni, who loves the young but poor shepherd, Mahinwal, is married against her will to a rich Zamindar, but, Mahinwal follows her, when she goes to her husband's village. There every night

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she creeps out to meet her shepherd love across the river Chenab. She has no boat in which to go across, but this is how she solved the problem:—

But love will always find a way
To still the sweet desire
She put her trust in the potter's clay
Hardened by the fire.

And every night whate'er betide
While the stars kept watch above
Her *ghara* would float on the river side
As she went to meet her love.

This song was a great favourite and all the girls joined in. They sang the verses which tell how her husband's sister discovers her secret and one day stealthily substitutes an unbaked *ghara* for the baked one that Sohni had used to cross the river. Then on a stormy night, Sohni floats this *ghara* on the angry waters and it breaks in mid-river.

As she was swept by the surging wave
Beneath the midnight sky
"Grant me, this wish O, God," she prayed
"To see him ere I die.

O, river rushing dark and deep
Thy waves in fury rise
Let o'er my limbs thy water creep
But spare my yearning eyes.

But tell him that I kept my vow
But he could not hear my cry
O, lotus flower show me how
To see him ere I die.

O, Khizar, Lord of every sea
Restrain thy angry waves
I lit my lamps each night for thee
Thou guardian of the ways,

O, wind ablowing o'er the wave
Thou wanderer of the sky
Go call my love I only crave
To see him ere I die."

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Her prayer is heard and before she drowns, Mahinwal appears on the other bank. Hearing her cry he jumps into the river, and the strong current carries them both away.

He held her fast in a last embrace
And a lone star sank and set
And even the water caressed her face
As over their heads the cold waves met.

But still in the lands of the fair Punjab
A voice on stormy nights
Comes whispering o'er the deep Chenab
'Whom life divideth, death unites.'

In a sweet and plaintive voice one of the singers sang the last verses and even the older ladies in the next room could not help but heave a sigh.

Just then, the door opened and Mohini walked in. Zohra jumped up and rushed forward to meet her. The two friends embraced and then Zohra said, "Oh I'm so happy to see you. When did you come back to Lahore?"

"This morning. I didn't telephone, because I wanted to give you a surprise."

"Darling, you look wonderful. Your health must have improved."

"Oh yes, I'm quite alright now."

"No fever, or —— or anything?"

"No trouble at all."

Meanwhile, the other girls stopped singing and they all crowded round Mohini. For some minutes , a merry chatter filled the room. Then two maids came in with a table cloth in their hands. This they spread on the floor and then laid plates and dishes upon it, and very soon the girls were busy having their dinner. All through the meal the laughter and the jokes continued and Sughra, who would not eat much, was continually, teased.

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Mohini and Zohra sat near each other and talked in whispers "Oh Mohini, there are a thousand and one things I want to talk about—but, I cannot talk freely here," said Zohra.

"Let's go into another room after dinner and have a chat," suggested Mohini.

"The house is full to over-flowing. There is no privacy anywhere, not even in the garden."

"Then we must wait until after the wedding."

"No, I'm too impatient. Listen, we can go into Habib's sitting room. I know he's dining with some friends and will not be home until late tonight, so we can have the room to ourselves."

"But —— but your brother may not like it."

"Oh, Habib won't mind in the least."

Having finished dinner they washed their hands and then walked through the courtyard to Habib's rooms. His sitting-room was small, but tastefully furnished and Mohini looked appreciatively at the two good paintings on the walls. Zohra curled herself up in one corner of the sofa and she looked like a little kitten sitting there with her legs tucked under her. Mohini settled down in the other corner and they were soon chatting away. Mohini's health, her stay in Kashmir, Zohra's activities at college, her desire to speak in the debate, her grandfather's anger and his illness, the political situation in the country were all discussed. Time passed: the songs of the girls floating across the courtyard were heard no more, the maids were no longer rushing excitedly to and fro, the shy winter moon sank into the western mist, but the two friends went on talking.

Suddenly, the door opened and Habib walked in. Seeing his sister talking to a friend, who jumped up hurriedly, as she saw him, he murmured an apology and was about to withdraw, when Zohra said "Come in *Bhaiya*. There is no need for you to run away for this is no purdah maiden! Surely you know Mohini?"

As he heard the name Habib looked up with interest. Zohra had told him so much about Mohini, that he had often thought about her

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and wondered what she was really like. Mohini had read several of Habib's letters to Zohra and she had found in them thoughts so similar to her own that she too had been looking forward to meeting him. And so, it happened, that she raised her eyes just as he turned to look at her and for an instant they stood thus looking into each other's eyes. Then Mohini blushed and lowered her lids, while Habib smiled and said "Of course we know each other."

"Yes of course," murmured Mohini "We met last six—or was it seven years ago?"

"When you invited me to play hide and seek with you...." said Habib.

Mohini blushed again "And you considered yourself far too grown-up for such frivolous games," she retorted: and they all laughed.

Then Mohini looked at her watch "Zori do you know, what time it is? It's eleven o'clock! I never realized it was so late. I must go now, as my mother will be waiting for me."

"Stay a little longer," said Habib "and let me offer you girls a drink. What about some orange squash or some *sherbat*? I have both."

"I really must be going," Mohini murmured.

"You can stay another fifteen minutes," said Zohra and she pulled her down on the sofa besides her. "After all there's a wedding in this house and you are supposed to stay here until late. Do give us some *sherbat*, Habib, I'm thirsty."

Habib poured out the drinks and handed them to the girls, "This is really an unsuitable drink for this cold weather," he said, "Next time you two honour me by a visit, give me due notice and I shall have coffee and cakes ready for you."

"Darling *Bhaiya*!" exclaimed Zohra, "You are the perfect brother. Do you know Mohini, he takes me out to the pictures and once he actually gave me tea at Lorange, in one of the private cubicles."

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"You are getting on Zori. The pardah seems to be disappearing slowly."

"Not so slowly either," said Zohra, "Now that I have a brother as an accomplice. You know, the first time I went out without a *burqah*, was just before you went to prison."

"Mohini" said Habib and then paused, "May I call you Mohini?"

"Of course. You always have called me that—*Bhaiya*," she said.

"Thank you. I was going to say that I envy you. You took part in the struggle last year and actually went to jail: while, I only read about it in the newspapers, though I wished with all my heart to be in it too."

"You could not help that as you were so far away. But never mind, you can take part in it next time."

"Next time—then you think there will be another struggle."

"The struggle never stopped. Although the movement was called off and the prisoners released, although Gandhiji went to London to the Second Round Table Conference, the Government repression did not stop. Now as you must have seen arrests and convictions have increased again."

"I once had hopes from this Round Table Conference?"

"So had I after the Ghandhi-Irwin Pact and when Gandhiji finally went to London. But, they kept on diminishing, and I'm not surprised at the result. Nothing has come of it and Gandhiji is coming home again a disappointed man."

"If only there had been a Hindu-Muslim settlement. Then, I think, we may have wrung something from their unwilling hands."

"You are right. We all long for a Hindu-Muslim settlement."

"One day, we read in the papers, that a settlement had been arrived at," said Zohra, "and then, it proved to be wrong and I was so dejected that I almost cried."

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"It's a pity that the Hindus and Muslims could not settle their differences even in London" said Habib. "I know of course that the Englishmen did their best to keep them divided, but our leaders should not have played into their hands. If the Congress and League had to come to terms at the Round Table, Britain would have had to give in to their demands."

"I am told that Gandhiji and the League leaders had come to terms," said Zohra, "but the Mahasabha and the Sikhs would not agree."

"Whatever happened, it was a tragedy."

"Let us hope, that there will be a settlement soon, " sighed Mohini, and she looked at her watch again. "I really must go now. Goodnight *Bhaiya*, and thank you for the *sherbat*."

After the girls had gone, Habib sat and smoked a cigarette, he was strangely elated and did not feel like going to sleep. He felt wide awake and restless and wanted to do something. But what could he do in Lahore at an hour nearing midnight? It was too late to visit any of his friends and there were no night-clubs in the town where he could go and have a drink. It was too cold to go out for a walk or a drive, besides, he did not feel like going for a walk or a drive alone. He picked up a book and tried to read, but he could not concentrate and his thoughts wandered. Eventually, he changed into his night clothes and went to bed. But, sleep was elusive and he lay awake for a long hour, thinking of the future, and of all the things he wanted to do. He was anxious to do well in his profession, and keen to take part in the political life of the country. "I must know more about the Congress and Congressmen in the Punjab, before I decide when and how I shall begin taking part in politics." He thought, "I shall go and see Pandit Sham Lal. He will be able to advise me, and I must meet Mohini again and discuss some things with her ...."

CHAPTER IX

It was the eve of Sughra's *Mehndi*—the last night of her girl-hood when *mehndi* or *henna* was to be put on her hands and feet for beauty and for luck.

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That morning the *Barat* or Bridegroom's party had arrived from Multan. Sheikh Nizamuddin and other members of his family, together with many of their friends, had received the *Barat* at the railway station, embraced the bridegroom's friends and relations in the traditional way, and placed garlands of flowers and tinsel round their necks. The *Barat* consisted of about 150 people and had come from Multan by special train. Forty cars were waiting outside the station to take them to a magnificent house not far from Nishat Manzil which a friend of Sheikh Nizamuddin had lent them for the wedding. The bridegroom's car was beautifully decorated with marigold and jasmine flowers: and five of the cars had curtains for there were twenty ladies with the *Barat* and all of them observed strict purdah.

The bridegroom's party settled down in the house allotted to them and all day a hired band played lively tunes on the lawn in front of the house, while friends and relations walked constantly to and fro between Nishat Manzil and the bridegroom's residence.

At about six o'clock in the evening, the ladies dressed themselves in silks and brocades, and were ready to go to Nishat Manzil for the traditional ceremony of the *Mehndi*. From time immemorial, this ceremony has been observed in India and in other eastern countries. For seven days during the period of *mayun* a scented paste made of herbs is rubbed on the bride's body, and she wears old clothes and remains in her room meeting only her own girl friends. On the last night of her girlhood, she is dressed in plain saffron-coloured clothes and her hands and feet are decorated with henna.

All day, the *doomnies*, who had come with the *Barat*, had prepared the henna, which they had brought with them from Multan. The powder was cleaned and placed in an earthenware vessel, water was poured over it and a thin paste prepared, this was allowed to stand for some time to bring out the colour, water being sprinkled on it every now and then. Finally, the paste was placed in silver trays and these were decorated with flowers and tinsel and candles. Sweets and nuts were placed in other silver trays and then all was ready.

Karimunnissa Begum, the mother of the bridegroom, was all excitement. This was a great occasion for her, for she was, at last, seeing the wedding of her only son. Her husband had died

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some years ago and as her son Mansur Hussain had been very young then and her two daughters not much older, she had applied for their vast estate to be looked after by the Court of Wards. Thus the Government had managed the estate and looked after the children's education until the boy was eighteen years old. He had studied at Aitchison College, a school at Lahore, which had been established for boys belonging to princely or aristocratic families and was generally known as the Chiefs' College, while the girls had gone to the same school as Sughra and Zohra for three years. Both the girls had married their cousins. There had been double-wedding when the elder was eighteen and the younger only sixteen years old. Three years later, Mansur, who was then seventeen and not very fond of his studies, had left school and a year after, he had taken over his estate upon the expiry of the guardianship of the Court of Wards. Since then, he had lived at Multan and looked after his lands with the help of his uncle. He had visited Lahore a few times during this period. Twice he had been to Delhi, one summer he had spent in Kashmir, and one in Quetta. Apart from these visits, he had lived in his home town enjoying all those pleasures, which were common among rich young men of aristocratic families.

Ever since he was a boy, Mansur had been engaged to his cousin Sughra, and always he had thought of her as his future wife. He must have seen her, when she was a little girl, but, try as he might, he could not recall what she looked like. Yet, he was eager to marry her, because everyone told him that she was sweet and pretty, and because she had always been associated in his mind with the thought of marriage, in fact, he could not imagine marrying anyone else. He was getting tired of living a bachelor's life and was keen on having a wife and children of his own, and he had wished to get married two years ago, but Sheikh Jamaluddin had insisted that they wait for Habib's return from England. Mansur's friends and relations had told him that he was marrying a very well-educated young girl, and sometimes his friends had teased him about this saying, she was better educated than he was, having passed her school final with credit, while he had failed to take his diploma. At such times he had felt somewhat apprehensive but his mother had reassured him saying, that Sughra was a simple and well-brought up girl and deeply religious. "She will settle down and be completely happy with home and husband ——and children. You need have no fear, my son." She had

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said, and so it was with a feeling of joy and pride that he had come to Lahore to take his bride home with him.

Sughra put on her saffron-coloured clothes, her eyes were bright and her cheeks were delicately flushed. This was the last night of her girlhood and joy and pain, eagerness and apprehension mingled in her heart. Her girl friends surrounded her and she could not help but catch their excitement, yet tears were not very far from her eyes: and her hands trembled, as she plaited her long long dark hair.

"Hurry up *Apa*," cried Zohra, as she rushed into the room, "The 'in-laws' are coming. They have left their house and should be here in a few minutes." Zohra was rosy with excitement as she ran from the room and her eyes and her curls seemed to keep pace with her lively movements. Like all the other girls she wore a saffron-coloured *dopatta* worked with silver, and she had on a new pair of ear-rings given to her by her father for the occasion.

The older ladies of the family and their friends were gathered in the ladies' sitting-room, where *doomnies* were playing the *dholki* and singing. One of the *doomnies* stood up and began a song which she accompanied by a few dance movements. She was no accomplished dancer but she wore the dancers' bells on her ankles and she made up in the vivacity of her expression and movements what she lacked in technique.

In the middle of the song, a maid rushed in to say "They are coming!" and instantly all was confusion. Guests, maids and *doomnies* rushed out into the courtyard. The *doomnies* being the most energetic, were ahead of everyone and they stood by the door ready to greet the "in-laws" with songs and words of abuse in order to tease them in the traditional way. Soon the courtyard was full of eager chattering women, and maids and mistresses mingled together, while some of the children began to cry.

Mehrunnissa Begam and her near relatives stood by the *doomnies* to receive the ladies of the *Barat*. The first car came to a standstill outside the door and Karimunnissa stepped out followed by her two daughters and a maid. Mehr moved forward to embrace her cousin and Zohra placed a garland round her neck,

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while the *doomnies* began to sing their teasing songs. There was some laughter and then Mehr said "Welcome, sister."

"Allah be praised for bringing me to your house on this auspicious day," said Karima.

Meanwhile, the other ladies of the *Barat* had arrived together with their maids and *doomnies* and they all streamed into the courtyard, the two sets of *doomnies* singing and shouting abuse at the top of their voices. More maids came throught the door carrying trays full of henna and sweets and nuts and the confusion was worse than ever.

Mehr and her sister, Anwari and Zobeidah conducted the ladies to the sitting-room, where Mehr's aged mother waited to receive them. They all paid their respects to her and were embraced in turn and made to sit down beside the big bolster cushion. Soon the room was full to over-flowing and many of the maids had to stand in the verandah. They crowded into the doors chattering and pushing each other eager to have a glimpse of the ceremony that was about to begin. There was keen rivalry between the two sets of *doomnies*, who sat in the centre of the room, each wishing to outshine the other in song and dance, each eager to receive the greater share of tips.

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"Bring in the bride," someone said, and Zohra went to her sister's room. Dressed in her simple saffron-coloured clothes, with no make-up on her face and her *dopatta* pulled low over it in a *ghungat* Sughra was ready for the ceremony. Supported by two of her friends, she walked into the sitting-room with her head bent and her eyes lowered. Karima stood up to receive her and kissed her on the top of her head, while Mansur's elder sister Husan Ara placed a garland of flowers round her neck. She was made to sit on the carpet beset of the bolster cushions, so that she may be able to lean on it, and the *doomnies* began to sing.

Four of the maids, that had come with the *Barat*, brought in the decorated trays of henna. They had lit the candles that decorated the henna and Zohra promptly put out the electric lights. Mansur's two sisters and three of their cousins took the trays from the maids and lifting them above their heads, began to dance in a ring in the centre of the room while the *doomnies* beat upon

the *dholki* and sang. They danced an ancient folk dance, and the beat of the drum and the song grew faster and faster and the dance wilder as the dancers kept pace with it. Finally, laughing and exhausted, they bent and placed the trays in front of the bride.

"*Bismilla Karo*, sister" said Mehr and Karima asked her sister to begin putting the henna on the bride's hands. The first to put the henna on is, usually, the mother-in-law, if she is not a widow. If she is a widow she asks some other woman of the family to begin the ceremony: for, the henna must be put on the bride's hands by seven happily-married women, in order to bring her good luck and happiness in her married life.

Karimunnissa's sister took hold of Sughra's right hand, and murmuring a prayer, put a little henna in the centre of the palm. She was followed by Mansur's two sisters and four other happily-married cousins.

"Congratulations," "Congratulations," was heard from all sides and Karima's face was beaming. Overcome with joy, she clasped Sughra in her arms and kissed her again on the top of her head.

"It is such ages since we saw her?" said Husan Ara, "Oh do let us see her face," and she attempted to lift the *dopatta* from Sughra's face, but Zohra caught her hand. "Oh, no you don't," she smiled "not until tomorrow."

"Ah well, she will belong to us soon" retorted Husan Ara.

Meanwhile the *Nain*—the chief maid, who conducts all the ceremonies—took hold of Sughra's hands and deftly applied the henna. In the centre of the palms, she made two small circles and around them, she sprinkled dots. Then she made delicate rings round the fingers and covered the nails.

"Dinner is served" announced one of the maids and Mehr let the old ladies into the next room, where several table-cloths were spread on the floor and a sumptuous dinner laid out.

Meanwhile, Sughra accompanied by her girl friends retired to her room. Here they began the lively game of putting stale

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henna from the bride's hands on each other's hands, for it is said, that this stale henna put on an unmarried girls hand leads to a speedy marriage for her. So, laughing and chattering and joking, each one of them took a little henna from Sughra's hands and tried to put it on the hand of some friend, who, in turn, tried to dodge or resist.

"Stop taking the henna from her hands" said the *Nain*, "Here take this," and she pushed a whole trayful of it towards the girls.

By now they were all rushing round the room and chasing each other. Soon hands, faces and clothes were smeered with henna amidst loud laughter and shrieks; and every now and then one or another of the girls retired to the bath room to have a wash. At least, exhausted, but cheerful, they sat down to dinner. After eating they helped each other to decorate their hands with henna and each had some suggestions to offer the other. Most of them put on just a little on one hand, in the shape of a crescent or a heart or some other design. Some just covered their nails, and those, who wished to put on more, waited until they went to bed when they would not need the use of their hands.

That night many of the girls slept at Nishat Manzil and the sound of whispered talk and muffled laughter could be heard until the small hours of the morning.

The *Nain* finished putting on the henna on Sughra's feet, "Sleep well my dear," she said and walked out of the room closing the door behind her—Sughra was alone in her room, alone with her thoughts and she sighed. The thick red curtains were drawn away from the window and through the panes of glass, she could see the bright stars of Orion moving slowly across the sky. She felt as though her room were a sealed chamber, into which the noise and throb of the outside world dared not enter tonight. Tonight was sacred for her alone, for her, who was to be a bride on the morrow. To be a bride and then a wife; to eat of the bitter-sweet fruit of the tree of knowledge. Her heart was full to the brim and something was choking her. Was it eagerness or reluctance? Did she want to leave her girlhood behind. To leave all that she was familiar with? She could hear the ticking of the clock on the mantle-shelf. Yes, yes: no, no! No, no: yes, yes! She jumped out of bed and put the clock away in a cupboard. Then, getting into bed again, turned

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on her other side but sleep would not come. Her past life passed before her mind's eye like a film moving on the screen. She was a little girl sitting on her grandfather's knee listening wide-eyed to tales of adventure and heroism. She was a school girl running a race. She was a maiden dressed in her first *sari* dreaming under a *peepal* tree of the day, when she would be a bride. They said one's past life flashed before one, when one was about to die: this too was a death. Each moment was a farewell. Death and Life: Life and love: love and death, where does one end and the other begin—?

A star was falling towards the rim of the sky like a golden tear, falling .... falling ..... and then it was no more. Soon the east would pale into the dawn: the sun would rise and with the sun, he would come to her. He would come to her, as he had always come in her dreams. Those dreams, that she could never recall. But, now, it was night and in the night, the stars were falling, seering its darkness with fire. In the night, she was standing upon a rock looking into the stillness of a pool —— soon she would jump into its velvety softness, and the water would swirl around her in eddies making larger and larger rings. Night and day dream and reality —— where does one end and the other begin —— ?

She was asleep.

CHAPTER X

Sughra's wedding day dawned bright and clear. From early morning, there was a hustle and a bustle at Nishat Manzil. The first maid awoke with the morning star and by the time the sun had crept over, the tree-tops in the garden and the dew on the grass had begun to glisten with red and gold, the maids, the mistresses and the girls were all running about excitedly. In the men's part of the house the confusion was almost as great. Sheikh Nizamuddin's young male relatives and many servants were busy decorating the *shamiana*, the hall of tents, that had been erected on the front lawn the evening before. In one half of the *shamiana* carpets were spread out and sofas and chairs arranged to make it look like a drawing-room. The other half was the dining-room and here long narrow dining-tables were arranged in rows, and chairs placed around them. The pillars that supported the *shamiana* were decorated with trailing vines and flowers while festoons of paper

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and tinsel decorated the roof. Near the kitchen was a large open space and here many temporary fire-places had been erected. On these were placed huge cauldrons and twenty cooks could be seen moving around among them stirring the contents with long spoons or tasting them appreciatively. A cousin of Sheikh Jamaluddin's was superintending the cooking, for the rice and the curries, the roasts and the *kababs* and the sweets must be just "right" for the feast for the pleasure of the guests and honour of the family.

In the ladies' part of the house, dining-tables were arranged in rows in the little walled-in lawn, for Sheikh Jamaluddin was determined to make all the feeding arrangements up-to-date. The maids could not always place the knives, the forks, and the spoons correctly and Zohra and her friends had to see to this. Three rooms in one wing of the house had been vacated for displaying the trousseau and the bride's furniture. One of the rooms had been furnished as a drawing-room, one as a dining-room, and one as a bedroom. On the sofas, chairs and beds were displayed her beautiful hundred and one dresses and a glass cabinet in the drawing-room contained all her jewels. In one corner of the dining-room were the kitchen utensils, and a cupboard in the bed-room was stocked with linen. For the girls, the most exciting part of the wedding was the dressing-up. For days they had been discussing their dresses and having them fitted and embroidered, and there was a great deal of friendly rivalry for each wanted to outshine the other in beauty and in smartness. Between Bilquis and Akhtari, however, the rivalry was not so friendly and there was continual tension between their mothers which was caught and aggravated by their maids. A few days before Chagan had reported to Anwari the fact that Zobeidah had ordered a new pair of earings for Akhtari and urged that a better pair be ordered for Bilquis. Upon Anwari's complaint, that they were too expensive, she had called them an "investment" from which great returns might be expected. Meanwhile, Nur had told her mistress the secret of Bilquis' pink lips and the box of powder that judiciously applied improved her sallow complexion out of all recognition. Zobeidah, however, had shrugged her shoulders contemptuously saying, that Akhtari had no need of such artificial aids to beauty.

The day before the wedding, Bilquis had disappeared for an hour to come back with her hair neatly arranged in waves, and it was whispered among the girls that she had been to a hair-dresser.

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Upon being questioned, however, she was indignant and denied the charge saying that a friend had taught her how to do her hair and, that the story about the hair-dresser had been spread around by Akhtari, who was jealous. Upon hearing this, Akhtari had gone to her mother and tearfully complained about Bilquis' remarks. Zobeidah had spoken to Anwari and hot words had been exchanged and it was with great difficulty that Mehr had pacified the two and restored the peace.

This morning, both Akhtari and Bilquis were busy giving a last look to their clothes. Akhtari had decided to dress in blue and gold, as this would emphasise her fair complexion and dark luscious hair, but, Bilquis was determined to stick to her favourite pink and silver, for this always lent colour to her sallow complexion. By ten o'clock all the ladies were dressed and ready and the girls in their bright silk and brocades were walking to and fro commenting upon each others' dresses and jewels. Their young happy faces, bright cheeks and dark sparkling eyes brought smiles of pleasure and appreciation to faces of the older ladies.

Karima went into Mansur's bed-room and passed her hand affectionately through his tousled hair. "Wake up my son," she said, "Congratulations on your wedding-day. May your mother's prayers bring you happiness and prosperity." Mansur opened his sleepy eyes and smiled at his mother. Just then, his sisters came in. "Wake up *Bhaiya*", they said "We are waiting to see you dressed up as a bridegroom."

"What time is it?" Mansur asked.

"Nine o'clock," replied his mother. "You have slept until late."

"And we let you" said Husan Ara, "for you must look your best today."

"O, *Bhaijan*," said Roshan Ara "I'm told, Sughra is lovely and am longing to see her. Aren't you?"

"Naturally. Now, you must run away and give me time to dress."

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"Yes we must go," said Karima "and I'll ask my maid to send your servants to you. Be ready by 10 o'clock, my son."

Mansur yawned and went into the bath-room to pour some cold water over his face. He felt tired and worn-out for his young cousins and friends had insisted upon celebrating the last evening of his bachelorhood and the usual dance and song party had lasted until the early hours of the morning. Two well-known dancing-girls had danced for them, and a famous singer had entertained them with her songs. Wine had flowed freely and he had drunk more than he should have. His friends having urged him on with jests and laughter saying that it was his last evening of freedom and he should make the most of it. Anyway, it had been a pleasant evening and he smiled at the thought of the mischievous sallies of one of the dancers, then he began to wonder, if married life would deprive him of all these diversions and almost involuntarily he sighed. Then he thought of his bride and cursed himself for being an unappreciative fool. Only the evening before one of his girl cousins had been telling him how sweet and lovely Sughra was. He began to think of her and to imagine what she looked like, and his excitement grew with his thoughts. By the time, he was dressed in his smart *Achkan* of gold brocade, he was flushed and happy and there was an eager look in his eyes.

His friends and relations were waiting for him in the drawing-room and, as he came in, congratulations were showered upon him. A servant brought in his turban of Benarasi cloth tied over a small gold cap with one end of it standing up as a smart *turah*, and his uncle placed it upon his head. Then a maid took him to the ladies' part of the house. Today, he was a bridegroom and none of his cousins kept purdah from him. They all surrounded him and the older ladies blessed him, while the young girls joked and giggled.

Husan Ara brought a beautiful *sehra* made of long rows of pearls and tinsel and this she tied round his head while the *doomnies* sang songs of praise. The rows of tinsel and pearls fell across his face and tears of joy came into Karima's eyes seeing her son dressed as a bridegroom.

"If only your father had been alive," she whispered and then she blessed him.

Husan Ara's little son aged four ran in. He was the best man and was dressed as a miniature bridegroom in gold *Achkan*

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and Benaras, turban with a small *sehra* hanging over his face. He caught hold of Mansur's hand "Come on uncle," he cried, "the horse is ready."

Mansur went through the private entrance and saw the white horse, he was to ride that day. It had been decorated with flowers and tinsel and covered with a cloth of gold-brocade upon which a gaily coloured saddle had been placed. His sisters came out and held the reins of the horse and before their brother mounted it, he smiled and gave each a hundred rupees, as is customary. The little best-man was placed behind him and he shouted and giggled as he clung on to his uncle's waist, while *doomnies* stood all round beating their drums and singing songs. At last the marriage procession was formed. First came the bandsmen in their red and black uniforms. These were followed by gaily dressed servants carrying sweets and the bridegroom's presents for the bride in silver trays and decorated boxes. And, then, in the midst of friends and relations, all of whom wore garlands, Mansur and his little best-man appeared mounted on the white horse. Four servants walked near the horse carrying a beautifully decorated palanqin, which was being taken to bring back the bride. After them came more friends and relations and the curtained cars containing the ladies brought up the rear. The bandsmen struck a lively march and the procession moved out of the house. As it entered the main road, spectators gathered on all sides and many of them joined the procession. Rose petals and coins were continually showered over the bridegroom by his uncles and cousins, and there was a mad scramble by the servants and beggars to pick up the money. Women appeared on the roofs of the nearby houses to watch the procession pass and many an old lady said a prayer for the future happiness of the bride and groom.

Nishat Manzil was only a few hundred yards away, yet the procession took half-an-hour to get there. As it entered the gates, the two bands massed on the front lawn began to play and the sound of this music mixing inharmoniously with that played by the bridegroom's party's band created bedlam.

In front of the porch and on both sides of the drive, the bride's relations and friends of the family were standing in rows with garlands in their hands. They garlanded and embraced the bridegroom and his party, and conducted them into the house. Meanwhile, many of the women had gathered on the roof and others

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were peeping through doors and windows watching the whole ceremony. Sughra had been led to a secluded window by her friends so that she may watch her *Barat* come in, but she kept her head bent as was only proper and never raised her eyes to see the groom although her friends urged her to look up.

She had waked up very early that morning and had lain quietly in her bed, while her thoughts had wandered once again to the man she was to marry. 'Mansur' she had softly said to herself 'Mansuri' and before her mind's eye had appeared a tall and manly figure like the knights of old. Soon her maids had come to disturb her reverie. They had rubbed her body with scented herbs until her skin was soft and fragrant. They had bathed her, washed and dried her hair and then rubbed pure jasmine oil into it. She was dressed once again in her saffron garments for she had to await the arrival of her *Barat* which would bring her bridal robes and her sisters-in-law, who would dress her up as a bride. She had sat quietly in her room, but her heart had not been quiet within her and now she was asked to look upon him.

"What a pity, one cannot see his face, for the *sehra* covers it," said one of her friends and Sughra walked back to her room disappointed, but with her eyes still modestly lowered.

Very soon Husan Ara and Roshan Ara came to her with a suit-case containing her red and gold bridal dress and the jewels her bridegroom was giving her. She felt shy and awkward and the sisters-in-law not wishing to embarrass her, asked Zohra to take her into the bathroom to put on the clothes. Then Husan Ara brought out a box of powder and some lipstick.

"Let me put a little on your face," she said "a bride looks better with a little make-up on."

"Here, let me do it" said Zohra gaily, and she deftly powdered Sughra's face and painted her lips.

"Now for the collyrium. You put it in your eyes yourself *Apa*," and she handed an ivory bottle to Sughra. Then she combed her sister's hair and braided it with tasselled braids of gold and finally sprinkled powdered gold over it.

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"She's ready for the jewels. Wait a minute, do you think she needs some rouge on her cheeks ?"

"Just a little," replied Husan Ara "She's flushed, but a little more colour won't do her any harm."

"There," Zohra dabbed on the rouge. "Ah she looks wonderful", exclaimed her sisters-in-law.

Roshan Ara opened the boxes of jewels and Zohra gasped at their magnificence. "She cannot possibly wear all those" she said.

"For today, let her wear the diamond set and the old-fashioned jewellery of gold " said Husan Ara "and the rest can be locked up."

At last Sughra was ready. Her arms were heavy with bangles and bracelets of diamonds and emeralds and gold, and her neck almost bent under the weight of a collar of diamonds and emeralds and three necklaces one of diamonds and two of gold. Long ear-rings of old Moghul design hung from her ears and in the middle of her forehead hung a pendant-shaped like a star and crescent, studed with emeralds and diamonds with a fringe of large pearls. On her feet were delicate anklets and her finger were covered with rings.

Both her dress and her jewels were magnificent. Sughra made a beautiful bride and the hearts of her sisters-in-law swelled with pride, as they looked at her and murmured that they would love to show her off to their relations at Multan.

Sughra sat down on the carpet and leant against a bolster cushion. Just then, her mother entered "Are you ready?" she asked and then pulled the *dopatta* low over her face. "Your father is just coming with the witnesses."

Sughra's heart began to thump painfully and her eyes were clouded with a haze of tears. She saw her father come in with some men and she never knew how many for the room seemed to be revolving around her. Then, through the veil of her *dopatta*, she saw Habib standing in the doorway and, as he smiled at her, she felt reassured and the unsteady world seemed to stand still once again.

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One of the men began to speak, "Sughra Begum daughter of Sheikh Jamaluddin of Lahore, do you accept Sheikh Mansur Hussain son of the late Sheikh Mahboob Hussain of Multan as your lawful wedded husband fixing your dower at a sum of rupees fifty thousand?"

She was silent for her throat was dry and her lips refused to move. Then she felt her father's hand on her head "Say 'yes' daugher," he said gently. And, in a voice scarcely audible, she said "I accept." Once again, the same question was asked and once again, she made the same reply. And then uncontrollable tears began to flow from her eyes, as the question was repeated for a third time, and unable to speak because of the painful lump in her throat she merely nodded her head.

Mansur sat among his friends and relations in the drawing-room reserved for the men. He felt a pleasant glow at being the centre of attraction and his face was flushed and happy. Sheikh Nizamuddin sat next to him and kept up a steady flow of conversation with his uncle, who sat on his other side, and who was acting as his father on this important occasion.

"There they are," said Sheikh Nizamuddin as the door opened and Jamaluddin and Habib entered with three men. They came up to the centre of the room and sat down in a row in front of Mansur. The talking and the laughter stopped and there was silence in the room for the marriage ceremony was about to begin. In a slow and sonorous voice the white-beared Qazi began: "In the name of Allah the most Beneficent, the most Merciful" he said, and recited a verse from the Holy Quran, then, "Mansur Hussain son of the late Sheikh Mahboob Hussain of Multan, do you accept Sughra Begum, the daughter of Sheikh Jamaluddin of Lahore, as your lawful wedded wife fixing the sum of rupees fifty thousand as her dower?"

Three times the all important question was asked and three times Mansur replied "I accept."

The Qazi recited another verse from the Holy Quran and then lifted up his hands in prayer. Upon this, all those, who were present, likewise lifted up their hands to pray.

"O, Thou the Most Merciful and Forgiving, bless this young couple. Give them happiness and prosperity and fruitfulness, and

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a lasting love, and above all, give them the gift of Faith, so that they may serve Thee and their fellowmen, and their lives may be spent in joyful usefulness, Amen."

"Amen" echoed the whole assembly. "Congratulations," said Sheikh Nizamuddin to Mansur's uncle and then everyone began to shower congratulations upon Mansur and upon each other.

Meanwhile, the servants brought trays full of dried dates and sugar balls and these were showered upon the guests, so that they may sweeten their mouths on this auspicious occasion.

One of maids ran up to Karimunnissa Begam who sat among the ladies in the ladies' sitting-room. "Congratulations" she cried, "the *Nikah* has been performed!" Karimunnissa beamed with happiness saying "Praise be to Allah." and embraced Mehr, the cry of "Congratulations" was taken up by all the ladies present. "Bring in the bride" said a voice and immediately other voices echoed the demand.

A door on one side of the room opened and, as she came in, even the chattering voices were hushed for a moment. Dressed in her red and gold garments, supported on either side by Zohra and Akhtari and followed by all her girl friends, she slowly walked towards the centre of the room, and after the first momentary hush, the babel of voices broke-out with fresh vigour and there was a hurried rush towards the bride. "Make way, Make way" cried the escorting girls, as they pushed their way through the excited faces that crowded around them. At last, she was seated against the bolster cushions placed in the centre of the back wall and Mehr and Karima sat on either side of her. The crowd of women and girls stood around in a packed semi-circle and there was so much pushing from those at the back that some girls nearly fell over the bride. "Please, please don't push", "cried Zohra and if those in front would only sit down then everyone would be able to see." "Sit down, please sit down," shouted several voices and in a few minutes almost everyone was again seated on the ground and some order had been restored in the room.

Sughra was feeling hot and dazed and there were beads of sweat upon her brow. Her face was still veiled by her *dopatta*, yet she could not raise her eyes for they were heavy with tears.

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"Let us look upon her face," said Husan Ara and placed a hand upon her *dopatta* to draw it back: but Mehr gently stopped her. "Not yet child," she said, "there will be time enough when she goes to your house."

Meanwhile one of the aunts had taken hold of Sughra's hand and raised her *dopatta* a few inches to show-off the jewels on her arm and upon her breast to the spectators. She not only told them what was given by who, but also gave them a list of the jewels she was not wearing and many a woman whispered 'lucky girl' and many a girl sighed with envy.

"Lunch is served," announced Anwari and there was a general movement towards the doors.

A gaily-coloured *shamiana* was put up in the back lawn and under it were rows and rows of tables and chairs. Huge dishes of hot steaming rice, curries and roasts and *kababs* and earthen-ware plates filled with the special rice-and-milk wedding-sweet awaited the guests while girls and maids stood around to serve them. Soon every chair was occupied and the women and children eyed the tasty foods appreciatively. "Please begin sisters," said Mehr, who sat with Karima at the head of the central table, and hundreds of hands were eagerly stretched forth for the dishes.

Only a few of her girl-friends remained with Sughra and she raised her *dopatta* a little so as to be able to breathe somewhat more freely. One of the girls brought a dainty tray of food and placed it before her, but Sughra would not eat. "Please, please take it away," she said, "I really could not swallow anything". "Let us take you to your room then," suggested one of her friends "and we can all have our food there, while you have a little rest."

"That's a good idea," said another and they all went into Sughra's room.

As the guests finished their meal, they trickled back into the sitting-room in little groups and by three o'clock the room was full again.

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"The bridegroom is coming," cried a young maid as one of the doors leading to the courtyard opened and Mansur walked in, followed by Habib. Instantly everyone tried to stand up again, but Mehr stood up and asked them to remain seated and she and Karima went forward to receive the groom. They made him sit down against the bolster cushions and sent for the bride. Sughra was brought in by her girl-friends and her feet trembled as she moved towards Mansur and sat down beside him.

"Sister," said Karima to Mehr "Let us have the *Arsi-Mashaf* and let them look upon each other. Zohra, child, bring the Holy Book and the mirror."

Three girls walked up to the bride and groom. One held a thick red and gold shawl, one a mirror set in a carved wood and ivory frame and the third had a copy of the Holy Quran in a brocade case, which she held above the heads of the others.

The shawl was spread over the heads of the bride and groom and the mirror placed between them. Then Mehr raised the shawl, reverently opened the Holy Book and said "Read!" Mansur read a verse, Mehr gently lifted his *sehra* of flowers and tinsel from off his face, and pulled Sughra's *dopatta* away from hers: then dropping the red-shawl she moved away from them. "Look upon each other my children," she said, "and may Allah bless you both."

There was a hush in the room, here and there some girls giggled and some voices whispered, but almost all were silent for their hearts went out to the girl and the man, who were to be partners for life, and who looked upon each other for the first time.

Mansur bent his head. His heart was beating painfully. At this last moment, he was even prepared to be disappointed: a strong dread seemed to hold him and an ever stronger eagerness to push him forward as he bent towards the mirror. Then, in the glassy pool a reflected vision of loveliness appeared before him like a dream. He took a deep breath and shuddered, but even he did not know then that he had fallen in love with his wife.

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Sughra bent her head, but try as she might, she could not raise her heavy lids. A strange shyness seemed to have overtaken her. The whole world had dropped away. The hushed voices came as if from a distance. Only loud and clear her heart throbbed. "Now, now! now!" Yet she could not raise her eyes.

"*Bhaijan*," she heard Zohra's voice, "Say 'O my wife I'm thy slave; open thine eyes'." Then a man's voice repeated the words. She almost drew back, because never had a strange man spoken so close to her before. But this was her husband, her husband —— "I'm thy slave, open thine eyes" said the voice again. Slowly, she raised her lids, while a sweet smile played upon her lips and expectation and reluctance mingled as she looked into the mirror.

A head, a turban, a *sehra* were all blurred, wavering before her eyes and she could not see clearly. Then she clutched the mirror with both hands and her eyes suddenly wide open looked deep into it. A fair heavy face looked eagerly back at her. A new face, a stranger's face: but he was her husband! This was her husband, but he was a stranger .... Then the fingers that clutched the mirror relaxed, her hot breath grew cooler and her heart seemed to be sinking within her like a stone in the water .... and the smile on her lips had turned to a sigh.

In a daze, she saw the red shawl taken away while her mother lowered her *dopatta* again. In a daze, she saw her relatives come forward to give money and sovereigns to Mansur, who looked happily around him. Today, he was the bridegroom and no woman was veiled before him.

"*Bhaijan* where is your shoe," cried Zohra mischievously.

"This little minx has hidden it," said Habib at his elbow "and you'll have to pay for it, you know."

Mansur smiled and brought out three hundred-rupee notes. "Here you are little sister. This is for all of you," and the girls giggled as Zohra handed him back his shoe.

"Purdah, purdah", shouted the maids, and some of the women left the room while others veiled their faces with their *dopattas*: as Sheikh Nizamuddin and Sheikh Jamaluddin came in.

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"O, my father, why must thou send me away" sang the *doomnies* and Jamaluddin wiped away a tear as he placed his arm round Sughra's shoulder. "Time to go my daughter," he said sadly and Sughra clung to him and sobbed bitterly on his shoulder, while Habib brought her thick red shawl and wrapped it round her.

"Is there no room in thy house for me, O my brother:" wailed the *doomnies* and Sughra wept more bitterly.

"Stop this wailing," said Sheikh Nizamuddin, "and pray for her!" Thereupon all, who stood there, raised their hands to pray and whispered 'Amen' after each verse as the *doomnies* chanted a prayer.

"Come, my daughter" said Sheikh Nizamuddin, as he led Sughra out of the room, "go happily to your home, and may Allah bless you."

Accompanied by Mehr, whose eyes were red with weeping and followed by the rest, they slowly walked down the steps, into the little lawn and up to the private gate in the outer-wall.

At the gate, Sughra clung to her mother and would not let her go and her pitiful sobs brought tears to eyes of all who were present. Sheikh Jamaluddin was weeping openly by now and even his stern father felt a tear trickle down his cheek. It was hard to let her go.

"Help her into the palanquin," he said to Habib and then turned to Mansur "Take your bride home, my son."

The bridal palanquin decorated with jasmine and marigold stood outside the gate and the bridegroom's horse was just behind it. Anwari held the Holy Quran above the heads of the bride and the groom as they passed through and Habib helped his sister into the palanquin and Mansur mounted his horse. The bridal band began to play and the procession began to move.

"Oh! my father why dost thou send me away.

Oh! my brother hast thou no room in thy house for me?"

Wailed the *doomnies* again, as the palanquin moved away from the gate and Sughra began her journey to her new home.

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CHAPTER XI

"Where are you going to, my pretty maid?" laughed Habib, "All dressed up in cream and lemon, with flowers in your hair, collyrium in your eyes and—let me look closely—yes, with lipstick on your lips?"

"Don't I look nice?" Zohra made a face at him.

"You make a perfect monkey," he tweaked her ear, "but what is the festive occasion?"

"You ignorant man! Don't you know that it is *Basant* today, the festival of Spring? Have you not seen the kites in the sky?"

"Of course, I should have known. I wish, I had remembered to get half-a-dozen kites and some string. It would have been pleasant to stand on the roof and make a few tangles."

"You were quite a champion once. I still remember the *Basant* before you went to England. You stood on the roof for hours and made tangle after tangle cutting the strings of innumerable kites while Sughra, I and a host of other children shrieked encouragement."

"Of course, I remember. Really I must ask one of the servants to go over and buy me a couple of kites and fly them for old times' sake."

"Do: and my girl-friends and I will watch the progress of your kites from the purdah lawn."

"Your girl-friends?"

"Yes. Some of them are coming to tea."

"Hence the dressing-up?"

"Hence the dressing-up!"

"Who's coming?"

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"Surrayya, Najma, Lakshmi, Rajindar, Iqbal and Mohini."

"Mohini too?"

"Of course, she's my dearest friend."

"She has not been to see you for a long time."

"How could she? As you know her father and her brother-in-law have been arrested again. The poor girl has hardly left the house for days."

"She must be doing some political work too."

"She's doing some work, but is not taking such an active part as she used to. She cannot afford to be arrested again. Her health will not permit it."

"But she looks perfectly well."

"So she is, but, the doctor says, she must not have another break-down and must be very careful for a year or so, or it might be serious."

"I see. Well, little one, run away to your tea party. I only wish I could join you."

"*Bhaijan* I have an idea. You would like to meet my friends, wouldn't you?"

"Naturally, but most of them are in purdah, are they not?"

"Only Najma and Iqbal: and I do want you to meet Surrayya."

"Why?"

"Oh, because —— just because she's my friend. When Najma and Iqbal are gone, I'll come and call you."

"On one condition."

"Yes?"

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"That you keep Mohini back, and —— and, of course, Rajindar too. I would like to have an opportunity of talking to them."

"Because they are both interested in politics?"

"Yes, yes, for that reason, of course."

"All right then: and now are you going to fly your kites?"

"No I don't think, I will."

"Why?"

"I've changed my mind. I'll have tea quietly in my room and wait for you to call me."

"Heavens! Look at the time? It's half-past four. They'll be here any moment. I must fly," she ran down the courtyard, her lemon-coloured *dopatta* fluttering behind her like a pair of wings and Habib watched her with a smile.

He sat down in an easy chair and lit a cigarette. It had been a cold February and for the last two days they had been having light showers of rain. Today was bright and clear, but a cold wind was blowing and Habib had told the servant to light a log-fire in the grate. He watched the purple and gold flames as they danced in flickering loveliness and his thoughts went back to Sughra's wedding day, when he had accompanied the bridegroom to the ladies' gathering. It was Zohra, who had made the suggestion that he accompany Mansur "So that you may see all the pretty girls, and no one will notice you on that day, they'll all be too busy looking at the bridegroom," she had said. "But the purdah ladies might not like it," he had protested. "Phoof! no one minds on a wedding-day. Iqbal's brother got married two weeks ago and a couple of men came into the ladies room with him and no one minded." And so, he had strolled in behind Mansur and, while one or two of the ladies had veiled their faces with their *dopattas*, no one had seemed to object to their presence. He had looked around at the sea of faces and some of them must have been pretty, but he did not remember: because all the time he had seen only one face laughing up at him with liquid eyes. Mohini, winsome! — Yes, it was a winsome face, and he wanted to see it again. He wanted to meet

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the girl, to talk to her and to watch .... watch the flames flare up in her eyes as she spoke of the freedom, for which she had fought so valiantly.

In the ladies' sitting room, the girls were chattering merrily round the tea table.

"My father has actually consented to my going abroad after I've taken my degree here," Rajindar told them.

"You are a lucky girl!" they all exclaimed.

"Where will you go?" asked Zohra.

"To Oxford, I hope."

"I wish, oh, how I wish, that I could come with you!"

"Some people have all the luck!" said Najma and her voice was bitter "while others like myself sometimes wish that they were dead."

"Why Najma," said Surrayya "what are you being so tragic about?"

"For the last half hour, I've been wondering, why you are so sad." Mohini got up from her seat and went and sat near Najma. "What has happened dear?"

Najma brought forth her left hand which she had concealed in her *dopatta* and flung it out before them.

"This!" she exclaimed. On her third finger flashed a magnificent diamond ring.

"You are engaged!"

"You never told us!"

"Who is the man?"

"When did it happen?"

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"Yes, I am engaged, and I wish that I were dead!"

"Don't you like him?"

"Who is it?"

"Is he old and ugly?"

"Why has it made you so unhappy?"

They all crowded round her, all talking at the same time, while the tears rolled down her cheeks.

"You are upsetting the girl," said Rajindar. "Crowding round her like this and all talking at once. Give her a chance to tell us. Calm yourself Najma. There, that's better. Sit down Zohra and you too Lakshmi. That's right. Now, Najma tell us all about it."

"It began some weeks ago. I could see that whispering and congratulations were going on, but I did not know that they concerned me until my little brother told me that they were planning to get me engaged to Nasiruddin, son of old Nawab Viqaruddin."

"But he must be thirty-five!" exclaimed Iqbal, "And a widower!"

"He's not even educated!" cried Zohra.

The others had not heard of him and they showered questions upon Zohra and Iqbal.

"Again, you are all talking at once," said Rajindar quietly. "Let Najma tell us in her own way. Go on Najma."

"Naturally, I was horror-struck, just as you are. My brother also told me that Nasiruddin was about thirty-five and a widower with no children. He said, that he was not well-educated, but had liberal ideas and wanted an educated wife .... The next day, my mother came and told me that they had decided upon the engagement. I tried to protest, but she merely said that father

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and she were in a better position to judge my chances of happiness than, an ignorant girl, who knew nothing of the world.... When I began to cry, she became angry and left the room saying that I was an ungrateful girl and that any other girl would have jumped at such a chance!" she paused.

"What did you do then?" asked Zohra.

"I wanted to come over to talk to you, but that very evening his sisters and other ladies of his family arrived, bringing the ring and the dress and all the other engagement things. I was desperate. If only my elder brother had not been abroad, he might have helped me, but as it was, I was friendless and alone. At last I decided to appeal to my father."

"That was a good idea."

"Surely, he would stand by you."

"He is said to be such a good and enlightened man."

Najma laughed hysterically. "These were just the thoughts that entered my head," she said; "also, I knew, that he was very fond of me and so I went to him ——" she paused again.

"Go on."

"What happened then?"

"What did he say?" The girls questioned excitedly.

"He patted my hair and kissed my forehead. He told me not to worry .... He brought forth all the platitudes about thinking only of my happiness, etc., etc. .... In fact, he gave me what he thought, was a pleasant little lecture on parents and children: and told me to dry my tears, and prophesied that I would be very happy as Begum Nasiruddin."

"What did you say then?"

"I told him that I did not know the man .... that I did not love him and .... and, that I believed that marriage should be based on mutual love and respect."

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"Well done."

"Good for you Najma."

"That was the right attitude."

"What did he say then?"

"He was taken aback, and I could see that he was annoyed; but he spoke in a calm and severe voice and gave me another lecture on the love that grows after marriage and how a dutiful wife can win and retain the affections of her husband .... By now, my courage seemed to be ebbing out, but I pulled myself together, and told him that from what I had heard, I did not think, I could love or respect Nawabzada Nasiruddin or be a dutiful wife to him .... Upon this, he became very angry, ordered me to my room and said, I was a stupid girl who had read too many novels: and that I would soon come to my senses when I was face to face with the responsibilities of life!"

"Such injustice, and he a judge of the High Court!" cried Zohra.

"He did nothing to stop the engagement?" asked Lakshmi.

"Of course not. That went on as planned. My aunt came and dressed me up in pink and gold. My mother led me to the drawing-room and his sister put on the ring."

"You should have protested," said Rajindar.

"Think of the poor girl's difficulties," cried Iqbal, "she was friendless and alone."

"You should have sent for me." said Zohra.

"And what could you have done?" asked Iqbal. "Nothing, and what could any one or all of us have done? Nothing! Let us be realistic."

For a few minutes, they were all silent, then Mohini said quietly, "Let us think of some way of helping her."

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"We can all go and speak to her mother," suggested Zohra.

"That will only annoy her father," said Iqbal.

"And she might even stop Najma's coming here," added Lakshmi.

"We must do something!" Zohra said emphatically.

"I have an idea," said Surrayya. "You remember old Miss Robinson of Q —— school? She was very fond of Najma and knows her father well. What, if Najma were to ask her to speak to the Judge Sahib? She might be able to persuade him to give up the idea of this marriage."

"A very good idea," said Rajindar "the old girl is very much interested in her ex-pupils and has quite an influence on the parents. Better go to her at once, Najma."

"She's sure to help you," added Lakshmi, but Zohra was not so certain. "Wonder?" She whispered under her breath remembering a certain day when Miss Robinson had complained about her conduct to her father.

Meanwhile Habib, strangely impatient, left his room to take a walk in the garden. Cold as it was, the first signs of Spring were beginning to appear. The fruit-trees were covered with pink and white blossoms, their eager beauty a little damaged by the rain, but their few leaves washed, a shining green. The sun cast its last pools of deep gold on the lawn and in the flower-beds, the first few pansies nestled like butterflies. Two gardeners were busy with a lawn-mower and seeing their lemon coloured turbans, he remembered, that it was *Basant* day, the herald of Spring. Before his mind's eye, flashed field upon field of yellow mustard, stretching towards the far horizon, the delicate heads of the flowers nodding in the breeze and he began to hum a village-folk song.

See the yellow mustard flower
Swaying in the spring-time breeze
Hear at eve the fairy whispers
In the magic *peepal* trees.

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'He must pay a visit to Multan,' he thought, 'and to the lands.' He (begon) to feel once more the unbroken peace of the fields, to talk with the village elders and to go out hunting with the young lads, to sit in the evening beneath the old *peepal* tree that stood on the lawn of their village home, smoking a *hooka* or drinking sugarcane juice and listening to the simple tales of the villagers, while, from the distance, came the gay sound of a flute or the sad tune of a song:

All the world is full of gladness
Birds and beasts and flowers are gay
Only in my heart is sadness
For my love is far away.

But, there was no sadness in his heart this day, and he smiled as he watched the birds hopping upon the branches of the rose bush and brown and yellow bees lingering upon the blossoms.

"*Bhaijan, Bhaijan*! Where are you?" It was Zohra's voice.

"Coming, little one" he shouted and walked back towards the house.

Most of Zohra's friends had gone and only Surrayya and Mohini were left in the sitting-room. "I'm sorry Rajindar could not stay," Zohra told Habib as she led him into the room, "but you must meet Surrayya. Surrayya! this is my brother, Habib. Mohini, you of course, know him."

"Yes of course," said Mohini. "Won't you sit down, *Bhaijan*, and let me give you a cup of tea?"

"I've already had my tea."

"Have another cup," she smiled at him, "and we shall keep you company."

"In that case I will, thank you."

Eversince his return from Europe, Habib had been meeting only his men friends. For one, who had spent five years away from India and during that period mixed as freely with women as with men, there was something unnatural in the segregation of the

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sexes that he found in his home town. He had felt this lack of women's company, and it was with a sigh of pleasure that he took his cup of tea, relaxed in his chair, and began to talk to these two intelligent girls.

Inevitably, their talk turned to the political situation. "The government has been too cunning for us," said Mohini , "While Gandhiji was still in London and the Round Table talks were going on, they began their repression. There were hundreds of arrests and Gandhiji came home to find the situation completely changed."

"Nehru's arrest brought the breaking-point," added Surrayya.

"Quite. But, what do you think will happen now?" asked Habib.

"A strong and swift movement is on, but the repression is stronger and swifter, " said Mohini sadly.

"You know Mohini," said Surrayya, "it is the lack of Hindu-Muslim settlement that worries me."

"As it worries all thinking people," said Habib.

"But thousands of Muslims have gone to jail," protested Mohini.

"Of course," said Surrayya "and the sympathies of many others are with the movement, but we cannot deny that it is not like 1919 when Hindus and Muslims fought shoulder to shoulder everwhere. Today, the majority of Muslims are apathetic and the break-down of the unity talks in London was a great blow to all of us."

"Oh, I felt so ashamed," said Mohini "that we should quarrel before those foreigners and show our disunity to the world."

"Why, oh, why can we not have a settlement?" cried Zohra.

A silence fell upon them all, a silence that was full of sadness. Then Surrayya sighed and looked at her watch. "I must be going" she said "Can you send a servant to call a *tonga*, Zohra?"

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"You must not go in a *tonga*," said Zohra, "Habib can drop you home in his car. Can't you *Bhaijan*?"

Habib looked at Mohini, "What about you?" he asked.

"That's right," said Zohra "You can drop them both. I would come with you, but Auntie and her family are coming to dinner and mother will be annoyed, if I'm not here to receive them."

Surrayya's house was on Davis Road and that being nearer than "Shanti Niwas" they dropped her first. Then Habib turned to Mohini "which is the shorter way to your house," he asked, "down the Mall or through the Gardens?"

"They are both the same," she replied.

"Then we'll go through the gardens," he said and driving very slowly, he turned the car into the Lawrence Gardens.

There were no lights on the roads in the garden and the moonlight reigned alone. "How amazingly the moonlight softens the harsh outline of things until they blend in silver loveliness," he said, as they passed Montgomery Hall, a large and ugly building, now ghostly and graceful in the light of the moon.

"Yet, moonlight is so cold. I prefer the warm mystery of the starry night, when the darkness gives brilliance to the stars and the stars lend depth to the darkness," there was a ringing quality in her voice and as he turned to look at her, it seemed to him that her eyes held the depth and the brilliance of the night. They were passing by the mound in the gardens and for a moment the heavy fragrance of the lady-of-the-night enveloped them like a cloud. She drew a deep breath and continued, "I think, I never loved the stars so well as when I looked at them from my prison-window night after night last year."

The car came out of the gardens and went slowly down Mozang Road. The road lights cast an orange glow that held the moonlight away from them.

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"And what did you think about lying there in your prison cell and looking at the stars?" he asked. A car passed dangerously close to them and its driver hooted the horn.

"Take care," she said.

"What did you think about, Mohini?" he insisted.

"What did I think about? Oh a million things." Her voice was different now, and he felt as if she were far away from him, when a moment before she had been so near. They turned down a side road and for a few minutes, he drove in silence. Then, as they entered the drive that led to Shanti Niwas, he asked, "When are you coming to see us again?"

"In a week or two," she replied casually, or so it seemed to him.

"Months ago you and Zohra promised to come and have coffee and cakes with me, and you have not fulfilled that promise, you know."

"Did we promise?" she smiled.

"Oh yes, and I brought a new tin of coffee and ordered fresh cakes from Lorangs every day —— hoping."

"What extravagance," she said gaily, "I don't believe you, and one of these days, we'll pay you a surprise visit and you will have nothing to offer us."

"Just try," he said, as the car drove into the porch and Mohini jumped out.

"Thanks ever so much for dropping me *Bhaijan*," she said, "Goodnight!" And a moment later, she had run up the steps and into the house. And he looked a long moment at the closed door, and then drove away in his car.

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CHAPTER XII

Sughra sat by the window looking at the slow sunset. The sun had moved towards the horizon in a blaze of red and gold, but its outline could not yet be seen through the blinding light. Far above, a small round cloud sailed across the sky dizzy with a borrowed glow of amber and rose: while, still further, the soft white moon floated in the blue like a blown feather. A tiny kite was straining to reach the moon, pulling at its unseen string. By and by, another kite appeared. The two strings crossed and there was a tangle. For a few minutes, the kites raced madly towards the sunset. Then, the string of one of them was cut and it went floating away like a bird that had gained its freedom, while the other taut and anxious, more strained on its string, still striving to reach the moon.

Sughra sighed and looked at the sun again. It was poised above the horizon, a trembling ball of light, as though it were almost afraid to dip into the blue. Suddenly, the rim dropped into the haze, and as she watched, the eager mists seemed to rise and embrace its fire, which trembling no longer plunged deeper and deeper into the blue, till only a crescent of light remained.

Meanwhile, the moon catching fire bent towards the single star that had appeared in the deep green of the sky, a tiny spot of light fearful at first, but growing bolder as the sun disappeared.

The moon and the star, together once again, and yet they failed to thrill her as they had done through many years that had gone before. She turned away from the window and put on the light. Then jumping off the bed, walked restlessly round the room. Her eyes fell on a book-shelf filled with books that had come as wedding-presents. Picking up one at random, she sat on her bed again and began to read "Hollow Men" by T. S. Eliot. She had never quite understood what Eliot was trying to say. Perhaps her knowledge of English was not good enough, or, perhaps she had no taste for modern poetry, but she opened the book and began to read, determined to get away from her thoughts.

Between the idea and the reality.
Falls the shadow.

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She saw herself dressed in red and gold painted and bejewelled, a bride waiting in her bridal chamber. Trembling and fearful, yet eager too. Waiting for the old life to end and the new to begin, for the love and understanding of the man who was to be her guide. And then —— ? Ah, he might have waited too. Waited until she knew him better, until she was accustomed to her strange home and her fresh surroundings. But he had showered his ardour upon her, while he was still a stranger and she had turned her face to the wall and her heart had been cold within her. Once she had imagined the slow growth of intimacy through days and weeks of tenderness, while her personality unfolded itself before him like the gentle blossoming of a flower. Once she had imagined the comrade and the friend, who would gradually become the lover and the husband —— but

> Between the moment and the spasm
> Falls the shadow.

And the husband was there, but the ghost of the friend had faded, had gone for-ever through the slow days that followed, while Multan and this house seemed to close around her shutting the world away. The husband was there, eager and passionate, obviously proud of his pretty wife and anxious to show her off to his relations. Showering presents upon her and smothering her with constant attention. Nothing was good enough for her and a host of servants were always ready to do her bidding. She was never left alone. When her husband was not with her, her mother-in-law came and chattered about a hundred trivialities, or relations came to call. And apart from these, there were always the maids with their sharp eyes and their ready tongues. She was never alone and her thoughts were struggling within her like caged birds, while she ached for the cool solitude of the garden at home.

And Mansur, large and good-natured, taking everything, wife, relations and prosperity for granted, was always smiling. What did he think about? What went on behind that heavy face with its continual smile? Or did he think at all? She sometimes wondered, for he was a man of few words. Often she tried to talk to him, but she never knew what to say for he did not appear to be interested in anything, save in her, in her clothes and her beauty. Once she had tried to read the newspaper to him, but after a few minutes, he had impatiently snatched it away from her,

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thrown it out of the window and caught her in his arms. And so the days passed by, each very like the other and she looked at the calendar again and again scarcely believing that only two months had gone by, since she came to Multan.

Life is very long.

She threw the book away and fell down upon her face sobbing while the moon and the stars cast a cold light upon her restless hair.

Outside the twilight faded later darkness and lights began to appear in the massed houses of the city, of which Mansur's house was a part. It lay on one of the outer fringes, large and solid towering above the other houses around it, as though the builders had sought to impress the wealth and prominence of the family upon the people. It had grown with the years, just as the family had grown each succeeding generation, adding a room or two according to its own taste, and now its three stories sprawled in a haphazard fashion.

"Sughra, Sughra, where are you," it was her mother-in-law's voice. Sughra jumped off the bed hastily, put out the light and wiped her eyes.

"Where is the young Begum Sahiba?" She heard Karima ask the little maid, who sat at the door.

"She has a headache and is lying down. She said, she wanted to be alone," replied the maid and kept on sitting valiantly in front of the door for Sughra Bibi, whom she adored, had told her to let no one in.

"A headache? Well I must go in and see if she wants her head pressed or her feet rubbed. Get aside!" Karima pushed the maid away, opened the door and walked in. The room was in darkness and by the dim moonlight that came through the window, Sughra could be seen lying on her bed and breathing regularly as though asleep.

"Asleep at this hour of the evening. These modern girls!" Karima muttered under her breath and walked away without disturbing Sughra, for she was still a bride and well-beloved by her son.

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Sughra sighed with relief and sat up to look through the window once again. The moon was sinking slowly towards the west, dragging with it, its accompanying star. To the right the outlines of the jumbled houses formed a crazy pattern against the sky and here and there the inhabitants moved across the windows gay with light. To the left were more houses and streets, but in front of her, the houses were few, and ended in a sea of darkness, studded with infrequent lights. Beyond the darkness lay the desert and beyond the desert, strange cities that she had not visited, while hundreds of miles away throbbed the sea that she had never seen. Across the sea was far Arabia and further still Syria and Palestine and Turkey. Would she never see these lands, whose very history beat in her blood? The glorious past was so different to the drab present. So different that she longed to escape into it, to retreat from dull reality and to lose herself in dreams ——.

She could see the armies of Salahuddin marching across the desert, drums beating and banners flying, with row upon row of knights and heroes mounted on restless chargers ready to die for the greater glory of Islam. And in front of them, always in front of them, the unknown knight with the crescent banner. Nearer they came and nearer, and the beat of their drums echoed the beating of her heart. And how they had entered the city and were marching through the streets, and as they passed below her window, she bent down, and flung the leader a deep red rose and he raised his head and smiled ——

"Sughra why are you sitting alone in the dark," Mansur switched on the light, but did not notice that his wife looked at him with the dazed expression of a sleep walker and that her eyes were hostile.

He came and sat on the bed beside her and placed his arm around her shoulders. Her delicate profile was silhouetted against the dim sky and the fragrance of jasmine was in her dishevelled hair.

"How lovely you are" he said, as he bent to kiss her lips, but to his surprise, she drew away and her shoulders were taut and rigid. He drew her closer and rubbed his cheek against hers. "How soft your skin is ——"

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A hollow laugh escaped Sughra's lips, he had noticed the softness of her skin, but not the tears that lay unwiped upon her cheeks.

"How was the shooting?" she asked him quickly.

"So, so, We shot about a hundred birds."

"How many did you shoot?"

"A good many, but I don't want to talk about birds. How good your hair smells!" and he buried his face in her hair and drew her closer again.

"Mansur, please leave me alone," her voice was sharp and he looked at her in surprise.

"I —— I have a bad headache," she hastened to add: "And I am feeling feverish."

"Is that so? Why didn't you tell me? I shall send for the doctor immediately."

"No, no, don't do that, I'll get up now and have a wash and am sure to feel better after a good meal."

"Of course, a good meal is the best thing for a headache. I'll go and order dinner at once."

There was a goodly display of tasty dishes on the table-cloth spread out on the carpet of the dining-room, but Sughra only nibbled at her food. The rich dishes were hateful to her, and it seemed as if there was a constriction at her throat and she could not swallow.

"You are not eating anything" said Mansur, as he took another handful of rice.

"What is the matter with you today?" asked her mother-in-law "Your cheeks are pale and your eyes are red."

"I have a headache."

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"A headache? That is bad, but you shouldn't have headaches at this age. I think, you read too much."

"It isn't due to that Auntie. I think, I need a little more fresh air. Can you take me out for a drive in your car tomorrow?" She asked her husband.

"I don't think it advisable," snapped Karima. "You have been out three times in one month and people will begin to talk."

"But at home ——"

"This is not Lahore and I cannot say, I approve of the new-fashioned ways of your home."

The tears were not far from Sughra's eyes and Mansur, noticing her distress, tried to curb his mother's tongue.

"It's all right mother. I like taking Sughra out for drives. Certainly we shall go tomorrow."

Through the rest of the meal, Karima did not say a word and her face wore a sulky expression. Already, her son was taking his wife's part and she only a bride of two months' standing! Already, he was forgetting to honour the wishes of the mother, who had born him and brought him up.

That night Mansur woke up to find Sughra sitting up in bed again looking out of the half-open window.

"Can't you sleep?" he asked "How is the headache?"

"The headache is gone, but I cannot sleep. I'm restless and there is an awful dread in my heart. I —— I really don't know, what the matter is with me. I hope all is well at home."

"You must not imagine things. Come lie down and try to sleep. Tomorrow I shall take you out for a long drive in the car."

Yet, try as she might, she could not sleep. She lay there quietly in the darkness, while he snored gently beside her, and her thoughts went racing madly into the past. She was a little

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girl again and she sat on her grandfather's knee listening wide-eyed to his tales of adventure, as he stroked her hair and dearly loved voice went on with the story. "And the Musalmans landed at Gibraltar. Then Tariq burnt his fleet and he said to his men. 'The enemy is before you, the sea behind you. Conquer or die ——' and his men rushed out to meet the enemy .... and each man fought like a hero .... and they won the day.

There was loud knocking on the door and Mansur woke up with a start.

"Who's there?" he called.

"A telegram. The clerk downstairs opened it. He told me to wake you up, because it's bad news."

Sughra's heart sank within her , as Mansur jumped out of bed, opened the door, and took the telegram from the servant.

"What .... what does it say?" she asked weakly.

He came and sat beside her: "You must be brave dear ——" he said quietly —— "It's from Lahore —— Your ——".

"Tell me quickly."

"Your grandfather died last evening. He —— had a stroke."

She said nothing, only looked at him with eyes from which the light seemed to die out, and then turned again to the window.

In the pale light of the dawn, a host of dim horsemen seemed to be galloping towards the desert. Drums beating and banners flying. Further and further away from her. Of course, they had come, the heroes of old. They had come to bear away their comrade beyond the horizon of life.

Mansur placed his hand on her hair, but she shook it away "Oh leave me alone," she cried , then whispering "Oh grandfather" fell sobbing upon her pillow.

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CHAPTER XIII

Nishat Manzil was not the same. It seemed as if it had lost some of its dignity and the many rooms lacked coherence. It reminded Sughra of these painted camel-skin Multan lamps upon which, when lighted, the designs and colours stand out in exquisite tracery yet, when the light is extinguished, they seem to be drab and un-interesting.

The rooms were strangely empty as she wandered through them and a desolation had fallen on the garden. Yet the house was full of guests and relations, who had arrived for condolence. Mansur and she had rushed home from Multan, but she had not been able to look for the last time upon the face of her grandfather, for he had been taken to his resting place that morning and her train had not reached Lahore until late in the evening. She liked to think of him as she had always seen him, tall and dignified, making most other men seem trivial and inconspicuous by his presence. She could not associate his vital personality with death and the grave, and she was glad not to have seen him carried away on the bier. They had told her what an impressive funeral it had been, and how the whole of Lahore had followed the bier, and hundreds had carried it on their shoulders. But she scarcely heard them, for to her, it seemed as if he had ridden away with the phantom horsemen across the desert—towards the eternal horizon, taking with him the spirit of an age that was dying.

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And suddenly Nishat Manzil seemed out of place. Where was the old-world charm for which it had been famed? The vaulted roofs were still in their appointed place. The Persian carpets still covered the floors, and old pictures adorned the walls. Yet now, it was merely an old-fashioned house. In the days to come, visitors would compare it with disadvantage with the modern houses near the canal and deplore the lack of sanitary fittings. The house was still there, but the Nishat Manzil that she had known and loved had also faded with him, leaving behind the empty walls, a memory of a way of life that was passing away.

She was lonely. To have been lonely at Multan had seemed natural enough, for Multan was new and strange. But to be lonely here in the house, where she had been born and brought up, was something she could not understand. So much of experience had

been crammed into her life in the last few months, so many thoughts lay confused and tangled in her mind, so many feelings struggled within her that she was like a kaleidoscope that had been shaken up and she, who had always striven to lead an ordered life, ached for some pattern to appear out of the conflict.

If only she could put her thoughts into words to give vent to her feelings, to pour out her heart to someone! But how and to whom? For always her innermost thoughts had remained a closely-guarded treasure and never had she confided in anyone. Her grandfather, she had adored, but with awe, and between her father and herself, there had always been the restraint of respect and she had never told him her childish troubles as Zohra had done: While her mother was a simple loving woman, who could comfort but seldom understand. It was Zohra, who had been her closest friend, and now she felt so much older than Zohra. The gap of two years that lay between them, had become so great by the crowded experience of the last two months that she seemed to be years older and Zohra a mere carefree child. How then could she talk freely to her? In appearance, she had always been quiet and serene and her calm eyes had never given any indication of her vivid imagination, or of that vast world of dreams and desires that surged within her. In appearance, she was still serene nor did her eyes betray the storm that was gathering behind them for they were merely stricken with grief and their heavy lids and frequent tears were taken to be a natural expression of sorrow at the death of one so dearly loved.

Mansur stayed on at Lahore to be near his wife, yet of all the people near her, he was perhaps the farthest removed—It is true they shared a room, but, all day he remained in the men's part of the house, and when he did see her in the evenings, she seemed so remote that he did not know what to say to her. She seemed to have withdrawn into a shell, and while she was always gentle and sweet to him, he felt that she was cold and unresponsive. He knew that she was deeply grieved and was ready to make allowances. He wanted to talk to her and to comfort her, but even under ordinary circumstances, words came to him with difficulty and what could he say to her now that she was so remote and cold and her eyes were pools of sorrow? So he was even quieter than before and it seemed to her that he was more of a stranger than ever.

The house was crowded these days, for hundreds of women came daily for condolence. They would embrace the bereaved

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relations and shout and cry in the traditional way and this went on and on, day in and day out, and at times Sughra felt like shrieking at them and saying "Oh shut up, what do you know about our grief?" She felt, she must do something, and she kept herself busy, serving the food that was given to the poor every day and on every Thursday, when the special prayers were said and alms distributed. She was busy all day long personally supervising everything.

The mourning period in Muslim houses lasts for forty days and during this time, priests sat in Sheikh Nizamuddin's rooms reciting verses from the Holy Quran day and night. Sometimes, Sughra wandered up to the door of these rooms and listened to these melodious voices that alone brought peace to her troubled mind. Three weeks passed and the shadow of death over the house became more dim and the traces of sorrow on the faces of the inmates became fainter, yet Sughra's tears were as frequent as before, her face was pinched and sallow and she seemed to have lost her beauty.

Visitors to the house were still many and they began to make remarks about her inconsolable sorrow, so unnatural in a bride, and the whisper went round that she was not happy in her married life. This came to the ears of Mehr and she was seriously perturbed and tried to question Sughra, only to be told that she was perfectly happy, but missed her grandfather and that was the only cause of her sorrow. Zohra, sensitive and quick to notice her sister's feelings was not so easily taken in, and, although, Sughra repeatedly told her that Mansur was good and kind and she was happy, she knew that all was not as it should be.

Then one day a change suddenly came over Sughra. As usual, they had been receiving visitors in the ladies' sitting-room and she was sitting quietly in a corner absorbed in her own thoughts, when she heard two women whispering.

"How pale and ill Sughra looks," one of them remarked.

"Yes, they say, she is quite crushed with grief." the other commented.

"Poor girl, she was the old man's favourite. However, the old must pass away and it is not right for the young to grieve so much."

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"Quite. She has ruined her good looks. What will her husband say?"

"Yes, she should think of his feelings. But," then the voice was lowered. "I'm told, she's not very happy, you know."

"Really?"

"Yes, it is said, the marriage is a failure."

As Sughra heard this, the blood rushed to her face and she was very angry. Her latent pride had been touched to the quick. Her marriage, a failure, and people talking about it! Never! Oh foolish, how foolish she had been. Moping and crying and disgracing them all. He would have hated to have her behave thus, without courage and without dignity. Grief was something too deep and sacred for the public gaze and, henceforth, she would hide it in her own breast, and curb those foolish tears that proclaimed it to the world. As for her marriage, how dare they call it a failure? Of course, it was not a failure, she would never let that be said and she began to reflect over her own behaviour. In retrospect and seen clearly with the eyes of reason, her own activities and feelings looked childish. After all, Mansur had been very decent to her and he was a good and kind man. What right had she to be disappointed in him and to —— yes almost to look down upon him. She hated herself now, for these romantic thoughts that had made her expect to find a hero in her husband and in a sudden revulsion from herself, became so nice to Mansur that he was amazed. In her determination to make him happy, she schooled herself to think of Multan as her home and the memory of the last words of her grandfather on the day of her marriage helped her. "Go my daughter" he had said "Go happily to your home and may Allah bless you." That had been his last message to her as she had never seen him again and she had not lived up to it, she now thought, and she had betrayed his advice for she had never thought of Multan as her home. She made up her mind that, in future, not only would she think of it as her home, but would try to make it as nice and comfortable for her husband as she possibly could. So she began to talk of going back to Multan after the forty days were over, and Mansur was delighted, because he had begun to fear that she was not very happy at Multan and reluctant to go back. Mehr was relieved to see the

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change in her daughter and when Sughra put on her gold bangles and ear-rings again and began to take an interest in her looks, she thought that all was well and that her fears had been merely imaginary.

To Sughra, Zohra appeared to be yet a child, but to herself, it seemed as if she had suddenly grown up, for she had been face to face with death. For days, she went about with a dazed expression in her eyes and her mind was a mass of tangled thoughts. But a few hours before his death, her grandfather had been talking to her, laughing and joking, and full of high spirits. Then, in the middle of a sentence, he had gripped his forehead with both hands, uttered a deep groan and fallen upon the floor in a faint, his face contorted and purple. Her scream had summoned her father and the servants and they had hastily carried him to his room and called the doctor, while a queer hush had fallen over the house. All the evening, servants had run about, medicines had been sent for and doctors had come and gone and then towards midnight, the sudden sound of wailing coming from the sick-room had informed her that he was no more alive.

In the morning, she had looked upon him and it was not her grandfather at all, but something else had lain there, something strange and almost alien had lain there on the bed in the simple white shroud, while the women sat around praying and wailing. Her grandfather had not been there. She had felt no bonds of kinship, no pull of affection towards that body fashioned in his image. Then where was he? Would she never see him again? Death was so final! So irrevocable. Who said, it was beautiful? Her head ached continually, she felt a feeling of nausea, when she tried to eat, often the unbidden tear would rush to her eyes, while the bewilderment in her mind grew greater and greater. The influx of visitors continued and she sometimes felt, she hated all these wailing, chattering, inquisitive women and wished that she could be alone to think. And thus the days went by. Then, life began to reassert itself, at first slowly, through the enveloping nausea of death, and then in an overwhelming rush, like the sudden blossoming of some flowers. She was wandering in the garden one morning, still absorbed in her conflicting thoughts, scarcely noticing the gay profusion of flowers, when a gust of air brought, so sweet a fragrance to her nostrils that she took a deep breath and an involuntary glad "Ah!" escaped her lips. She looked up and the sky was so deep

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blue and the sunlight so pure gold and the trees and the birds and flowers were all so gay that an overwhelming wave of joy rushed over her—and she was in love with life all over again, and with a greater and more eager love having seen the grey face of death. She put away all the troubled thoughts, the confusing problems of why and wherefore that she could not solve and the spring air awakened in her a new sense of anticipation.

Habib was sitting quietly in his room one morning when he saw his sister coming across the courtyard. He had been deeply grieved by the death of his grandfather, but the many responsibilities in connection with the funeral, the receiving of visitors, the conduct of the mourning and the giving of alms that had fallen upon his shoulders had kept him busy. The days had been sombre and full of reflection, yet through them all a feeling of impatience had troubled him. It was as if winter had returned in the midst of spring, as if the cold fingers of death had been laid upon the young buds to marr their blossoming; and he was impatient with winter and with death. He wanted the spring and the intoxication of the orange-blossom scent that filled the garden, and was angry with himself for wanting them when the heavy hand of death had taken away one so close to him. He had been looking out of the window this morning and watched two birds build a nest in the tree opposite, when to his own surprise, he had felt a strong desire to see Mohini again. Something always happened to prevent his meeting her as often as he wanted to. First Sughra's marriage, then her father's arrest and now this death in the family. And, he did want to meet her again; he wanted to watch the light playing hide and seek in her eyes, to know those elusive thoughts of hers that lay behind the sensitive features, making them quiver and tremble with joy or fear. He had left the window and sitting in his chair began to plan how to see her again when his sister appeared, as if in answer to his thoughts.

"*Bhaiya* darling, do something for me!" she said.

"Of course, pet, what is it?"

"Let me have your room for this afternoon."

"Certainly, but what are you going to do?"

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"Mohini telephoned me saying, she has something important to tell me, and the house is so full of people that there is no place, where we can sit and have a quiet talk."

"You can have my room dear, but on one condition?"

"Yes?"

"After you have had your talk, let me come in and have a chat with you girls. I —— I've been so depressed that I think it would do me good."

"Of course, you must *Bhaijan.* I've scarcely seen anything of you myself. Then that's settled, she's coming at 4.30 . Give me half an hour and you can join us at about 5 o'clock.

"What is the mysterious secret?" Zohra asked her, when the two girls were comfortably seated in Habib's room.

"I've brought you a distressing letter. It's from Najma. Here read it."

"Mohini and Zori darlings," Zohra read "When this comes to you, know that my life has been completely ruined. Your advice to enlist Miss Robinson's help was no good. I went to her, but she talked platitudes just as my father had done and told me not to offend my parents, adding that she was sure, they were the best judges of my happiness. She was not only unsympathetic but treacherous. She telephoned my father, and oh my dears, my *Nikah* is to take place today though the wedding celebrations will be after two months.

I'm alone .... I'm *doomed.* I wish that I were dead.

Your unhappy,
Najma."

"When did you get this?"

"This morning."

"It was posted yesterday. By now she's married."

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"Poor girl."

"It's terrible, and nothing can be done now."

"No. We must only hope and pray for the best."

"I suppose so, but oh how angry I am with that family of hers."

They were both silent for a few minutes. Then Zohra sighed. "I'll go and call *Bhaijan*," she said.

"*Bhaijan*, but why —— ?"

"He's depressed poor darling. He was very fond of grandfather you know."

"Of course."

"He's lonely too. We all are in a way. You see, we've had to receive all these formal visitors for so many days, and seen nothing of our friends or even of each other."

"I know. My thoughts have been with you," she pressed her hand tenderly.

"I'll go and call him now. You don't mind?"

"Of course not. Do call him."

Anwar Jahan Begum sat brooding in her room. Now that her father was no more, the future loomed dark before her. True, he had left her some money, but as the feudal land-holding Muslim families of the Punjab followed customary laws instead of Muslim Law, she did not inherit her rightful share and what she was to receive, was a mere pittance in comparison with the princely inheritance of her brothers. Again, fate had treated her shabbily, for she had continually hoped that her pious father would make a will in accordance with Muslim Law, whereby each daughter inherits one-half of what each son gets, but Sheikh Nizamuddin had followed the custom of the Punjab, which, in accordance with the ancient Indian system of inheritance deprives Muslim women of their in-

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heritance, and makes their position similar to that of Hindu women, who do not inherit their father's or husband's property. Anwari, like other Muslim women, considered this to be a gross injustice and against the tenets of Islam, but she was helpless before the weight and might of custom. She felt that whereas formerly she had a right to live in her father's house, now that the house had passed to her brothers, she could only remain there on sufferance. Nor could she go and live with her son, for his salary was barely sufficient to support his own family. What then was to become of her and Bilquis? There was only one way of re-establishing their position, Habib must marry Bilquis. But how was she to arrange this? True, he had shown no interest in Akhtari, but then, neither had he paid any attention to Bilquis. Now Fakhruddin and his family had arrived to stay for two months and he would press for the engagement to take place after the forty days were over. What then could she do? Somehow, this engagement must be prevented, but how? She was pondering over this when Chagan appeared.

"Well, Chagan?" she asked, "What is the news?"

"That Zobeidah has been asking her husband to press for the engagement after the forty days are over."

"I expected that. What about Habib?"

"Ah, that's just it! What about Habib?" Chagan's tone was significant.

"Don't tantalize me, woman. Have you any news?"

"Habib's not interested in Madame Akhtari. Ah! No, our young Master's heart is beginning to be occupied in other directions."

"What do you mean? I've not seen him pay much attention to Bilquis."

"To Bilquis? Oh no!"

"Then what is it? Who is there? Surely he's not keen on that shameless Surrayya", Anwari was angry now.

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"No, no clam yourself. It's something entirely different and if you ask me, the young man is riding for a fall."

"What on earth do you mean?"

Chagan came up to her and whispered something in her ear.

"Impossible," cried Anwari "Preposterous. Such a thing is unheard of, you must be mad, woman!"

"Oh no *Bibiji*. Come here a moment" she called Anwari to the window. "Look!" she cried.

Anwari could see Zohra and Habib and Mohini walking in the gardens and she saw Habib break a rose and hand it to Mohini, who looked up at him and smiled and said something.

"Shameless!" Anwari turned away in anger. "An infidel girl: Besides, her family will kill her. You are right. The young fool is riding for a fall. This must be stopped. Yet wait" she paused and a crafty smile lit her face, "I have an idea . Go quickly, Chagan, and call Bilquis to me." Chagan went out of the room and Anwari walked up to the window again and as she saw the two girls and Habib strolling in the garden and talking happily together, she smiled and rubbed her hands together and muttered something under her breath.

"What is it, mother?" she heard Bilquis ask.

"Sit down, child. I must have a serious talk with you. You know that we are practically penniless and our position, in this house, is now well-night untenable."

"You needn't rub it in!"

"However don't be unhappy about it. All will be well, if you play your cards properly."

"What can I do?"

"You can marry Habib."

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"I can reach the moon! Mother, don't talk of impossibilities."

"It's possible."

"How?"

"Listen, Habib's sweet on that Hindu girl Mohini."

"How do you know?" a wave of jealousy swept over Bilquis.

"Never mind. You must be very nice to Mohini and praise her before Habib. Also, you must invite her to come over, whenever you can."

"Habib likes her and I'm to encourage him! Never!"

"Don't be a fool. Listen to me. Habib may like her and all that, but it's absolutely impossible. There can be nothing between them. There's a whole world of religion, custom, tradition and public opinion to keep them apart. Meanwhile, Habib will refuse to marry Akhtari and her infuriated parents will marry her off elsewhere."

"I see. I see." Bilquis was excited now, "And I shall be Habib's friend and confidant."

"Of course, and when he's dreamt his impossible dream and it's all over, he will, naturally, turn to you."

"Oh wonderful," cried Bilquis and hugged her mother. "Mother darling, you are marvellous, I do love you so."

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CHAPTER XIV

"Grandfather," said Mohini one morning. "There is something I want to talk to you about."

"Certainly my child," he said, "What is it?" He was sitting on the divan in the old library, turning over the pages of some rare manuscripts and she came and sat on a small stool by his side.

"I'm worried. The hand of repression is getting heavier and heavier and, I'm afraid, our movement cannot be sustained indefinitely."

"That's true," he sighed. "Freedom is not won easily my child The struggle is long and painful."

"I would not mind, if all were going well, but at present, they are gaining ground and we are loosing it."

"Nor can freedom be gained by one battle only," he continued. "We are up against the might of the world's most powerful empire."

"All you say is right, but is there not a way by which we could not only strengthen the struggle but intensify it and march on to victory?"

"If there were such a way and we knew of it, then our wise leaders would adopt it."

"There is such a way and we all know of it."

"What do you mean?"

"A Hindu-Muslim settlement. That is what we need."

"That we have always needed, but it has receded with the years," he sighed.

"Why, whose fault is it?"

"It's difficult to apportion blame, and it's a long and sad story."

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"You know, grandfather, I only realized the need of it one day, when I went to Nishat Manzil to sell salt in the early days of the struggle."

"And you got a cold reception?"

"Well, not exactly that, but the whole atmosphere there was so different to that of our house, and then, uncle Saeed Ahmad was there and he said some things, which made me think, but I forgot them again in the rush of work. Then, when I was in jail, I pondered over them and many questions arose in my mind. My illness clouded over these thoughts again, yet recently, they have recurred with renewed forcefulness. The other day Zohra told me the story of Hindu-Muslim relations as related to her by her father."

"Ah! I know Jamal's point-of-view. He's not a fanatic, but what he is, is not entirely fair."

"How?"

"As I said before, it's a long story and its roots go back into history. I need not go into the details of the Muslim conquest of India. I need not tell you, how the early invaders plundered and destroyed, and the later ones settled here and helped the prosperity and culture of the country. Notable among these were the Moghals, but don't forget that while some of the Moghals were fine and just rulers, there was always a certain amount of resentment among the Hindus at being ruled by them for they were looked upon as aliens."

"But why? They made India their home and loved it. They became Indians just as we, Aryans, had become before them."

"True. Yet we have never merged and mingled together."

"That is just what I have often wondered about. The Muslims have been here nearly eight hundred years and only some of them came from abroad, whereas many of them are descendents of converts. Then, why have we not merged and mingled together?"

"Religion is a great force in India, my child, and a great barrier. Besides, there is custom. Look at us, we are Kashmiri-

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Pandits and we have only married among Kashmiri-Pandits for centuries, priding ourselves upon the purity of our blood."

"And Zohra's family is equally proud of their blood."

"Naturally."

"Grandfather, you may not like it, but I'm against the caste system."

"A great many people are nowadays. It had it's uses. It was a good system for the division of labour, but I, too sometimes think that it has outlived its utility."

"We should abolish it."

"You can't do things by force. It must come about gradually, as public opinion changes. These things are deep-rooted, my dear. As I said just now, I'm not for the caste systems, yet when it comes to arranging marriages for my own children, I, invariably choose Kashmiri-Pandits. In these matters, it is not only reason that counts, sentiments and emotions play their part."

"The caste system divided us up into compartments and it's so monstrously unjust to the lower castes."

"That is true and I agree with those Hindus, who say that it must go in order to make the Hindus a united people with a society based on justice. But it must all come about gradually, my child, gradually."

"I think that not only Hindus, but all Indians must become one people, if we are to build up our nation."

"India is vast and has many communities and between them are barriers of religion and language, and culture and custom. Yet the many peoples can be united by bonds of friendship and by the love of their common motherland."

"Quite, and the first essential is a Hindu-Muslim settlement. Please go on with your story of this problem."

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"As I said before, a certain amount of resentment against Muslim rule remained. Then the Central Government weakened and the British, who had come as traders, took advantage of this, played upon our differences and conquered province after province and State after State, until they ruled over all India.

"They only did this by making Indian fight Indian. It was not their swords that conquered us."

"Quite. Then came the revolt of 1857 and this too was put down by the treachery of our own people, notably the Punjabis, and after this, we were completely enslaved. A sad period followed and then slowly patriotism began to reassert itself. It was the Hindus, who first took to Western education and political awakening began to spread rapidly all over India. In 1885 the Indian National Congress was founded and this gave a fillip to political awakening, but it was the partition of Bengal in 1905, however that brought patriotic fervour to fever-pitch and the spontaneous movement started by the people of Bengal forced the Government to rescind its decision and to reunite Bengal. That was our first victory."

"I know."

"The British, afraid of this rising nationalism, remembered the policy of 'divide and rule' and encouraged the founding of the Muslim League, and the quarrels began. Then war came and upon being promised Dominion Status by the British, Indians helped the allies against Germany, only to receive a stab in the back when the war was over, and Britain went back upon her word. The Muslims, too, were agitated against Britain because Turkey, a Muslim power, was fighting on the other side and some of them notably Mohammad Ali and Shaukat Ali, started the Khilafat Movement, a movement for the restoration of the Khalifa in Turkey. Thus the forces of patriotism and religion were united, especially when Gandhiji and the Ali Brothers got together and the great Civil Disobedience movement of 1919—21 began. You know all about that and how thousands of Hindus and Muslims went to jails and faced bullets together. You also know, how Gandhiji called off the movement, when it threatened to become violent.

"Yes, yes, but what happened after?"

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"We had had a partial victory and we continued to fight in the newly-formed legislatures, so reluctantly conceded by Britain by the Reforms Act of 1919. But, somehow, the Hindus-Muslim unity began to break-down and there was a wave of communal riots all over the country."

"How horrible. Why was this?"

"It's hard to say. Yet some of the causes were economic. The Hindus were educationally and industrially more advanced, the Muslims resented this and demanded safeguards, the Hindus resented this demand and the result — a clash."

"What safeguards did they demand?"

"Several. They were formulated later in the fourteen points of Mr. Jinnah. Meanwhile, Britain sent the Simon Commission and the Congress and the best Muslims all boycotted it.

"Good. Then, we should have come together."

"We tried again and failed. The Nehru Report proposed a just and fair constitution for India, but the Muslims rejected it."

"Why?"

"They insisted on their Fourteen Points."

"Why did we not give them what they wanted?"

"Well, we had no objection to some of the Points, like the safe-guarding of their religion and culture, but others were controversial.

"Which were these?"

"Notably, the question of joint and separate electorates, by which the Muslim voters only vote for the Muslim candidates and the Hindus for the Hindus and we thought this a retrograde measure, as it meant a lasting division."

"We were right, but why did the Muslims want it?"

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"They felt, it was the only way they had of electing the real representatives of their community. Then there was the vexed question of Punjab and Bengal."

"Tell me about it."

"As you know, the Hindus are in a majority in most of India, but there are some areas, where the Muslims are in a majority. So we have the problem of Muslim minorities in Hindu Majority Provinces and vice-versa. For the protection of these minorities, various safe-guards have been framed one of which is "weightage". By this is meant the giving of a larger number of seats in the Provincial Legislature to the minority than it is entitled to on the basis of population. Thus, the Muslims are 14% of the population in the United Provinces, but have 30% of the seats in the Legislature."

"And the Hindus?"

"The Hindus have weightage too, but in the Punjab and Bengal, there is a curious situation. In the Punjab the Muslims are 55% and in Bengal only 54% and they say that if they give weightage to the minorities there, their majority will become a minority and so they demand their full quota of seats on the basis of population."

"And the Hindus don't agree?"

"Quite, they demand weightage. To my mind, this system of weightage is no good."

"I suppose, the Muslims say that the minorities in the Punjab and Bengal are too large to need much protection?"

"That's right, and they add that in Bengal, the Hindus are by far richer and a more educated community. The Muslims say that in areas, where they are an overwhelming majority, like the N.-W.F.P. and Sindh, the Hindus can have weightage. But so far the Frontier has no legislature and Sindh is joined to Bombay."

"That of course, is not right."

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"We have no objection to the separation of Sind and we have been fighting for reforms for the Frontier Province, which the British have deliberately kept back."

"Good. But what happened at the Second Round Table Conference. Surrayya tells me, that a relation of hers, who was a delegate, told her that the Muslim representatives had actually agreed to joint electorates and 51% of seats in Bengal and Punjab and a pact between them and Gandhiji was imminent, and then something happened to sabotage it. Is that true?"

"Yes, I'm afraid, we lost an opportunity then. Gandhiji I'm told was agreeable, but the Hindu Mahasabha and the Sikh representatives would not agree."

"I wish there had been a Congress-League pact. Why didn't Gandhiji make the pact and leave the Mahashabha alone?"

"I believe, he wanted a pact that was agreeable to everyone."

"Grandfather, don't you think that we must bring the Muslims into the Congress?"

"Some of the best of them are there."

"True, but. so many have left it in recent years."

"That is because of the growing communalism among the Muslims. There are some very reactionary elements among them and the British are using them to encourage communalism. Today, the Muslim League is playing the British game.

"Then, if we made a pact with the patriotic Muslims, the others will be isolated."

"The patriotic Muslims are in the Congress."

"Not all of them. There are fine men like Mohammad Ali Jinnah, who are estranged from us. It is with them that we must make a pact."

"Then we must accept their terms. We cannot accept principles, that would be absurd and retrograde—like separate electorates.

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"Oh, let us do so since it will bring the freedom of India nearer?"

"It is not so easy. There are other elements in the country also and they have to be considered. Don't trouble your head too much about these things my child: you have wise leaders, leave it to them."

But Mohini was not satisfied and the problem of Hindu-Muslim unity continually recurred in her mind. She was restless these days, and curiously agitated, and she spent long hours in her garden drinking deep of the orange-blossom fragrance, which restless as herself, filled the whole air and, sometimes, even penetrated into the house, when a gust of wind blew into the rooms.

To her surprise, Bilquis rang her up one day and asked her to tea. "We have seen so little of you, Mohini dear," she said. "You really must come over." Mohini accepted out of sheer amazement. In school, Bilquis had never been very friendly with her and she had even felt as if she had been disliked by her. After leaving school, they had not taken any notice of one another, so this invitation and the honeyed tone of her voice on the telephone came as a great surprise, which was intensified, when she arrived at Nishat Manzil, to be received cordially by Bilquis and her mother and taken to their little sitting-room for tea. Zohra and Sughra were already there. The forty days of mourning were over and the girls were no longer dressed in white. As soon as she was able, Zohra took Mohini aside, "Is'nt amazing," she exclaimed, "this cordiality on the part of Madame Bilquis? I don't like it. I'm sure that she and that aunt of mine are upto something." But, Mohini's gentle heart was incapable of suspicion and she only remarked, "Perhaps, we have misjudged her, besides, people change you know, and Bilquis is probably lonely and wants to be friendly with your friends. You should appreciate her attitude."

After tea, the girls went into the garden and it seemed quite natural that Habib should join them there. Bilquis had asked Chagan to spread a carpet on the grass and a few cushions were strewn around and here they all settled down comfortably, "Come on Zohra," said Bilquis. "it's time for a song." The others echoed

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the request and Zohra began to sing an old love song. Bilquis saw Habib look at Mohini from under his lashes, as Zohra sang and she noticed that Mohini blushed and lowered her eyelids. When the song was over, Mohini thanked Bilquis for the tea and said she must be going. She seemed to be in a hurry to depart.

"You can't go yet," protested Bilquis. "It's not half-past-five and even your car hasn't come to fetch you."

"I —— I've just remembered, that I have asked some people to come and see me. I really must go."

"In that case, I'll drop you home in my car," suggested Habib.

"No, no, I mean —— yes, if Zohra will come too." Mohini was visibly agitated, and Zohra came to her rescue.

"Of course, I'll come. It will be a pleasant drive. Come on *Bhaijan*."

"What's the matter, Mohini?" Zohra asked her, as the car moved out of Nishat Manzil. "Have you really an appointment, or was it just an excuse? Your departure was so sudden!"

"I —— It was just —— Oh I don't know —— there was something in the atmosphere, and I felt I must get away.

"It's Madame Bilquis," said Zohra, "She gives me the creeps sometimes."

"No, no it is'nt that. She was very sweet to me."

"Well," said Habib gaily, "since it was only the atmosphere and that is changed now, and since you have no appointment, I suggest a drive to Shalimar."

"Wonderful!" said Zohra. "Let's go."

"Any objections, Mohini?" asked Habib. Mohini took a deep breath, and then she seemed to catch his mood.

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"Let's go," she said and her eyes sparkled.

They drove up to the gate of Shalimar gardens and then left the car to take a walk inside. As they walked along the paved path of the first terrace, they heard someone say "Hallo Habib" and a young man came towards them with his hand outstretched, "How are you, old man," he said.

"When did you get back?" asked Habib in surprise

"Only a week ago, and I meant to come over and see you."

"He is Mr. Aziz" said Habib introducing his friend. "He was at Sandhurst the same time as I was at Cambridge. Aziz, meet Miss Kaul and my sister."

Mohini bowed politely and murmured a greeting, but Zohra was too excited to speak. This was the first time that she had been introduced to a man who was not a relation and she felt elated for it was a sign that her way of life was beginning to change.

Habib was very glad to have met Aziz again, as they were great friends. All four of them walked down the steps to the second terrace. Here the beds were bright with flowers of Spring and the perfume of stalks and pansies filled the air. It was a Sunday and the fountains in the two big tanks were playing, while the water gurgled and curled down the marble waterfall as it came down from the first to the second terrace. This terrace is square in shape and in the centre of the wall, leading down from the first terrace, is the waterfall and below this is an old marble seat. A paved path, bordered with flower-beds, goes all round the tanks and between them. On either side of the tanks, are two *baradaries*, and on the third side of the terrace, opposite the waterfall, is the hall of the thousand and one lights. In the middle, where the path goes between the tanks, is a small square platform and, here, in the old days, the Moghul Emperor used to sit surrounded by the nobles of the court.

The four young people walked down the path and stood looking down the hall of the thousand and one lights. There is a *baradari* on either side and between the two, is what looks like a sunken tank, in the three walls of which are a thousand and one small niches,

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and in the fourth is a gate that leads on to the third terrace. The water flows down the walls in the shape of three waterfalls into small channels below and goes out by a little channel under the gate.

"Just imagine," said Zohra, "What a wonderful sight this must have been in the old days, when a thousand and one lights burned in the niches behind the water."

"Shalimar is but a ghost of what it must have been," said Aziz. "Its ancient glory has faded. It was ruined and plundered during the Sikh rule."

"They have now tried to restore the rose-gardens. Let's go there," suggested Mohini. From the two sides of the second terrace, steps lead down to the rose-gardens, which are laid out on either side. These are lower than the second terrace, but higher than the third to which they are connected by sloping paved paths.

Zohra walked ahead accompanied by Aziz and Mohini and Habib followed a few steps behind them.

"Shalimar," said Mohini softly, "how lovely and graceful it is! How perfect in proportion. The Moghuls knew how to build. We seem to have lost the art now. Look at the ugly buildings, that are springing up around us."

"We seem to have lost the art of living as well," said Habib. The Moghuls loved life and beauty. Wherever they went, they planted trees and flowers and built beautiful gardens. They were a happy people and what a sad people we have become now. Poor, hungry, ignorant, thousands upon thousands of us!" he sighed.

"That is always the fate of an enslaved people," said Mohini. "Life and the good things of life will come with freedom."

"But freedom cannot come without unity."

"How right you are! That is just what I was saying to Grandfather only the other day. Our people must be united and all this conflict and confusion smoothed away. Oh look at Shalimar," her voice was like a bell, "Is it not perfect, like a pearl in a delicate setting? It is Muslim, as Muslim as you are Habib, yet how well

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it fits in with the setting of Hindustan around it. They don't clash, they merge and mingle together each lending the other a greater beauty and a deeper significance. There is no conflict between them only a perfect understanding."

"As there is between us, Mohini," he whispered. She looked up at him in startled surprise, while the colour flowed in rich profusion into her cheeks.

"Mohini," he whispered again.

"Look *Bhaijan*," Zohra turned round to say, "Look at the sunset."

They were in the rose-garden now and beyond the ancient wall, the sky was afire with the sunset. The old tower was silhouetted against it in delicate beauty and the ivory crescent of the young moon had just appeared nearby.

Habib put out his hand and plucked a white rose from the flower bed, but as he turned round to give it to Mohini, he saw that she had walked away and was climbing the steps that led to the second terrace. He hastened to follow her and overtook her near the waterfall. She seemed to be lost in thought as she gazed at the water curling down the marble.

"How poignant is the sound of this waterfall," she said. "This is the place where Zaibunnissa used to sit and mourn her lost love. Do you know the lines she wrote here Habib?"

"No."

"O waterfall what aileth thee?
Thou wailest all night long!
What hidden pain has creased thy brow,
For whom thy plaintive song?
Art thou by secret grief compelled;
Like me these weary years,
To strike thy head against the stone,
And flow away in tears?"

"Are they not beautiful?"

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"Yes, but very sad."

"Her life was sad that is why she talks about striking her head against the stone. Habib, to try for the impossible, is to strike one's head against the stone and it can only lead to tears."

"The ideal always seems unattainable until one reaches it."

"Can one ever reach the ideal?"

"Why not, if one perseveres? Mohini, even if one were to strike one's head against the stone continually, a fountain may burst from the rock. It is perseverance that counts."

"And, are you very persevering?" she smiled.

"Very! Listen Mohini —— "

"Com on you two," said Zohra hurrying up, "it's getting late, and you seem absorbed in conversation. What are you talking about?"

"About the waterfall," said Mohini wistfully.

"About our ideal of Hindu-Muslim unity," said Habib significantly.

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CHAPTER XV

Habib had driven home from Shalimar in an exultant mood. While walking in the gardens, a wave of gladness, which even Mohini's sad words could not dispel had enveloped him. It seemed to him as if he were drunk with all the beauty of the world and the joy of living. He knew now what she meant to him. All that he had ever admired or believed in, dreamt of and longed for, seemed to be gathered in her and not even the many obstacles, that he knew lay between them, nor all the force of the opinions and prejudices that he foresaw, could seek to separate them, could dim his joy in having found her. Just now he could not even think of the difficulties that lay in their path, he was happy just

at the thought of her and of the quick colour that had rushed into her cheeks and the light that had flashed in her eyes, when she had seen the dawning love in his. He was impatient to see her again and asked Zohra to telephone and ask her to come over, but for two days, he tried in vain and it seemed to him that Mohini was trying to avoid him for she always made some excuse or another and they did not meet. This made him all the more impatient to see her, for he knew that she must be fearful fearful of his feelings and her own, for she too knew of the terrible odds against them and he wanted to talk to her, to tell her of the strength of his love and to dispel her fears by his own determination.

On the third evening, Sheikh Jamaluddin sent for his son. Habib went into his father's study and was asked to sit down. He saw that his father was in a thoughtful mood and wondered what he wanted to talk to him about.

"You know my son," he said, "that the sad death of your grandfather has altered a great many things, and there are several new responsibilities that I have to take up, and problems that we must all face."

"I know."

"So far Fakhruddin has managed the estate, but, now, I must manage my own share. In view of this and in view of the fact that I am no longer a young man, I have decided to give up my practice at the bar."

"But father —— "

"Wait. Let me finish. I realize, however, that before I retire, I must give you a good start so I am deferring my retirement till January next year. Meanwhile, you will continue to work as my junior and must try to establish yourself firmly in this period."

"This is very good of you, father."

"I'm glad, this matter is settled to the satisfaction of both of us, but there's something else that's giving me considerable anxiety."

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"What is that sir?"

"It concerns the family, the estate and above all, you."

"Me?"

"Yes. Some months ago, I spoke to you on the subject of your marriage and we decided to defer the matter for a few months. Your grandfather's death has precipitated things and the situation is such that it demands immediate action on our part."

"I don't understand you."

"Fakhruddin and I are both anxious that the estate should not be divided and it is also our dearest wish to see you and Akhtari united as soon as the six months of partial mourning in the family are over. I must now ask for your consent, my son, for a formal engagement, which in view of our bereavement, will, of course, take place without the usual celebrations.

"But that's impossible."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I don't wish to marry Akhtari." Habib's head was in a whirl. For weeks, he had not thought of Akhtari or of any other woman save one and this conversation had come as a complete surprise. To him, the idea of marriage with Akhtari, Bilquis, or any of the girls his family had thought of, seemed absurd and even monstrous now. But to his father, this emphatic refusal came as an even greater surprise. Habib, since his return home, had appeared to be a good and dutiful son, obedient to his father's wishes, affectionate to his mother and sisters and so considerate and gentle in his behaviour, that he had endeared himself to all and the whole household including the servants fairly doted on him. Now, this sudden and to his mind unreasonable refusal to accept, what was a more or less a settled fact, almost caused Sheikh Jamaluddin to lose his temper. But, he was a lawyer and a wise man and he controlled himself.

"May I know your reasons for this refusal?" he asked sternly.

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"Reasons? Must I have reasons father? Is it not enough that I don't love the girl?"

"Cease talking like a callow youth, Habib, and think of your responsibilities. Do you want to break up the family and the estate, and to cause an estrangement between your father and his only brother on the grounds of a mere romantic fad of not being infatuated with the girl you were always meant to marry? And it's not as if she were unsuitable in any way. Young, lovely and well-educated, she is a girl that any man would be proud to make his wife."

"In that case, let her find one more worthy of her." Habib's temper was also rising.

"If you talk like that, you will certainly prove yourself to be unworthy of her or any woman. Have you ever heard of a son of a respectable family breaking his engagement in such a way?"

"I have never been engaged to her!"

"But I gave an undertaking."

"That you had no right to do."

Sheikh Jamaluddin stood up in anger, "What do you mean? No right? I, your father?" His voice was hoarse.

Habib controlled himself. It would not do to make his father angry, it would only alienate him and complicate matters.

"Please be seated father," he said gently, "and let us talk this over."

Jamaluddin's face softened and he, too, decided that it would be better to be diplomatic.

"Be frank with me, my son," he said, "is there someone else you have an eye on?"

Habib's heart gave a jump and a fearful thought came to him. Perhaps, they knew. If so, it was disastrous and he would have to act quickly, but his father's next words dispelled his fear.

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"I have seen you talking once or twice to Bilquis," he said, "do you prefer her? Let me tell you, that she is plain and unsuitable".

"No, no this has nothing to do with Bilquis."

"Ah, I have it. You have fallen for Surrayya Sajjad Ahmad! That foolish child, Zohra, has been asking her over often enough!"

"It's not Surrayya, or, or anyone father."

"Then, what's the matter with you?"

"Oh, father," pleaded Habib, "do try to understand. I don't wish to marry yet and when I do, it must be a girl I love and respect."

"Akhtari is worthy of your love and respect."

"Of course she is, but you must know that love cannot be forced."

"No, but it can be cultivated. Look at my marriage to your mother. I was not in love with her, when I married her, yet now, she is the dearest woman in the world and no man happier than I."

"That's true and our happy home is the source of all our joy and contentment but ——" he paused.

"But what?" asked his father impatiently.

"The things that made you happy, may not do the same for me. Akhtari is a fine girl, but I don't feel that she could be a companion to me," Habib brought up another argument.

"Why not?"

"I don't think she can understand or share my ideas, besides," He was thinking rapidly now, "as I said before I'm not yet earning enough to support a wife."

"Your grandfather has removed that obstacle. By his will, you will inherit enough to make you independent of me."

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Again, Habib felt that he was cornered, but this time, he was determined to leave no illusions in his father's mind.

"In any case, my mind is made up," he said emphatically, "I cannot marry Akhtari."

"Is that your final decision?"

"Yes,"

"Leave." Jamaluddin was furious and Habib, seeing the expression on his face, stood up to leave.

"Wait. Oblige me by not saying anything to anyone on the subject yet. I must deal with this in my own way. Besides, you may yet see sense."

"I shall not say anything to anyone," said Habib, as he left the room, "but I shall not change my mind."

Sitting in the arm-chair in his room, he smoked cigarette after cigarette, thinking about all that had happened and making one plan after another.

"*Bhaijan, Bhaijan,*" it was Zohra and she seemed to be agitated. "Mohini is on the phone," she whispered, "and she wants to talk to you."

Habib jumped out of his chair and rushed to the telephone. He was glad to find that there was no one in the room.

"Is that you, Mohini?"

"Yes."

"I have telephoned you so many times. When are you coming over. I—we must see you."

"I've been —— very busy. I wanted to tell you that I'm going away."

"What?"

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"Yes. Tomorrow morning to Kashmir."

"That's impossible. You can't go away now, Mohini."

"I had a wire, my aunt, my mother's sister, is ill and we must go."

"Listen Mohini, I've got to see you."

"It's not possible now, Habib."

"I must. I have something very important to tell you."

"No, no," she was agitated, "don't tell me anything. Good-bye, Habib."

"Wait, for God's sake, don't ring off. Let me see you Mohini, at least this once. Then—then, if you don't want to see me again I shall not trouble you."

"Oh Habib," she was distressed. "You don't understand ——"

"I don't."

"Please, please don't misunderstand me, I ——"

"Then come over for half an hour."

"It's late."

"It's only nine o'clock. You can get back by ten."

"We are leaving in the morning and I have to pack."

"That will not take all night."

"What can I tell them at home?"

"Tell them, you must say good-bye to Zohra."

"I'll try to come over."

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"Promise."

"'I'll try," she put down the receiver quickly, for her heart was quivering within her like a leaf in the wind, just as it had done the other evening at Shalimar, when he had first whispered 'Mohini' in that tender way and a feeling of joy and grief and tenderness and fear had swept over her all at once, and her feet had faltered as they had walked towards the rose-garden, and then she had raised her eyes to see the flaming sunset reflected in his, and a sudden panic had seized her and she had hurried away to pause breathless by the waterfall. And the sound of the waterfall had been soothing and sad, so soothing and so sad that it had lulled her fears and turned her tenderness to wistfulness. Then she had come home and the mad rush of her blood had been stilled, and she had forced herself to make excuses when Zohra had telephoned to ask her over. Better not to meet. Better not to let him hope for the impossible. Better, to let it die at birth, this love that could know no fulfilment. Thus the voice of reason had whispered, but it could not still that other voice within her that insisted 'This, this I cannot give up. For this I was born and for this I have been waiting all these years. Oh I'm alive, alive at last. I never lived before. Never, like this!' The cool voice of reason had prevailed, and she had refrained from going to Nishat Manzil. Then this morning had come the telegram from Kashmir, telling them of her aunt's illness and hastening their departure which was due a month hence. She had felt a sense of relief, for events had decided for her and she had now no chance to be weak. Yet, when she heard his voice again with its deep notes of tenderness and urgency that feeling of mingled joy and fear swept over her now until she choked and trembled. She felt she must see him again, just once again, come what may, and she opened the door and walked out into the front lawn. The April moon was up and the moonlight clutched at her heart with icy fingers. Everything was cold, oh so cold and grey! She had intended to call the driver and to tell him to bring the car, but now she walked away with slow steps deep into the shadows of the garden. All around her was a hush and a stillness and the whole pale world seemed to say "This has been before, so many many times before; this will be again, so many times again." "But not to me, not to me," she cried. "This will also pass" sighed the cypress, "love is a dream!" "Then let me have my dream," she whispered. "Go to him!" chirped the cricket, and she turned her steps towards the drive, when, from the shadows an owl hooted

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mournfully "No hope! No hope!" She sighed once again and looked up at the moon and it had such a cynical smile on its old face that she walked quickly towards the verandah and going into her room, closed the door behind her. Hurriedly, she changed her clothes, put out the light and jumped into bed, but try as she might, she could not sleep.

"I must see you again." He would be waiting.

"Try to understand!"

"I don't," Perhaps, he would not.

"If you don't want to see me, I shall not trouble you again." Never to see him again. Never? Never was so long!

"To strike the head against the stone can only lead to tears."

"But a fountain may spring from the rock."

"No hope! No hope! No hope!

"Go to him! Go to him! Go to him!" She jumped out of bed, put on a thick coat and walked out into the garden again.

The moon had set and she saw the fire-flies flit in and out of the warm darkness in glad abandon. The myriad voices of the night had set up their low orchestra and gay chirping of the crickets mingled with the distant creaking of the frogs. The leaves of the magnolia stirred, as some restless bird flew out and as she turned out to look towards her bed-room, she saw a large moth beating against the closed door striving to reach the light that peeped through it. A warm breeze blew a gust of jasmine fragrance into her face and she trembled again with joy and fear. "I must go to him". She whispered and, hurrying back into her room, changed into her day clothes and opened the door. Just as she was about to go out, her eyes fell on the clock. It was 12 o' clock. Too late! She could not go now. He had waited in vain; he would be waiting no longer.

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CHAPTER XVI

Sughra's return to Multan was very different to her first coming there. Then, an agitated, but, eager bride had entered the house in fervent hope and tender anticipation. And her little feet had moved across the courtyard, but her vivid imagination had raced ahead into her world of dreams from which she had been so rudely dragged away. She could recall with a wistful smile, her dazed awakening from dream to reality and how her eyes refusing to face the clear light of the day, had clouded with tears. Then she had continually avoided facing life as it was, and escaped, whenever she could, into the maze of her own thoughts. She had neglected her duties and shirked her responsibilities, and as she had been a bride, no one had chided her.

This time she came to Multan, knowing what lay before her, with eyes wide open to the complex problems of her home and with a determination to make the best of it.

The first few days were spent in unpacking the many boxes containing her trousseau and in arranging the furniture that her father had given her for her rooms. She was arranging their sitting-room one day when her mother-in-law came in, and she saw from her face that she was annoyed.

"What have you done with all the furniture that was in this room?" she asked.

"I've had it taken out, Auntie," Sughra replied, "so that I may place my furniture in here."

"Why did you not consult me?"

"I'm sorry Auntie. I thought you said that this was my sitting-room and I——"

"Do you realize that the furniture you have removed has been here since my husband's time and no one has dared to touch it?"

"I should have asked your permission before removing it. Forgive me Auntie."

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"Bring the furniture back," said Karima to the maids.

"But Auntie .... where shall I put all my furniture? If it remains in the crates and cases, it will rot."

"You can bring that here as well, there's plenty of room."

"This room is already crowded."

"Nonsense."

'What about the carpets and the curtains? There are carpets and curtains in this room already."

"The carpets can be spread in the spare-rooms and you can keep the curtains in a box, until they are required."

"But Auntie the carpet, the curtains and the furniture match. It would be a pity to place these things in different rooms."

"It can't be helped."

"What shall I do with my bed-room furniture?"

"You can have that placed in your room" Karima conceded "and have the furniture already there, sent to the men's part of the house, to be placed in one of the guest-rooms."

Sughra sighed with relief.

"The furniture, that has come with you for the other bed-room, can be used in Husan Ara's room. Her furniture is old and in any case you don't need furniture for two bed-rooms as you have only one."

Sughra looked up in surprise and bit her lip, but she did not say anything.

"Really, your father wasted a lot of money on all these things," Karima continued, "it would have been better if he had given you more cash. I don't know, what to do with your dining-room table and chairs and other things! We don't use them. We

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prefer to have our meals in the old-fashioned way. It's so much cleaner. However, have it all sent to the men's part of the house; it can be used in the dining-room there."

Sughra sighed again. What little pleasure, she had tried to find in arranging her rooms was gone, but she did not wish to offend her mother-in-law and she did as she was told.

"Do you like the sitting room?" she asked Mansur when he came home in the evening, hoping, that he would say, it was over-crowded and then she would be able to remove some of the old furniture.

"Ah! You have had your sofas and chairs brought in. They look very nice."

Sughra turned away impatiently, but pulled herself together, and said "Come and see the bed-room, that's looking really nice". And she took him to their room, which she had arranged according to her own taste.

"Very nice, very nice indeed," he said glancing casually around. "Only a little empty, don't you think? What about a few more pictures on the wall. Where is that picture of the two girls, let's hang it on this wall here."

'What? That awful —— I mean that copy of some painting? No, I don't think we'll have it here. It looks better in the spare room. Look, don't you like this lovely painting by Chaghtai?"

"Not bad, not bad. Let's go and have dinner, shall we?"

He was busy with the estate these days, and came home only in the evenings. She was left to her own devices and she found the long hours difficult to pass. Her books were a great comfort, and she read continually hour after hour, until her eyes began to ache and there were dark rings under them. Twice he took her out for drives in his curtained car, but each time, her mother-in-law made some sarcastic remarks on their return, which spoiled her pleasure. She was quite lonely, but she preferred that to having to entertain relations, for, when other aunts and cousins came, they would sit and gossip for hours, talking scandal and discussing clothes and children and servants and she had to smile at them

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and pretend to take an interest in all they said. Occasionally, she went out with her mother-in-law to relations' houses to call or to attend functions in connection with festivals and births, and, once, there was a marriage and the feasts lasted for three whole days. Her determination to please Mansur and his relations did not falter. She took part in all the family functions and talked so cheerfully and sweetly to the aunts and cousins that they began to say that she was not one of those spoilt modern girls after all, and that Karima had a model daughter-in-law. She helped her mother-in-law to run the house, taking over one duty after another, and conducting it with such quiet good temper that even Karim's ill-humour would be smoothed away and her resentment against the daughter-in-law, who had so quickly taken the first place in her son's affections, began to diminish.

The days became hotter and hotter and they moved into the cooler first floor of the house. Sughra had been used to the large garden at home and the comforts of Nishat Manzil, with its many electric fans and she began to look pale and worn in the intense heat of May in Multan. Mansur, noticing her distress, had electric fans installed in their rooms, but Sughra's health continued to deteriorate. She felt tired and listless and she could no longer take up her part of the household duties. She knew that Karima must be grumbling again about her being no help in the house, but try as she might, she could not get rid of her feeling of fatigue. Then one morning, an intense wave of nausea overcame her and she felt faint and ill. This happened again the next morning and the next and she began to wonder. The only lady-doctor in the town was sent for and she confirmed her suspicions, Sughra was going to have a baby and she immediately wrote and told her mother the news. The lady doctor had already told her mother-in-law and Karima's face was wreathed in smiles, while Mansur beamed all over and he was most solicitous for her comfort. But Sughra went on feeling faint and sick and her frayed nerves were continually irritated by her mother--in-law, who kept on telling her what to do and what not to do and what to eat and what not to eat. So her relief knew no bounds, when she received her mother's letter to say, that they were all delighted to get her letter and the news contained therein, that in view of her state of health and as Zohra was also looking pale and tired after her examination, they had decided to go to Kashmir for the summer, and that her father had written to Mansur asking him to bring her to Lahore immediately.

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A few days later, Mansur took her to Lahore, but he only stayed at Nishat Manzil for three days, for the affairs of his estate, neglected for months owing to his marriage, demanded his presence at Multan: Sughra found the family making preparations for their impending departure to Kashmir and despite the continued nausea and fatigue she suffered from, she began to look forward to the summer months, to be spent in that exquisite valley about which she had heard so much and which she had never seen. In her present state of health, she found it soothing to be with her own family again, but she soon noticed that there was an unfamiliar tension in the house. Her father and her brother scarcely spoke to each other, her mother looked worried and Habib was no longer his happy good-natured self, but would sit for hours in his room, brooding over something and was irritable and short-tempered with the servants.

"What's the matter with Habib?" She asked Zohra one day, "and why is father annoyed with him?"

"There's been quite a rumpus in the family," Zohra told her, "Habib has refused to marry Akhtari and uncle Fakhruddin has gone off in a huff."

"So that's it. Is father very angry ?

"Yes, but he dotes on Habib and will soon forgive him."

"Then why is Habib so moody and irritable?"

"I don't know."

"Oh, come on, you must know something."

"Really *Apa*, I have no idea."

Zohra had her suspicions, but she was reticent. Besides, if what she suspected were true, it was such a delicate and a serious matter, that, she thought, it best to keep silent about it. She had noticed the growing attraction between Habib and Mohini, but she realized, that a marriage between them, was almost an impossibility. She knew that such things never happened, and that neither custom, nor society, nor the law allowed them. Muslims

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married Muslims, and Hinduswedded Hindus, so it had been for centuries and so it would always be. True, some of the Moghul emperors, in the days gone-by, had taken Hindu wives, but then they were Emperors and could defy laws and convention, but even in their case, the marriages had been resented both by Hindus and by Muslims. Here and there, through the hundreds of years that they had lived side by side, there had been romantic attachments between young people of the two communities, but they had almost always resulted either in the conversion of one of them to the other faith or in tragedy: and, in each case of conversion, the one who was converted, was ostracised by his or her family and community. Some modern people had recently begun to advocate inter-marriage without conversion, but there had been very few such cases in the whole of India. To begin with, the law of the land did not allow marriages between people of different faiths. True, they could marry by Civil Registration, but before that could be done, they had both to declare that they had no religion. Then Hindus and Muslims equally looked down upon these people and even the best educated families would not tolerate any of their members making such a marriage. Among Muslims, their law allowed a man to marry a Christian or a Jew, as these were spoken of as 'people of the book', but Hindus were considered infidels, and no marriage with a Hindu girl was legal, while a Muslim girl could not marry anyone save a Muslim, the reason given being that the children of such a marriage would follow the father's faith and be lost to Islam. Among Hindus, it was still difficult even to marry out of caste in their own community, and a marriage with a non-Hindu was considered monstrous. Zohra knew all these circumstances, as they had often been discussed at college, and in view of these, she was glad that Mohini had gone away. It would be better for her brother and her friend to forget each other as an attachment between them could only lead to heart-break. She could see that Habib was suffering, and she would often go and have a chat with him in his room. They never talked of Mohini, but there was an unspoken sympathy between them.

These days, Habib thought long and furiously. He was face to face with the greatest problem of his life and he could not as yet see a solution. The night before Mohini went away, he had paced the lawn in impatience, expecting every moment to see her car drive in. But she did not come, and slowly his ardent expectations had died down leaving a dull ache behind. He had waited long,

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pacing the garden long after there had been any chance of her coming. He had hoped against hope, pinning his faith upon the light in her eyes and the tender note in her voice, and then dread had entered his heart. 'Perhaps, she did not care,' he thought. 'Perhaps, he had only imagined she did. Perhaps, the light in her eyes had just been a reflection of the fire in his own. Perhaps, she had merely been kind to him for her nature was sweet and gentle, and he had read more in her words than she had intended. Yes, that was it or she would have come this evening. She did not care, why should she? She was brilliant and lovely and all men, who knew her, must love her; why then should she care for him, an ordinary man belonging to another community?' In despair, he had tossed upon his bed all night and fallen into a heavy sleep towards dawn. For the next few days, he had gone about doing his work in a listless and half-hearted manner, and the dull ache in his heart would not leave him, and then a letter had come through the post and seeing the Srinagar post-mark, he had hastily opened it in hope and in dread.

HABIB,

Try not to misunderstand. It is better thus. I shall try to think over everything with my head as well as with my heart. It will not be easy, just as it is not easy to go away. But I must and you must understand.

MOHINI.

P. S.

I know, you will want to come to Kashmir as soon as possible. But I want you to promise not to come or to write to me for four months; this time, we must both try to spend in cool reflection. Promise! Please! For my sake ——

He had read the letter again and again. At first, a wave of exultation had swept over him, for now, he knew, that she cared and he had gone out with bright eyes and smiling lips and Zohra had wondered what had happened to him, and then a cold fear had begun to trouble him again. He would not see her for four long months and after? He did not know. She did not promise any-

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thing. Supposing she changed? He chided himself for the thought, Mohini could not change, any other woman might, but not she, for she was loyal and true and stead-fast. But she talked of cool reflection and there were so many obstacles between them, so many, that even he shuddered at the thought of them. How then could she decide to unite her life with his? She may think the difficulties insurmountable and ask him to give her up, and that he would never do now that he knew that she cared.

The summer days were lazy and long and the nights warm and passionate surcharged with the heavy scent of summer flowers. His bed was placed on the lawn and he lay awake long hours, watching the stars shoot across the sky and the fire-flies flit among the shadows and he felt that neither the stars nor the fire-flies were as restless as he. Then Sughra's letter arrived and there was quite a commotion in the family. They were all delighted with her news and consultations were held as to where the family should go for the summer. Habib was glad to see that Zohra was insisting upon Kashmir. He had not dared to suggest it, for his father's displeasure, though somewhat softened, was still great, and he did not want him to suspect his interest in Mohini. Actually, his fears were unfounded, for such a thought never entered Sheikh Jamaluddin's head, and as Mohini had gone away and Anwari had her own reasons for keeping quiet, no one suspected anything. What surprised Habib most was the gentle and sympathetic manner of Bilquis. She had thrown off some of her shyness and sometimes came with Zohra to have a chat with him. Often she talked of Mohini and praised her in such glowing terms that Habib's heart warmed to her. Then again she amazed him by talking against marriages between cousins, and she could not have been hinting at Akhtari for she herself was a cousin. Habib began to think that Bilquis, in spite of her plain exterior, was a sweet and intelligent girl and that Zohra and Sughra had misjudged her.

The family decided to go to Kashmir. Sughra arrived and a few days later, he took them all to the station and put them in the train for Rawalpindi. The next day Anwari took Bilquis for a visit to her son and his family and Habib was left alone in the house with his father.

At first, there was a constraint between them, but as the days went by, father and son came close to each other again. Jamalud-

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din was very fond of his children and he could not remain displeased with his only son for long. Besides, Fakhruddin had already begun to indulge in wild extravagances and was squandering away the money inherited from his father, and Jamaluddin began to wonder if Habib had not been wise in not marrying Akhtari.

The process of the division of the estate went on, and Jamaluddin was generous with his brother, giving him the first choice in each portion, but Fakhruddin was mean and grasping and Jamaluddin was deeply hurt by his insistance on having Nishat Manzil. He said that he, being the elder of the family, must have the house, and as the estate was to be equally divided among them, Jamaluddin could have other lands in lieu of it. In vain, Jamaluddin pleaded that it was his family that lived at Lahore and Fakhruddin only came there on visits and, therefore, the house should come to them. In vain he told his brother that the house, if it were not lived in, would go to rack and ruin. Fakhruddin was not prepared to listen to anything. Eventually, Jamaluddin gave in with only this stipulation that his family should be allowed to live at Nishat Manzil for a year until their new house near the canal had been built.

Habib did not want to give up their ancestral home and urged Jamaluddin to offer a fabulous price for Nishat Manzil and this too was done, but Fakhruddin refused even this offer.

In July the High Court closed down for the summer vacation and Jamaluddin prepared to go to Kashmir to join the family, but to his surprise, his son refused to come with him saying that he must first visit some friends at Simla and would join them early in August. So Jamaluddin went away by himself and Habib was left alone in the house.

He was alone with his thoughts and these had become more and more depressing as the days had gone by with no more letters from Mohini. Sometimes Zohra mentioned her in her letters, but that was not often and she never sent a message. He began to wonder what her decision was. August was still three weeks away and each hot day seemed an age. He had told his father that he was going away to Simla, but now he could not bring himself to leave Nishat Manzil and the garden with its memories. Sometimes, he would go out with his friends to have a drink at the club or

to see a picture, or, he went for lonely drives in his car and these invariably ended at Shalimar. The gardens were bare and desolate now, and most days the waterfall and the fountains were silent, yet, there was a repose in the gardens, a repose that the slow centuries had lent them. They had seen so much of greatness and disaster, of pomp and show and ceremony and of solitude and silence. The old walls and towers had heard music and the clash of arms, songs and laughter had echoed through them and tears had mingled with the fountains. Men and women had come and gone and their restless emotions were stilled forever, but the walls, the paths and the baradaris remained mellowed by the passing years.

Habib loved Shalimar, for when he was there, Mohini seemed to be close to him. She walked with him on the smooth worn paths, she mused with him under the trees, she watched the sunset and the stars, and once he heard her voice in the gentle murmur of the waterfall.

Art thou by secret grief compelled
Like me these weary years
To strike thy head against the stone
And flow away in tears?

Was he trying to strike his head against the stone? Striving to reach the unattainable? Would it end only in tears for him and for her? His thoughts became as under and his gloom deepened as each day went by. Then, one day, towards the end of July he received a letter from Zohra and she said, "Mohini says to tell you not to forget your promise to come here in August. That very day the monsoon broke. The clouds gathered in purple masses upon the horizon hurrying with the fast winds; the rain began to fall and the bare earth breathed again. The lawn turned green, new leaves burst on the branches and here and there a flower appeared. The whole world had changed and Habib, bright eyed and triumphant once more, left for Kashmir.

CHAPTER XVII

The train crawled all night and reached Rawalpindi in the morning. Habib engaged a car and set out on the winding road

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to Srinagar. Passing through wooded hills and pine forests, they reached the heights of Murree and then the road went down and down, curving and twisting among bare hills, until it descended into the valley through which the river Jhelum flows. Here, they crossed Kohala bridge and entered the State of Kashmir. Hence forth the road followed the bed of the Jhelum, which flows through the narrow valley now mild and clear through paddy fields, now foaming and rushing over rocks. The vegetation changed slowly, the bare hills gave place to wooded slopes again, and then the road wound higher into the mountains covered with forests of pine and deodar, while here and there, one caught a glimpse of some snow-covered peak. Then the road began to descend again, the valley was broader, the river widened and flowed more quietly and then suddenly a vast panorama opened out before them and they entered the vale of Kashmir. Green and blue and gold and poplar and chinar and its myriad streams twinkling through. Gentle it was and peaceful and the waters of the Jhelum, quiet here and serene, wound lazily through the undulating countryside, while all around it, the giant mountains kept guard. Range upon range of rock and forest and snow, one above the other, like the ramparts of some dream city that were tinged with rose and amber and gold as the sun set and the purple and blue haze began to screen the golden valley.

The road was level now and straight and on either side, were towering avenues of poplars, until it seemed as though they were driving through a green and leafy tunnel. Beyond the trees, lay the paddy fields with their squares of cream and green and gold and brown, like a patchwork quilt. While here and there, weeping willow trees bent over the many streams that came to meet the Jhelum, that was never very far.

They passed through many small villages and it was almost night when they came to Srinagar, the capital of the State. Crossing the Jhelum, that flows through the city, they drove up to Chenar Bagh, where Sheikh Jamaluddin had rented a house for the summer. Zohra ran out to meet her brother, while Mehr and Sughra waited in the porch to greet him.

Habib looked at his watch. It was late and he could not see her tonight. He would have to wait until morning and he was restless and impatient. The train had seemed all too slow and the car had crawled at the pace of a snail. But the waters of

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the Jhelum, in their mad rush through hills and valleys and fields, had seemed to reflect his mood. Only, the river was rushing away from the valley, towards the distant sea, whose call it could not resist, and he was coming to the valley that had called him from beyond the mountians.

The next day, he asked Zohra to come with him to call on the Kaul family, but she told him that the family would be out all day as they were attending a cousin's wedding. The hours dragged: at last, it was evening and he asked Zohra to come out into the gardens...

"You must help me, Zohra dear," he said, "I must see Mohini."

"I shall try to ask her over tomorrow."

"I must see her this evening."

"But, *Bhaijan* ——"

"Please, Zohra."

"It's none of my business, but *Bhaijan* I'm not exactly blind, and I can see which way you are going."

"What of it?"

"*Bhaijan*, have you reflected? Where will this get you? Don't you realize that it can only lead to heartbreak and misery for both of you."

"Zohra, it will not. I love her too much to let her suffer."

"Here wait a minute. We can't just go there like this. You wait here, while I go to the next house, where there's a telephone, and I'll ring her up."

"Good, please hurry."

"Mohini was at home and she was expecting a call from Zohra. She said that it would not do for them to come over to the house as everyone was tired after the day's outing, but that she should come

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over to their house. "I've already told mother that I may be dining with you," she said.

In an hour, she arrived and Habib was waiting with Zohra at the door to receive her. She was radiant as she smiled at him and all care and sadness seemed to have vanished from her brow. All through dinner, she was gay and vivacious and her conversation was scintillating. Habib and Zohra caught her mood and they chattered so happily that even Sheikh Jamaluddin joined in, while Mehr beamed confortably for she was content to have all her children with her and to find them in such good spirits.

After dinner Habib had an idea; "Come on Zohra," he said, "I'll take you girls to the pictures. Will you come, Sughra?"

"Sughra should not go out at night," said Mehr.

"Will you honour us, father?" Habib asked politely, secretly hoping that he would refuse.

"Not tonight, my son," said Jamaluddin, "another evening perhaps. You young people go."

"Mohini?" Habib turned to her; but, she hesitated.

"Oh come on!" cried Zohra.

"I did not tell mother."

"I'll telephone her."

"All right, then."

Habib brought out the car and three of them got in, but, as soon as the car had left the house, he said:

"If you don't mind Zohra, let's not go to the pictures. Let's go onto the lake instead."

"Anything you say, *Bhaijan*."

"What do you say, Mohini?"

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"Anything you say," she repeated laughingly.

"Look here," said Zohra, "I think you had better leave me behind. There is a crowd, you know."

"But, we can't go alone," said Habib.

"That would not be wise," said Mohini.

"What am I supposed to do, while you talk to each other? I'll tell you what, *Bhaijan*. Your friend Aziz is staying at Nedou's Hotel, let's go over and pick him up."

"Is Aziz in Srinagar?"

"Oh yes, we've seen him several times, hav'nt we Mohini? And each time, he bows ever so politely, and once, when we two were out for shopping, he walked over to talk to us and told us he was on a month's leave and was staying at Nedou's. He even asked if he could come over and see me, but I told him that would not do as I was still a purdah lady, well semi-purdah anyway," she giggled.

Habib had already taken the road to Nedou's. Aziz was in his room and pleasantly surprised to see his friend. He readily agreed to go with them for a row on the lake and Habib proceeded to Gagribal.

About twenty *Shikaras* were waiting here and there and the oarsmen rushed up as the car stopped, each pleading with the visitors to hire his boat. The *Shikaras* were gaily decorated with colourful curtains and cushions and they had the most amazing names.

" 'Hot Stuff,' " read Zohra laughingly, "Let's take this one."

" 'Spring Chicken!' Good heavens! What a name!" exclaimed Aziz.

" 'Lovers' Nook,' shall we hire this one?" asked Habib.

"I vote for the 'Lady of the Night'," said Mohini.

"Oh look!" cried Zohra. "This one's called 'Turkish Delight,' let's take this."

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"We w'll have the 'Lady of the Night'," said Habib.

"*Bhaijan*, this one's much better," Zohra was insistent.

"You and Aziz get into that one, and Mohini and I will sit in the 'Lady of the Night'."

"What?" Zohra was aghast. "Go in separate *Shikaras*??"

"Much more comfortable," said Habib, "We'll remain together. Come on, get in."

The oarsmen were separated from them by a screen and they could not see them. They reclined on the cushions and were gently rowed across the lake by these invisible oarsmen, of whose presence they would hardly be aware, but for the gentle splash of the oars.

Habib and Aziz each put out a hand and joined the two *Shikaras* together and then they were rowed through the channel that leads to the lake. But when they came to the open water, Habib let go the other *Shikara*, and laughingly, gave it a gentle push, saying "You go your own way for a bit," then he called upon the oarsmen of his own *Shikara* to row faster, and the 'Lady of the Night' shot away from the other *Shikara* moving smoothly over the quiet waters of the lake.

Habib turned to Mohini and took both her hands in his." "At last —— It has been so long!"

"I know."

"So many months and I aching to tell you how much I love you."

"But I knew all the time."

He bent and kissed her hands. "And you, Oh Mohini! Do you?"

She bent her head, for a sudden shyness had overtaken her.

"Look up and tell me that you love me," his voice was insistent.

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She raised her candid eyes "I love you," she said simply.

Gently, he drew her into his arms and she snuggled closer to him like a bird in its nest: and she was so small and so frail. Where was his restless ardour, that passionate desire for her, that had enveloped him like a flood? Gone, all gone. For, as he held her lightly, like a flower, fearful of his own rough strength; a feeling of tenderness that was almost like pity gripped his heart and he knew that he could never let her go. He would guard and protect her against the whole world and no rude word and no rough wind would ever touch her again.

"Habib."

"Yes, dear,"

"Let's join the others now."

"Wait, I have so much to ask you. Mohini will you never change?"

"Of course not."

"And —— and you will unite your life with mine?"

"Yes."

"Oh Mohini, there are so many difficulties."

"I know, but I've decided. Let's not talk of difficulties: Tonight, I just want to be happy —— with you."

"Believed!"

The rim of the moon appeared above the dark hills and the whole world was hushed as it rose growing rounder and rounder and dappling the warm waters of the lake with gold.

"Look," she said, "the moon is no longer a pale maiden. How big she is tonight and how golden."

"Perhaps, she too is in love." He drew her closer.

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"We must join the others now," she said presently.

"Must we?"

"Yes, Zohra must be wondering where we are."

He called out to the boatmen and they began to row towards the other *Shikara*.

"Let's go to Char Chinar," said Zohra, when the two *Shikaras* were together again.

"Good idea," agreed Habib and instructed the boatmen to take them towards the little island. Then he turned to Zohra again. "Meanwhile, you must sing to us," he said.

"Please do," pleaded Aziz.

"What shall I sing?" Zohra asked Mohini.

"Something from Ghalib," she replied.

Zohra's liquid voice rang out above the murmur of the waves.

"Out of the loveliness surrendered unto dust
Alas! Not all has blossomed in the poppy and the rose.
I went into the garden and a symphony broke forth
To mingle with my weeping songs of nightingales arose
All day the clustered Pleiades were hidden in the sky
At night what thought compels them their beauty to disclose."

"Don't forget the verse about the restless locks," said Habib.

"The night and sleep and dreams belong to him and him alone
Upon whose arm in ecstasy thy restless locks repose."

She sang and very gently Habib pressed Mohini's hand. "What about the breakers of tradition Zohra?" she said.

"We, who break tradition, we believe mankind is one
Humanity will only rise, when nations decompose."

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"Hear, hear," murmured Aziz, "Those are my sentiments, please continue, Miss Zohra."

"I would recall those rainbow hues that graced the gatherings once,
Not only my forgetfulness is still adorned by those.
The cities that ye see today, tomorrow will in ruins lie
The tears that flow from Ghalib's eye are words of one who knows."

"Oh Zohra," cried Mohini, "this is too sad. Sing me something joyful!" and she began to hum a gay folk song. Zohra took it up and the others joined in the chorus. The outlines of a tiny island could now be seen, dim and unreal in the moonlight. As they came nearer, they saw that four stately chinar trees were growing in its four corners and knew why it was called Char Chinar. The boats were moored near the shore and the four of them jumped out. Clusters of white and yellow flowers peeped at them from the dark turf and the perfume of jasmine and clover filled the air. Zohra, eager to explore the whole place, wandered away and Aziz followed her; but Mohini sat down on a little knoll over-looking the moon-dappled lake, while Habib stretched out on the grass at her feet.

A silence fell between them, heavy and sweet like the clover fragrance around. All the restlessness of the past months was smoothed away and in peace that had come to them, the need of words was no more. Only the lapping of the waves, mingled with the rustling of the leaves and somewhere, in the grass, a cricket began to chirp. Mohini looked up to see the pattern of the leaves that quivered with alternate light and shadow and then looked down at the waves as they too trembled beneath the silver shower, while the gray hills beyond were still like ghostly watchmen guarding the enchanted lake. Such a night had never been before. Such a night would never be again.

She took a deep breath and turned towards Habib, "Do you know what I'm doing?" she asked.

"No, but I know what I'm doing."

"What?"

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"Looking at you."

"I mean seriously —— "

"I'm very serious."

She smiled. "I believe you! But you hav'nt asked me what I'm doing."

"What are you doing?"

"I'm storing it all up in my mind. The night and the lake, this island, the moonlight —— and you. Deep in the treasure house of my mind it will remain, and like a hoarder, I will take it out every now and then and gloat over it."

"Why should you gloat over memories, when I shall be there and each moment of our lives together more precious than the last?"

"Our life together —— ? Oh Habib, who can look into the future?"

"Darling ! You talk, as though you thought, we might be separated?

"Nothing will ever separate us Habib —— but ——"

"But what?"

"Who can tell what the years may bring?"

"No one, but our destiny lies in our own hands."

"Destiny is sometimes too big for human hands, Habib."

"Why Mohini, it's unlike you to be fearful. Look dear and see, how everything smiles at us tonight—the flowers and the water and the old man in the moon. Nothing is sad. Come smile for me!"

She laughed happily and placed her hand in his. "Nothing is as happy as I am," she whispered. "Only for a moment ——"

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"Forget that moment."

"I will."

The next day was a Sunday and the four young people planned to go for a picnic to Nishat Bagh. The road wound its way through fields and orchards and every now and then they caught a glimpse of the lake. They drove round in an arch and came to the hills that lie on the far side of it. The Moghuls knew how and where to make their gardens and Nishat Bagh lies on a slope of the hills, over-looking the Dal Lake and commands a magnificent view of it. It is built in terraces and a canal from the hills feeds the waterfalls and fountains. Each terrace is a little lower than the other, and the water flows down from one to the other in water-falls and cascades and the marble of these waterfalls is so engraved that the falling water makes a different pattern going down each fall. On the highest terrace is a *baradari* with tanks all round it, in these, the fountains cast their jests of water in intricate patterns and surrounding them are paved paths. The Moghuls' love of trees is evident from the many chinars, poplars, cypresses and fruit trees in the garden and all through the summer the beds are bright with flowers. It is indeed the Garden of Joy.

Habib and Mohini climbed up to the highest terrace and stood beside the fountains, looking down at the first waterfall.

"This waterfall does not sing a sad song," he said.

"No. The water gurgles down joyfully, tumbling eargerly over the marble and getting gayer with each fall."

"Why?"

"Don't you know?"

"No."

"It's trying to reach the lake, for in its cool depths alone will it find peace, and when it reaches this garden, it knows that the lake is near and soon it will drown itself in its bosom its restlessness still forever."

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"You make a poem of everything."

"Everything is a poem, if you only see it with wide-open eyes."

"Today I see everything with your eyes, Mohini. You have cast a spell upon me."

"And you upon me."

"Will it always be thus?"

"Of course."

"Mohini ——"

"Yes dear?"

"Sit down here on this seat beside me, now we must have a talk Mohini —— you will be mine?"

"I am yours."

"I mean—when will you marry me?"

She lowered her lids and her eyes were veiled.

"Tell me," he insisted.

"As soon as possible," her voice was so low that he had to bend his head to catch her words.

"What do you mean by 'possible'? Darling don't talk in riddles."

She raised her candid eyes and smiled. "You are a doubting person, are you not?"

"No —— no. Only I love you too much. When will you ——"

"How can I tell you now," she cut in. "You know that father is still in jail. As soon as he's out, I shall tell him and try to get his consent."

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"If he refuses?"

"I'll try to persuade him."

"If you can't?"

"Then ——. Have I not told you that nothing will separate us?"

"Your family will never consent. Mine too will be furious. Our relations, our friends, our acquaintances will all be against it. Dear, I love you too much to let you do this with your eyes shut. We must face facts. The whole world will be against us. Are you prepared to face them all?"

"Yes".

"Thank God, for your courage."

"All these days and weeks and months, when we did not meet, I've been thinking about these things. I have thought about my family and the pain I will be giving them, about my friends and what they will say, about the society, a large section of which will ostracize us. Sometimes, these thoughts weighed so heavily upon my mind that I almost wrote and told you to forget me."

"Never."

"Above everything, the thought of the pain I would be giving my family, made me hesitate."

"Then what decided you."

"Two things. One of them was my love for you."

He lifted her hand to his lips, "and the other?"

"That was perhaps the most important factor. Habib I must confess that I forced myself to look at this feeling of ours from one point-of-view only.

"I tried to judge whether my uniting my life with yours, would be harmful or beneficial to the cause, to which I have dedicated my

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life and I decided that if I were to remain true to my ideals, I should not sietate." Once again, her voice was like a bell and a light like the sunrise transfigured her face. "If we are to be a free country, we must break down these walls that divide our people. So many communities inhabit this land of ours and each has its own creed and way of life, but that should not lead to disunity. Yet we are disunited, because we don't mix and mingle together as we should. Now, we must build a nation. A nation that can take ts rightful place among the peoples of the world; and young people, like us, must have the courage to break down such customs and traditions as come in the way of unity. You are not merely you, and I'm not just I. We represent two parts of a great people. Two parts that must harmonize and pull together, if we are to gain freedom. Hence my decision, Habib."

"I agree with your ideas, Mohini, and I admire your courage, but I am a simple man, who loves you and I must ask you one question,—if—if it had seemed to you that our union would be harmful to your cause, would you have given me up."

"Yes."

"Are you sure?" His tone was reproachful.

"Oh, Habib, please don't insist. How can I tell? I would have tried to give you up —— but, even , if I had succeeded, there would have been no other man."

"That's enough for me. But, Mohini, I would never have given you up for anything."

"If somehow we were to be separated ——"

"Never."

"Just suppose. I want you to promise me one thing."

"What?"

"Don't ruin your life by remembering me too well. Find some worthy partner ——"

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"Hush," he placed his fingers on her lips, "don't even think such thoughts."

"Habib, Habib! where are you?" Aziz was calling.

"We must join them," he said.

"Wait," she asked, "There is something else, I want you to promise.

"Yes."

"You must go away from Kashmir in a week's time."

"What? Impossible —— I ——"

"Let me explain. All my life, I have never hidden anything from my parents, except just that once when I went to prison. I cannot deceive, Habib. It's not my nature. If my people should notice anything and ask me about you, I could never lie to them, and if I told them the truth now, when father is still in jail, it would not only cause my mother greater pain, but would also increase our difficulties. Now, do you see?"

"Yes, but it's so difficult . After all these months of waiting."

"I know. It's not easy for me either. Promise."

He hesitated. "For my sake," she said softly.

"I promise."

———

CHAPTER XVIII

These days Sughra went about like a dream-walker and there was an amazing light in her eyes. Her face had filled out and softened and she had the inward look of one, who lives in a world of her own. Her nausea had disappeared with the passing months and her glowing health radiated warmth. She sat for long hours in an easy chair under the chinar trees in the lawn, her busy fingers knitting little garments of white and pink and blue, while her rich

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mind was busy knitting patterns of dreams, even more lovely and intricate. All doubts and despairs seemed to have been smoothed away by the growing miracle of creation within her, and the tangled threads of her life were falling into place. So intent was she on the inner wonder that transfigured her being, that she scarcely noticed all that was happening around her. She did not even see anything strange in her brother's visit and sudden departure, nor did his radiant face have any special significance for her. For her, the whole world emanated a radiance as she wove into the little garments all those hopes and desires that had lain caged within her for so many years.

August had come and gone and the September days were cool and mallow. The year had rounded off its rough edges, the harsh winds of winter, the parched days of June and the storms of the monsoon. had given place to the season of fruitfulness; and she, whose inner being had been like the angry torrent of the Jhelum, as it cut its way through the Himalayan rock, now found within herself the calm depths of the Dal Lake, reflecting in its bosom the mountains and the stars. Nature was forging on its anvils, a mother.

Mansur had been trying to find time to visit his wife, but the affairs of the estate had given him no respite. He had been involved in some litigation with people, who owed him money and had found it impossible to get away. He was a poor correspondent, finding it even more difficult to express his thoughts on paper than in person, for words always eluded him, but he read happily the long letters that Sughra wrote to him. True her complex thoughts and involved phrases sometimes escaped him, but the very length and frequency of her letters was a source of joy for his affection for her was deep and genuine and he now felt that her affection for him was growing daily. Had he but known it, her mind was over-flowing with her abundant emotions and feeling, that she must pour out her thoughts to someone and she naturally turned to the father of her child. Her pen raced over the paper as she sat down to write and she seldom reflected as to whether he would understand and appreciate all she wrote.

Jamaluddin and Mehrunnissa were both delighted by Sughra's evident happiness, and felt that the marriage had turned out well after all. Jamaluddin was somewhat worried these days for

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his brother was giving him a great deal of trouble. The division of the property was still going on and Fakhruddin continued to display a grabbing and niggardly mentality. Jamaluddin was now really glad, that Habib had refused to marry Akhtari and was on the look-out for another bride for him. He had been inclined to favour Bilquis, but Mehrunnissa had stoutly opposed the idea and so he had given it up. As for Habib, everytime his father talked of marriage, he promptly dismissed the subject by saying, he wanted a few more years of bachelorhood. Jamaluddin, being a man of the world, had noticed Mohini's attraction for Habib during the later's brief stay in Srinagar. But. he never gave the matter serious thought, for the idea of love or marriage between them, was so impossible that it never occurred to him that they could even think of it. Thus, when Habib left Srinagar so suddenly, the mild suspicion in his mind was completely allayed and he did not give the matter a second thought. Meanwhile, he was enjoying his holiday in Kashmir and the cheerful company of his daughters, especially Zohra, made his life at home more pleasant than ever. Zohra was growing up rapidly and although she was somewhat headstrong in her ways, he did not wish to curb her high spirits, or to damp in any way her natural vivacity and love of life. Her gurgling laughter and gay chatter so dear to him, that he often gave in to her wishes to the point of indulgence. The death of his father had removed the check on his own more modern ideas and thus Zohra did not find it difficult to persuade him to let her give up one restriction after another. Besides, they were far away from Lahore and the gossip of relations, and it was much easier to relax the rules of purdah. Within a month of their stay in Kashmir, Zohra had put away her *burqa* when she went out for long walks with her father, which Jamaluddin enjoyed as much as she did. When Habib came to Srinagar, she went to the pictures with him and once to their surprise, their father came too and when Zohra would have put on her *burqa*, he smiled and said, "Since you don't usually put it on, there is no need for it today". Habib had introduced his friend Aziz to her, but this her father did not know and Zohra thought that he would object to her meeting men, who were not her relations, so she was greatly surprised, when he called her one day and said, "Child, a friend and his wife are coming to tea today and I would like you to be present". Her joy was so great, that she was restless all day. At last, the purdah was being lifted completely, and through the half-open door, she could see the enchanting vistas of life and was more impatient than ever to step

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out into the world that called to her. That afternoon, she met her father's friend and his wife and this introduction soon led to others. By the time September came and the time to return to Lahore drew nearer, she had formed a small circle of friends, who came to see her and whose houses she visited. True, most of them were older people, who were her father's friends, but she was anxious to meet everyone and anyone, and she did not yet feel the lack of young friends. During Habib's stay, she had met his friend Aziz under circumstances that were extraordinary and she had taken a natural pleasure in his company, but so many exciting things had been happening to her these days that this was just another incident and did not have any special significance for her. Towards the end of Habib's stay, Aziz had turned a trifle sentimental. By now, the attachment between Habib and Mohini was apparent and it was but natural, that Aziz should be affected by the atmosphere of romance, as well as by the constant company of an attractive girl like Zohra, and one evening, he had whispered a few words of affection. But Zohra had merely giggled and told him not to be silly. All the same, his admiration had not failed to thrill her and she began to look forward to his company. After Habib left, she saw him only once, when she went out shopping with Mohini and then his leave was over and he too left Srinagar. But before leaving, he wrote her a letter in which he promised to call upon them at Lahore and hinted at his affection. Zohra showed the letter to Mohini and said "I must confess I do miss him."

Mohini was pleased. "He's a nice boy", she said, "I shall be glad, if you two became fond of each other."

But this was too much for Zohra. "Pooh! You are so serious" she said, and a few days later, she had ceased to miss Aziz. Life was daily growing more interesting with visits to the cinema and the Industrial Exhibition that had just opened, and picnics in the company of her father and his friends, and she could not be sad or wistful for a moment.

"You no longer talk of poor Aziz," Mohini chided her one day.

"Men may come and men may go ——" Zohra laughed at her. "I must be one of the fickle ones!"

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"Heigh, don't talk like that."

"Said the lady terribly-in-love! Don't worry, darling, I know that you and Habib are the constant type. Besides, that's a different matter altogether. You are both dead serious, and I shall be the happiest person in the world if you can make it come about."

"Not the happiest", whispered Mohini.

"All right, the second—no, the third happiest. But, as for me I shall never marry."

"You can't say that!"

"Well not for years and years, anyway. There's so much else I want to do."

"What?"

"Go abroad and take part in politics and a hundred and one other things. Give me a life of adventure, just sitting at home and looking after babies doesn't appeal to me."

"But that can be the greatest adventure of all."

"This being in love has changed you! Marriage is a strange business altogether, look at *Apa*, she sits in her easy chair all day, knitting woollies and looking as if she had conquered the world."

"Perhaps she has —— her world."

"Pouh! only a few months ago, she went around like a sick cow moping in corners. Between you and me, she did not feel an overwhelming love for Mansur -a-a- yet now —— I give it up!"

"You will find out one day: when you fall in love."

Zohra laughed.

"Ah love, they said and love they said
The gift of love is this
A crown of thorns upon thy head
And vinegar to thy kiss.

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But tragedy is not for me.

And I'm content to be gary ——" she quoted.

"Tragedy is not for me?" whispered Mohini under breath. "I wonder!"

Towards the end of September, Mrs. Sham Lal received a telegram from her husband saying that he had been released on grounds of health and was coming up to Srinagar to join them. There was much excitement in the family, and anxiety as well, for they knew that Pandit Sham Lal must be seriously ill for the Government to have released him. They were not prepared, however, for the shock they received when they saw him, for he was a mere ghost of himself. He had lost over two stones in weight, and the doctors said he was suffering from stones in the kidney and would have to undergo a serious operation. "I've come up here for a few weeks to pick up some strength", he told his wife and daughter, "and, then, we shall all go down to Lahore. Meanwhile, Anand is writing to Dr. Bose, who is the cleverest surgeon in Bombay, and we hope he will be able to come up to operate on me."

Mohini's happiness was over-clouded by her anxiety for her father and for the time-being all thoughts of her own affairs were driven out of her mind. She wrote to Habib and told him that until her father had recovered completely, she could not even hint at what was between them, for it was likely to have an extremely serious effect on his health. She begged him to be patient and to continue to trust her judgment and assured him of the steadfastness of her affection. This letter she gave Zohra to give her brother as Sheikh Jamaluddin and family left for Lahore, a few days after her father's arrival.

In the health-giving climate of Srinagar Pandit Sham Lal slowly, but surely, picked up strength. He gained weight and the pinched look left his face. Although, the anxiety of the family could not be allayed until the operation was over, it was now much reduced, for with the passing of each day, they saw that he was getting stronger and the doctors assured them that if the improvement was maintained, he would be able to stand the operation.

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October brought snow on the peaks of the nearest hills, the days became shorter and the chinars and poplars caught autumn fire. Their leaves turned to red and brown and gold. The hills were blue and purple in the mellow sunlight and the colours in the valley deepened. The green meadows turned to brown and maroon and here and there, the fields flamed with saffron flowers. Whenever she was free from attending to her father, Mohini wandered away into the garden and sometimes, in the evenings, she went out for long walks upon the river bank. Often she sat under a clump of willows and watched the boats as they drifted down the stream and it seemed to her as if the very current of the river had slowed down to keep pace with the quiet days. Far away the white and blue range of the Pir Panjal seemed to be dreaming against the sunset, while in the river the reflection of the mountains and the sky was lost in deeper slumber. She reacted to the peaceful atmosphere and the richness and colour of autumn gathered within her, lending a hitherto unknown depth to her thoughts, and just as some chemicals set the colour in the cloth, so in these days of undisturbed quiet saw her love for Habib, sink deep into her mind until it seemed as though it were a part of herself.

Early in November, the whole family left for Lahore and a few days later Dr. Bose arrived from Bombay. He examined Pandit Sham Lal, pronounced him strong enough for the operation and removed him to the Albert Victor Hospital. The evening before the operation, Pandit Sham Lal called Mohini to his room and she found her grandfather sitting in an easy chair beside the bed of his sick son and her sister Padma standing on the other side of the bed. "Daughters," said Pandit Jawala Prashad, "Your father had something to say to you".

"Children," began Pandit Sham Lal "Your brother is too young, but you are both old enough to hear what I have to say to you. I have every hope that the operation will be successful, but life is an uncertain factor, and if anything should happen to me——"

"No, no father," cried both the girls.

"You are grown up now," he said quietly. "Face facts. If anything should happen to me, look after your mother, be dutiful—daughters and don't hurt or disobey her in any way. Promise."

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"Of course", they both whispered.

"And above all be true to that greater mother —— our country and to the ideals for which we are fighting."

By now both the girls were crying, and he held out a hand to each of them. They clasped them in their own and in tear-drowned voices they said: "We promise", and bent their heads. He kissed them on the foreheads and blessed them and then Pandit Jawala Prashad hurried them out of the room.

For nearly two hours, the family waited anxiously in the corridors of the hospital, while Dr. Bose operated upon Pandit Sham Lal and then at last, Dr. Kaul came out of the operating theatre and as they rushed up to him, he smiled and said "All is well. Stand aside now." They saw Pandit Sham Lal still unconscious on the stretcher, being wheeled away to his room and as his wife looked at his ashen face, she almost fainted. Dr. Kaul reassured her, by telling her that it was only the effect of the anesthetic and then took them all to the office of the house-surgeon. Here, they were allowed to wait until he came to them again to tell them that uncle had regained consciousness and everything was all right. Everyone heaved a sigh of relief and all went home much happier than before.

Pandit Sham Lal stood the operation amazingly well. In five days, he was out of danger: and in two weeks, he was home again. The stones in his kidney having been removed, the doctors assured him that his health would improve rapidly and he would soon be his old self again.

CHAPTER XIX

Anwari was worried and she asked Chagan to call Bilquis. As she looked at her daughter, however, her anxiety was somewhat relieved, for Bilquis was looking remarkably well. The strenuous exercise she had taken all through the summer had slimmed her down, and the calcium injections and iron tonics, prescribed by her brother's physician, had improved her complexion out of recognition. She could not be called pretty but she was now decidedly pleasant to look at.

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"Sit down child," said Anwari "I must have a talk with you. Chagan, you can go out." Chagan grumbled below her breath, but she left the room.

"Now," Anwari continued, "I must confess that I'm worried. For over a month I was very happy and things were going on so well between you and Habib that I thought the matter was practically settled. You were both so friendly with each other and several times, I saw you talking together in the garden. Even my brother noticed your growing attachment, for he one day remarked that if Habib should choose a girl in the family, he would be very happy and women's unreasonable objections would not stand in the way. That was a clear hint. Yet, now? For the last two weeks, Habib does not seem to notice you and ——"

"Mother," cut in Bilquis, "this is all due to your wonderful idea."

"What do you mean?"

"You and I, both, knew that Habib liked Mohini and you told me to encourage him in that."

"Well?"

"Now, he has no eyes for anyone else."

"What do you mean? All last month Habib was paying you all manner of attentions."

"Habib was nice to me because Mohini was away and I was always talking about her and praising her to the skies."

"It couldn't have been only that for one day, I heard Habib talking to Zohra and he was saying that you were a sweet girl and that in his opinion his sisters had misjudged you."

"I'm afraid Habib only thought me sweet, because I praised his lady-love." Bilquis' tone was bitter.

"Hush," said her mother, "you can still win him, if you play your cards properly. After all, even, if he is infatuated with Mohini, nothing can come of it and he will soon get over the feeling."

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"That's what you think. Believe me, mother, Habib intends to marry Mohini."

"Impossible. I don't believe it. How do you know?"

"I heard Zohra and Habib talking one day."

"So Zohra's in this thing too?"

"Of course. Much good your plans have done us! Now Habib will marry Mohini and I —— Oh I hate everybody!" she began to sob.

"Don't be silly," said Anwari. "This is not the time to cry: it's the time for careful thought. Tell me, how can Habib marry Mohini? She is not a Muslim, she is not even of the Book? No Muslim can marry her under Muslim Law; and no Hindu girl can marry a Muslim under Hindu Law. Then, how can they marry? You see, it's not as easy as you seem to imagine."

"They will find a way, never fear. They'll have one of those registration marriages, I suppose."

"Never, For then, they would both have to declare that they have no religion, and that they'll never do."

"How do you know all this?"

"I've not been idle. I've been noticing things for a week and I tactfully asked my brother about Hindus and Muslims and their different marriage laws."

"Doesn't he suspect?"

"Not he! Anything could go on under his very nose and he'd never know! However, the point I wish to emphasize is that Habib cannot marry Mohini, apart from the legal position, there would be such an uproar among her family and friends to say nothing of our friends and relations that no one would be able to face it."

"Mother, you under-rate Habib, and she too is an obstinate girl, believe me they'll find a way. Why, she might even become a Muslim."

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"Her family and community would ostracize her completely. I tell you, it's impossible."

"And I tell you, they are hatching some plan."

"In that case, we must make it unsuccessful. Once, this thing is over, Habib will inevitably turn to you. You don't know what a great advantage you have gained by winning his confidence and friendship."

"Much good it's done me."

"Time will show you. Meanwhile, we must put our heads together. This thing between Habib and Mohini has gone far enough. Now, it must be stopped."

"How?"

"If her people find out and my brother comes to know, it will be nipped in the bud."

"You could tell uncle."

"And have Habib hating you and me for life? Oh, no that would be stupid. We must find a more subtle way. Do you know anyone in Mohini's family?"

"Oh, yes I know several of her cousins. Saraswati was always a trifle jealous of Mohini. She was married over a year ago and her husband is a staunch Hindu Sabhaite. If only they could come to know of Habib and Mohini's intentions, they would be furious, and would try their best to stop the marriage."

"Then they must be told."

"Shall I —— ?"

"No, no, if you tell Saraswati, and Habib comes to know of it, he will never forgive you, so that's out of the question."

"Then who?"

"I have it. Saraswati shall be told by means of an anonymous letter. You can make it up. It must look as though it has been

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sent by a Hindu friend, who has heard rumours —— No that's not enough —— a friend, who has seen Habib and Mohini together in Lawrence Gardens in an attitude that showed their attachment, and who has heard them saying words that leave no room for doubt regarding their intention of marrying one another —— Yes, that will do. Now, Bilquis it's upto you to frame such a letter in English."

"Really, mother, I don't like doing this."

"Nonsense. It's really for his good. Such a marriage, even if did come about, could never lead to happiness".

"That I suppose is true."

"Habib would be much happier with you. Now run along and frame the letter."

"My hand-writing might be recognised."

"I hadn't thought of that. Wait a minute though. Your uncle has a typewriter, can you use it?"

"Not very well, but Zohra and I have sometimes tried to type, and I suppose, I could manage a short letter."

"Good. Chagan will take you to the office, when it's empty and keep guard while you type. Why are you hesitating? Come, be a good girl. Don't you want to win a man like Habib? I tell you, he will one day realize your worth and come to love you. I assure you, he will."

This decided Bilquis and she went into her room to write the fateful letter.

Saraswati and her husband were sitting in easy chairs under the shade of the *Sukh-chain* tree, enjoying a quiet half-hour in the garden. Madan was a young and hard-working lawyer, who seldom found time to come home from the High Court for lunch, and this was one of the rare days when he had found time for having his mid-day meal in the company of his wife, and indulging in an hour's rest in the pleasant November air.

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The servant brought the post on a salver and Saraswati began to open the letters and read them in a leisurely manner. Suddenly she sat up with a start, the drowsy look that the sunshine had coaxed on her face, disappeared and she seemed to be agitated.

"What is it?" asked her husband lazily, as he yawned in his easy chair.

Saraswati stood up and handed him a letter. "Just read this," she cried.

"The malicious gossip of some bounder," Madan exclaimed after he had read the letter. "Writers of anonymous letters are always to be despised."

Saraswati was silent for she had suddenly grown thoughtful.

"It is a tissue of lies," continued her husband and then he glanced at his wife's face. "Don't you think so?" he asked sharply.

"I? Er —— of course."

"But you're not certain? Saraswati, don't hide anything from us. This is a very serious matter. If you know something, come out with it."

"I don't know anything —— only ——"

"Only what?"

"Oh Madan I hate even to think of such a thing, but lately Mohini has been different. When they first came down from Srinagar, we were all two absorbed in uncle's illness to notice anything, but since he has come back from the hospital, I have remarked many a time at the strangeness of Mohini's behaviour."

"What do you mean? In what way has her behaviour been strange?"

"It's difficult to put it into words. She is absent-minded and dreamy and extraordinarily happy, and she rushes off to Nishat Manzil at the slightest pretext."

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"Nishat Manzil?" Madan voice was ominous, "that's the home of the fellow mentioned in this letter, is it not?"

"Yes, but ——" Saraswati was frightened by the look on her husband's face "but —— the Sheikh family have always been great friends of ours, and Zohra, the daughter of Sheikh Jamaluddin, and Mohini were practically brought up together and are fast friends. Let's not jump to conclusions, perhaps, she merely goes to Nishat Manzil to see her friend."

"I hope so! In any case, the matter must be investigated, for it seems to me that you fear there may be some truth in what this letter says."

"I never said so."

"No, but you thought so and you can't wriggle out of it now. Don't you realize the gravity of the situation. If there is any truth in this rumour, the honour of our whole family, nay, of our whole community is threatened, and we cannot treat such a threat lightly. This evening, you and I must both go to Shanti Niwas and have a talk with your grandfather."

"Oh Madan, must we? Don't you think, you are taking the words of an anonymous letter too seriously? Why, just now, you said that the writers of anonymous letters ought to be despised."

"That was before I realized that there may be some truth in what the fellow says. I've always told you that your uncle Sham Lal allows his daughters far too much freedom and this is what comes of it. I'm going to the Court now, and I'll be back by four o'clock. Be ready to come with me to Shanti Niwas."

Diwan Jawala Prashad sat in his library, pouring over an old book when the servant announced Mr. Madan Lal Saxena and Saraswati and her husband walked in to greet him with folded hands. He blessed them both and asked them to be seated, and then ordered the servant to bring some tea.

"I've come to talk to you about an important matter," said Madan. He was flushed and agitated for his anger had grown with each passing hour until he could hardly contain himself.

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"What is it, my son?" enquired the old man gently. "You seem to be upset."

"Of course, I'm upset." Madan burst out. "Anyone would be! Read this!" And he handed a letter to Diwan Jawala Prashad.

"It's an anonymous letter", said Saraswati.

Her grandfather put on his spectacles. "An anonymous letter? Some malicious gossip, I suppose!" He read the letter through, then threw it down on the floor. "Nonsense!" he exclaimed. "Utter rot. Take no notice of it."

Saraswati was relieved. But Madan's suspicions, once having been aroused, he was not going to give in so easily.

"Are you sure, grandfather?" he asked. "Have you noticed, how happy and excited Mohini has been of late, and how she rushes off to Nishat Manzil at the slightest pretext?"

"The child is happy, because her father is well again: and as for her going frequently to Nishat Manzil, there's nothing new in that as Jamaluddin's daughter is her dearest friend. Don't let your imagination run away with you, Madan."

"But grandfather just think if there is any truth in this—s—"

"There isn't."

"How can you be so emphatic? After all, Habib is an exceptionally attractive young man and they have been seeing a lot of one another."

"But —— "

"What more natural than that the two young people should be attracted?"

"But there has not been any indication to that effect." Madan noticed that the old man's tone was not as emphatic as before—and he continued in the same strain.

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"After all, such things will happen and you can't build up barriers against them," he said gently, although inwardly he was boiling with rage. "What we must prevent is youthful emotionalism leading to serious consequences."

"Serious consequences? What do you mean?" the old man was getting angry again.

"It seems, they are thinking of marriage."

"Prepostrous ——— I tell you, Madan, you've taken leave of your sense" Diwan Jawala Prashad had raised his voice for he was thoroughly angry now.

The door opened and Pandit Sham Lal Kaul walked in. "What's going on in here?" he asked. "Why father, what is the matter? You seem to be angry about something."

"This young fool has come here with an absurd and insulting tale and he persists in saying there's some truth in it."

"What is it all about?" Madan was somewhat nervous now and he just pointed at the letter. Pandit Sham Lal picked it up and read it through in silence. "Absurd," he exclaimed, when he had finished.

"That's just what I said," said his father.

"Some bounder is trying to make mischief," continued Pandit Sham Lal. "You should pay no attention to such letters."

"I hope you are right, uncle. But while we are on the subject, don't you think, it would be better if we and especially the ladies of our family did not give any cause for gossip?"

"What do you mean?"

"You say that this letter is a tissue of lies and I believe you, but would it not be better, if Mohini did not go quite so frequently to Nishat Manzil? People always talk, you know, especially if a young man and a young girl are seen driving about together and alone."

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"Driving together alone? Who?"

"Since receiving this letter, I have made a few enquiries and it seems that Habib is in the habit of bringing Mohini home in his car each time she goes to visit his sister."

"He may have dropped her home once or twice, but that does not mean ——"

"I'm not saying it means anything, but it leads to gossip. Please think over what I've said. And, now we must go home. Come Saraswati."

"Stay and have some tea", said Diwan Jawala Prashad.

"No, thank you. Some people are coming over to our house. Good-bye." Madan hurried his wife out of the room.

"He's a narrow-minded young ass," exclaimed Pandit Sham Lal.

"Hum" his father was thoughtful.

"What an absurd story!"

Diwan Jawala Prashad made no reply.

"Father!"

"Yes, my son?"

"You are very silent."

"I'm thinking, my son."

"About?"

"About the unpredictability of human emotions."

"Mohini!"

"Father!" Sham Lal was horriefied. "You mean?"

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"It's possible."

"No, no. Just now you were angry!"

"Of course."

"You contradicted him emphatically."

"Naturally."

"Then why ——?"

"That letter was written by some scoundrel, it's mischievous, it's malicious —— but ——"

"But?"

"I think, there may be some truth in it."

"Impossible."

"It's not impossible. Things come crowding in my mind now. Little incidents I hadn't noticed before. A look on his face, a light in her eyes, a gesture, a smile —— I tell you it's very possible."

"My God —— this! And —— from the Sheikh family —— What an insult! That damned scoundrel! I'll thrash him—I'll break his bones —— I —— "

"Don't lose your temper. Let's first find out if our suspicions are correct."

"Yes, yes. We may be wrong after all."

"Quite. We must find out."

"How?"

"Mohini will never lie to us. Send for her."

She was smiling as she glided into the room. Clad in a simple red and white painted cotton *sari*, with scarlet flowers in her hair,

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she seemed to be the very spirit of joy and her little feet hardly touched the ground as she moved towards them with buoyant steps.

The old man sighed, and his son looked down, for he felt, he could not meet the light in his daughter's eyes.

"Sit down, daughter," said Jawala Prashad gravely. "We must talk to you. Here take this chair. That's right. Now —— Mohini, your father and I are sorely troubled for we have heard some disquieting rumours."

"Rumours, what kind of rumours?"

"Concerning you."

"Concerning me?"

"Yes daughter. It is said that —— that —— forgive me child, for even mentioning a thing you would be ashamed of .... it is said, that you and Habib are attached to each other."

"Of course, Habib and I are attached to each other."

"I know, I know, but that's not what they mean —— people are saying that you and Habib have fallen in love with each other and have fantastic notions —— of —— of —— uniting your lives.

"It's a shameful tale Mohini," said her father. "Of course, we don't believe it, but we wish to hear it denied from your own lips."

She raised her clear eyes and looked him straight in the face. "But why should I deny it? It's perfectly true and there is nothing shameful in it."

For a moment they were both speechless, the old man with sorrow, the younger one with anger.

"Why you ——" thundered Sham Lal and his face was purple as he came towards her with his right hand raised as though to strike her.

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"Hush" cried his father, "Don't lose your temper:" And rising from the divan he came and stood between his son and his granddaughter. Then, placing his hand upon his son's shoulder, he said "She's a child. She does not understand. We must explain it to her. Sit down Sham Lal and you too my daughter. We must all face this thing calmly and with wisdom, Mohini, child, do you realise what you are trying to do?"

"I —— "

"Be quiet a moment. Let me explain —— There are things that are bigger than our individual selves, there are customs and ties that have grown up with the centuries until our lives are rooted in them —— You cannot uproot them in a day. Try and the very tree of society will wither and die. Mohini, marriage is not a private affair. It's not the joining together of two young hearts in blissful affection .... It is a social sacrament. It is the joining together of individuals so that the race may go on and develop and progress upon smooth and healthy lines. It is the very warp and woof of which our society is woven, and no individual has any right to disrupt this woven fabric for the sake of an imagined personal happiness."

"Happiness is important."

"Yes, child, it is, but it does not come to one this way. You two young people blinded by attraction, cannot perceive things clearly. Can either of you injure your family, give up your community, alienate your friends and still be happy?"

"Injure the family? Give up the community? Alienate our friends?" She said slowly. "Grandfather I don't understand. Why should my marriage with Habib do all these things?"

"You fool," her father burst out. "Where is all your education? Have I to stand here and tell you such elementary things as the fact that Hindus and Muslims do not and cannot marry each other?"

"Why?" she asked calmly.

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"Because, religion disallows it, because, custom prevents it, because, society abhors it, because, Hindus are Hindus and Muslims are Muslims and ——" he raised his voice in anger, "it just isn't done."

"You are angry, father," she whispered gently. "Please don't be angry with me and let me have my say."

"Let her have her say, Sham Lal," said the old man.

"All right, go on."

"Grandfather, you seem to think that my affections have blinded me completely and that I am thinking only of my individual happiness. I assure you that you're mistaken. I pondered over this thing for months .... I did not take my decision lightly and affection only gave me a clearer perception .... a broader vision .... and a deeper insight."

"Yes, and it taught you to sneak and lie and carry on a clandestine affair," interrupted Sham Lal angrily.

"You are wrong, father", Mohini's face was flushed. "I have not sneaked or lied. As soon as my mind was made up, I wanted to tell you, but when you came out of jail you were ill, and I decided to wait until you were well again."

"So that you may kill me with shame."

"Oh father," she pleaded, "don't say such things, you don't. You can't know, how much I love and revere you."

"A fine way you have of loving. Tell me, has that scoundrel got such a hold over you that ——"

"He's not a scoundrel," she interrupted spiritedly.

"Of course he is," cried Sham Lal. "He's abused our hospitality, he's betrayed our friendship. He .... He's bringing shame upon the respected name of his own family. He ...."

"All this, because he wants to marry me!"

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"Of course."

"Is marriage dishonourable? Is not Habib's family as good as ours. Is he not educated, high principled, good-natured? If such a son of one of your Kashmiri Pandit friends had asked for my hand, would it have been dishonourable?"

"That's not the same thing."

"Why not?"

"I've told you, that Hindus and Muslims don't marry each other. Must I go on repeating myself?"

"Why don't they marry each other?"

"Ours laws, our customs —— Oh you fool!"

"Laws? Customs? We live in the same land, breathe the same air, till the same fields, reap the same corn, drink from the same springs! Is there not a greater law than the law of communities? The law of humanity that denies any barrier between man and man? .... Is there not a greater custom than the petty customs that have grown up in the market place, the custom of nature in which blood attracts blood, regardless of caste and creed? .... Oh father, you, who have fought and suffered for the great national cause: are you going to build your nationalism upon the flimsy foundations of communal barriers?"

"Ah child," said Jawala Prashad, "I fear, you are an idealist. Your head is in the clouds and you have forgotten that your feet must remain on the ground. Your talk is all book-talk. You see visions of a world that does not exist. The law of humanity! the brotherhood of all mankind! It sounds very fine, but it's nowhere to be found. Not that I don't believe in these ideas; we all do, and where is the thinking man, who does not long for your visionary world? But reality is reality. We live among human beings and we cannot ignore their feelings and prejudices. The laws of your land the customs of your people are there, my child, and you can't break them."

"Why not, if the laws be bad? You say, religion disallows such a marriage, yet Habib and I have talked together and found

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that on all spiritual matters and in all fundamentals, we think alike. His religious ideas are closer to yours grandfather than Madan Bhai's narrow conception of Hinduism. You say, society adhors it! Yes, and that's why our society is shut up in compartments and torn into fragments. Believe me, its men and women like Habib and myself, who can if they have the courage to rise above personal ostracisation and injury to their families, lay the foundations of that true nationalism which alone will lead to the liberation of this lovely land of ours .... We cannot be free or great, until we are one people, and we cannot be one people unless Hindus, and Muslims, and Christians and all others break down their barriers of caste and creed to mix and mingle together .... We must make the utmost sacrifice, we must cement with our blood the schisms that have arisen among us, only then will Indians be a nation and India a country."

Her face was transfigured and her voice had that bell-like quality which hypnotises even the sceptical.

For a moment, the two men were silent, then the old man sighed again. "Alas! You are a visionary!" he said. "Reason will not appeal to you, but child, don't bring this misfortune upon us. Don't ruin our good name, don't trample our honour in the dust, see, I plead with you!"

This gentle tone touched Mohini, and when she saw tears in her grandfather's eyes, her own began to flow profusely. Sham Lal realised that affection would move her more than anger and he said "Mohin, I see that I misjudged you when I thought that you were selfish enough to injure us all. My child, I know, that you will never do such a thing, moreover, I now know that there are things you don't understand. You believe in Hindu-Muslim unity, without which our high ideals cannot be realized. I too believe in it. But this is not the way to achieve it. Such marriages only antagonise the two peoples and push them further apart. You want to pull them closer together and you feel that this is the way. But believe me, child, there is no short-cut to understanding, nor can antagonists be cemented with bonds of relationship. On the contrary take your own case. The friendship between the Sheikh family and ours is generations old, and yet a marriage between you and Habib would merely disrupt it. Do you think that his family and friends will not resent such a thing as much as yours.

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You two would only bring dishonour and ridicule upon both households and thus tear them apart for ever, and remember the reactions of the two communities towards such marriages would be similar to the reactions of the two families. Mohini, you could think of no better way than this to disrupt that Hindu-Muslim unity which we both desire."

She was sobbing helplessly now and her grandfather drew her on the divan beside himself and pressed her head on his shoulder.

"Oh grandfather," she sobbed "I don't know what to do!"

Jawala Prashad made a sign to Sham Lal to leave the room and left alone with Mohini went on patting her hair and talking to her in a soothing and gentle voice as a mother talks to an unhappy child.

CHAPTER XX

"You sent for me, father?"

"Yes Habib, take a seat," Jamaluddin's voice was stern and looking at his grave face, Habib knew that he must at last have found out.

"I did not think that you, upon whom I have lavished so much affection," continued Jamaluddin "would grow up to cause me so much pain and to bring such shame upon the honour of our family."

"Father!"

"Quiet! I realize now that my over-indulgence has ruined your character and destroyed in you all sense of responsibility. When Pandit Jawala Prashad came to me today, my ears could hardly believe the tale of your shameful behaviour. We have always prided ourselves upon the honour of our men and the chastity of our women, with us the honour of the daughters of our meanest Hindu tenants has been safe and you have dared to cast your eyes upon a girl of the proud and noble Kaul family. I'm ashamed of you."

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"If you are referring to my love for Mohini, it is something I'm proud of. I, not only love but respect and revere her, and her honour is dearer to me than my own. There is no question of shame."

"Be quiet. You are only insulting her further by such talk. Our friendship with the Kaul family is not only a sacred heritage, but a precious possession for each one of us. Mohini is as dear to me as one of my own daughters, and can you imagine what I would do if some young scoundrel like you talked in such a way about one of them. By Allah, I would break every bone of your body."

"But father, you don't understand. Mohini and I love each other and I am going to marry her."

"What? You dare to say this to my face?"

"Why not? I see nothing wrong in it."

Jamaluddin was speechless with rage. He rose in his chair and took a step forward and it seemed to Habib as if his father was actually going to strike him, but the older man controlled himself and sat down again.

"You, young idiot. Was it for this that I gave you the finest possible education? Thank God, your grandfather is not alive to witness your behaviour.. When the old Pandit spoke to me today, I could have died of shame, and when I hear you talk this, I could strangle you with my own hands."

Habib could never have imagined that his gentle and indulgent father could ever give way to such wrath, but Jamaluddin had been touched in that inner core of his being, where the most sacred trust is the honour of the womenfolk of his own and his friends' families.

"Do you realize that you are referring to a daughter of the haughty Kashmiri Pandits?" he continued, "who are as proud of their lineage and their pure blood as we are of our own? Don't you know that for a Muslim, even to have such thoughts about her is an insult to the family and to the community?"

"Why?"

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"What a question! Because, they marry only Brahmins of their own blood. Anything else is unheard of. It is difficult even for a Hindu of another caste to aspire to the hand of one of their daughters. As for a Muslim —— it's unthinkable —— impossible!"

"Don't you think it's time, we grew out of this narrow-mindedness?"

"Narrow-mindedness? What do you mean? It is the law. We have been in this country for 800 years and we have always respected the laws of the land. Besides, even our own law forbids marriage with a Hindu. It just isn't done, how can you even think of it?"

"I can: and what is more I think it's time, it was done."

"You insolent young fool: And pray, how are you going to do it? By what law and what custom can you unite her life with your own? Hindu law forbids it, Muslim law disallows it, Indian laws make no provision for it."

"There could be a registration marriage."

"What? So you would be ready to declare that you are no longer a Muslim and she no longer a Hindu? That you are both derelicts without a faith and without allegiances? My God! that a son of mine should have come to this! You would both renounce religion, disgrace your families, break away from your communities and friends, all for the sake of a transitory passion?"

"It's not a transitory passion. As for the law, what can one do if the law is unjust and unreasonable? Why should not a Muslim marry a Hindu, if they both desire it? Mohini and I have talked at length about our beliefs and we don't find them antagonistic. We both believe in God and in the life hereafter, in truth and goodness and justice. Why should the law prevent my remaining a Muslim and her remaining a Hindu, if we decide to have a registration marriage?"

"Because the laws of a land cannot be changed for youthful fancies. Besides, our law, which has withstood the test of time and trial for 1,300 years, is quite clear on the point. You cannot remain

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a Muslim and marry any other but a Muslim girl or a girl of the Book! It is so decreed by the Holy Quran. As for her, she cannot marry any but a Hindu, and even to marry a Hindu out of her caste would be very difficult. Thus it is, and thus it will remain. Face facts."

"Yet we live in the same country and are trying to build up a nation."

"We have lived in the same country for hundreds of years."

"The Moghul Emperors married Hindu girls."

"Because they were Emperors, and even so, the marriages were not popular. The high caste Hindus resented them and the Muslims disliked them. However, enough of this argument. You have erred, and it is now up to you to make retribution. You must go at once and beg the forgiveness of Pandit Jawala Prashad and Pandit Sham Lal, assure them that you are repentant and promise them never to see Mohini again."

"I am afraid I can't do that."

"I order you."

"Father, I'm sorry."

"You dare to defy me?"

Habib was silent.

"I have been indulgent with you in other things. Even when it was a question of your marriage, I allowed you liberty. But remember, Habib, this is too serious a matter. This I cannot and I will not allow. If you disobey me, you must leave my house for ever. I shall not only disinherit you, but shall never set eyes on you again. Begone now. Think it over and bring me your answer in two days. Meanwhile, I charge you on your honour not to see Mohini, you have caused enough unhappiness in that family."

An hour later Zohra found Habib sitting gloomily in his easy chair, holding his head in his hands. "*Bhaijan*," she exclaimed in a horrified whisper, "Father's found out."

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"I know."

"He's been talking to mother. She's in tears. What do you think? Old Panditji has been to see him."

"So he told me."

"Then he talked to you?"

"Yes."

"Oh dear! What did he say?"

Habib was silent.

"*Bhaijan* please! I'm so worried, what did he say?"

"He's furious. Told me I'd insulted the Kauls, disgraced our family —— and all sorts of things. I'll not repeat them."

"What did you say?

"What do you think? Told him I loved her and that we intended to marry each other."

"My goodness! And then?"

"Gave me a lecture on marriage laws. All the things I'm sick of hearing."

"Then", she persisted.

"Finally he demanded that I was never to see Mohini again and upon my refusal, threatened to disinherit me and turn me out of the house."

"*Ya* Allah! What are we to do? No wonder mother's in tears!"

"Zohra."

"Yes?"

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"Do something for me dear?"

"Of course."

"Telephone Mohini. I'm worried. I'm a man and can bear all this, but heaven only knows what she's going through."

"I'll go at once."

As she left the room, Habib got up and began pacing up and down the room, his mind in a turmoil. For the last hour, he had been subject to alternate fits of elation and dejection. When he thought of Mohini and their love for each other, such a wave of joy would well up within him that neither his father's harsh words nor the difficulties that he was faced with seemed to matter. But when his thoughts turned to all that he knew she must be going through, he was sick with pain and dejection. He knew how sensitive she was, and how loyal and devoted to her family. He could imagine, how she would flinch before their anger and how all her happiness would wither and fade away under the weight of the shame and humiliation that would be cast upon her. If only they could have let things go on quietly for some time longer without anyone knowing, and then told their families in their own good time! But they had found out. God alone knew how! And now? He did not doubt Mohini's love nor the strength of her resolve. He knew that she would be loyal to him, come what may, but he shuddered to think of the opposition she must face and the indignities that would be heaped upon her. To the problem of his own family, he hardly gave a thought. He knew that such things were always easier for a man and he felt sure that if his family gave him up for some time, they would eventually be reconciled : and even if they were not, he was confident of being able to stand on his own feet and of providing a comfortable, if not a luxurious home, for Mohini. True his elders would upbraid him, and some of his friends and acquaintances might even give him up, but all this was nothing compared to what she would have to face.

Sughra found him pacing restlessly up and down as though the very walls of the room were irksome to his rebellious spirit.

She came in quietly and sat down in his chair.

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"*Bhaijan*, I must have a talk with you," her voice was calm, but her eyes were no longer serene.

"Yes, what is it?" he asked shortly.

Instinctively he knew that she was not in sympathy with him and he resented her presence. Her body, heavy with her unborn child and her face grown round with pregnancy, were suddenly distasteful to him and he wished that she would go away.

"Mother has just told me about you and Mohini ——" she began.

"Sughra I've no wish to discuss the subject."

"But *Bhaijan* ——"

"Just leave me alone, please."

Zohra came in and hardly noticing her sister, she said in an excited voice, "Just imagine, they won't let her come to the 'phone. Upon hearing my voice, he merely said: 'She's not well and cannot be disturbed'!"

"Who said?" asked Habib.

"Don't know. Perhaps it was a servant, or perhaps a cousin. He just muttered these few words and banged down the telephone."

Habib walked up to the window and looked out. The garden seemed blurred and distant, a jumble of lights and shadows under the dim winter moon.

"You've been ringing up Mohini?" Sughra's voice was accusing.

"Yes, I have," said Zohra defiantly.

"Is it wise?"

"What do you mean?"

Taj Tamir Foundation

"After all, Zori! We know nothing can come of all this. *Bhaijan* has been out of this country for so many years that he hardly realizes what an impossible thing he's trying for."

"Nothing's impossible."

"Don't be a child. Listen to me and you too *Bhaijan*, please listen. I speak out of my love for you. I don't want you to suffer unnecessarily." She spoke tenderly and Habib turned from the window to look at her again. "Then help me," he pleaded.

"Alas! it would only lead to further unhappiness," her eyes were dark and brooding, "should I encourage you in this, I would be your enemy not your friend."

"Sughra, you don't nuderstand ——"

"*Bhaijan*, darling *Bhaijan*, it is you, who have lost your understanding. Think a moment, even, if you could surmount the difficulties that face you and marry her, can such a marriage lead to happiness?"

"Why not?" asked Zohra.

"Because, if you had a Muslim marriage, she would have to give up forever her community, family and friends, and knowing Mohini's tender and gentle nature, I know, that she would not be happy in such circumstances. Seeing her miserable and forlorn, you would blame yourself and your marriage would never be a success."

"A registration marriage ——" began Habib.

"Should you have a registration marriage, you would both have to give up religion, friends and family. After all, you cannot live in isolation. You have to live in this world as it is. No matter how great your love, it will never be able to bear the weight of this estrangement. Can you go away, the two of you, to some imaginary world of your own? Can you even leave your own country for ever? And if you remain, wherever you are in this country, you will meet with coldness and disapproval from both Hindus and Muslims."

"We should not care."

Taj Tahir Foundation

"So you think now. But you would! And have you thought of another matter? You and Mohini have been brought up in two different environments, with two different sets of customs and traditions. Will you be able to adjust your lives and your habits to suit each other? Rather, will it not lead to continual friction?"

"We have the same ideals and the same ideas. As for adjustment that must take place even between two Muslims. Don't you know Sughra?" he was sarcastic: for her words had pained him and he felt he must hit back.

"I know," her tone was almost bitter, "and I also know how difficult it is. Oh *Bhaijan*, the roots of your two cultures draw their nourishment from different springs. Your history is not her history and her traditions are not your traditions."

"Nonsense. We have 800 years of a common history."

"In which your heroes are her villains and your villains her heroes. Aurangzeb and Shivajee and ——"

"You exaggerate. There is also Akbar and our common heritage embodied in Delhi and Agra and the Taj."

"Delhi and Agra and the Taj are purely Muslim. As for Akbar's efforts, they came to nothing. Alas! we are still apart as we have always been, 800 years have not welded us together. We believe in one and they in many gods. We believe in the brotherhood of mankind and they in the caste system."

"Mohini and I both believe in one God, and the brotherhood of mankind, and in Truth and Love and Beauty. And, it is upon these foundations, that our nationalism is built."

"Yet many of her family will not even eat with us, and although they speak the purest Urdu, the younger children are being taught Hindi. So much for nationalism. Ah *Bhaijan*! Don't you know, how easy it is to talk high phrases? Everyone talks them and has talked them for ages and yet people live differently and it is not talk that draws people together or thrusts them apart, but actions and ways of life, and I tell you that Hindus and Muslims are drifting further and further apart."

Taj Tahir Foundation

"That is why Mohini and I wish to bring them close together by a union of blood."

"A union of blood! You mean through your children, and have you ever thought of what those children would have to face? Poor derelicts without family or community, rootless and forlorn in a hostile world."

The door opened and Mehr walked in. Her eyes were swollen with her recent tears, and her face bore a sombre look, but she opened her arms and said: "Come to me, my son."

Habib rose to meet her and she sat down on his bed and drew him down beside her, placing his head on her shoulder. "Leave us", she said to the girls and Zohra and Sughra walked away.

"My child," said the mother, "I'm with you. I have told your father that if you leave the house, I go with you."

"Oh mother, darling, you shouldn't have done that. You are wonderful and I adore you, but ——"

"But nothing. You shall follow the dictates of your heart. I shall not stop you."

This devotion and remarkable understanding amazed Habib and a weight seemed to have been lifted from his heart.

"As for Mohini," continued Mehr "she's a lovely girl and sweet too, and I'm very fond of her. She loves you truly, I've seen it in her eyes. Oh yes. I've known for some time, but I kept my own counsel. I want your happiness, that is all. Bring her to me my son, and I shall welcome her."

"Oh mother! Thank God for your amazing understanding. I love her, mother, and if I don't marry her, I'll remain single all my life."

"And pray why shouldn't you marry her? I'll not let anyone prevent you."

Taj Tahir Foundation

"Alas! There are so many difficulties. Poor Mohini, her family knows now, and I wonder how she is faring."

"Hum—They must be furious. They're very high caste, and after all —— Yes, they must be very, very angry."

"What shall we do, mother? Please help us."

"Of course, I'll help you, my darling. The best thing to do is to bring her to your house as soon as possible."

"But father ——"

"Leave him to me."

"The Kauls will never forgive us and they're our friends, you know."

"Yes, and it distresses me to give them such pain, but it's better than ruining two young lives. Besides, they'll get over it in time."

"In time —— but Mohini ——?"

"She'll be so happy with you and we'll all make her so comfortable that she'll forget their disapproval."

"Oh! mother, you're marvellous. You've given me new life and hope."

"That's right. Now you get up and try to meet her somehow. Then arrange to bring her here, and I'll have the *Maulvi* ready to perform the *Nikah*."

"The *Nikah*? But, mother, she's not a Muslim!"

"Her conversion will only take a few minutes and the marriage ceremony will follow."

"But —— but mother, she wants to keep her own faith ——"

Taj Tahir Foundation

"Keep her own faith? Then, how can you marry? A *Nikah* can't be performed with a Hindu girl!"

"I thought of a registration marriage."

"What's that? Can a Muslim marry a Hindu that way?

"No —— not exactly —— that is to say, we both have to declare, we have no religion and ——"

"What? You'll give up your religion?" Mehr was horrified. Impossible."

"Only in name ——"

"Oh never! You can never do that."

"Mother think, just now, you were calmly talking of her giving up her religion."

"That's different."

"It's not. Darling! Try to understand."

"I'll do anything for you, my son, but this I cannot let you do. Forsake your faith! How can you? How can I let you? I have to show my face to my God one day!"

"Oh mother! even you are no longer with me." It was a cry of despair.

She kissed him on the forehead. "Don't say that I am not with you. Only you must be reasonable. Besides, Mohini may agree to become a Muslim. Believe me that's the easiest way. Don't look so worried and upset. Pray to the Almighty and it will all come right in the end. Don't grieve so, my son, I can't bear to see your miserable eyes. Smile for your old mother. There, that's better. Come now and have dinner. Please, for my sake! Yes, it will all come right in the end," and taking him by the hand, she let him out of the room.

Tai Tahir Foundation

CHAPTER XXI

She was walking through fields of Himalayan flowers. Yellow, and red and purple, they nodded their heads around her, and the air was sweet with their perfume and vibrant with the song of birds, and by the joy in her heart, she knew that she was going to meet Habib. But suddenly, she found herself in a dark ravine, where a mountain stream was striking its head against the rocks, while all around the pine trees stood like gaunt sentinals. And the song of the stream was sad as it throbbed among the stones. And then it seemed to flow away there before her very eyes and the song was hushed and only the bare black stones remained. Then the pine trees closed their ranks, coming closer together, until they weretowering walls, smooth and high. And, still, they were coming nearer, bearing down upon her from all four sides. Closer they came and closer, and she turned this way and that, but found no escape; and now, she was choking and terror held her in its grip. She screamed and woke up with a start to find herself in her own familiar bed. Her forehead and the palms of her hand were burning and her body was bathed in sweat. The horror of the dream had not left her and the darkness was oppressive. She switched on her bed-side lamp and pouring out some water from the carafe that lay near it, she gulped it down greedily. Sleep had left her entirely now, and stretching her hand she pushed open the window near her bed and the cold air rushed in. She sighed and looked out, hoping to see a streak of light upon the horizon. But the stars were still shining with relentless brightness, and darkness held the earth in its embrace as if no dawn would have ever come. It was thus each night, for when the darkness closed down upon her, the hours seemed to grow longer and longer and the dawn more distant than before. She would lie awake for hours, wooing in vain the goddess of sleep, who seemed to run from her turbulent thoughts. Sometimes she would doze for a few fitful hours only to be awakened by chaotic dreams. Oh, those dreams that mixed together sweetness and horror until the walls of reason seemed to give way and thoughts and fears and desires mingled together in ecstasy or in madness.

Perhaps, they were just a reflection of her life, which in itself had become a mixture of esctasy and pain until she hardly knew where one ended and the other began. Always she had seen things so clearly and all she had ever done, had come easily to her for each thought and deed had fitted into a pattern, as each day and night

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that passed had woven the rich, yet simple fabric, of her life. But now her vision was blurred and the pattern disrupted, and she pondered over each thought and action, while doubt and conflict tore her mind.

When she thought of Habib and her love for him, when she saw again her vision of a free India, where all people were united, she knew where her path lay and resolved to follow the dictates of her heart. But she would also see her grandfather as she lay there on the divan, grown suddenly old and showing upon his face all his seventy-five years. So still and silent, he lay with eyes that were pools of pain, and only his hands were eloquent as they fluttered like restless birds. Then her eyes too would fill with tears as she turned away, and all her high resolve would flow away as she sobbed upon her pillow.

They did not say anything to her; but a pall of gloom lay upon the whole house, and, sometimes, when she entered a room, those who had been talking excitedly, were suddenly silent, and she knew that they had been discussing her.

They did not forbid, in so many words, her going to Nishat Manzil, but there was always someone with her when she wanted to go out of the house. They did not prevent her using the telephone, but a servant was placed near it to answer all calls; and she noticed that whenever she went to it, someone or another was just within earshot.

Her candid nature would not allow her to meet Habib in a clandestine way or to visit Nishat Manzil secretly, and so the days went by without her getting any news of the Sheikh family.

She went about the house these days proud and silent. Almost an alien in her own family. She had grown thinner and her delicate features looked more frail than ever. There was an unearthy quality about her face, so pale and fair with two burning spots of colour on either cheek. Only her eyes were like storm-clouded skies, flashing with alternate light and shadow and long after the thought of them haunted all who had seen her then.

Her sensitive spirit was bruised by the attitude of her relations. She would have preferred anger and reproach to this cold disapproval.

Taj Tahir Foundation

She longed to have a heart to heart talk with her father, but he seemed to be remote. She ached to place her head on her mother's lap; but her timid mother appeared to avoid her. She did not know that night after night her mother's pillow was also wet with tears; that Kailash Kumari's gentle spirit could hardly bear the weight of her daughter's disgrace; and that the sarcastic remarks of her sister-in-law were like barbed arrows that gave her no peace. Often, seeing her daughter's tense face, she too longed to take her in her arms —— but, then, what could she say to her? Her husband had told her not to mention the 'unfortunate affair', besides she could not sympathise with Mohini's feelings, nor had she the heart to cast further reproach upon one, who was already suffering deeply. And so she avoided her daughter and never knew that this apparent indifference hurt Mohini far more than any harsh words could have done. The estrangement with her family was telling on her nerves, and as each day went by, the atmosphere in the house grew more and more strained until she felt, she could bear it no longer and decided to have a talk with her grandfather.

Pandit Jawala Prashad lay on a divan in the verandah looking out on the sunlit lawn. His eyes wandered over the rose-garden, gay with winter blooms, and it all seemed like a painted picture to him, remote and unreal. The complication in Mohini's life had hit him hard for she was his favourite, nor could he take a simple view of things like his son Sham Lal and condemn her conduct utterly. He could not help viewing events with the eyes and the wisdom of seventy-five, weighing them in his mind, turning them, looking at them from all points-of-view until the conduct of Mohini and Habib seemed monstrous no longer, but only natural, almost inevitable. Yet his clear vision only strengthened his belief that the young people must be separated, for he saw all the complications that would follow any other course, and firmly believed that it would lead to unhappiness not only for Mohini and Habib, but for their families as well. He felt an overwhelming pity for Mohini, who to his mind, was just a victim of the present era, when society was passing through a period of conflict and transition. His heart was tender towards her, but his mature judgment told him that silence and cool indifference would effect her as no words, however angry or affectionate, ever could. He had, therefore, advised Sham Lal to tell everyone in the house, to keep quiet, and she would come to her senses. 'Let her see how hurt and unhappy we all are, but utter no words of anger or reproach as these will only drive her away from

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us.' Yet all the time, he suffered deeply. He could read upon her sensitive face almost every thought that passed through her tortured mind and every hour he ached for her and with her. The weight of his years was suddenly heavy upon his shoulders and he was an old man.

She came to him at last as he had always known she would, and her steps were weary, but her head was held proudly high, and her eyes looked unflinchingly into his own.

"Grandfather, may I have a talk with you?"

"Certainly, my child. Take your seat."

"Grandfather, for many days you have shunned me and ignored me as if I hardly existed."

"Shunned you? Ignored you? Of course not my daughter. I have merely refrained from discussing painful topics with you."

"Why?"

"So that you may have peace and be able to make your own decisions without fear or influence."

"Peace? Do you think I've had peace with all of you disapproving of me —— hating me ——"

"Disapproving, yes. Hating, never. Child don't let your imagination run away with you."

"Only look how everyone is. Father hardly talks to me. Mother avoids me. Auntie looks at me as though I were a pariah. Why? Oh grandfather, I have done no wrong!"

"Such vague terms, my dear. Right and wrong. It always depends on how you look at things. But let that pass. Believe me, all these days my heart has ached for you."

"Really? Oh grandfather," the ready tears were in her eyes. "I —— Oh the conflict and the pain of it —— I —— don't you understand?"

Tal Tahir Foundation

He passed his hand gently over her hair, "Of course I do, and yet, Mohini, we are all in your hands."

"Oh don't say that!"

"Surely, you know."

"There is also the other side. Habib —— my ideas —— my beliefs ——"

"I know. That is why it's for you to decide."

"Please talk to me frankly. If —— if we had a registration marriage, what would happen?"

"He would have to leave his family and his friends would forsake him. Jamaluddin has told me that he would disinherit him and ask him to leave the house."

"Oh —— but —— but —— how can he? He's so kind so ——"

"Yes, but he's also deeply religious, and the honour and presitage of his family means the world to him. If he married you at a Registrar's office thus forswearing his faith, Habib would be ostracized."

"And I?"

"And you also."

"Could either of us prevent that and yet marry?"

"Perhaps, if he turned a Hindu or you a Muslim, you may succeed in keeping one family with you. But the public disgrace would hardly be less and the injury to the other family even greater."

"Are there not educated men and women of high ideals, who are above these prejudices. Would they not side with us?"

"Perhaps. A few. A very few."

Taj Tahir Foundation

"Grandfather, is it not true, that pioneers always suffer?"

"It is and they make others suffer too."

"Then Habib and I —— "

"Are not exactly pioneers working for some ideal," he interrupted, "but two young people ready to sacrifice all for personal happiness."

"Oh grandfather, you are unjust."

"Perhaps. But I'm just telling you what everyone will say."

"You know that I firmly believe in Hindu-Muslim unity."

"Which you are doing your best to disrupt, I think. We have already explained that to you."

"I must —— I must confess that my mind is a mass of conflicting thoughts and —— and I don't know what to do ——"

"You must decide."

"I can't give him up or be untrue to my beliefs."

"If that's, how you feel ——"

"On the other hand, how can I give you all up, or take him away from his family —— and perhaps even do harm to my own ideals? I don't know .... I can't think. Nothing seems right!"

"You will have to choose."

"Life is so cruel."

"Yes."

"Grandfather.? Before I decide, I must talk to him. It's only fair."

Taj Tahir Foundation

"We have not forbidden your meeting him."

"Not in so many words —— but —— "

"We have only made it clear that we would not approve of it."

"I don't wish to do anything in a clandestine way."

"And so?"

"And so I'm asking you to let him come to the house and allow me to have a talk with him."

"I shall talk to your father."

"Then, then you think I might?"

"Yes. I think, it is only fair," said Jawala Prashad tenderly, for he felt that half the battle was won, and a little indulgence now would bring Mohini closer to them.

"Thank you, grandfather."

Sham Lal was reluctant to have Habib coming to the house. "It might seem as though we were almost encouraging the scoundrel" he exclaimed.

"Nonsense!" protested his father, "Sooner or later, she must meet him, and it is better to let the meeting take place in our own house. Thus she will be under an obligation to us and her sense of duty will be stronger in her mind than her feeling for him. However, let everyone presume that they are meeting to say farewell. Let us make it so clear by our attitude that Mohini herself may almost believe it."

"But how can we let them meet alone?"

"I've thought about that. I shall tell Mohini that they may sit here on the lawn and have their talk: out of hearing but within sight."

"In that case, I think, I can give my consent to the meeting."

Tal Tahir Foundation

"Good. I'll ring up Jamaluddin and arrange it."

She saw him coming across the lawn and, all at once, she felt so weak and weary that she could not even stand up to greet him. Only her pale hand trembled towards him and he grasped it firmly in his own.

"Mohini, at last —— "

She looked across the lawn: upon the verandah of the house, the family was gathered and they were having tea as if nothing had happened: as if Habib had come to visit them as of old and the last few weeks had never been. Then she turned to him again, and her eyes looked at him helplessly and her lips quivered, but no words came.

"Darling, how pale you are and how thin. My God, how you have suffered!" He exclaimed "And I —— longing to come to you and unable to do so and all the time no word —— no message —— "

"I couldn't."

"I know, I know. Only, I was so anxious for you."

"It's been —— torture, unbearable —— Oh, I can't explain. Only father —— Mother —— Grandfather!"

"I can imagine."

"And you? Your father?"

"He's furious of course. Things are bad enough, but it's easier for a man."

"Has he threatened to disinherit you and to turn you out?"

"Yes, but mother's more reasonable. Mohini, darling, nothing matters. Now that I have seen you again, I can face the world. I'm prepared to give up everything. It only means that we shall be poor, but surely you don't mind?"

"Of course, not —— but —— "

Taj Tahir Foundation

"But what?"

"Oh, Habib, it's all so impossible."

"Impossible? But, darling, we had agreed."

"Yes, but —— " she was silent.

"Mohini," he burst out, "be frank dear. I too have suffered these last few weeks; but all the time my faith in you and our love has never been shaken. Don't, oh don't tell me that you are wavering."

"No, no. It isn't that. I can never waver in my love; but —— but the difficulties? For us to leave both our families and all our friends. To be ostracized by our communities?"

"We've thought of all that before. Did we not agree that we would not care if we had each other? Mohini, we've been over all this a dozen times. Must I repeat all your own arguments? Have you forgotten our common beliefs and ideals?" his voice was tense now for he knew that he was fighting for her, fighting all the combined might of her family, her friends and the traditions in which she had been brought up.

"Thinking about things and actually facing them are so different, I knew they would suffer —— but to see them thus! Father and grandfather and mother —— They feel it to be a disgrace and they can hardly raise their eyes to meet those of their relatives —— and they so proud!"

He bent forward and grasped her cold hand in both his own, and his hands were so warm and vibrant with life and vitality and his eyes so compelling that the blood rushed into her pale face and she seemed to come out of the hopeless lethargy into which she had sunk.

"Mohini" he urged, "Be brave dear. It will only last a few moments and then people will forget, and relations forgive. You yourself told me that one day all right-minded people would applaud our action, for it will lead to the eventual unity of our people."

Tara Tarini Foundation

"Yes, but I'm beginning to think, I was wrong. Can't you see that this will only break the bonds of friendship between our families and tear our communities further apart." Her eyes looked at his pleadingly as if she wanted him to refute her argument.

"That's a short-sighted view", he said, "where we lead, others will follow and what may seem disruption now, will lead to unity in the long run." Her eyes were wavering now and uncertain and he leant closer to her, forgetful of the watching eyes on the verandah. "Don't forsake me," he pleaded, "for if you do all joy and beauty will go out of my life. —— I ——I don't know what I shall do ——" his voice broke and she shuddered. "Say, you will never give me up. Say it, Mohini, say it!"

The warmth in his voice seemed to flow through her body.

"I'll always love you," she whispered.

"And you will be mine?"

"Habib I can't —— I can't ——"

"You can. Promise me."

"I —— Oh Habib I'll try. Only leave me now. I promised —— and now ——!"

"What did you promise?"

"Well, I didn't exactly promise anything. But I begged for this talk with you and grandfather got me the permission—and —— and I rather think, he thought it would be a farewell."

"He thought! He reckoned without me." He was confident again, almost triumphant, "we shall never say farewell," he said.

A ghost of a smile lit her face and she signed, "You are so sure!"

"Of course, I am, and so you must be."

"You must go now —— Look, grandfather is coming towards us."

Taj Tahir Foundation

"All right I'll go. But I must see you again soon. Where?"

"Habib I can't. I won't meet you in secret." She was firm on this point.

"Then?"

"Be patient. Give me time."

"Then promise you will not forsake me. Promise!"

"I promise, but you must go now."

For a minute he saw them standing together, and the old man looking at his joyous face knew that Habib had won her all over again. He glanced from his strong hands to his own feeble ones and sighed, wondering if it had been wise to allow this meeting. But, if she had reacted so strongly towards him, when she had met him under their very eyes, what would she have felt if she had met him alone and away from them all?"

He saw them standing together there on the lawn of her home, and then Habib turned to her "*Au revoir*, Mohini," he said, and his eyes looked ardently into hers. 'For a short while, only for a short while' they promised 'and then never never to part again' And the warm clasp of his hand seemed to lift her out of the slough of despair, higher still and higher until her spirit was light as the green parrots that fluttered among the leaves.

"Good-bye Habib," said Jawala Prashad stiffly, "Remember me to your father."

Mohini shuddered and seemed to come out of a dream. She looked at the old man as he stood there with bowed shoulders and trembling hands and a wave of pity overwhelmed her and she wanted to take him in her arms and to comfort him and all at once she hated herself.

Then the two men walked away and she was left alone with the conflict in her mind unresolved. She wandered in the garden and her eyes strayed over the flowers, hardly seeing them and the fragrance wooed her nostrils in vain, and the sunlight lay there

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in forlorn pools to be trodden underfoot, and the light of it seemed to hurt her eyes. Then she turned to the feathery grey shadow of the euclyptus tree and thence to the golden-brown shade under the *Sukh-chain*. But as she raised her eyes, she saw a pair of pigeons billing and cooing, as they pranced upon the branches, and she felt a stab in her heart and turned away. The purple mango shade promised peace and her slow footsteps led her there, but the wind rustled wistfully overhead and a brown leaf came fluttering down on her shoulder like a lost soul, and she turned away again her restlessness unstilled.

It was the same garden in which she had played as a child and laughed as a girl. Each bush was an old friend, and each tree a confidence to whom she had whispered many a time her hopes and her fears. It was the same garden into which she had fled so often, as if to a heaven to escape the turmoil and the fever of the busy world outside. Yet today there was no peace in her garden. The icy wind moaned through the *tahli* trees and their dead leaves blew in despairing gusts to the ground, and as the sun disappeared, a host of crows went flying overhead and their shrill cries rent the air. There was no peace in her garden now, because there was no peace in her heart.

Taj Tahir Foundation

CHAPTER XXII

The days went by each very like the last and still no word came from Mohini. The clear December weather gave place to a dreary January and a new year was born. The wind blew colder than ever, great clouds scudded the sky and there were frequent rains. Habib saw the glad looks on the faces of the servants as they whispered, "So good for the land. Each drop is a drop of gold: God willing, we shall have a bumper erop." But the gloom that shrouded the house, only deepened with each departing day. Jamal-uddin seldom spoke to his son and spent as much time away from home as possible. Mehrunnissa's cheerful face wore a sad look and her eyes were often wet with tears. Anwari gossiped all day with the servants, and Zohra, her nerves tense with the changed atmosphere, had several quarrels with Bilquis. Only Sughra lived in a world of her own, aloof withdrawn intent only on the child that would soon be born.

No word came from Mohini and Habib's patience began to give way. One day a common friend told Zohra that Mohini was down with a chill and fever, and Habib, unable to bear the silence any longer, insisted on Zohra's visiting Shanti Niwas. Nor was he reassured when she came back to tell him of the cold reception she had received.

"How changed they are!" she exclaimed, "and how chilly! But polite, oh so polite. My word I felt as if I were freezing."

"Mohini?" He asked sick with apprehension.

"Pale and thin and a ghost of herself. The fever's gone, but she still has a nasty cough."

"Did she say anything? About me I mean?"

"How could she? Saraswati sat with us all the time and we talked of the weather and such trifles! I couldn't stick it for more than half-an-hour, and then took my leave: and no one asked me to stay on!"

That was all. And for a few days his anxiety was so acute that he could hardly have his meals and then some other friend told Zohra that Mohini was well again and out of bed. His anxiety removed, he was cheerful for a short time, but still no word came from her. The days resumed their monotonous tempo, a cycle of maddening regularity. Sunset faded into darkness and the stars paled before the sun, again and yet again: dawn and noon and night came and went in constant repetition, and still no word came from her.

Then, one day, towards the middle of the month, a servant came and told him that Dr. Kaul had called to see him, and Habib hurried to the drawing-room to find Anand standing before the fireplace, gazing thoughtfully at the burning logs of wood.

Habib greeted him cordially and asked him to take a seat.

"I expect, this visit surprises you?" asked Anand.

Tahir Foundation

"No —— no. That is why should it? Is there anything strange in your coming to see an old friend?"

"Yes there is, things being as they are. I'm going to be very frank with you, Habib. The occasion demands it."

"Good."

"I want to talk to you about Mohini."

"Very good. You know that's just what I've been waiting for, for some one belonging to your family to have a candid talk with me about everything instead of just condemning me as you've all been doing."

"Habib, I'm not here to discuss the ethics of it all, I may have my opinion and it may be different to yours, it may not even be identical with that of my family, but I'm not going to talk about that. You see I'm a doctor."

"Yes?" whispered Habib fearfully.

"And Mohini is sick."

"She's been so unhappy!"

"Yes, and you are all to blame. You and her parents and everybody. Between you, you've driven her this way and that until her being is torn in twain. She has not eaten or slept properly for days, and she was never strong. And then this attack of influenza on top of it all !" He shrugged his shoulders.

"What do you mean? How ill is she?"

"It's difficult to say —— "

"I tell you , Anand, she needs happiness. Surely, you know that that's the best medicine for her. If only your grandfather and uncle would not stand in her way. If only they would let us marry."

"My dear man, you don't know what you're talking about! Let me not mince matters. Unless something drastic is done, Mohini will be in the arms of the Tragic Bridegroom —— and you still dream of marriage!"

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"You don't mean?" It was a horrified whisper.

"I do. She's come in for tuberculosis, and it may be the galloping variety."

"My God!" Habib's face was ashen, he bowed his head and his hand trembled so violently that Anand felt sincerely sorry for him. He stood up and placed his hand on his shoulders. "Bear up, old man!" he said. Then opening a cabinet that stood nearby, he poured some brandy into a glass and handed it to him.

"Here drink this."

"And are you —— are you sure?" Habib asked after some time.

"Yes, she's been X-rayed."

"Just, how bad is it? For God's sake tell me."

"Bad enough."

"What shall we do?"

"That's better. That's why I'm here, to ask you to co-operate."

"Of course. I'll do anything—anything."

Anand could not help being touched by the intensity of Habib's feelings.

"Believe me, Habib" he said "I'm sincerely sorry for you both."

"Thank you."

"Nor do I think of you as a scoundrel, or of her conduct as disgraceful as the others do. I'm just very sorry that it had to happen."

"Anand, believe me, if I'd known, that it would affect her thus I'd —I'd —— rather have gone away —— or —— or done anything ——"

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"I believe you. But what's happened has happened."

"What can we do now?"

"The first thing that you must all understand is this. She must be free of all worry. I've spoken to uncle and to grandfather.

"They?"

"They're terribly upset too. Like you, they too regret having worried the poor girl day and night and are ready to do anything now."

"And so?"

"For the present shall we consider the subject of love and marriage taboo?"

"If you say so."

"She must have peace and no violent emotions must disturb her. That's impossible while she's with her family or in the same town as you. I'm sending her away."

"Where?"

"To Kashmir. My wife will go with her. There's a very good doctor in Srinagar and the dry cold climate of the valley she loves is the best medicine for Mohini. If she improves and is well enough to travel, we shall send her to Switzerland in a few months' time."

"Why not straight away?"

"She's not strong enough."

"I see. And you want me to ——?"

"I have uncle's permission to take you to see her for a few minutes. I want you to present a cheerful appearance. Tell her that you want her to go to Kashmir and to get well soon: that she must not worry about anything and that you want her to put away all

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disturbing thoughts. Without putting it into so many words, let her feel that everything will be all right once she is well again."

"I shall certainly do as you say. But her family?"

"They will adopt the same attitude."

Habib was silent for a few minutes and then began in a hesitating voice. "Anand," he said, "I —— it's difficult to put it into words: and believe me I'm not thinking of myself, but if you were to forget all the complications and think of Mohini only as a doctor —— "

"That's just what I'm doing."

"Then don't you think that it would be much better for her if she had something to look forward to —— something to live for. If she were told, for instance, that once she recovered, all obstacles to her happiness would be removed, would it not help her recovery?"

"It's difficult to say. To begin with, even, if she recovered, I doubt if she will ever be strong enough for marriage—and—and children."

"Ah!" it was a cry of despair.

"Besides Mohini is intelligent and a sudden change on the part of her family will show her how ill she is. And lastly, I doubt if I could make the family agree to it."

"To save her life ——" began Habib indignantly.

"I've just explained that the effect it would have on her health is doubtful. As for the family, they naturally feel that they should not make any promises which they would not be able to keep. In any case, what's important is that her mind should be at rest. Tranquillity is better for her than excitement. Therefore, I want her just to feel that all is well, rather be all keyed up and excited at the thought of a possible marriage that in all probability could never take place —— Only to suffer another disappointment and set-back when she realizes that. Do you see now?"

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"I see."

"That is also the reason why she must not write or receive letters."

"But surely ——" protested Habib.

"All excitement and exertion is bad for her. On the other hand, I realize that she must have news of you. Swarup will therefore correspond regularly with your sister."

Habib began to feel that Anand's judgment as a doctor was being influenced by the prejudices of his family and he was silent. From the look on his face, Anand guessed the thoughts that were passing in his mind.

"Habib," he said gently "Let me tell you one thing. Mohini is my sister and I love her deeply. Also I'm a doctor. To save life, is my business and the aim of my existence. If I thought that by marriage with you I could save her, whatever my ideas and feelings may be, I would be the first to advocate it."

"But the others?"

"I cannot answer for them. But I would help you both. You must believe me when I tell you that complete separation from all that has been worrying her and perfect rest is necessary for Mohini. Now, will you do, as I say?"

"I will, but I must also tell you in all honesty that I don't agree with you. I know Mohini. The conflict in her mind will remain until it is resolved by some solution. Also, she needs happiness, that is the only tonic for her sensitive nature. However, you are the doctor. I know your ability and am convinced of your sincerity. I'll do whatever you say."

"Thank you, Habib."

Lying on her bed on the verandah Mohini took a long look at the lawn and the garden spread out before her. She was all packed and ready to depart and after many weeks of dejection eagerness enveloped her. She had been so weary all these days, so weary

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and so worn-out with the conflict and the confusion in her mind, but now at the very thought of Kashmir, her blood seemed to rush afresh through her veins. A few hours ago Habib had been to see her. Habib so alive and so ardent, and as always his tender eyes and strong hands had lifted her from the depths of despair. He had been cheerful, almost gay, and confident of the future and she had caught the mood from him. Swarup and Anand had been kind. They had actually left her alone with him for a few minutes. Everyone was very kind to her these days, mother, and grandfather and even father. There was something to be said for illness for it had given back to her all the lost affection she had been longing for. When first Anand had told her that the old trouble had recurred and that she was suffering from pleurisy again, she had hardly cared, she had just turned her face to the wall and longed for peace. She had been so very tired, for the accute tension of the past weeks had worn her nerves to shreds: and she had come to a state when nothing seemed to matter. But the tenderness of her parents and the kindness of her friends had soothed her restlessness, and today when she had been allowed to meet Habib so freely, all had seemed right again, and the desire to be fit and healthy once more was strong in her; while the thought of her beloved valley, to which she was going, was a balm to her nerves.

"I shall go to my valley," she thought, as she gazed into the distance, "to the snows and silences. To the world that lies enshrouded in a white mantle of forgetfulness. Away, away from 'the weariness, the fever and the fret' —— and there, when the snows melt and the hills become a deeper blue, and the mountain streams rush through the brown mould stirring it to new life —— when green shoots burst from the waiting seeds heralding red poppies and flowers of indigo and gold: and the almond groves are frosted over with flowers more fair than snow, and the peach trees blush into blossom beneath the warm caress of the breeze. Then the willows will whisper to the waters that spring is here again, and perhaps I shall find peace once more. Perhaps, I shall find peace once more, and an answer to the many questions that haunt me now —— and at last the conflict in my mind will be resolved. Yes, I shall go to my valley."

During the last days of January, Sughra's son was born, and scenes of rejoicings were witnessed in Nishat Manzil once more. Jamaluddin, the proud grandfather and Mehrunnissa, the happy grandmother, vied with one another in praising the little grandson,

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who had become the centre of attraction, the moment he had come into the world. Karima arrived from Multan with trays full of sweets and fruits, a new dress together with a set of jewellery for Sughra and dozens of tiny garments for the child. Mansur had a shy, yet proud, air and every now and then, he would go into his wife's room to take another look at his son.

Sughra lay in her large bed, dreamy and content, looking at the world with eyes grown tranquil. The hours of pain had passed slowly enough, and yet, she had found an exultation in the torture through which she had passed, for it had made more precious still ,the moment, when at last, she had held her son in her arms. At first, her love for him was like an ache, an urge that must find expression and it was only when he suckled serenely at her breast that peace enveloped her like a flood. Her life that had seemed to be a tangled web of dreams and disillusionment, had surged forward to fall into a pattern, and significance flowed into her world again. Already her fertile imagination was busy as she lay there dreaming about the future. Her son! He was a bonnie baby, a wonderful child and he would grow up to fulfil all her hopes and aspirations. She would bring him up to be a true example of Muslim manhood and he would revive the glory of the heroes of old by deeds of valour and of daring.

Hundreds of visitors came to shower congratulations upon the parents and grandparents and presents upon the baby: and once more, the brass-band arrived from Multan to play odd tunes and marches upon the lawn. In vain, the nurse pleaded for rest and quiet for the young mother. Relations and friends would insist on seeing her and the baby. "Just for a minute please, nurse," each one would plead, "I won't remain long. I must congratulate Sughra and see the baby." And Mehrunnissa would say, "Oh, do let her go in nurse, she's a very close relation or a very special friend, you know." And the nurse would shrug her shoulders and let them in, fearful for the health of the mother. But Sughra was strong, her spirit was soaring on the wings of happiness and neither noise nor worry seemed to touch her.

In the midst of the general rejoicing, there was only one, whose mind knew no tranquility. For Habib, each day was like a chess board of hours of alternate hopes and fears: and the most important event in the day, was the postman's knock upon the door,

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for he had learnt to wait for the letters that came all too seldom from Swarup to Zohra. Each day, he would wander out on the front lawn at the hour when the morning post usually arrived and would hurriedly walk forward to meet the postman, when he appeared, his heart pounding heavily against his chest as the postman sorted out the letters. The afternoon post generally came at about 2 o'clock and often the family would be having lunch, when it arrived. The men usually had this meal by themselves in the larger dining-room that opened on to the front verandah, and at every knock upon the front door, Habib would jump up and rush into the hall, hoping to find the postman at the front door holding out the welcome letter, for the postmen had soon learnt that the young Sheikh Sahib waited for letters from Srinagar, addressed to Miss Zohra in a certain handwriting, and each time the letter came, they held it out with a broad grin and usually received a tip.

There was little news from Srinagar, at first Swarup wrote to say that Mohini's progress was very satisfactory and the doctor was taking a more hopeful view of her case. But soon a letter came to say that there had been a set-back and that the patch in one of her lungs had spread and her fever had mounted higher than before. Again, she wrote to say that she was better, and then a few days later another letter reported a set-back. With each letter, Habib would be tossed back and forth from the heights of hope to the depths of despair. He became nervous and irritable and his face wore a harassed look. Jamaluddin was well aware of his son's suffering. He had realized that even if Mohini lived, there was little chance, that Habib's hopes could ever be fulfilled, and with this thought all anger had vanished from his mind and his heart was sad for his son. He could see that Habib's nerves were taught to the point of breaking, that he ate little and slept less: and he decided to try and pull him out of this continual brooding. So he called him to his study one day and told him that as he was getting older and less energetic, Habib must take over more of his legal work. Habib had already been acting as his junior counsel, but now, his father left several of the cases entirely to him and this meant many hours of hard work each day. And he was glad of the work, for in dealing with the problems of others, he would, sometimes, forget his own and thus find a respire from his thoughts. The birth of his nephew had filled the house with guests and with gladness, and he felt lonlier than ever. When he saw Sughra's glowing face, he was happy for her sake, but as he held the child in his arms, he had a vision of Mohini as

she might have looked with his son in her arms, and sick at heart, he walked out of the room.

Zohra was a great help to him these days. She was growing up rapidly and with her genuine sympathy and warm affection help him as no other could have done.

February came and with it the festival of *Basant*. The sky was dotted with many-coloured kites again, but Habib hardly noticed them, for he was thinking of last year's *Basant*. He took out his car and drove rapidly to Shalimar. The gardens were full of laughing, chattering people and the women had yellow *dopattas* and the men had tied on their heads turbans of the same colour, for Spring was here again. The brightly dressed children were like wandering flowers in the garden and some of them stood in clusters by the water that trickled merrily over the marble of the waterfall, and its song was gay today for nothing could be sad upon this bright day of *Basant*. As he looked upon the flowers and the fountains and upon the kites that sailed the skies, Habib's spirits rose and he hurried back for he felt certain that there would be a letter from Srinagar today. And sure enough, Zohra came forward to meet him smiling and she held forth a sheet of paper and said "Good news, Swarup says that she is ever so much better."

Spring had come to Lahore, but in far-away Kashmir, it was still winter and the snow lay thick upon the ground. The air was crisp and dry and the sunlight so golden and the sky so deep a blue that it seemed to have come out of a picture post-card.

Mohini would spend the day upon the balcony of the two-storeyed bungalow that her father had built away from the congested part of the town and near the fields. Lying on the broad couch-bed that had been made up for her, or sitting in her easy chair, she could see before her the valley covered with its mantle of snow and dotted with dark trees, with the Jhelum river winding through; while, in the distance, the white mountains of the Pir Panjal range that separated it from the Punjab, kept silent vigil. The river was not far from the house and she could see a stretch of it as it came down a bend and then went out of sight again twisting and curling like a giant serpent. This stretch of the water fascinated her as she gazed upon it hour by hour, while the river-craft went up and down all day; squat, crudely-made boats of the river-folk, whose lives were

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spent on the water, would pass by, often steered only by a child: boats carrying logs of wood, would come floating down and upon the piles of timber could be seen a man or a woman with a long barge pole; small *shikaras* would flash past as they shot down-stream, or come slowly up the river, the oarsman rowing hard against the current; and now and then, a lovely house-boat went by and the voices of her crew were loud and shrill as they steered her along; but the house-boats came seldom for this was not the season for tourists.

Sometimes the water would sparkle with flash of gold as the sunlight played upon it, and sometimes, it would be cold and grey under a cloudy sky: but the river was loveliest when the moon was bright and the light of it purer and whiter in this winter world than she had ever seen it before. And there, upon her balcony, it would seem to her as if life itself were like this river, only a stretch of which was visible to her eyes. From an unknown world it came winding its way and for a span it lay there before her, golden and grey and silver with each passing hour, and then flowed away out of sight, again passing through many lands, ere it reached its destination. From some strange land we come, through many lives golden with laughter or grey with tears: and into some strange land, we passed and what joys or sorrows lay before us, we would never know. Until at last, our struggles over, our restlessness would be forever stilled in the limitless ocean of Nirvana. But this short sunlit span, her prcsent life, how sweet it was and how short? Often she thought of Habib and the certainty of his love enshrouded her in a warmth so sweet it was an ecstasy, and then she was sure that with the spring, shc would be well again and go forth to meet him with laughter in her eyes, and hand in hand, they would wander away into the fields of poppies and irises and all obstacles to their love wonld be removed. But sometimes the sky was overcast, the wind was cold and a strange shadow lay upon her and the icy fingers of the unknown would seem to grip her like the claws of some huge bird of prey, and then, she would shudder and call for Swarup and ask her to sit there and talk to her. But of all the hours, the difficult were those, when she came out of the dreamy haze that surrounded her and saw the world with eyes grown keen and clear. Then conflict would grip her mind again and she would toss upon her bed in fever and in restlessness. Father, mother, Habib! Her ideas, her aspirations. Grandfather! Love and life: disease and death! They fought in her mind and in her body like monsters and they would not let her rest.

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The doctors fixed a strict routine for her: breakfast, then rest upon the balcony, then a short stroll in the garden on the days that she was well enough, then lunch and rest again, then tea followed by indoor games or a quiet chat with Swarup, then an hour's reading: supper at 7 p.m. and bed at 10 o'clock. They emphasized the necessity for rest and nourishing food and fresh air and freedom from all worry, and she tried to do all they asked of her, for she was anxious to be well again. Youth was strong in her and there was so much that she wanted to do, so many lands she longed to see, so many people she wished to meet. ' In spite of the obstacles that lay in her path, life appeared to her to be a sunlit vista leading to wondrous lands unseen. She was anxious to be well again and to feel once more Habib's arms around her and to hear his whispered words of love. And there were days when the thermometer registered hope, when her head was clear and the blood ran tranquil through her veins; then she would feel, as if she were almost well again and her steps would be light as she walked along the garden paths, and, sometimes, there would be a song upon her lips. But days would come, when she was unable to leave her bed and the incessant cough wracked her body, and the froth upon her lips was the hue of rose; then the night would coil around her like a black serpent, choking her breath and bathing her limbs in sweat; and grotesque dreams would haunt her fitful sleep.

In the last week of February, the weather became wet and dreary and the thaw began. The doctor had warned Swarup to be careful, but somehow Mohini caught a chill. Her fever shot up alarmingly and the world became dim and hazy. For some time, she passed off into a dream of delirium and reality faded away. Swarup sent a telegram to her parents who arrived in Srinagar, post-haste bringing Anand with them; but Mohini did not recognise father or mother. She lay there moaning restlessly and now and then, she muttered a few words and sometimes she whispered "Habib!"

She woke up one night and for a moment she wondered where she was. Then the mist rolled away and she saw her own room quite and dark and knew that it was night. She turned on her side and saw that a shaded table-lamp was burning in one corner and near it sat a white robed figure. Apprehension shot through her in quick waves. A nurse! then she had been very ill, perhaps—— and suddenly fear held her in its grip —— Death loomed near

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like a huge shadow, death —— the unknown—. "Nurse!" she cried and her voice was almost a shriek. The white clad figure put away her knitting and came towards her. She had a kind face.

"Nurse?"

"Yes, dear."

"Am I going to die?"

"Of course, not."

"Are you sure?" The dark eyes were pleading.

"I am."

"Nurse, I'm too young to die."

The gentle voice tore at the nurse's heart and she sat down in the easy chair near the bed and took her tiny hands in both her own.

"You are going to live for many many years," she said and she was so cool, so undisturbed, so efficient and her hands were so strong and reassuring that Mohini's fears began to die down.

"Nurse," she said again after a time.

"Yes?"

"I'm thirsty."

"Good."

"And hungry too!" she smiled a shy trembling smile.

"Very good! I'll get you some warm milk."

The hot drink warmed her and slowly the strength seemed to flow through her cramped limbs again while the nurse gently chafed her hands.

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"I've been very ill?" she asked.

"Yes, but you're much better now."

She was feeling much better and hope had taken the place of fear, the quick bouyant hope of youth that is so slow to die and so quick to reappear.

"Nurse, I have a feeling."

"Yes?"

"I'm going to be ever so much better now."

"Of course, you are! Let me settle your pillow; there, now, go to sleep like a good girl."

"And you'll sit near me.

"Of course."

And with her hands still held in those of the nurse, she fell into the first peaceful sleep she had known for many nights.

The next day she was better, and the doctor said that the crisis had passed. The improvement was maintained, and as the wet days of February gave place to March sunshine, and the first buds began to break into flower upon the almond trees in the garden, she was so much better that the doctors became hopeful of her case once more.

CHAPTER XXIV

"I tell you I will. I must," Zohra's voice was shrill.

"What's all the fuss about," asked Habib as he walked into the sitting room to find Sughra sitting calmly on the sofa and Zohra pacing up and down agitatedly.

"It's the inter-university debate ——" began Sughra.

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"You must help me *Bhaijan*," interrupted Zohra, "once again, I've been asked to speak on behalf of my college, and —— and —— if I'm not allowed to this time —— I don't know what I'll do!"

"Shout the house down first, and then lead a suffragette movement," laughed Sughra.

"And I will too. All this humbug about the woman's place being in the home! I tell you, it's getting on my nerves."

"Not such a bad place, the home, you," said Sughra.

"A healthy husband and a child every year. No! thank you. There are other things, I want to do."

"Zohra!" said Habib, "don't be nasty, child."

"And please stop calling me a child, *Bhaijan*."

"Al'right young woman! Now stop being excited and let's know all about it."

"I've just told you, I've been asked to represent my college at the inter-university debate. I told *Apa* about it and she says she does not think it would be 'wise' for me to speak among so many boys! Not 'wise'! I ask you?"

"She's just voiced her opinion, and you shouldn't be so angry about it?"

"I expect you both to help me to get father's permission."

"Last year ——" began Sughra.

"That was such a long time ago," interrupted Zohra, "nearly eighteen months and things have changed so much. I'm not exactly in purdah now, you know."

"Not exactly, but ——" began Sughra, again.

"I agree with Zohra," it was Habib, who interrupted her this time, "things are different now, and I think, father will allow her to take part in the debate."

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"Oh *Bhaijan* darling, you really think so?"

"I do. Look there's father coming across the courtyard. Now, you girls, hold your tongues and let me ask him."

"Al'right," said Sughra "You know I'm not really against Zohra's speaking —— and I —— well I'll be happy, if father thinks, it's alright for her to do so."

"Thank you *Apa*. Please don't oppose the idea. Put in a word for me," pleaded Zohra and her elder sister smiled.

"I'll do that," she promised.

Zohra hugged both borther and sister in turn "Oh, I love you both!" she exclaimed, as their father walked in.

"Why this emphatic declaration of affection?" he smiled, as he looked affectionately at the three of them.

"Oh father, it's something ever so exciting," began Zohra, but Habib made a sign to her to stop and let him do the talking.

"There's something we must discuss with you," he said "but first let me order tea."

"Yes, do that, son. A cup of tea will be most welcome."

"I'll tell the servants," said Zohra and ran out of the room.

"What's the child so excited about?" asked Jamaluddin.

Habib pointed to a row of silver cups on the mantle-shelf. "Zohra is a very good speaker," he said "most of those were won at inter-collegiate debates."

"I know and I'm proud of her. Is she going to speak at another debate?"

"She wants to, but ——?"

"But what?"

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"She requires your permission."

"Of course, she has my permission. I'm always delighted to hear of her triumphs."

"This time, she wishes to speak at the inter-university debate and it's not a contest among the girls' colleges only."

"The men's colleges are competing too?"

"Yes."

"Hum, that's different. Is the debate open to the public?"

"Yes father, but please allow her. She's really talented and should be encouraged."

"I must think it over. What do you say, Sughra?"

"Zohra's not exactly in purdah now."

"That's true. But so far, she's only met some of our friends. Speaking in public is a different matter."

"I'm sure, she will do very well and we shall all be proud of her. Please allow her father."

"Oh please, please allow me father," begged Zohra, as she came in. She came and sat very close to him on the sofa looking pleadingly up at him. This decided Jamaluddin.

"Al'right," he said, "You have my permission and mind you win the first prize."

"Oh father, darling, I love you so," Zohra hugged him.

"Little minx—let us have tea in peace. When is the debate?"

"In a week's time."

"What's the subject?"

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"Women's place is in the home and she should not take part in politics."

"And of course you'll oppose it!"

"Of course."

"Well you'd better be good, for we are all coming to hear you. Aren't we Habib."

"Oh, yes."

"Oh! —— I —— how wonderful ! I shall not let you down."

The hall was full to overflowing. Crowds of chattering undergraduates of both sexes, had come to cheer the debating teams of their respective colleges and enthusiasm ran high.

Zohra and another girl named Sham Kumari were representing the Punjab College for Women and they sat demurely among the members of the other teams.

The hon'ble judges, two men and a woman, took their seats in the first row facing the platform, the President made an introductory speech, and then the debate began.

Lots had been drawn to determine the order in which the competitors were to speak and Zohra's name was seventh on the list. She was feeling nervous and uncomfortable. Her face was flushed, and her hands were cold and clammy and as she heard speaker after speaker enunciate his or her views, she felt she had forgotten all she wanted to say. By the tones of their voices she knew that some of the speakers had learnt their speeches by heart, just as she had done the year before when she first began taking parts in debates. A few days ago, she had seriously considered writing down her speech for this debate and learning it, but remembering the parrot-like tone of some of the speakers she had heard, she had discarded the idea, and satisfied herself by thinking out the points of her speech and noting them down. A few well-formed phrases had flashed through her mind and these she had memorised, and that was all. Yet now, she was to get up and to speak in front of all these people. She felt, she would never be able to

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do it: she was sure, she would make a fool of herself there in front of her father and Habib and everybody, and she was in agony. She had an impulse to get up and to walk out of the hall, but she controlled herself and tried to think coherently. It was no use, her brain just refused to function.

The President said. "Miss Zohra Jamaluddin will now speak against the cut motion," and Sham Kumari nudged her. She rose from her seat as if in a daze, and walked towards the platform. She took her stand before the Speaker's desk, placed her notes on it, and then looked around. Hundreds of eager faces were looking up at her and the girls of her college were clapping and cheering.

"Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, " she began and her voice was low and nervous and the words came to her lips with great difficulty. She had said but a few sentences, when someone sniggered. Then the blood rushed to her face and she faced her audience defiantly. At that moment, she saw her father and he smiled at her and nodded, and then as suddenly as it had overtaken her, the nervousness vanished. She forgot the President, the judges and the audience, she forgot everyone except the thoughts she wished to put into words: and the words came tumbling to her lips in well turned phrases and her voice rang out melodiously. Dimly she heard the cheering of the audience and paused to look around, and she saw the eager young faces and the smiles of the girls of her college and now she was no longer afraid, she was the master of the situation, and she continued her speech with perfect confidence. She had felt so deeply upon this subject, and now, all the frustrations and longings of a girl behind the purdah, aching to take a citizen's part in the happenings of the world, were poured forth in a voice so full of feeling that all, who heard her, were visibly affected.

Thunderous applause greeted her as she finished her speech, but she had eyes only for her father's proud face and her brother's encouraging smile.

Sham Kumari was the tenth speaker and Zohra's speech had given her such courage that she spoke remarkably well although she was only a beginner and had memorized her speech.

The judges retired and the hall full of people waited breathlessly for the verdict, while forecasts were whispered among the teams and

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their supporters. At last, the judges reappeared and the President called for order. There was a pin-drop silence as he began to read out the names of the prize-winners.

"The first prize is won by Miss Zohra Jamaluddin of the Punjab College for Women, whose remarkable oration has greatly impressed the judges," he read, and the applause broke out with renewed vigour.

"The second prize goes to Mr. Nand Lal of the Government College and the third to Mr. Azhar of the Islamia College. The ladies' prize is won by Miss Sham Kumari of the Punjab College for Women. " The announcement of each prize was the signal for fresh cheering.

"I am very pleased to announce," continued the President "That the Trophy is won by the Punjab College for Women," upon this, the applause was deafening: "and I call upon the team from that college to come and receive it."

Smiling and triumphant, Zohra and Sham Kumari went up to the platform to receive the beautiful silver trophy; and then Zohra had to walk up to it once again to receive the first prize, while the cheering continued without abatement.

It was a blushed and happy girl, who brought the prizes home and laid them before her mother, and the mother clasped her in her arms and kissed her lovingly, while the proud father presented her with fifty rupees to buy herself a new dress in honour of the occasion.

An hour later after the family had finished lunch, Habib went into his room for some quiet reading. His thoughts flew to Srinagar and to Mohini. "How happy she will be to hear of Zohra's triumph," he thought, and the longing to see her again overwhelmed him once more. Last month, he had nearly gone to Kashmir, when the news of her serious condition had come through and he had learnt that her parents had gone to her. He had packed a bag and reserved a seat on the train to Rawalpindi and then a telegram had arrived to say that he should not come up as the excitement of seeing him would be bad for her. Since then letters had reported a progressive improvement in her condition and there was talk of sending her to Switzerland in a few months' time.

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'If she goes to Switzerland', Habib was thinking now, 'I shall go to: and there in that free country, where convention is not so rigid, I shall be able to see her often and help her along the road to complete recovery.'

"*Bhaian, Bhaijan*!" it was Zohra's voice and a moment later she burst into the room. Habib was shocked to see the look of horror on the face that had been radiant a few moments before.

"*Bhaijan*," she cried "Mohini —— oh Mohini!" and she held out a letter.

"What do you mean?"

"She —— She"

"She is very ill."

"It's worse —— Oh *Bhaijan*!"

"Not —— not —— no!"

"Yes."

"My God." He sank into a chair, and she fell down on the sofa sobbing helplessly.

"It can't be true", he cried at last "I don't believe it."

"This letter, " she sobbed "it was —— brought by a cousin ——"

"Give it to me," his voice was harsh.

"I'm sending this letter by a cousin. It is better so," Swarup had written. "A telegram would be too much of a shock to your brother. Zohra —— Mohini is no more. Give the enclosed to Habib."

His hands shook and the words were blurred and he could not read any more. His head dropped on the arm of his chair and the letter fluttered away helplessly from his hand. Zohra came and sat at his feet placing her head in his lap, and sobbing would

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not be stilled —— But, he neither saw nor heard. After a time, he sat up and picked up the envelope again to find a letter for himself enclosed on it.

"Believe me Habib," wrote Swarup, "I'm sincerely sorry for you. Through all these weeks that I was with Mohini, I learnt to sympathise with you both, and to curse the barriers that separate man from man. Now you have my heartfelt sympathy in your great sorrow and I feel I must write to you.

"She loved you deeply, Habib, and the thought of you was always in her mind, but she loved her parents too, and these conflicting loyalties gave her no peace —— she has found it now in Eternity, let that be your consolation.

"All these days she was so sure of getting well; despondency hardly seemed to touch her, and the thought of death scarcely entered her mind: except last month, after she had been very ill, and then one day, she said to me, 'If I should die ——' 'Don't talk nonsense,' I interrupted. 'I said if' she persisted, 'If I should die —— Spring will not delay its coming —— nor the flowers refuse to appear. The winds will blow as before —— and the fields be filled with corn again . Then tell Habib from me that life should go on for him, and my spirit, wherever it be, will be happy in his happiness —— even —— even if there be another to take my place beside him —— tell him, that I wished it so ——, 'and her voice broke and she turned her face to the wall ....

"But she was so much better after this, and we made plans for going together to Switzerland and then ——

"It was a lovely Spring morning. The sun was bright and the birds were singing; and Mohini looked down from the balcony and saw the clusters of white almond blossoms intermingled with the pink peach blooms in the orchard and then said 'Look Swarup, Spring is here at last,' and she took a deep breath of contentment. Then suddenly a terrible fit of coughing overtook her and I saw the blood trickle down her lips and then gush forth in torrents and I shouted in terror as I ran to support her fainting form and uncle rushed to the telephone to call the doctor——

Two hours later, she was no more ——"

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Habib threw the letter away and walked out of the house towards the garage. Then he took out his car and drove away, further and further away down the endless roads. People shouted at him and motorists hooted their horns, but he neither saw nor heard. Faster he went and faster, and tongas and bullock carts and buildings flashed past and people hurriedly left the road to get out of his way, and still he drove on.

Suddenly, with a start, he recognized the old walls of Shalimar. Then he slowed down and brought the car to a standstill and jumping out entered the garden gate. It was Sunday and the fountains were playing, and the yellow mango flowers covered the trees like a film of gold. The second terrace lay drowsy and golden under the strong March sun, and round the tanks the profusion of flowers was a riot of colour and the clusters of butterflies like floating petals among them.

"Spring will not delay its coming ——"

In the rose garden the roses were in full bloom, red and white and pink and flame they nodded their heads in welcome to the hum of the crowding bees.

"Nor the flowers refuse to appear ——"

And Habib hated it all, Spring, and the flowers, the bees and the butterflies; and—all the meaningless carnival of colour and song. Only the waterfall was in sympathy with him, the waterfall, whose plaintive song was never stilled. And he ran along the path to stand in front of the falling waters.

"Art thou by secret grief compelled ——?"

Then in frenzy he rushed forward and struck his head against the unyielding stone, and buried his face in the curling water and his sobs mingled with the murmur of the waterfall, and his warm tears joined its cold waters to flow away over the marble.

THE END

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PART II

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CHAPTER I

The Punjab was in the grip of election fever. After many years the people, or at least some of them, would be going to the polls in January 1936 and although, it was only November and the election a good two months away, the campaign was in full swing. There were several parties in the field among whom the Congress, the Muslim League, the Unionists and the Sikh Akalis were the most important. But, although, the new constitution had widened the franchise, the Punjabis were still politically apathetic and individuals mattered more to them than parties. A man or a woman would vote for a friend or a relation or a member of a certain tribe, regardless of what political views he or she represented, for thus it had always been in the Punjab, and the Punjab is slow to change. One thing, however, was new and strange and interesting; women were to vote for the first time in large numbers and the excitement and enthusiasm among the women voters was higher than among the men.

The new constitution of 1935 had not only given women the vote but reserved a certain number of seats for them in each Provincial Legislature, and several women were contesting the two seats reserved for them in the Punjab Assembly. This granting of certain privileges to women was one of the few good things in the new constitution. The second Round Table Conference in London had been followed by a third, and then a Joint Select Committee of Britishers and Indians had carried on its deliberations for months. A Franchise Committee had toured the country and many men and women had appeared as witnesses before the Joint Select Committee. Eventually all this mountain of labour had produced—the new Constitution.

Congress had boycotted the deliberations, after the fiasco of the second Round Table Conference. Out of the Muslims representives, the most important, i.e., Jinnah had not been invited, while two of the other prominent Muslim leaders had died during this period. Among the remaining Hindu, Muslim and Sikh dele-

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gates, there was no compromise as to the share that each community should have in the legislatures.

Fresh elections to the Provincial Legislatures were ordered in January, 1937, and, after prolonged deliberations among their respective members, both the main political parties,—the Congress and the Muslim League, decided to contest them.

Jinnah had returned to India in 1936 and a new wave of political consciousness had galvanised the Muslims. He had re-organized the Muslim League, and its influence had grown by leaps and bounds, especially in the provinces where the Muslims were in a minority, but as always the Punjab was slow to change. British influence was strong here, and the League was preaching a new doctrine to the Muslims of India, a doctrine of freedom both from British Imperialism and from Hindu domination. This new doctrine was not welcome to the landlords of the Punjab, or to their British friends and so the League was given a cold shoulder.

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The League was given a cold shoulder by most of the rich and powerful landlords of the Punjab, but in the towns and among the younger Muslims, its influence was growing. Some of the Muslims newspapers of Lahore had openly adopted the League policy, and the money of the Unionists could not buy them over, nor reduce them to silence. The great poet of the Muslims, Iqbal was still alive and in constant communication with the political leader of the Muslims—Mohammad Ali Jinnah. The songs of Iqbal were sung in the streets and recited on the platforms of the cities and they awakened in the Muslims, a sense of their past greatness and their present degradation. They called them to a new life and a new world. They preached the philosophy of the true realization of the 'self', and the development of man not merely as a part of nature, but as a guiding force as well, and they revived the idea of the international brotherhood of Islam.

Some of the better educated families of Lahore were staunch Muslim Leaguers and among them the Sheikh family was prominent. Saeed Ahmad, the husband of Zaibunnissa Begum, who had been to prison in 1919, had always been a follower of Jinnah and his brother-in-law Jamaluddin shared his views; but, while Saeed Ahmad

took an active part in politics, Jamaluddin led a quieter life. He had given up practising at the Bar, and most of his practice had gone to Habib, who was doing exceedingly well in the profession. The family had moved into the new double-storeyed bungalow built near the canal. The quarrel with Fakhruddin had been patched up many a time, but always broke out afresh, for although Akhtari was happily married to the son of another rich family from Multan and was now the proud mother of two children, Fakhruddin could never forgive Habib for refusing to marry her. For years, he had lived at Multan and came to Lahore but seldom, and Nishat Manzil, which the Jamaluddin family had surrendered to him, had begun to have a neglected and dilapidated appearance.

Saeed Ahmad was not rich and Zaibunnissa had been given to him in marriage, because he was a brilliant young man of good blood and not for the sake of his wealth. He had been expected to do well as a barrister, but his political work had interfered with his practice and he had never made much money. All the same, he decided to contest one of the seats in the Provincial Assembly as a Muslim League candidate. Jamaluddin was delighted to hear of this decision and hastened to Saeed's house to offer whatever help he may.

"Thank you, *Bhai*," said Saeed, "I shall need all the help you can give me for my chances are not bright."

"Not bright?" asked a friend from the United Provinces, who was visiting Lahore, "but aren't you the League candidate?"

"Oh yes, the Muslim League has given me its ticket."

"But .... but, then I don't understand. The League is the strongest Muslim party—why, in our Province, almost all the League candidates are certain to get in."

"You come from a province, where the Muslims are in a minority" said Jamaluddin, "and your weakness has proved to be your strength, for the fear of domination has united you. It is not so in these provinces, where we are in a majority and the position in the Punjab is peculiar."

"Then the League is not strong here?"

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"It's like this, after the great repression of 1919 the Punjab became apathetic, then the British, who had become afraid of the growing power of the Congress and the Muslim League, encouraged the reactionary feudal landlords of the Punjab to form a party of their own—The Unionist Party. A few educated families like ours stuck to the League, but the other landlord families joined the new party which helped by its British masters, grabbed power under the old constitution which had enfranchised only the moneyed classes. Although this party consists of Hindus and Sikhs as well as Muslims, the majority of the landlords who control it are Muslims, and it is well entrenched in the Punjab."

"But what of the League?"

"The Muslim League lost ground, partly due to the machinations of the Unionists, but also because Mr. Jinnah had left India to settle down temporarily in London, and death deprived us of two of our other great leaders. Since Mr. Jinnah's return a new life is beginning to spring up in the Punjab, especially in the cities where people are rallying round the League, but we have not had time to grow strong enough to beat the Unionists in this election."

"And Saeed's opponent is?"

"One of the richest and most powerful of them."

Next day Jamaluddin heard that his brother Fakhruddin was standing for election as a Unionist candidate from one of the Multan constituencies and that his success being almost certain, Nishat Manzil was to be reopened for the Fakhruddin family to reside in during the periods that the Assembly would be in session. A few days later, a letter arrived from Fakhruddin's opponent, who was the Muslim League candidate asking for his help in the election, and after some hesitation Jamaluddin made up his mind to assist him. This led to another flare up between the two brothers, and this quarrel created a schism so deep that a family feud began, a feud that was to last for many years to come.

Zohra was busy re-arranging the drawing room. It was a very special occasion, for Rajindar was coming to tea. Rajindar had been away for four years in England and had returned home to Lahore only the evening before. Zohra was excited at the thought of seeing

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her again, and her excitement was tinged with envy, for Rajindar had done all things that she had longed to do. She had been abroad, and studied at Oxford, and travelled all over Europe and met many interesting people, while she herself had remained in the same old Lahore. True, her life had changed greatly, for she was no longer in purdah, she had taken her bachelor of Arts degree with honours in English Literature nearly two years before and was now preparing for her Master's degree: and she was prominent in the social life of the town, where she was greatly admired both for her beauty and her brains, but to her it seemed as if her life was drab and uninteresting compared to the marvellous things that Rajindar had done.

A car drove into the porch. There she was and how well she was looking! "Zori darling!" "Rajindar at last!" The two friends embraced and Zohra led her into the drawing-room.

"Oh Rajindar!" she exclaimed "tell me all about it!"

"Bye and bye!" smiled Rajindar, "it will take a long time you know! But first let me look at you. Zori, how pretty you have grown!"

Zohra blushed "You're looking well yourself."

"Pooh! I'd hate to be a beauty" Rajindar pointed to her homely but pleasant face and both laughed.

"So this is the new house? Very modern and elegant, but Zori I miss Nishat Manzil."

"I don't. I like it here. We've done away with all that zenana business."

"Has your mother come out of purdah too?"

"Not she! She says she will be too embarrassed. But she's met a few of father's friends, a very few. And believe it or not, she no longer hides from the men servants."

"Good. And Sughra?"

"*Apa* is still in purdah. She spends most of her time in Multan.

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She comes here but seldom and lives upstairs when she does, all the same we've persuaded her to let the men servants appear before her."

"She's happy?"

"Yes, I suppose so. She looks contented enough. Her little boy is a darling and she dotes on him."

"And Habib?"

"Habib! Well he's never been the same, Mohini—you know".

"I know."

"But time softens sorrow."

"He's never married?"

"No, and I don't suppose he ever will."

"I thought that he may marry Bilquis."

"Auntie Anwari tried hard enough for two years, but Habib had no eyes for her or for any woman after —— then. Auntie Anwari managed to book an I.C.S. Officer for Bilquis."

"Just the thing for her. What does Habib do? Any interest in politics?"

"None at all. He was very bitter after Mohini's death and he said that his nationalism had died with her and that he was not interested in any other 'ism' either."

"And so?"

"And so he's been working hard at his profession and is doing very well."

"Last but not least—what about you Zori?"

"I? Well I'm as you see me. Nothing very exciting has happened to me."

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"You can't say that. You're out of purdah for one thing."

"Oh! I've got used to tha.t"

"For another, you are, I hear, one of the most admired young ladies in town."

"Someone's been exaggerating!"

"And I suppose parties and shows and picnics are plenty."

"Oh, yes!"

"But, tell me, have you become a social butterfly?"

"Heaven forbid!"

"Then you're still interested in all that's happening around you?"

"Of course."

"Any political activities?"

"I'm in the Students' Federation. We have debates and lectures and so on, but that's all.

"That's good enough. But do you only have discussions with the girls, or do the boys join in?"

"I'm at a boys' college. Didn't you know there are no M.A. classes in any of the girls' colleges, and a few of us have been allowed at G—College."

"But that's wonderful. How did your father agree?"

"You'd be surprised how he's taken to new ideas."

"Politically too?"

"Politically he's with the League."

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"Well, at any rate that's better than being a Unionist. And you?"

"My sympathies are still with the Congress, but I do think that the 'new' Muslim League as I call it, is by far the best Muslim organization."

"Yes, but surely you are against communal organizations? They are anti-national."

"That's true, but I'm told that in the U.P. and some other places Congress and League are very close to each other. In fact I fear that in the U.P., except for a few constituencies where Muslim congressites are opposing Leaguers, Congressites and Leaguers give tacit support to each other and fight the reactionary landlord organization similar to the Unionists here."

"That's good, but I think that reports about the unity are probably exaggerated. Besides, they may split when the common enemy is no more."

"Not if we have coalition ministries. Besides you forget the greater common enemy—the British."

"Who always help to divide rather than unite us." However, I agree with you about the desirability of coalition ministries."

"Uncle Saeed says that Hindus and Muslims stand at the cross-roads, and henceforth if we unite we shall go down one road, otherwise our ways shall be different, and I do think he is partly right. Unity has become more necessary than ever."

"How right you are. But Zori, this unity has to be forged, and we are all so narrow and even think in compartments."

"Quite. I always think of the tragedy of Habib and Mohini —— Oh Rajindar, if only they had been allowed to marry —— somehow —— it seems that their lives reflected only our national tragedy."

"But some inter-communal marriages have taken place now."

"That's true .... and sometimes I wonder if Mohini had lived ....? But in spite of the few inter-communal marriages ....

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the two communities are drifting further and further apart .... something big must be done, and not merely by individuals, to cement the growing cleavage."

"I rely on the common man. The workers and the peasants live together in peace. Their troubles and sufferings are the same, be they Hindus or Muslims. They will unite."

"But the Congress and the League must also unite that is why we are hoping and praying for coalition ministries after the elections .... but that's enough for politics, let's talk of other things .... I've told you all about us, but you've told me nothing of yourself. What are you going to do?

"To begin with, I'm going to teach at the New College for Women."

"So you'll be a lady professor, how wonderful! But why are you not joining the staff of the Punjab College ? I hear they offered you a position."

"It was a better position than my present one, but it's a Government college and their rules would have forbidden my taking part in politics."

"You are going to work for Congress?"

"Yes, and....

"And what?"

"Have you ever heard of the Communists?"

"Hum .... but vaguely, I've met one or two communist students."

"I am a communist."

"Oh really? But you're going to join the Congress too?"

"Yes, Congress is a national organization and people of all ideas are in it. The communists are in it too. They are a small

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group, but have some of the best young people among them. They also belong to the Communists Party of India, but that is an illegal body .... it was declared to be illegal by Government some years ago.

Just then the telephone was heard ringing in the hall, and Zohra rose to answer it.

"Who do you think was on the 'phone'?" She asked when she returned.

"Who?"

"Najma!"

"Really? How is she?"

"I haven't seen her for years, but one hears all sorts of things."

"It's a long story —— but to cut it short, her marriage is a complete failure."

"But I thought she was getting on well. At least she was in England three years ago, and she asked me to tea at her gorgeous suite at the Carlton, and she was all dressed-up and made-up, quite the grand lady in fact!"

"And I suppose her dress and her make-up put you off?"

"Well to tell you the truth, yes!"

"Poor Najma! It was like this, her husband first exulted in her beauty and dressed her up and brought her out of purdah to show her off, and even took her to Europe."

"And Najma?"

"Well to begin with she loathed him, but then he gave her all that money could buy and she came out of purdah and met lots of people and was quite thrilled and exhilerated and she reconciled herself to the age and ugliness of her husband."

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"And then?"

"Then she disappointed him for she did not produce a son; in fact she did n't produce a child at all!"

"You mean, he did not produce a child, the debauched old man?"

"That's probably nearer the truth, anyway he blamed Najma. He began to drink more than ever, and he often shut her up in her room and let her starve, and sometimes he even beat her!"

"Horrible! Surely it can't be true?"

"It's just hearsay, I met Najma soon after her return from England and haven't seen her since: so I don't know how true all this is. Anyway now he's married again."

"Another wife?"

"Another wife, one of the women from the Indian screen!"

"And Najma?"

"Is treated worse than ever. Ah there she is ! I hear a car."

"Najma?"

"Yes I told her to come over."

Both the girls were shocked to see Najma for she looked pale and haggard, in fact she was a mere ghost of her former self.

"Zori at last," she whispered after she had embraced both her friends.

"Sit down dear," said Zohra "and let me give you a cup of tea. You look very tired."

"I'm always tired. Oh Zori, Rajindar! I've so much to tell you."

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"Of course, you have. But first relax and drink your tea," said Rajindar.

"I feel as if I couldn't swallow anything."

"Nonsense! Of course, you can. Come, drink it up. There, that's a good girl. Sit back and relax. That's right. Now let's hear all about it."

"It's my —— my marriage. It's a fiasco. You —— you must have heard Zori?"

"Rumours, that's all. I've been wanting to hear the true facts from you."

"I hardly know where to begin. You remember of course how I was married off against my will, and all that?"

"Yes."

"Well, he was crude and uncouth and I could not bring myself to like him even. But I was married, and at first he was kind, and he brought me out of purdah, and it seemed as if he were doing all that was humanly possible to please me .... and then I felt as if I were unkind and uncharitable, and learnt to tolerate him."

"Then?"

"We went to Europe, and I enjoyed that. He seemed to be very fond of me —— and then gradually the fondness began to wear away. You see the —— the new toy —— was becoming old".

"Ah!"

"He began to voice his disappointment at my not having a child. I —— I went to many doctors both here and abroad —— but ——"

"What did they say?"

"They said there was nothing wrong with me: but my husband continued to blame me, and began to call me a useless, barren woman."

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"The brute!"

"Then he began to drink very heavily, and he would shout at me at the slightest pretext —— and —— and sometimes he would even hit me."

"I would like to wring his neck."

"And he would shut me up in my room for days —— and my food was handed in through a window. Then came a time when I hardly saw him —— and to tell you the truth, I didn't mind that because I'd come to hate the sight of him."

"No wonder."

"I heard rumours that he was infatuated with some cinema woman —— at last one day he brought a loud, heavily-painted woman into the house and introduced her to me as his new wife."

"Ya Allah ——"

"Then began the period of my greatest misery, for he constantly humiliated me in front of this woman.... He would order me to serve her as if I were her maid, and if I refused he would hit me, or lock me up and I would hear them both laughting over it. I could bear it no longer. One night I bribed a servant and ran away. I caught the train to Lahore and came to my father's house."

"What did they say?"

"I had been telling them for months how I was being treated, but .... they would hardly believe me. They kept on thinking that I was exaggerating. You see, my husband was always nice to them! Besides they kept on reminding me how good he had been to me, and how he had taken me abroad and all that. They urged me to overlook his temporary weaknesses, and assured me that he would soon be his old self again. After he married again, I was not allowed to write to them .... and then I suddenly came home. When they heard about the new wife and saw the bruises on my body .... they believed me at last."

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"My poor darling!" Zohra put her arm round her, "No wonder you look so worn-out and ill."

"Oh Zori I— I've been through hell."

"What are you going to do now?"

"That's what I've come to consult you about. You see a few months ago my brother came back from England. He's been so sweet and wonderful. Now he is urging me to get —— to —— a divorce."

"A divorce?"

"Yes, I know it —— it never happens —— in families like ours —— but —— Oh God what am I to do?"

"I think your brother is right," said Rajindar, "Divorce is the only possible solution to your problem."

"Only —— don't you see I shall be —— almost an outcaste."

"Nonsense, your religion allows it."

"Of course, And yet it never happens."

"It's time it should," exclaimed Zohra. I agree with Rajindar. But what about your father?"

"*Bhaijan* thinks he will be able to persuade him if I agree."

"Good. But under the existing law, the man has to give the divorce. Will your husband agree?"

"*Bhaijan* says that if I renounce my dower —— and the Deputy Commissioner, who is a friend of *bhai's*, bring sofficial pressure to bear upon him, he 'll agree. He —— he's a coward you know."

"Najma, if you give up your dower —— and your -a-your father's not very rich." began Zohra, "forgive me dear, but I feel we must consider this coolly."

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"I know. That's one reason why I've been wavering. I hate to be a burden on my old parents."

"Why should you be a burden, Najma?" said Rajindar "Enter College again and take your training as a teacher. In a few years you'll be independent."

"That's what I'd like to do and *Bhaijan* will help me."

"That's the spirit."

"Before deciding, I wanted the advice of you two —— my best friends."

"You must try to get this divorce," said Rajindar emphatically.

"Of course, you must," agreed Zohra.

"Thank you," said Najma quietly.

CHAPTER II

The sick child moaned restlessly and the watching mother dipped another cloth in a mixture of cold water and vinegar and changed the pad upon his forehead. The dark eyes were closed and the long lashes were a fringe upon the flushed cheeks. His breath was like the quick blast from a furnace, for the little lungs were labouring valiantly against the fever that gripped the slender body.

Sughra passed her hand under the sheet to feel once again the limbs grown so pitifully thin, hoping to find the touch of the welcome moisture that would signal a drop in the temperature. But the skin was hot and dry and every now and then the legs twitched as if in pain.

"How much longer? Oh God how much longer?" she whispered "He is so small, he will not last —— Oh have mercy!"

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For twenty long days and nights she had kept her vigil, getting only a few hours of restless sleep in every twenty-four that passed, while little Khalid battled against the dread typhoid fever. He had grown weaker with each passing day, but the fever continued to rise to a higher level each night.

"It must take its course," the doctor had said, "We can do nothing to bring it down earlier. What he needs is good nursing, and I would recommend a trained nurse, but there is none available in Multan."

"Oh, but we can wire for one from Lahore!" Sughra had exclaimed as she sat by Khalid's bed and refused to move even when the doctor came to the horror of her mother-in-law, who believed in strict purdah.

Mansur had agreed to send for the nurse, but his mother had objected to having a strange woman staying in the house.

"All the fuss!" She had exclaimed, "as if no one had this fever before! Why I nursed Mansur through it, when he was ten and our old Hakim Sahib was alive. The new fangled notions! No Mansur, you'll not bring a strange woman into the house, for if you do, I'll leave."

Sughra had begged and pleaded, but in vain. The old woman would not give in. All her resentment against the daughter-in-law, who had stolen her son's affection and had even become popular among his relations had fortified her resolve. She had convinced herself that Sughra was creating unnecessary fuss and nothing could make her change her mind.

"Oh Mansur, please, please! Sughra had pleaded, but Mansur had never openly defied his mother, and the habits of a life time could not be broken easily.

"My dear, what can I do?" he had said helplessly, "she will not listen to me, and I can't have her leaving the house ——"

Reluctantly Sughra had given in to them, but she had taken all the nursing upon herself. She had moved her bed into the sick-

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room, and with the help of two maids, kept constant watch over her child, sleeping only when he did.

With the passing of each day, his little body seemed to be smaller, and to Sughra it sometimes looked as if he were slipping out of her hands: at such moments of horror she was near hysteria, but she kept a firm grip upon herself, goading her own tired limbs to greater and greater effort. He could not be moved out of bed, and required careful nursing, so with her own hands, she sponged him daily and sometimes several times a day when the fever was very high. She changed his sheets and his clothes and made his four-hourly feeds and his fruit juices and his barley water. She kept his temperature and respiration chart and took his pulse. In fact so efficiently did she nurse him that even the doctor marvelled. And each day her own body seemed to shrivel as if it too were burning away with the fever, and her cheeks became more and more pinched and the purple hollows beneath her eyes were deeper.

"I hope the fever will break on the twentyfirst night" the doctor had said, "but watch out for the crisis, Begum Sahib."

"I shall not leave him for a moment," she had replied, and settled down in her easy chair for another night of vigil.

The child moaned again "Give me my kite, —— the motor car —— oh don't run away ——.

He was delirious again. She looked at her watch. It was midnight and taking the thermometer, from the disinfectant solution, she placed it carefully in his groin.

"105! and the pulse nearly 130. Dear God! How long can he stand this agony?" she groaned.

"Mother —— mother ——" cried the child.

"Khaloo darling. I'm here. Look at me."

But he was still delirious and although the dark eyes were upon her they did not recognise her, over-bright and wild they looked at her as if she were a stranger. "Where is my Mother ——? mother —— mother ——!"

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"Hush, hush darling, Lie quiet" she whispered and changed the pad on his forehead once more.

"I had two kittens —— daddy —— Lahore —— what did you say —— motor-car —— "

"He was off again. Babbling incoherently while she held his little hands and tried to soothe him.

Presently he went into a heavy sleep, but his breath came faster than ever and she was fearful lest the fever had risen higher still.

"Spare him to me dear God," she prayed "Have mercy, he's all I have," and her tears dropped upon his folded hands while all the frustrations of the five years of her married life welled-up within her once more. Like a real on the screen—the years passed through her mind again in fitful memory. She was a bride painted and bejewelled —— and then the sick sense of disillusion. The first months at Multan —— the resentment and rebellion in her heart —— the night of her grandfather's death —— the hopefulness of the months that followed —— the resolves, to make a success of it and then the constant, the slow, the deliberate adjustment of herself to life as it was, while each day it seemed as if something within her had died —— then hope again —— and the birth of Khalid and since then the continuous adjustment once more, but this time with an inner world to enliven her days. A world she built up for Khalid, weaving around him patterns of dreams more colourful than his toys —— They crowded into this night all the five years, with their hopes and dreads and desires as she kept her vigil beside her child.

"It's a train. I'm going. I'm going away." he cried, and sick with apprehension, she felt his pulse again. It was still rapid, and his breath came faster than ever and his limbs were twitching constantly. She tried to calm him, but the child was restless and tossed from side to side. Then she placed her hands upon his body to keep it still, fearful of movement for she knew that it might injure the diseased intestines.

He moaned louder and babbled all the time, and she called Mansur from the next room and asked him to fetch the doctor.

"I'm afraid he's very bad," she sobbed.

"I'll go at once," said Mansur and put on his coat.

She sat beside the bed again and then the sense of her utter helplessness overwhelmed her. He was in pain, yet she. who would gladly give her life for him, could not alleviate or even share it. He might —— he might leave her forever —— and she could not hold him. Then all the built-up self-control of days gave away and she sobbed helplessly —— "Oh God, dear God —— mercy —— mercy, mercy!"

She put her hand under the sheet once more. Was it her imagination or was there some sweat upon the body? Her heart thumped painfully and she passed her hand over the back. Yes sure enough, he was sweating. The fever would come down. He would be well again. Thank God, Oh thank God.

Then she remembered the doctor's words "Beware of the crisis. The fever might come down suddenly. "She went out and found the two maids sleeping in a little room near by, and taking one of them by the shoulders, she shook her hard "Wake up! Wake up!" she cried.

"Yes —— yes, Begum Sahiba."

"Go and heat some water. Keep the kettle boiling."

Returning to the sick room, she lit the spirit-stove and heated some milk. Then she looked at the clock, it was half an hour since Mansur had left and the doctor had not come. Coming back to Khalid, she found that he was soaked in sweat, and she took off his wet clothes, wiped his body and dressed him in fresh dry garments. His skin was cooler, but the sweat was still pouring out. In the next hour, she changed his wet clothes three times and once she even changed the bed sheets for they were soaked with sweat. His body was getting cooler and cooler, and then he opened his eyes.

"Mother," he said "mother," He had recognised her after so many days!

"Praise be to Allah," she cried. "Drink this darling," and she gave him the warm milk in a feeding cup.

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But the sweat continued to pour out of his body, and now it felt cold and listless, and his eyes were closed, fearfully she felt his pulse and it was a mere thread that throbbed feebly. She took his temperature and the mercury barely touched 96. He had stopped swearing now, but his body was getting colder and colder: and still the doctor did not come.

She ordered the maid to bring the hot-water, filled up a bottle and placed it at his feet.

"Khalid," she called, "my own *Khaloo*! Look at me." There was no reply. He was as pale as his sheet and his lips had a bluish tint. Was he going to slip out of her hands after all? "Oh God —— help ——" she prayed again.

The door opened and Mansur came in at last with the doctor." He was out on a case and it took me ages to find him, and then he could not come immediately for a woman was having a baby."

Meanwhile the doctor was feeling Khalid's pulse.

"Is he bad?" Sughra asked fearfully.

"I'm afraid so. I'm going to give him an injection. God willing he will be stronger after that."

He opened his bag and brought out a syringe, and prepared the injection.

"Hold him. Begam Sahiba. Yes I'm going to give it in the hip. That's right. There. Now we must watch."

Then the three of them sat round the bed and the mother prayed as she had never prayed before, and every now and then the doctor felt his pulse.

The dark sky turned paler and paler and at last a streak of red appeared upon the Eastern horizon. Then the doctor looked at the child and asked for a thermometer.

"98" he announced, "and the pulse is much better. Congratulations Begam Sahiba. All will be well now. But remember you must be very very careful."

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"Of course," she whispered "Oh thank you! Thank you," she spoke to the doctor, but as she looked at her child, who was sleeping peacefully her heart thanked her God to whom she had prayed so earnestly.

Khalid was better the next day and the improvement was maintained until on the fourth day after the crisis his temperature was normal all day.

A few days more and he will be out of danger, "said the doctor", "but for these few days you must be very careful of him. Remember his intestines are still sore and delicate and feed him with liquids only."

Meanwhile the child was clamouring for food. He begged for rice and buttered toast and potatoes: and he was hungry all the time. Sughra was very strict with him and refused to give him anything save liquids and those at regular intervals.

"Give the child something to eat," her mother-in-law would tell her again and again, "he's alright now, and needs feeding up, look how pale and thin he's become."

"Bye and bye, Auntie," Sughra would tell her, "We must obey the doctor.

"You're a cruel mother," would be Karima's retort, "starving your own child and making him cry for the sake of a doctor's new fangled notions."

Sughra was worn-out after nearly four weeks of nursing, and Karima's constant nagging jarred on her nerves and she was often on the verge of losing her temper, but controlled herself with an effort.

On the fifth day after the crisis, Sughra went into her room for an afternoon nap. Khalid was sleeping peacefully and she herself had such a bad headache that she felt she must have a few hours of rest. Tired, as she was, she fell into a heavy slumber and when she woke up the sun had set. Surprised, she looked at her watch to find that it was six o'clock. She had slept for nearly four hours. Jumping out of bed, she went hurriedly into Khalid's room. The child was

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talking to his grandmother "Mother," he exclaimed when he saw her "I've had toast with lots of butter on it. Lots and lots of butter.

"Who gave it to you?" Sughra asked sharply.

"Grannie did. I love Grannie."

Sick with fear Sughra felt his pulse and took his temperature. Everything seemed all right. At 7 o'clock the doctor came and she told him what had happened.

"Unfortunate!" he exclaimed "However let's hope for the best."

At 8 o'clock the child complained of a pain in his stomach and asked for the bed-pan. When Sughra removed it, she nearly fainted for it was full of blood. A haemorrhage had started. Meanwhile Khalid was moaning with pain and his pulse was a rapid thread.

She ran to Mansur and asked him to fetch the doctor immediately. Then called the maids and told them to bring bricks with which to raise the foot of the sick child's bed. He was flushed now and she could see that his temperature was rising rapidly.

"It's a relapse," said the doctor when he arrived. "That toast! Begam Sahiba I begged you to be careful!"

"I —— Oh you know it was Auntie! Doctor —— tell me —— is he very bad?"

"Yes."

"But there's hope?"

"While there's life there's always hope Begam Sahiba." If the haemorrhage has stopped: and if the relapse is not very severe, we may pull him through."

"You think the haemorrhage may not have stopped yet?"

"I can't say. I'm going to give him an injection. Keep him lying flat on his back and absolutely quiet, and give him nothing to eat or drink."

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"Not even water?"

"Not even water. If he's thirsty give him ice to suck."

"Doctor," said Mansur," know it's asking a favour, but please stay here tonight. Meanwhile I'm wiring Lahore for a trained nurse."

"Certainly I'll stay and we'll do our best Begam Sahiba, you look ill yourself, you must trust in God and hope for the best."

"Yes, yes I just trust in God," whispered Sughra and she sank into the easy chair near the bed. The child was unconscious now and her yearning eyes looked at his gentle forehead and his soft lips. She ached to fold him to her breast and to hold him there. To hold him come what may, to protect him with the fierceness of her love, even from death.

Hour after hour, she sat there forgetful of the whole world. Her mind tense and concentrated and her eyes watchful.

Every now and then the child moaned restlessly and then she felt his pulse to see how it was beating. Sometimes when he dropped into a sleep, she bent closer to see if he was still breathing; and all the time her own heart was beating painfully as if the volume of her feelings were too great for it to bear.

At 3 o'clock in the morning, the child had another stool of blood, and after that the doctor knew that it was a losing battle. He did all that was humanly possible, but Khalid slowly sank towards the unknown and when the first streak of dawn appeared he was no more.

All through the night Sughra had been strangely silent. Like one in a daze, she had gone about her task and the doctor had marvelled at her self-control. Now she saw the doctor shake his head and move away, and heard Mansur's sobbing.

"No!" she whispered "No!"

"Take her into the next room," the doctor told Mansur.

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"No" she cried "No! and her voice was a shriek. "He's mine-He's not dead!" and falling upon the little body, she clasped it in her arms.

"Take her away, Mansur," said the doctor sharply, and Mansur placed his hands on her shoulder. Then she turned upon him like fury "Get away," she cried, "you —— you murderer. You and your mother! I hate you. Oh how I hate you." Latent and suppressed for so many years, the storm had burst at last in all its fury.

The doctor caught Mansur by the arm and led him out of the room. Then came back to find the mother lying in a dead faint across the body of her child.

Khalid was buried within a few hours, and even when they took the flower-covered bier away, Sughra did not cry. She sat there like a statue and those who looked at her felt as if she were far away in some world of her own.

The next day her mother and Zohra arrived, but even their love and their tears could not move her. For three days she could not eat a morsel and Mehr was fearful, for her health.

"You must talk to her, Mansur," she said.

"I —— I feel she does not want me near her," he said. Mehr could see that his suffering was hardly less than hers. "I've hardly seen her since —— since ——"

"I know. She's lying down in her room now. Come with me."

She was sitting on her bed gazing out of the window.

"Sughra," said her mother, "turn round darling and talk to us."

She turned round slowly and looked helplessly at her mother. And then she saw Mansur and her face woke into life, but it was her face no longer: her wild eyes blazed at him and her lips curled with hatred.

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"You!" she cried, "how dare you come near me.. I hate you. I have always hated you."

"Hush, hush child," exclaimed Mehr, "Mansur don't listen to her: she's mad with grief."

"Oh how I've always hated you," Sughra went on "I only tolerated you for his sake, and now you have killed him, you and your mother!" and she fell sobbing on her bed.

Mehr hastily took Mansur out of the room and sent a wire to her husband to come to Multan immediately.

Three days later Jamaluddin arrived and seeing the state Sughra was in, persuaded Mansur to let him take her to Lahore.

CHAPTER III

Sheikh Jamaluddin was worried. Sughra had been home for a month, but the state of her mind had not improved. She sat in her room hour after hour, gazing out of the window or sobbing upon her bed. She refused to go out and when her friends came to see her, she hardly spoke to them, and she had grown pale and thin, looking years older than her age. Mansur had come to Lahore a few days after they had brought her there but she had persistently refused to see him, and after a week he had returned to Multan.

"This will not do," Sheikh Jamaluddin said to himself, "She must be pulled out of this despondency," and calling his servant he told him to ask Sughra Bibi to come into the study.

"I've been thinking about you child," he told her as she came in and sat near him, "and I'm worried,"

She said nothing.

"Sughra, this will never do. You will make yourself ill."

She was still silent.

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"One cannot fight against the Will of God. What's happened has happened. Your grief is natural, but it's not right to give in to despair as you have done. You must try to pull yourself together. You've always been courageous, and it would be wrong to show weakness now. Don't you agree with me."

She made no reply.

"Remember you'are not the only one in this world, who has suffered bereavement. I can't let you go on behaving like this. Don't you realise that not only are you injuring your own health but that there is a pall of gloom over the whole house which cannot be lifted unless you help. Granted you have no thought for yourself, but you might at least think of your mother and Zohra." His tone was reproachful and she was goaded into replying.

"I don't worry them."

"Don't you? And how do you think they react to your constant tears and your haggered appearance?"

"I don't cry in front of them."

"No, but your eyes are always swollen. Come Sughra, it's no use arguing in this way. You must pull yourself together."

"What do you want me to do?"

"I don't ask you to forget your sorrow," his voice was gentler, "Believe me I feel intensely for you and I know that for your pain to be soothed, time is necessary. I only ask you to bear this blow with courage. You must not shut yourself up in this way. You must meet more people. See something of your friends ——"

"I'm not interested," she interrupted.

"You must make yourself interested. I've been thinking about it all and I've an idea which may be agreeable to you."

"Yes?"

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"I think it's essential that you take an interest in something and give up brooding. For this I have always found work to be the best remedy. But you are a woman and so it's difficult. However I have an idea—Zohra and you have always been interested in politics, how would you like to do some political work?"

"Political work?"

"As you know there is to be a general election in this province in about four weeks' time. One of the candidates is my friend, and there are about four thousand women voters in his constituency. How would you like to help him?"

"I'm not interested in the Unionists."

"He's not a Unionists, nor would I ask you to help one. I'm speaking of Mian Aziz, who is one of the oldest Muslim Leaguers in this province, and who is standing from the Outer Lahore constituency."

"And his opponent?"

"Is a Unionist."

"I see."

"Well, what about it? I know you feel strongly for the Muslim League, that's why I ask you."

"I'll think about it."

"Believe me child, I'm thinking of your good. This will take you out of yourself and give you something to do. Go now, and give me your answer tomorrow."

"Alright —— and —— thank you father."

She felt she should consult Zohra and went in search of her. She thought she heard her voice in her mother's room and went there to find her in the midst of a hot argument with Mehr.

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"I tell you mother this is most unjust and unfair of you," Zohra was saying.

"I'm only thinking of your reputation," protested Mehr, "after all, you are a young unmarried girl."

"What's all the argument about?" asked Sughra.

"Najma's coming to tea and mother objects."

"I don't object to her coming to tea today, but Zohra has been constantly with her these last few days, and after all she's just been divorced —— and ——" Mehr paused.

"And what ?" asked Sughra.

"A divorce is not exactly a good thing you know. It's not the sort of a thing that happens in respectable families."

"Najma's family is as good as any."

"That's the pity of it. It's such a disgrace for them."

"Mother!"

"Well it is. I don't know why her father allowed it."

"But you know that the poor girl was going through hell, and that old roue had married another wife. It's not poor Najma's fault." Zohra was indignant.

"Perhaps, but it's a disgrace all the same."

"I don't see why she should suffer," said Sughra.

"But that always happens, it's the woman who suffers!"

"Then it is up to us to stand by our own sex," said Zohra "and you ask me not to see so much of her!"

"Three of our relations have spoken to me about it. After all she is a divorcee. Besides her own reputation is none too good.

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Some people are even saying that he had good cause to divorce her. Your aunt Anwari ——"

"My aunt Anwari! There's as much truth in her stories as in the gossip of the bazars! I tell you, mother, we must stand by poor Najma in her sorrow. Don't you agree, *Apa*?"

"I agree."

"Then you must support me by talking to her today. The poor girl is so sad."

"I —— don't know."

"You must. She's suffering so. I'm sure you sympathise."

"Alright."

The four girls were gathered round the tea-table and it was almost like old times, only one was missing and she was there in the mind of each of them like an unseen presence, but so sad and sweet was the memory that none talked of it. Her cousin had never been close to them and they did not miss her, yet it was her name that was mentioned.

Taj Tahmina Foundation

"What's become of Saraswati?" asked Rajindar.

"Haven't seen her for years," said Zohra.

"We met her once some months after Mohini ——" Sughra's voice was bitter, "it was at a purdah party, and there in front of all those women, she refused to speak to Zohra or myself and said loud enough for everyone to hear, 'they are the sisters of a murderer'."

There was silence for a few moments, then Rajindar said, "The narrow-mindedness of some people is amazing. However I'm going to change the subject for I came here today with a very special purpose.

"Yes?"

"I want to talk to you Najma, and I'm very glad that Sughra is here too, for what I'm going to say applied to her as well in some ways."

"Go on," said Najma.

"Have you looked in a mirror recently?" Rajindar asked her.

"I —— well —— !"

"Well you're looking awful. Yes awful. Haggard and worn out and old."

"So what?"

"This, that you have no right to go on grieving in this manner. You were tied to a brute of a husband and you had all our sympathies. But you got a divorce and are well rid of him. Yet you go on moping and moaning. This should stop now."

"Rajindar! You are unkind!"

"Am I? Or am I kinder than all the others who come in contact with you? Believe, me you have my sympathy and my affections, but I'm your true friend and I'm not going to molly-coddle you. You must snap out of it my dear, and begin to take an interest in life. Remember, you are still young and you are still lovely if you would only give yourself half a chance," and she smiled at Najma in her disarming way.

"But what do you want me to do?" asked Najma.

"First of all you must stop moping!"

"And then?"

"Then take up some work. It's the only way to forget your troubles real and imaginary."

"Imaginary!"

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"Yes, Imaginary too. For to every real trouble some imaginary ones are added if one broods over it too much."

"But I plan to join college in a few months' time."

"Good, but meanwhile don't waste your time and energy in this way. Do some work."

"What work? What can I do?"

"What can you do? Heavens! Child, do you live in this world or out of it? Can you not look around you? Have you not been into the city and seen the squalor, the sickness and the suffering of tens of thousands of people? Is it not your duty and my duty and the duty of all of us to do something to alleviate this misery?"

"You know, Rajindar," said Sughra, "Father had a talk with me this morning, and what he said was something like what you are saying."

"Good. That's why I told you that I meant to talk to you as well as to Najma. My heart aches for your very real sorrow, but you too Sughra have no right to give in to grief as you are doing."

"I've been thinking. Perhaps you are right, you and father. But —— I don't yet see my way clearly."

"You will, if you go on thinking."

"But I still don't see. What can we do?" persisted Najma.

"Well, to begin with, I want you both to come into the city with me tomorrow. I have a friend, who is a lady doctor and she has a dispensary where she treats women and children, free of charge, every afternoon for three hours. Hundreds of poor women and sick children come there daily."

"Little children?" asked Sughra "Sick children? Yes, I'd like to go."

"Najma?"

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"I'll come too."

"Good, I'll come here at two o'clock. Can we all go in your car, Zohra?"

"Certainly."

The car stopped in one of the main roads of the city and the four girls stepped out of it. Sughra had a *burqa* on, but the other three had no veil of any sort.

"The car can't go any further," Rajindar explained, "Now you'll have to walk, my dears," and she led the way down one of the narrow lanes.

Tall houses stood on either side and the winter sun touched only their upper stories for down the narrow twisted lanes its rays could not penetrate. A thick black liquid flowed in the open drains and a heavy stench rose from it. Further they went and further into the heart of the city until the lane was so narrow that they had to walk in single file. Piles of refuse lay here and there and everywhere, and among them many dogs were sprawling. Passers-by looked curiously at the girls as they stood aside to make way, and one made some rude comments about women without *burqahs*.

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At last they came to the house of Rajindar's friend. Climbing a few steps, they opened the door and entered a courtyard where a number of women were standing. They could see that all of them were poor and most of them were dirty, while some carried pale sickly children in their arms. In one corner some little girls and boys were playing together and the shrieks of the children mingling with the chatter of the women created quite a babble of noise. They walked across the courtyard and came to the verandah to see a middle-aged lady sitting at a table surrounded by women.

"Her name is Miss Prem Dass and she's a Christian," whispered Rajindar. They pushed their way through the women and Rajindar presented her friends.

"How many times must I tell you to try to make these people stand in a queue?" said the doctor to her maid.

"I'm trying *Bibiji*, but they won't listen to me."

"Sisters," continued the doctor "one at a time please. I'm sitting in the verandah today because it's too cold in the rooms, but that does not mean that you should all crowd around me. If you go on like this, I will not be able to treat any of you. Now all of you, get out of the verandah please and wait in the courtyard. Bring them in one by one," she told her maid.

"Mem-sahib, Mem-sahib," wailed one of the women, "my child is very ill."

"Oh, Mem-sahib, please give me something quickly," cried another, "this pain is killing me."

"One at a time please, or I'll go away."

This threat had a salutary effect and they all stepped down into the courtyard.

Miss Prem Dass then ordered chairs for her visitors.

"Do you mind if I continue my work?" she asked them.

"Please do," said Rajindar, "We only want to watch."

One by one the women came up and the doctor examined them and prescribed medicines for their ailments.

"These are made up by the compounder in my dispensary free of charge", she told the girls.

"But who pays for them?" asked Zohra.

"I pay partly out of the money I make from my general practice, and then there are many good friends who contribute. But all the same, we are always short of funds and it breaks my heart when sometimes I cannot give a much-needed medicine because it is too expensive."

"I think you're wonderful!" exclaimed Najma.

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The doctor smiled, "What I'm doing is only a drop and an ocean is wanted! Daily I have to turn away scores of women whom I haven't got the time to treat, and then there are those, who need treatment that we can't afford and operations ——"

"But the hospitals?" asked Sughra.

"Have only a few beds in the free wards and hundreds on the waiting list. Oh Begum Sahiba if you only knew —— above all I feel for the children, who are so under-nourished that they will never grow up to be strong and healthy. Come here Barkate, show your child to the lady. You see rickets, and if I ask her to give it more milk she says, 'Who's to pay for it? My man earns only 12 annas a day and I have four of them to feed besides the two of us,' and if I prescribe Vitamin D tablets who's to pay for them? And this child is only one of scores, who are suffering in this way."

"The Government ——" began Sughra.

"The Government," Rajindar was sarcastic "the top-heavy bureaucracy! The Sahibs of I.C.S.! Do you think they would come into these streets?"

"But the Health Department? The municipality?" persisted Sughra.

"The Health Department? If you talk to their officials, they say they're doing all they can with their limited resources. There's never any money! The municipality? It's a mass of corruption and petty squables."

"Why's there no money even?" asked Najma. "Our country's rich enough."

"You've touched a big subject Najma. It's the system."

"It's an alien government," said Zohra. We must get independence."

"Yes, but that's not all that's necessary. Political power must come into the hands of the people and not be the monopoly of just a few."

Tai Tahir Foundation

"Rajindar," said Sughra "We must talk about this. Perhaps it's political work that is necessary or we'll never get to the roots of the problem."

"Quite."

"Look at this child," said the doctor, "Scurvy! and this woman has a tumor ——"

A small boy came running up to Miss Prem Dass, "Mem Sahib," he lisped, "My legs can run now."

He was dark-eyed and snub-nosed and he looked up shyly at Sughra. Memory stabbed her like a knife. "What's the matter with him?" she asked.

"He's just recovered from typhoid. He was so ill that he couldn't be brought here and I visited him every day. The little fellow has winsome ways, hasn't he?"

"Yes, yes. Miss Prem Dass I want to talk to you. Will you please come into the other room."

"Certainly."

"Doctor," said Sughra when they were alone, "You've given medicine today not only to many sick bodies but to a sick mind as well. Please take this from a graceful woman," and she took off all her gold bangles. "For the children" she whispered, and her voice broke for tears were choking her. "I shall contribute something every month. Can I —— can I come and help you so sometimes?"

"Of course."

CHAPTER IV

For two days Sughra was very thoughtful. She pondered over all that she had seen and heard and her mind sought to fathom the problem, but the more she thought over it, the more puzzled

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and confused she became. She felt that something was very wrong somewhere, but realised that unless she, knew more about several matters, she would fail to understand the underlying causes that made things as they were. Again and again, she was haunted by the expression in the eyes of the sick women and by the memory of the waxen faces and stunted limbs of children, who should have been aglow with health and vitality. Dimly she realised that all this could not be put right in a day, that mere charity would not even touch the fringe of the problem, and that it was the prevailing system of government and society that was at fault. But the how and wherefore of it she could not grasp. Politics for her had consisted mainly of a few books, newspaper reports and talks with the members of her family and her friends. Like all the youth of her generation, she had a passion for freedom, but the background of her family and the early influence of her grandfather, an influence that Zohra had missed, had made her intensely Muslim; and that was why although she sympathised with all that Congress had done for the freedom of India, she instinctively turned to the Muslim League for guidance. Her growing years had been deeply influenced by the stirring poetry of Iqbal and she too, like so many others, had dreamt the dream of Muslim renaissance. But it was freedom that she most longed for, freedom from domination and a nation's right to live its own life in its own way. Of the great and urgent social problems that confronted the country, she had hardly thought for her sheltered life had not only been free of want, but had also kept her ignorant of the want of others. Yet now her mind, grown tender and receptive with the shock of her own sorrow, had responded with an aching intensity to their need. It came to her with the force of a revelation that it was not only freedom she wanted, but a freedom, whereby poverty, disease and ignorance, could be abolished for ever. She was suddenly appalled by her own ignorance, she who had prided herself upon being so well-read. Today her knowledge of literature and poetry and music could not help her, nor could all her woven dreams of rainbow hues hide any longer the open sewers of the city. Sughra's rose-coloured glasses had been shattered in a day and her mind would remain restless until she had learnt to fashion her dreams with the concrete stuff of reality.

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She determined to improve her knowledge of politics and the affairs of men, and she telephoned Rajindar to come and see her.

"I've been thinking ——" she began when she saw her friend.

"Good", interrupted Rajindar, "It was time!"

"So many things I had seen and not noticed are crowding into my mind. So many things, the significance of which I had never realized —— They came back to me, all the little instances. The backs of the Kashmiri coolies bent beneath their load, the rickshaw-men panting as they labour up-the-hill, and the hands of the beggars in the streets —— oh Rajindar, how blind we are!"

"And deaf and dumb."

"Pity turns my bones to water."

"Pity does not help."

"We who are educated could surely ——"

"Spare them your patronage."

"Rajindar! You know I don't want to be patronising. Believe me, oh believe me, I want to help!"

"That's better."

Zohra came into the room. "Just heard you were here, Rajindar." she said, "and having a private conference with *Apa*. Am I allowed?"

"Of course."

"What are you both looking so serious about?"

"Well I —— Oh really I don't know how to put it into words" said Sughra.

"Sughra's growing up!" exclaimed Rajindar.

"Well that's one way of putting it," laughed Sughra and Zohra was amazed at the change in her, for her cheeks were glowing with excitement and her eyes were bright once more.

"You see," said Rajindar, "How well my shock-treatment worked?"

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"All credit to you doctor, but you still haven't told me what the conference is about."

"The conference? We are reshaping the world my dear. Shattering it to bits and remoulding it closer to the heart's desire."

"Stop joking."

"I'm not joking Zohra. This is how the great change begins in the minds of thinking people."

"The great change?"

"The birth of a new order out of a decaying system. The beginning of the end of the poverty, want and ignorance that has so apalled Sughra. Listen Zohra, Sughra's been a dreamer all her life, and her dreams were of the gossamer thread of romance which when shattered, left her destitute. I'm a dreamer too: but my dreams are built of cement and brick and steel, and of the muscle and bone and sinew of living people. I'm not joking when I say that I wish to 'shatter' the existing order to bits and to rebuild it nearer to my heart's desire. I do. When I see the stench-ridden streets of the city and the shrunken bodies and weary eyes of the working people, I don't feel pity but anger, a white-hot anger against the system that lets this happen; and I want to shatter it to bits, and then, then build the new world of my dreams."

"You are right," said Zohra "but what I feel is that before we can even begin to change the system, we must have the liberty to do so. At present, we are the slaves of another race and therefore unable to change anything at all."

"That is of course true. That's why people like myself are in the Congress, which is fighting for freedom."

"But," said Sughra, "freedom must mean freedom for all."

"Of course."

"In that case you can't say Congress is fighting for freedom, because it is fighting for the freedom of the Hindus only."

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"Oh, come Sughra, surely you are unjust."

"That's how the Muslims feel. If Congress is sincere about freedom why doesn't it come to terms with the League. Together they could win the battle in no time."

"For that matter, why doesn't the League come to terms with the Congress?"

"Our terms are very reasonable."

"They say the same."

"Remember we are the minority and it is for the majority to be generous."

"But a minority should not stand in the way of independence."

"We're not doing that, it is the Congress that ——"

"Look here," Zohra cut in, "this will not get us anywhere, this Congress-League controversy. I'm for unity between the two."

"We're all for that," said Rajindar. "Surely the common people on both sides should be able to come together. They have lived together in the villages for hundreds of years."

"But they have never mixed and mingled," said Sughra,, "in some places, they don't even eat together and there's no intermarriage ——"

Both Zohra and Rajindar thought of Mohini and for some moments there was silence.

"Leaving aside the Congress-League controversy, I wanted to talk to you about some other things," said Sughra, "To come back to poverty, disease and all that. How are we going to solve these problems?"

"Once we are independent and the drain of a foreign administration is gone ——" began Zohra.

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"Things will be better," cut in Rajindar, "but that's not all that's necessary."

"Then what's necessary? asked Sughra.

Rajindar looked at her watch. "I have to run away now," she said, "Sorry, Sughra, but I'll come again, It's a big subject you know. Meanwhile would you like some books?"

"Oh yes."

Next day Rajindar sent the promised books and Sughra devoured them with an eagerness that amazed herself. Far into the night, she would read and the words of Shaw and Laski and Bentham would echo in her mind again and again.

New ideas and thoughts and feelings mingled with the old, and slowly but surely a synthesis of the two began. She read, once again, the later peotry of Iqbal and learnt to reinterpret it in the light of her recently acquired knowledge. Her fundamentally Muslim upbringing had fostered in her the idea of the brotherhood of mankind, but now this acquired a depth, a breath and a vision that it had lacked before.

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Meanwhile, the city attracted her like a magnet and very soon she visited Miss Prem Dass again. For two hours, she helped the doctor in the dispensary, learning to wash sore eyes, to paint septic throats and to bandage heads and arms and legs.

These poor working women were not touched by the mounting election fever for they were not enfranchised, but in her own home, Sughra heard many of the richer women discussing the merits of the various candidates. She made up her mind to find out how the election was affecting the people, especially the women belonging to the lower middle class some of whom had been enfranchised, and she went to her father and asked him to get in touch with Mian Aziz and to tell him that she would like to help in his election and would be prepared to go out and work with the ladies of his family.

The next day two young girls arrived in a curtained car. They were the nieces of Mian Aziz, and they offered to take Sughra out with them.

"We're going to the Mozang area" said one of them, who was called Mahmuda, "many of my uncle's voters reside there and we have visited only a few of them so far."

I am very ignorant, "confessed Sughra," you must first tell me all about it please."

"It's like this," said the other girl named Masuda, "about fourteen thousand women in Lahore have been enfranchised."

"Only fourteen thousand?"

"Yes. Only those who own a certain amount of property or pay a certain amount of rent can vote, and also those who can read and write."

"You forget the wives of the voters," said Mahmuda.

"Oh yes; and the wives of voters, but not all voters. For this, the property qualification is higher."

"Very complicated!" exclaimed Sughra.

"Ah well, we don't have to bother about all that. The Government's made the lists, and we just go and canvass for the votes of those whose names are there."

"But surely, all the qualifications you have told me about, would include a larger number of women than fourteen thousand?"

"You are right, but there's another condition. Women voters had to send in applications before their names were included in the lists and very few applied!"

"In short they made it as difficult as possible!"

"You know these men!" said Mahmuda., "they're not really pleased about women getting the vote."

"Besides," went on Sughra, "it's mostly the rich who can vote."

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"And the literate," added Masuda.

"But only the rich are literate," protested Mahmuda, "for there are practically no free schools for the poor."

"All the same, some of the women voters are quite poor. At least they are not rich."

"That I suppose is the rent-paying class," said Sughra, "the clerks and the lower paid officials, the shop-keepers and others belonging to the petty bourgeoisie."

"The what?"

"The lower middle class."

"Yes, that's right."

"How many of these fourteen thousand are your uncle's supporters?"

"About four thousand in all. The rest will vote for the city constituency."

"Oh I see. Then your uncle's constituency comprises the civil station."

"It's called the Outer Lahore Constituency. The civil station comes in, and also some areas like Mozang and Anarkali which are really city areas as well as some of the suburbs of Lahore."

"Now I have it all clear in my mind. Thanks. Let's go."

The car drove down the main *bazaar* of Mozang and then stopped in front of a lane."

"This is where we get out," said Mausda, "now we'll have to walk as the street is too narrow. I hope you don't mind?"

"Of course not. Lead on."

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Once again they passed down the narrow winding lanes with the open drains on either side. Once again the clouds of stench assailed their nostrils and Sughra saw that Mozang was no cleaner or healthier than the city.

"Aren't these streets ever cleaned?" she asked, "we have a municipality!"

"Oh yes," said Masuda, "and sometimes the refuse carts do come along. But what can you do? Just look there," she pointed to a house-wife who was standing in her door-way, throwing a basket full of refuse out into the street. "And there!" A child was playing in the drain.

"There is so much to do!" exclaimed Sughra.

"We need schools, more and more schools," said Masuda.

"We have no money for them," retorted Mahmuda, "but we have money enough for an over-paid bureaucracy."

"We must also talk to the people."

"Yes," said Sughra, "but not in a patronising way. If they could only be made to feel that this city was their city, and that the streets belonged to them as much as their houses do, they would try to keep them clean."

"This is where we begin," said Mahmuda "there is a voter in this house, come along."

They went up the steps and entered a courtyard. It was empty.

"Is any one there," called Mahmuda.

"Yes" replied a voice "what do you want?" And a partly middle aged woman came out. Her hands were covered with flour and she had obviously been cooking in the kitchen. "*Salaam-aleikum*" said Masuda "*Wa-aleikum-salaam*,! I beg your pardon" said the woman "I didn't know some ladies had come to visit us. Excuse me a moment." And she disappeared into a room to come out a few minutes later with a new *dopatta*.

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"This way, this way please," and she led the way into a little sitting-room.

"Please be seated. What can I do for you?"

"We've come about the election ——" began Masuda.

"Oh yes, I can put in a slip," said the woman proudly.

"Yes, you are a voter; and we have come to ask you to vote for our uncle Mian Aziz."

"Of course, of course, and who else should I vote for ? After all I belong to his tribe!"

"His opponent also belongs to the same tribe," said Sughra sharply. She did not approve of narrow feudal loyalties. But Masuda nudged her, "No need to say that," she whispered.

"Yes, that's true," said the woman, "but our tribal elders have decided in favour of Mian Aziz. Besides, you know that my third cousin is married to his brother-in-law's nephew. So I'm a kinswoman, you see."

"Of course, of course!" said Mahmuda. "You are one of us, Auntie. Then we can rely on you."

"Mian Aziz is a Muslim Leaguer," began Sughra, "that's a big reason why you should vote for him."

The woman looked at her blankly.

"And his opponent is a Unionist," continued Sughra.

"A what?"

"He belongs to the Unionist party."

"What do we know about parties sister. We shall vote for Mian Aziz."

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"Yes, yes. That's right," said Masuda, "and now we must go to the next house."

"It's no good talking politics to them," she told Sughra when they were walking down the street again, "they don't understand."

"Then what's all this election for?" asked Sughra, "surely—"

"Well, they know about the candidates," cut in Masuda.

"But not what they stand for."

"That's right," said Mahmuda, "that's why the Unionist Party has sometimes as many as three candidates in one constituency."

"What? Not really?"

"Really, truly. There are three women standing from the Lahore City constituency, and all three are Unionists!"

"You don't say? Haven't they given one of them the party ticket?"

"Yes" —— to all three!"

"But that's against all canons of political decency."

"The Unionists have no princples. Let all the candidates be Unionists, they say. Whoever wins, the party wins! It's a ramp!"

"Quite."

They entered another house. This was obviously a poorer home and a tired looking young woman received them. "Please be seated," she said, as she spread a sheet on a bed lying in the court-yard, "What can I do for you?" she asked.

"We've come about the election ——" began Masuda.

"Sorry, but I've promised my slip to another lady."

"Oh but I've not come for a lady, I've come for a man.

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"I don't understand."

"It's like this sister. You have two votes. There are two men standing from this area and you can vote for one of them. Also there are three women standing for election and you can give your other vote to one of them."

"You mean I'll have two slips."

"Yes."

"And if I promise to give you one ——"

"Not me but my uncle."

"If I give your uncle one, then can I give the other to the nice lady who came?"

"Yes. Who was the lady?"

"I forget the name. They call her Jahan Ara. But she was very nice."

"Tell me, sister, why have you made up your mind to vote for this lady?" asked Sughra curiously.

"She talked about the rights of women," said the woman and her eyes suddenly lit up, "and she said that we were as good as the men, and she said that we should inherit properly as our religion commands I —— my father died and my step -brother took everything."

An old woman came out from one of the rooms. "What are you doing here Ayesha?" She asked, "you should be cooking! Get back to the kitchen."

"These ladies ——" began the young woman.

"I'll talk to them."

"Please let her stay," begged Sughra.

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"And who's to get the meal ready?" "Grumbled the old tartar, who was obviously the mother-in-law."

"Please! It's only for five minutes," insisted Sughra.

"Alright. But what's it all about?"

"It's this election ——" began Masuda.

"Ilukson! Ilukson! We've heard nothing else for days. Some woman came, then some more women came and now you! Are we to have no peace?"

"I'm sorry, Grand mother," said Mahmuda diplomatically, "but you are very important you know. Both of you are voters."

"It's all that boy's doing. Filling up applications. What do I want a 'slip' for? And don't you go about putting ideas into the head of my daughter-in-law here like that other woman, who came and talked about the rights of women."

"But you are a woman, grandmother," said Sughra. "And surely you want women to have their rights."

"I don't know anything about it, and I don't want to know. I want to be left in peace."

"We'll not trouble you much. But please promise your 'slip' to my uncle," said Mahmuda.

"Ah, what's this, is a man wanting our slips too?"

Her daughter-in-law explained the business about the double vote.

"Oh I see. Who's your uncle," she asked.

"Mian Aziz."

"The one who lives outside Yakki Gate."

"Yes."

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"I'll give no 'slip' to him. My sister's son has quarrelled with his nephew. That young man's head is in the stars, he behaved as though we were not good enough for him. *Bah*! I'll not give a 'slip' to Mian Aziz."

"But, Grandmother" persisted Mahmuda, "what has my uncle to do with a quarrel my cousin had with someone."

"I've said I'll not vote for your uncle. Now leave us, kindly."

The young woman looked at them wistfully as they left the house. It was obvious that she wished to say something but was too afraid.

The next woman they called on was a widow, who lived in a tiny house that seemed to be falling to bits. She was obviously very poor, and she did not even know what a vote was or that she had one. When it was all explained to her, she promised to vote for Mian Aziz.

"But there's one thing I want to know," she asked. "What will he become?"

"He will become a member of the Council that makes laws."

"Will he give my son a job?"

"Well —— not exactly —— but —— "

"Ah well," interrupted the woman, "You needn't say anything. It's always the same. You big people always want something of us, but as for our troubles —— there's only God.

"Sorry sister," said Sughra, "I know how it is."

"How do you know," said the woman and looked at the jewelled rings on her delicate hands.

"Believe me, I sympathise. Better days will come sister."

"When?"

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"Some day when we are free again and when we can build a new world. A world, where no one will be poor or hungry."

"I think you're talking nonsense," said the woman, "how can there be such a world? All the same you mean well. I'll vote for your uncle: never fear. Now you must excuse me for I have to go and cook."

One house after another they visited and with each visit Sughra learnt something new, but one thing she found everywhere and that was this that apart from a few educated households and the homes of some young enthusiasts, none of the women knew anything about the political views of the candidates in the field, nor did they realize the significance of the vote . To them it was a 'slip' that they were given, and with which they were delighted, for they felt a new sense of importance and it gave them a feeling of equality with their men-folk which was very gratifying, but of political parties they knew next to nothing. In some of the houses they visited, women who were not voters would come up to them and enquire why they did not have a right to the 'slip' and many would protest against the injustice of granting the vote to a privileged few.

"You tell us, we have no 'slip' because we're too poor," said one, "well, surely that's wrong. It's the poor who need the 'slips' so that they may choose people who'll do something for them." She was an illiterate middle-aged woman and Sughra was amazed at her sound commonsense. "Besides," she continued, "We're all Muslims and in Islam all should be equal; then why are these 'slips' being given to only a few?"

"I agree with you, Auntie," said Sughra, but it's the Government that has made all these rules, "she had a sudden idea," We are holding a meeting in this area on Friday after *Zohar* prayers. Will you come?

"Yes I'd like to."

"Then will you say a few words?"

"A few words? I? No, no daughter I can't make speeches."

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"It's no speeches we want, but the words of people like you, who understand the needs and wishes of the voters of this area. Please say yes. You will be helping Mian Aziz, and believe me he stands for all the things you talk about. He believes that everyone rich and poor alike should have the right to vote."

"Alright, I'll try to say something."

"Thank you."

On the next Friday, the meeting was held in the courtyard of a large house in that area. A meeting for women was quite a new thing here. Previously purdah meetings had been held in some of the large halls in Lahore, but only a few rich and educated women had gone to them. But this meeting was for all and they came trooping in large numbers until the courtyard was full to overflowing. Then they began to collect on the roofs of the adjoining houses, and all of them were eager and curious.

The meeting was being held jointly on behalf of Mian Aziz and one of the women candidates, who was standing from that constituency.

It began with a recitation of verses from the Holy Quran and this was followed by a song in praise of Prophet Mohammad sung by a batch of young girls. After this, an elderly woman stood up and introduced the lady candidate and appealed to the voters to vote for her and for Mian Aziz.

The next to speak was the lady candidate herself. She was the best known Muslim woman in the Punjab and had fought for the women's right to vote at the Round Table Conference. Women knew and loved her as a champion of women's rights, and Sughra noticed that while she was speaking, even those women, who came from the small houses of Mozang and who knew nothing of the world outside, were thrilled. She told them of all that women were doing in other lands, and they listened with breathless interest. She sympathised with the degradations and indignities they had to bear, and their eyes became moist with tears. Then she exhorted them to awaken, to unite and to fight for their rights as women and as human-beings, and their heads were lifted proudly and there was light in their eyes.

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Sughra was amazed. 'How receptive they are', she thought, 'and how quick to understand when we talk about something that touches their daily lives. I was wrong to be despondent. The women of the Punjab will soon be a force to be reckoned with.'

There were some more speeches and among them the elderly woman that had impressed Sughra so much was the most loudly cheered for she belonged to that area, and she voiced the feelings of the audience when she said that every man and woman, rich and poor alike, should be able to vote. Sughra also noticed how deeply religious the speakers were and how thrilled the audience was when instances from Islamic history were quoted to show the bravery and sacrifice of Muslims in the past. It was a poem of Iqbal's wherein he reminds the people of the past greatness of Islam and chides them for their present degradation that brought forth the most applause and when the singer's voice rang out, many of the women were crying.

After the poem had been sung, Sughra was asked to speak and at first she hesitated for unlike Zohra, she had never made speeches. But the supporters of Mian Aziz insisted, and she went into the improvised platform to say a few words.

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She began speaking in a very simple way and told the audience how Muslim women in the old days had taken an active part in the civic life of the state. How they had been professors and poets of renown and what an able administrator Queen Nur Jahan had been and how bravely Chand Bibi had led her army. Then she related the story of the heroism of Muslim women at the battle of Jaloola, when those who had gone there as nurses had turned the tide of the battle. For when the men were being routed, the women had picked up the arms and marched to meet the enemy, and then the men in sheer shame, had gone back into battle and won the day. The women listened in spell-bound silence, and when Sughra said, "Awaken, my sisters in Islam for until you, who are the mothers of our people, bring your sons to live and die as free men, our nation cannot progress," they broke into wild cheering.

The meeting was a great success and the women voters of Mozang took a pledge to vote for the two candidates in whose support it had been held.

That night Sughra told her uncle that she was no longer depressed about the political ignorance of Muslim women, "We have only to talk to them," she said, "And they understand. But so far no one has talked to them and they know nothing about the League and other political parties, and if it is like this in the cities, the ignorance in the villages must be greater. But I say again, I'm not depressed for if we can but take the message of the League to the people, the people are sure to respond."

"We have hardly the time or the organization—this time," he said.

"But there is always the next time," she said, and he smiled.

CHAPTER V

Very soon Sughra was busy all day, visiting different parts of the town in the company of the nieces of Mian Aziz. She met women of all kinds and ages and classes, and learnt to know, and understand them and to sympathise with their difficulties. She saw that Muslim women did not enjoy those rights, which their religion had given them, but lived and laboured under a social system that not only suppressed their liberty as citizens, but even deprived them of their rights as human-beings, and her anger and her sympathy rose to fever pitch until the cause of Muslim women became a passion with her. Islam had been the first religion in the world to give the rights of inheritance to women and yet Muslim women in the Punjab were deprived of these. Islam had made divorce easy, yet not only was it considered a terrible disgrace, but under the British-made laws, there was hardly any way by which an ill-treated neglected or even abandoned wife could get it. Islam had enjoined widow-remarriage, but Muslim widows, who married again were looked down upon. Sughra thought continually about the grave injustice that Muslim women had to put up with and she blamed the influence of Hindu culture for many of the hardships that her sex had to bear.

"I'm amazed at our Muslim men," she told her uncle Saeed Ahmad, "they talk of Islam and forget it's tenets. They want to be free and make slaves of their own women-folk. I tell you uncle,

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this pernicious Hindu influence, whereby a woman is considered an inferior being, has entered our society and destroyed the very roots of it."

"You are right," said Saeed Ahmed; "in fact a great deal of the present degradation of Muslims is due to the fact that they have forgotten the teachings of their Prophet."

"Islamic society is casteless and yet we talk of so and so being a Sayed and so and so being a Pathan."

"Yes, and Islam forbids exploitation yet —— "

"That's what I wanted to talk to you about, uncle. I've been reading a lot of books recently and I must say I find a great attraction in socialist ideas."

"Communist ideas?" asked Saeed Ahmad remembering Rajindar.

"No. I'm too religious, I suppose. Besides somehow the idea of revolution and blood-shed appals me. But I —— I do think that the present system of gross inequalities must go, to be replaced by some planned system for the greatest good of the greatest number."

"Sughra, socialism is nothing new for a Muslim. If you study it carefully, ours is a socialistic system. Only as you have said before, we have forgotten our own ways of life. There was a time when the Khalifa Omar could be openly asked in court how he could wear a new shirt when the cloth quota given to each Muslim had been a yard and half, which was not enough to make a shirt, and he had to call his son to bear witness to the fact that he had given up his share to his father so as to enable him to have a new one. That was Islam, Sughra. Yet today, a poor Muslim may be dying of starvation outside the gates of the mansion of a Nawab and no one will offer him a glass of water or a morsel of food."

"How right you are, uncle. The foundations of democracy lie in the Islamic way of life, and with it, we must combine all that is good in the modern world —— like new methods of education and medicine, with schools and hospitals for all.... and above all economic planning ...."

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"But we must first be free. Free of British Imperialism and of Hindu domination, and also free of those traitors among ourselves, who sell the public good for private benefit and act as stooges of the British or the Hindus."

"Like the Unionists?"

"Like the Unionists. The Muslims must unite under one flag and join their national organization, the Muslim League. They must win their own freedom and an honourable place in the country, and have the right to live their lives in their own way. Then and only then can we begin to change this system with it's monstrous inequalities."

"I begin to understand."

"Polling of votes in the Punjab was to last over a fortnight and one of the first constituencies in which it began was Saeed Ahmad's. This area was not far from Lahore and as the polling here was to last nearly a week, he would come into Lahore every second or third day, and the family would cluster around him to find out how he was doing. The first two days he polled a far larger number of votes than his opponent. But after that the news was not so good, and Jamaluddin and the girls were distressed to hear that the prospects of his success were diminishing.

"But, uncle," said Sughra. "you were doing so well, What's happened?"

"What is happening everywhere, my dear, official interference and police pressure. Yesterday the police rounded up my voters in one village and beat them up, and today the petty irrigation officials threatened to cut off the water from the land of some other villagers unless they voted for the Unionists."

"It's no election at all!" grumbled Zohra.

"Hardly. Besides the other side is spending money like water and I'm a poor man."

"But Saeed, surely I ——" began Jamaluddin.

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"No, no brother," Saeed Ahmad, "I'll not stoop to bribery and corruption and adopt dirty tactics like them."

"You know Saeed, we Leaguers are only contesting a few constituencies and if you lose, we'll hardly have a party in the legislature."

"I know, but then we only began to think of contesting this election very late, besides as you know the Unionists are not really contesting this election as a party but as individuals."

"Of course, giving tickets to more than one, in fact to every one."

"Never mind father," said Sughra, "the freedom of nations is not won in a day. We'll work hard in the months and years to come and we'll beat them next time."

"That is the spirit, Sughra," said her uncle, "we shall beat them next time, so help us God."

In the women's constituencies, the city voters were to go to the polls two days before those of the civil station,. Each woman would be given two ballot papers, on one of which she would vote for the male candidate and on the other for the female.

In the city constituency, the men had gone to the polls a day before the women and the Unionist candidate was reported to be leading. Sughra and Mahmuda decided to visit some of the polling stations in the city, just to see what was happening in order to be able to cope with the polling all the better in Mian Aziz's constituency two days later.

They arrived at one polling station and saw a strange sight. Hundred of women were pushing and straining against a single door and their shouting and shrieking filled the air. Policemen were trying in vain to stem this tide, but they were helpless as the women seemed to have little respect for them and they on their part hesitated to treat them roughly. Through the glass-panes of a closed corner window, Sughra saw the polling room where two harassed women officials were surrounded by a host of screaming women, each demanding her 'slip'.

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At the next polling station, they were told that the polling had been stopped because rival parties had entered the polling room and torn up the lists. The district magistrate had rushed there and he had been treated with scant respect, his coat had been torn and the policemen, who escorted him, had been slapped and his hair had been pulled by several women.

"This is terrible!" exclaimed Sughra to an Inspector of Police, who stood there.

He laughed good-humouredly. "Our sisters are voting for the first time," he said "they don't mean any harm. It's just enthusiasm run riot. I think each one fears that unless she casts her 'slip' speedily into the ballot box, she may not be able to do so at all!"

"What are you going to do?"

"We have sent for women wardens from the jail. Women will be able to handle women! The men find it difficult."

Just then a lorry full of burly women wardens arrived, bringing new lists and in a little while order was restored again.

That night, the women supporters of Mian Aziz held a meeting and decided to form bands of volunteers to keep order at the polling booths. They had been told that one of the lady candidates was doing the same.

"We must have a peaceful election," insisted Sughra.

Zohra laughed "I believe that several of the women, who were entitled to vote, stormed one of the polling booths and insisted on voting! My sympathies are with them."

"Yes I know." said Sughra. "Just think Zohra, what wonderful things could be done if all this spirit and enthusiasm could be properly canalized.

"Mahmuda rushed in," "Have you heard?" she said, "they say that the Unionist candidate in the city has probably lost."

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"Not really?" exclaimed Sughra, "He was leading by about four thousand votes after the men had voted."

"Yes really! The men decided to elect him, but their wives and daughters decided otherwise! I believe six thousand women have voted for his opponent and he'll win."

"Wonderful!" said Sughra, "I'm glad the Unionist is losing.

"But his opponent is not much better," said Zohra "he's an independent candidate and one who is pretty reactionary in his views."

"The women voted for him because he has been recently converted to Islam, " Mahmuda told them.

"I know" said Zohra, "and that's not exactly a political reason."

"But it shows the independent spirit of the women," said Sughra, "that's what's so heartening. The first time they go to the polls, they have the courage to exercise their own judgment rather than blindly following their menfolk."

"That's one way of looking at it," conceded Zohra.

"I tell you Zohra, Muslim women are going to play a great part in the rennaissance of our people. Wait and see!"

Two days later, the election of Mian Aziz took place. Girl volunteers were stationed at all womens' polling booths and they soon learnt how to vote in an orderly manner. Women wardens had also been stationed at the doors of the polling rooms by the Government, and their presence had a salutary effect. The scene at each polling station was very like that at a fair, a woman's fair, for the women came dressed in their best clothes, carrying their children in their arms. Street vendors had set up their stalls in the street outside and in one instance in an open site nearby; and here they conducted a brisk sale in sweetmeats and *kababs* and toys.

By two o'clock, the election of Mian Aziz was a certainty and the enthusiasm among his supporters ran high. He himself was visiting each polling station, and although he was not allowed

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inside as the arrangements were purdah, the women cheered him loudly when they were told that he had come. Among the women candidates it was evident that the well-beloved Jahan Ara was having a walk-over.

That evening, the houses of the two successful candidates were packed full of women and all of them had brought garlands of jasmine, marigold, roses and tinsel: while some of their more enthusiastic supporters, had even had garlands made of oranges and applies and other fruit. Great was the jubilation in both the houses, and Mian Aziz had a pleasantly embrassing moment when his women supporters demanded to see him. His nieces agreed to bring him into the hall that was packed full of eager chattering ladies. "If anyone wishes to observe purdah, please put on your *burqa*" said one of them.

"He's an old man," said a middle-aged woman, "no need to keep purdah from him."

Nevertheless, some of the women put on their *burqas*., and then Mian Aziz came into the room. He was greeted with prolonged cheering and one of the enthusiastic ladies broke into a song of praise and congratulations.

Thus it was that the Muslim women of the Punjab went to the polls for the first time, and no one then knew what a far-reaching effect their participation in politics was to have on the history of the country.

The results of the elections showed two things very clearly. It demonstrated to the world that in the several Muslim minority provinces as they were called, there were now two parties, the Congress and the Muslim League. Congress won almost every Hindu seat, defeating everywhere the Hindu Mahasabha and the other rival parties, and the League won almost all the Muslim seats, defeating not only the rival Muslim parties but the Congress Muslim candidates as well. In the four Muslim majority provinces however it was a different story. Here the Muslims being in majority, the sense of oppression was not so great, and in the Punjab at least the British influence was so strong that the Unionists came into power. Of the Hindu seats, Congress won a large number, but some went to the Unionists and the Conservative Akalis won

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most of the Sikh seats. In Bengal, the Congress won most of the Hindu seats and the League won a large number of Muslim seats, but not enough to form a Government. It then formed a coalition with other Muslim parties and took office, and in Sindh although the Muslim League was the largest single party, it could not form a government and an inter-communal coalition took office.

The Frontier Province was the one Muslim majority province, where the Red Shirts, who were a Muslim party allied to the Congress, won many Muslim seats and Congress became the largest single party, but it did not command the majority in the house.

Although the League was not so successful in the Muslim majority provinces, it's strength elsewhere amazed its opponents, for Jinnah had reorganised it only a year before and yet it had swept the polls in the seven Muslim minority provinces and in one, i.e. Assam the Muslims, who were the largest single party formed a dominant part of the coalition government. It was soon realized that this victory in the minority provinces, could not fail to have a far-reaching effect on the others as well. Congress realizing this started a Muslim mass contact movement in an effort to win over the Muslim masses, but this made little headway.

Meanwhile in the Punjab, the Unionist Ministry took office early in April. Only three well known Muslim Leaguers had been elected and one of these went over to the Unionists, and Mian Aziz, seeing that they had hardly any party at all decided to form a small party of independent Muslims, who would be able to criticise the Ministry. Although on the face of it, the League had suffered a heavy defeat, yet in reality it's influence was much stronger than appeared on the surface, and it was generally acknowledged that if the elections had been fought on the basis of adult franchise, and if official pressure had not been exerted in favour of the Unionists, the League would have won a far greater number of seats.

After the elections, opinion in the Congress that had fought the elections on the plank of 'wrecking the slave constitution, was divided on the question of the acceptance of office. A convention of legislators was held at Delhi, prolonged negotiations went on with the Government, and at last in July, Congress decided to accept office in the six provinces, where they had an absolute majority

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Congress cabinets were formed, but no other party was invited to coalesce, and Muslim Congressmen alone were taken in the cabinets as representatives of the Muslim minorities.

The news of the acceptance of office by the Congress and the formation of single party ministries, caused varied reactions among the people. Congressmen in general and Hindus in particular were delighted, but the Muslims in general and the Muslim Leaguers in particular greeted this move with disappointment and anger, while those men and women, who had been striving for a settlement between the two political parties, felt that their hopes had suffered a set-back.

"This is a challenge to the Muslims," said Saeed Ahmad to Jamaluddin, "I hope we shall now be able to close our ranks and present a united front."

"I must say that I expected Congress to be wiser," the old man observed, "the formation of single party ministries has made unity much more difficult. Congress of course argue that a homogeneous cabinet will ensure a smooth running of administration, but I think they're wrong."

"The inclusion in the ministries of the so-called nationalist Muslims, who are Hindu stooges and don't represent the Muslim masses, has added fuel to the fire."

"Yes, and the opposition has been intensified. On the other hand, if Congress had coalesced with the League to form ministries, the people as a whole would have rallied behind such governments."

"It's the same old story! They always neglect the true representation of the Muslim people, they only want their own Yes-men among us to have power. I tell you these 'nationalist' Muslims stand in the way of a Congress-League settlement. Anyway formation of these cabinets together with the League victories at the elections is already having a far-reaching effect on us."

"Yes, the influence of the Muslim League is growing by leaps and bounds and even some Muslim unionists are beginning to realise that they must side with their own people."

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CHAPTER VI

In May that year, Zohra finished her B.T. examination. But it was not until August that the results came out and she knew that she had passed. The family had gone upto the hills for the summer and they were in Simla when the news of Zohra's success came. She was a trained teacher now and had made up her mind to take up the profession. She knew that there would be strong opposition from the family, who did not see the 'necessity of her earning money' when they provided her with everything, but she was determined to be independent. Her parents thought that it was high time she got married. The question of her engagement with Anwar Ahmad had cropped up many a time in the proceeding years, but she had always put it off by pleading that she must first take this examination or that; and her father, who was proud of her academic achievements, had supported her. Besides he had grown used to the companionship he found with her and knew that with Sughra already away, the house would be very lonely, were Zohra also to get married. So he was not sorry to postpone the event, although the year before, there had been quite an argument with Mehr, who could not see why Zohra should train to be a teacher.

"I really don't see the necessity," she had said, "it isn't as if she had to earn her living. Besides she's getting too old to remain unmarried and people are talking."

"I don't care about people's talk," her husband had replied, "if Zohra wants to take her B.T. degree I shall not stop her."

"Anwar will not wait for ever! After all he is an England returned I.C.S. officer now. He can get any girl."

"There's no girl like Zohra. If he doesn't appreciate her enough to wait for her, he can find himself another wife," Jamaluddin had retorted, and there the matter had rested for a year.

Now that Zohra had finished her B.T. examination, Mehr took up the subject again with her husband and he asked her to speak to Zohra for she was now twenty-three years old and he felt that he could not postpone her marriage any longer.

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One evening in September, Mehr called Zohra to her room and tactfully opened the subject of marriage, counting one by one, all the good points of Anwar Ahmad. But Zohra had no intention of marrying a man she did not know and with her radical political views was prejudiced against officials belonging to the I.C.S. for they were generally known to be British stooges. She made up her mind to be perfectly frank and outspoken with her mother and told her that she had no intention of marrying Anwar Ahmad.

"But" protested Mehr in shocked surprise, "it has always been understood!"

"Not by me," said Zohra, "I never told you I'd marry him."

"But you knew what the arrangement was!"

"What arrangement?"

"Come Zohra, don't pretend ignorance! As if you haven't known all these years that your parents and his intended you two to marry, provided the boy turned out well."

"My parents and his! Mother dear, it's I who would have to spend my life with him and not my parents."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that it's for me and the young man of course, to decide whether we should marry each other and it's not a matter that can be left to the parents."

"Zohra! Have you no shame?"

"What's there shameful about it?"

"A girl talking thus about her own marriage, and about —— about choosing her husband! It is disgraceful?"

"Not a bit of it. Why does our religion enjoin that the girl's consent must be taken at the time of marriage, if her preference is not to be considered?"

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"Her preference! Zohra don't tell me that you've formed some undesirable frienship. That would be ——"

"I've formed no friendship," cut in Zohra, "not of the type that leads to love and marriage and all that. But one thing I insist upon. When I do marry, it shall be for love and I shall choose my own husband!"

"Zohra! This is unheard of! My child, you've gone mad. Girls of respectable families don't fall in love until after marriage."

"And supposing they don't then? Haven't you seen what a fiasco *Apa's* marriage has been? Surely that should have taught you a lesson, mother."

"Sughra's marriage is not a fiasco. She's just distraught with grief. She'll be alright in a few months' time. After all she was perfectly happy before."

"So you thought. Anyway I'm not going to have an arranged marriage."

"But, child, your parents think of your happiness."

"I've heard that argument before. Yet look at Najma."

"Ah Najma! It's as I thought, she's had a bad influence on you."

"I have always had these ideas."

"But this is the first I've heard of them."

"I didn't want to worry you unnecessarily, and the time hadn't come."

"Then you refuse?"

"I refuse!" Zohra was emphatic.

"Ya Allah!" exclaimed Mehr. "What shall I do? Your father has spoilt you. Now he must deal with you."

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Her father sent for her the next day.

"My child," he said "you've upset your mother dreadfully."

"I'm sorry father, but I couldn't help it. She was unreasonable?

"Because she was asking you to marry an eminently suitable young man?" "Come child that was certainly not unreasonable on her part."

"She was asking me to enter into an arranged marriage."

"But that's how marriages take place in this country."

"Then it's time the system were altered. Besides not all marriages are arranged. Love will sometime s find a way, you know."

"Zohra! don't tell me you've fallen for someone?"

"No! No! it isn't that. It's just this that I don't want any one else to arrange a marriage for me. I want my own choice."

"But my dear, how can you, a young and inexperienced girl, judge these matter? Don't you trust us? Don't you think that we are thinking of your happiness?"

"Dear, father you should have thought of all these things before you let me come out of purdah. It's now impossible for me to marry a man I don't know and don't love."

Jamaluddin was silent and thoughtful for a while. Then he said "Zohra I want to help you. Perhaps it's true as your mother says that I have indulged you too much. Yet I do see your point-of view, when you say you don't know him. That can be easily mended you know, and you, not being in purdah, will be a help. I'm prepared to invite the young man and let you meet him. There now that should satisfy you! But so far as this love business is concerned, get those romantic childish notions out of your head. They lead to sorrow and bitterness, look at Habib!"

"But father, I don't know whether I'll like Anwar Ahmad."

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"Of course, you will. He's good-looking and pleasant to talk to."

"He's an I.C.S.!"

"To be prejudiced against a man merely because he's an I.C.S. is unreasonable and wrong."

"But father ——"

"That will do, child. We shall be back in Lahore by the end of the month. Then I'll write to Anwar and ask him to come there for a few days. Come now, don't look so glum. It will all come right. Trust your old father," and he kissed her on the top of her head.

A few days after they came back to Lahore, Shiekh Jamaluddin informed the two sisters that Anwar Ahmad would be coming to tea on the following Sunday. There was an air of excitement in the house and there were whispers about the engagement that would soon take place. But Zohra had made up her mind and although she said nothing to her parents, she was perfectly sure that she would not marry Anwar Ahmad. She invited Rajindar and Najma to the tea party and asked Sughra to be sure to be present. Sughra had much improved in health and since her return to Lahore, had taken up an honorary position in the Anjuman Himayat-i-Islam, which was a Muslim Social and Educational organization. She had become a Joint Secretary of their Orphanage Committee and was busy working several hours every day. The question of her sister's marriage worried her, on the one hand, she had developed a definite bias against arranged marriages, and on the other, she did not see how Muslim girls, who led secluded lives, could possibly choose their own husbands. In the case of Zohra, however, she felt that a headstrong independent girl like her should not be coerced in any way, or the results would be disastrous. She conveyed her views to her father, and was glad to find that he agreed with her.

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"Never fear," he told her, "I understand Zohra and will not force her into anything. I've met Anwar and found him very charming. I tell you, Sughra, that Zohra is bound to like him."

Sunday came and Mehr was all anticipation. She went into

the drawing room several times in the day to see that all was in order. She ordered sweets and savouries and cakes and told the servants again and again that they too must be at their best.

The question of Sughra appearing before Anwar Ahmad cropped up and Mehr was reluctant to allow her to do so; "Her husband may not like it," she told Jamaluddin.

"Leave Mansur to me," he replied "I take full responsibility. After all Anwar will soon be her brother-in-law."

"Ah well, if you think it's alright ——" and Mehr gave in on this point.

Half an hour before Anwar was due, the girls had gathered in the drawing room and the usual political discussion began. Sughra was critical of the Congress ministries that had been functioning in some of the provinces.

"I'm told they are no better than their predecessors," she said.

"That's nonsense," said Rajindar, they haven't had much time. Give them a chance. In the short while they've been in office, they've already restored civil liberties."

"For Hindus only!"

"What do you mean?"

"Some of my cousins came from the U.P. some days ago and they said that every congressite Hindu there behaves as though he was a king."

"If the ordinary people feel that they are ruling the land, it's a good thing. I hear that the doors of the secretariat have been opened to all and people troop in and feel happy at the thought that it now belongs to their government, who is functioning in their interest."

"You've misunderstood me, Rajindar. What I meant was that every congressite Hindu behaves with arrogance towards the Muslims. It is as if they were the ruling race and the Muslims their slaves."

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"Oh Sughra, you must not talk like that! After all there are Muslim ministers ——"

"Stooges!" cut in Sughra "they don't represent the Muslims."

"But, Sughra, you yourself have often said that we must judge a Government by the legislation it brings and what it does for the common man, and not by it's personnel."

"Quite, and I tell you that in spite of pledges made during the election campaign, the big business interests that are so strong in the Congress, will never let the ministries bring about progressive legislation."

"Don't be pessimistic. I have full confidence in Nehru's ability to see that election pledges are fulfilled."

"Alas! I thought so too! See how the Congress has allied itself with the reactionary Hindu element in the Frontier to form a coalition ministry with them, and yet they would not coalesce with the League."

"Well for that matter it's reported that negotiations are going on between the League and the Unionists."

"The Muslims are a minority, they must unite or be crushed." Sughra was emphatic.

Sheikh Jamaluddin came in with a young man and the four looked curiously at him. He was undoubtedly good-looking and well dressed, and as Jamaluddin introduced him to the girls and he murmured a few words, they noticed that he had a perfect English accent.

Sughra instinctively compared him with Mansur, much to the latter's disadvantage and feeling that Zohra could not fail to like him, felt happy for her sister. She poured out the tea and Rajindar handed round the cups, while Najma passed the cakes and savouries to the men. Zohra sat quietly in a corner and kept her own counsel.

"I'm so glad you were able to come to Lahore," said Sheikh Jamaluddin, "I was afraid you might not get leave."

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"Well, it was very fortunate you asked me to come over this week end," said the young man, "because as it happens I'm dining with the Governor this evening and so it all fits in."

"We were all keen to meet you again," continued Jamaluddin, "and we hope you will come and see us whenever you come to Lahore."

"I'll be delighted to, " said Anwar glancing at Zehra, "as a matter of fact, I may very soon be stationed at Lahore.

"Really?"

"The Chief Secretary is very kind to me. Very kind indeed, and so are the ministers. You see they can trust me to carry out their policy faithfully. Believe it or not, in these days even officers of the I.C.S. are not always loyal to Government."

Zohra gasped, and Rajindar had an ominous look in her yes.

"Loyal to the British you mean? She questioned.

"Well, er —— it isn't exactly that Miss er ——"

"Rajindar Kaur. I belong to the service, and it's the work of men like us to carry on the administration and not dabble in politics. We must be loyal, loyal to whatever Government is in power."

"I'm afraid I can't agree with that view. It's the duty of every official to be loyal to the Government, provided the Government is loyal to the country and to the people it governs."

"Anwar smiled." What would you have us to do? Lead the insurrection?" he asked sarcastically.

"No one wants you to do that," she said, "but you just be sympathetic to the people and their aspirations. If you were truly loyal to your country, you would be valuable where you are."

"What do you mean?"

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"I know of some I.C.S. officers in the U.P. who gave tacit support to the Congress during the civil disobedience movement."

"Now really, Miss Zohra, that's an attitude I can't condone. Civil servants have no business to take sides in politics. Let the politicians change the government, if they can, and then we'll be on their side. Meanwhile we must do our duty."

Sheikh Jamaluddin saw that the discussion was taking an unpleasant turn, and he tactfully changed the subject. But Zohra was thoroughly annoyed and Sughra saw that during the rest of the evening, she hardly talked to Anwar. She felt that it was a pity that it had all begun so badly and did her best to steer the conversation into pleasant channels, but Zohra had a bored and sullen expression on her face. To her. the whole tea-party had seemed a form of coercion, for in her mind the thought of taking up a profession and being independent had taken deep root, and she had been prejudiced against Anwar even before she had met him. Now his remarks, which to her mind were preposterous, had antagonized her completely. Her father sensed this antagonism, but put it down to the tantrums of a wilful and rather spoilt girl, and was certain that even if she had received an unfavourable impression today, Anwar's good looks and charming manners would soon win her over. That is why he was careful not to mention Anwar's name after he had left them that evening. But Mehr was not so tactful."

"What do you think of him?" she asked Zohra and Sughra eagerly?"

"Poof! He's a snob!" said Zohra.

"Zohra! How can you talk like that?"

"But he is. Look at the way he mentioned dinner with the Governor and the Chief Secretary's kindness as soon as he began talking."

"Really Zohra, you're being unkind," said her sister, "he's so good-looking and has most polished manners."

"He's a 'Kala-gora' that's what he is," said Zohra rudely.

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"You're just prejudiced."

"I think so too," said Najma who had just come in "really Zohra I do think that he's a very nice young man and you're a lucky girl."

"Spare me!" cut in Zohra, and walked out of the room.

"Leave her alone, mother," said Sughra, "she's just spoilt and ungrateful.

"She'll be alright, Auntie," said Najma gently, "he really is most charming you know," and she sighed.

"For the first time, Mehr looked sympathetically at Najma."

"You girls must help me" she said, "talk to Zohra and try to bring her round. She'll never get such a match again. Besides it's always been our wish that these two should marry."

"Alright Auntie. We'll do our best ——"

"It's that Rajindar's influence I'm afraid of."

"I'm very fond of Rajindar and I think she's an admirable girl, but it's true ——" began Najma.

"But she's a bit too radical and independent," cut in Sughra.

"All the same, I don't believe she has a bad influence on anybody" said Na jma loyally. She's been very good to me and always gives me sound advice. I don't think, you need have any fear Auntie. Rajindar will never try to take Zohra away from the path of her true happiness."

"Sughra sighed "Conceptions of happiness differ," she murmured,, "Mother dear, let's not try to force things too much. Let Zohra and Anwar meet a few times, and if it's destined to happen, it will happen. Just pray to the Almighty to guide her to the right path."

"Yes, yes, we must pray," said Mehr devoutly.

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The Muslim League was at that time holding its annual session in Lucknow, and it was well-known that the Premiers of Punjab, Bengal and Assam had gone to it. Since the end of the elections and specially since the formation of the Congress ministries, there had been a growing feeling among the younger Muslims in the Unionist Party itself that an alliance with the League was not only desirable but necessary. This feeling was very much stronger among the people especially in the cities, and the combined pressure began to tell on the leadership.

In Bengal, the coalition had been working smoothly and a similar pressure from the independent Muslims in his party in particular and the people in general, began to influence the Premier. Assam was no different, and when the newspapers reported that these three Premiers, together with many of their supporters were to go to Lucknow, they waited with bated breath for sensational news.

Rumours of a pact or compromise were current in the air and Zohra was not surprised when Sughra rushed in with the newspaper one morning.

"Wonderful news," she exclaimed "Oh Zohra! it's absolutely marvellous. The three Premiers of Punjab, Bengal and Assam are in the League, and the Muslim Unionist M.L.A.'s are all coming in. So will the independents and others in Bengal, I suppose, and in Assam. At last, at last we are united! All united, all are Muslim Leaguers."

"I'm not so jubilant," said Zohra, "I don't think that the coming in of all these reactionaries is a good augury. We know what they're like. I think Mr. Jinnah should never have accepted them,"

"And pray why?"

'Because they are reactionaries, and many of them are British stooges. Now if there had been a pact with Congress instead ——"

"A pact with Congress indeed! And how is that possible with that party behaving as it is. The formation of single party Congress ministries and the starting of the so-called "mass-contact movement" to bring Muslims into the Congress parlour, was a challenge

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which the Muslims must meet with unity. The League leadership has realized this. Moreover ever since it came into power, Congress is trying to crush the Muslims."

"Alas! your talk only makes me realize that the gulf between the two major political parties is increasing, and no well-wisher of our country can look on without misgiving. Failing a pact with one another, the best element in both parties is coming to terms with its own reactionaries, and this will widen the gulf."

"The fault is entirely with the Congress. We're not trying to crush the Hindus anywhere. We don't keep our own stooges in their community and boast them up —— we ——"

"Oh *Apa*! To hear you talk like this is tragic in itself, after all there are some fine Muslims in the Congress, with a long history of service and sacrifice!"

"Then let them realize that they are the stumbling block to unity. If they were not there, the Congress would recognize the League as the sole representative of the Muslims and unity would follow soon. I tell you, Zohra, unity in Muslim ranks would lead to a settlement, for Congressmen will realize that the League alone can deliver the goods and come to terms with it instead of supporting their own proteges.

"It's no good saying 'if' this and 'if' that, unity between the two major parties should come about without delay.

"Congress does not try ....."

"They say the same about the League .... But it's no good arguing .... but don't you see that the Unionists will have a double loyalty —— to their own party as well as the League? and they'll never be completely loyal to the League. Let me tell you this that toadies, whom you are welcoming today, will be a snake in your sleeve ...."

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CHAPTER VII

Early in December, Mansur came down from Multan for another visit. He had not seen his wife for a year now, for although he had visited the family twice the winter before, she had persistently refused to see him. Sheikh Jamaluddin had then told him to leave her alone for a few months. Now seeing that his daughter was much happier and busy working in the orphanage, he had written to Mansur and asked him to come up to Lahore. Mansur had arrived post-haste, but Sughra, upon hearing of his arrival, had retired to her room once more, and neither her mother nor her father could persuade her to go back with her husband or even to see him again. Against all their pleadings, she maintained a stony silence, and when at last her father became angry, she said, "Please father, I want to forget, forget the nightmare I went through all these years."

"But surely, Sughra, you were perfectly happy with him, " he protested, "you . . . . "

"I put on an act!" she retorted, "Yes, a very good act to deceive you all until Khalid came and then he made up for everything. —— and now —— oh father!" her voice broke.

"Come , come child, you've been so brave all these months. Don't break down now."

"Then don't send me back there, don't turn me out of your home! Please, please don't, I —— I beg of you."

Jamaluddin was touched by her very real distress and he said "Alright child. This is your home and I'll not deny you this house. Stay as long as you like, but on one condition."

"Yes?"

"You mustn't refuse to see your husband. That I can't allow,"

"But —— father!"

"That's my condition," and walked out of the room,

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"Mother!" she whispered, "Oh mother —— there's something I must say."

"Yes child?"

"I can't, I can't share a room with him, oh please, please mother darling," and she fell sobing upon her mother's breast.

Mehr had never seen Sughra like this, and the tears began to roll down her cheek too as she held her daughter in her arms and tried to console her.

"Mother —— I can't —— I can't —— I'll die," she sobbed.

"But he's your husband," said Mehr shakily.

"I know. I know. But arrange it somehow. Say I'm not well. The doctor! Anything! I'll stay upstairs. Give him a room downstairs."

"Alright."

"You promise? Oh please you must promise!"

"Alright."

She had a talk with Jamaluddin that night. "Don't rush the girl," she said, "let them meet for a few days and it will gradually come alright."

"But, what can I say to him?"

"Talk about her health and put the blame on the doctor's orders, or something of the sort."

"You think it's necessary."

"I do. Or she'll break down again."

"Alright, my dear. You know these things best."

He had a talk with Mansur and Mansur was distressed to hear

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that Sughra's health was still giving cause for anxiety.

"Of course- anything you say," he said in his queer blundering manner. "Uncle —— I ——" and words failed him again.

"You've been very good, my boy, and no one appreciates it more than I do. The girl hasn't yet recovered from her shock —— be kind to her."

"Anything —— anything ——" he murmured again and Jamaluddin had an idea.

"What is your opinion about purdah?" he asked.

"Purdah?"

"Well, you must have noticed that I've brought Zohra out and it's done her no harm. Now if Sughra were to come out too ——"

Mansur gasped with surprise.

"It might do her a world of good you know. Take her mind off her sorrow and all that. Besides she would appreciate such a gesture on your part."

"My mother ——" he began.

"Has influenced your lives long enough. Look Mansur do you want your wife to come back to you, and to live happily with her?

"Of course."

"Then something radical will have to be done to win her over again, and this is what I suggest."

"But our religion?"

"Permits the face and hands to remain uncovered."

"And —— and custom?"

"Custom among whom? A fraction of the population!

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Purdah is a luxury of the rich, the ordinary working women and village women cannot afford it —— in any case customs that hinder progress should be altered."

"Sughra herself ——?"

"Will I think be quite agreeable. So many of her friends are now out of purdah."

"But she —— she hasn't even —— seen me ——."

"That will be alright, my boy. You will see her at dinner tonight."

Mansur's face brightened visibly.

"But you must remember what I've told you about her health. That's why she'll have her room upstairs, and yours will be downstairs near mine."

"I'll do anything —— anything" he said again, and Jamaluddin marvelled at the strength of his love for Sughra.

'She does not know what a jewel he really is' he thought and sighed.

A few days before Mansur's arrival, Anwar was transferred to Lahore and he became a frequent visitor at the house of the Sheikh family. It became increasingly evident that he was strongly attracted by Zohra and was doing his best to please her. Being the son of a rich man and an I.C.S. officer as well, he was much sought after and many were the parents who would have been glad to welcome a proposal from him for their daughter's hand. For this reason, Zohra's friends and relations were surprised at her indifference to him. But try as they might, her feelings would not change and the more her parents and relations praised him, the more annoyed and anatagonistic she became. While he on his part not being used to such treatment, found her indifference exceedingly attractive. Matters came to a head at last when Sheikh Jamaluddin told her that he had had enough of her 'tantrums' and that it was time she made up her mind to marry Anwar "I've given you every latitude," he said, "and you're being most ungrateful. Everybody finds Anwar

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charming and clever and no one except you has any fault to find with him."

"But I've told you that I don't love him."

"Stop talking like a romantic fool. Have I not had enough of this love business in my house? I tell you Zohra that if you continue to behave like this, I shall regret having brought you out of purdah."

"What's done is done!"

"Then don't make me regret it. It isn't as if I were asking you to marry an unsuitable man."

"He's unsuitable for me."

"Your remarks are beyond understanding."

"Our temperaments on so different!"

"Nonsense! You are both educated and young and charming. For the rest who can judge a temperament? Even cousins, who have known each other all their lives, are surprised at the hidden traits they find in one another after they marry."

"Anyway, father let me tell you once and for all that I shall not marry Anwar."

"Zohra!"

"I'm sorry father, but I have other plans. I want a career?"

"A career?"

"Yes. I want to teach."

"You have no need to earn your living."

"It isn't that, I don't want to live on my parents. I want to be independent."

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"Preposterous. You are really getting out of hand."

"You defy me?"

"No father. I shall convince you that I'm right." Outwardly she was calm, but inwardly she was worried. The pressure of her family was telling on her nerves, and being very fond of them, she could not think of breaking away altogether. She consulted Rajindar, who advised her to stick to her guns and Najma, who asked her not to be hasty; "I feel that you're unnecessarily prejudiced against Anwar." She said, "I find him very nice and charming." Then Zohra had a sudden idea. She looked hard at Najma, who was looking lovely and full of health and vigour once again. What if she succeeded in pairing her off with Anwar? She seemed to like him, and she was so sweet and pretty that he was bound to like her if he were made to feel that she was not indifferent to him. The more she thought of it, the more the idea pleased her, and she hastened to the telephone and invited Anwar to lunch the following Sunday. The young man accepted with alacrity, and began to feel that his persistance was bearing fruit at last.

Najma was surprised when Zohra asked her to lunch and insisted on knowing what she was going to wear. "Need I dress up for coming to your house?" she asked, "Or is there a party?"

"No, no. There's no party, but darling you look so lovely in that white *sari* with the red border, wear it for my sake. Please."

Najma promised, and indeed she looked like a tinted lily in the white *sari* when she arrived for lunch. Anwar arrived a few minutes after and behind him was Sheikh Jamaluddin, beaming with pleasure at the thought that Zohra was beginning to see sense. Mansur came in a few minutes later and he asked a servant to call Sughra for acting on her father's advice, he had encouraged her to come out of purdah and she had already met some of the men friends of the family. Since Habib was out, the six of them sat down to lunch.

Zohra was so animated and vivacious right through the meal that her father became more and more sure of her, and Anwar's

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joyful face was eloquent of the happiness that he was feeling. After lunch, Jamaluddin left the young people on some pretext, and asked Mansur to accompany him, then Zohra surprised the two girls by saying that she wanted to talk to Anwar alone. Sughra cast a significant look at Najma and the two of them walked away.

The strain of the last few days manoeuvring had so told upon Zohra's nerves that for a moment she became almost blind to the reason and propriety that the situation demanded. Acting on a crazy impulse, she said to Anwar:

"There's something I have to say to you" began Zohra.

"Yes? And there's great deal I want to say to you, Miss Zohra."

"Yes, yes. But first tell me how do you like my friend?"

"Your friend?"

"Najma. The girl in the white *sari*. Surely you know her by now?"

"Of course."

"Well, what do you think of her?"

"I? Ah well: She's very lovely of course."

"You think so. Good. She finds you very charming too."

"That's kind of her. But I don't see ——"

"I'm coming to that," she cut in "Of course you've heard her sad story?"

"Yes I know her husband and he is indeed a brute."

"I'm glad you know all about it. Don't you think she deserves happiness now?"

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"I'm sure she does, but what have I ——"

"Please wait until I've explained," She cut in again. "You see she likes you a lot."

"Ah, so?"

"And so I suggest that you two should marry each other." There! It was out at last and it had cost quite an effort.

Impulsively she had led him to this strange dialogue and it appeared she was making fun of him. He was stupified and for a moment too surprised to speak. "But surely you have misunderstood me." He said at last, "When I said she was lovely I didn't mean that I had any such intentions as you have referred to."

"Perhaps. But you can have them now."

"Miss Zohra!"

"You see I think you would make such a charming pair," and she smiled at him. He thought that sh e was just teasing and he smiled back.

"Oh Yes?" He said "But you see I have other ideas. I know of someone, who is even more charming."

"Do you ? I don't."

"Zohra, why do you think I've been coming here over and over again?"

"I'm sure I don't know," she replied.

"I think it's been fairly obvious," He bent closer to her. "My dear," he whispered softly, "I have had ideas of marriage, but in another direction." She moved away in apprehension. "It's you who have pulled me like a magnet." He continued. "Zohra, what have you to say?"

"I —— I really —— I don't think of such things."

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"Perhaps I should have spoken to your father first, but I've been carried away. May I speak to him now?"

"Of course not. Really Mr. Anwar. It's you who have misunderstood me. I have no intention of marrying —— ever.'

"What do you mean?"

"What I say. I'm going to take up a job. I'm going to teach. Besides I don't like you in that way.

"Is there someone else?"

"No, no. I've just told you I'll never marry."

"But surely it's always been understood —— our parents ——"

"What have they to do with it. I've told you what I think. Isn't that enough."

"I see." His voice was grim.

"Well then let's forget all about it."

"I will." He was convinced that she was making fun of him and was getting angry now.

"Good. But coming back to Najma ——"

"Najma!"

"Yes. She's lovely, she's sweet and she'll make you an ideal wife. Much better than —— "

"Spare me," he protested.

"Alright! But you must listen to me. Najma —— " She began again.

He was furious now. "Look Miss Zohra, "he said, "You've told me plainly that you don't like me, and that's that, But please

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don't insult me by trying to pair me on with someone else and a divorcee too —— What do you think I am? I have my career to think of and my good name. Najma indeed! Who do you think is going to marry a girl who has been divorced by that old Nawab?"

Angry beyond words, Zohra looked up and then her eyes widened in horror. Najma was standingi n the doorway behind him and she must have heard every word.

Habib left his car and walked towards his room. It was cold in the hall and upon an impulse he retraced his steps and walked out into the garden. He wandered down the path and to the side-lawn and here a strange sight met his eyes. A girl in a white *sari* was sitting on the bench. Her head had dropped on the wooden arm and she was sobbing helplessly.

"What on earth is the matter?" He asked in surprise. She raised her head and looked at him with long tear-dimed eyes: and he saw that it was Zohra's friend Najma.

"I say!" He said awkwardly. "What's happened? I mean has anyone ——" And he sat down near her. She looked at him again and found his eyes sad and kind.

"I —— Oh don't talk to me!"

"Why?"

"I'm a *pariah*! An outcaste!"

"What nonsense."

"You see —— I —— don't you know?"

"Don't I know what?"

"I'm a divorcee."

"So what?"

"It's considered a terrible disgrace.

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He looked at her in pity. She was so young and so helpless and pretty too. He had hardly noticed her before although he had seen her several times. But then he had ceased to have any interest in Zohra's friends long ago."

"You mustn't talk like that," he said. "Has someone said anything to hurt you?" She nodded.

"Well then forget it," he continued. "Look, Miss Najma, isn't it?"

"Yes, but Mrs. —— "

"Miss," he insisted and then he smiled at her. How gentle he was and how kind. And he had suffered so deeply. She looked at his temples that were prematurely grey.

"Life is not easy for —— for any girl," he went on, "and ignorant people are often cruel. But you must not let that get you down."

"I —— I try —— "

"I'm sure you do. I'm sure you're very brave. Won't you continue to be so?" And he smiled at her again, and the load seemed to have been lifted from her shoulders. She smiled back at him and she looked so lovely with the tear-drops on her flushed cheeks that he was reminded of sunlight sprayed with rain.

'That's better," he said, "And will you talk to me sometimes and let me help you? No that's wrong —— I should say let us help each other."

"I —— of course."

"Good. Now come back to the house with me."

They found Zohra in the drawing-room. She had got rid of Anwar, and one could see at a glance that she was still furious.

"Najma darling! Forgive me!" She cried.

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"It's alright," said Najma, "onlyyou shouldn't have —— "

"I know. I know. The undeserving cad!"

"What's it all about?" Asked Habib, but Najma made a sign and Zohra said "Nothing. Something between us girls, and all forgotten. I feel so free. *Bhaijan*. Let's celebrate! Take us to the pictures." She hardly expected him to agree as he never took her out when any of her girl friends were with her, and was quite surprised and delighted when he told them to go and put on their coats.

———

CHAPTER VIII

Anwar did not come anymore and Zohra felt relieved and cheerful once again. Her father was visibly annoyed with her, but there was nothing he could do now as the young man had been irrevocably alienated. Mehrunnissa shed a few tears and complained about the girls getting out of hand: "I don't know why my children should be so different," she wailed. "First Habib goes and falls in love with a Hindu girl, then Sughra refuses to go back to her husband and now Zohra behaves so outrageously! *Ya Allah*! For what sin are we being punished? Other people's children marry and have children and lead decent and quiet lives!"

"Never mind," her husband consoled her. "It will all come right in the end. It's a period of transition you know, and it's effecting many households. Look at Najma."

"Heaven forbid! Surely you are not hinting that my daughter—"

"No, no. God forbid! I was just thinking of the problem of unhappy marriages."

"It seems to be a problem created by this new education. Marriages have been happy enough in our land in the past, only now —— these girls are becoming too difficult to please."

"That's partly true, but then in the old days Indian women had to put up with all sorts of things cheerfully, and if the modern girl refuses to do so, it's not surprising!"

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"Nevertheless it leads to unhappiness."

"True," he sighed. "By the way, Mansur wants to go back to Multan."

"Oh! And I don't blame him —— but what can I do?" She made a gesture of helplessness.

"I suppose there's no hope of her going with him?"

"None at all."

"Then we must make the best of it. Let us pray that in a few months' time —" He sighed again.

Mansur left a few days later and Sughra continued her work in the orphanage. She was nominated to the Education Committee of the Anjuman as well and she was so efficient and hardworking that people, interested in educational and social reform, began to talk of her with respect and admiration. Since the Lucknow Pact, the position of the League in the Punjab had become immeasurably stronger. All the well-known Muslim women of the Province were now in the League whole-heartedly and the upsurge among the women received further encouragement and inspiration. A Muslim Women's League had been functioning spasmodically for some years as a part of the Provincial League, this was now reorganized and Sughra was placed on the Provincial Committee. She took up political work among women once again with an ardour and zeal that was the pride and envy of those, who worked with her.

Meanwhile, Zohra was secretly making plans for taking up a job. She scanned the newspapers looking for advertisements and asked Rajindar to be on the look-out for a suitable appointment.

The winter months passed thus. Outwardly quiet and eventful for the two sisters, but slowly, yet surely, an invisible transformation was taking place and their life was changing with a rapidity that they could not perceive because of the general change and the swift movement of events around them.

Spring came, short and sweet in its swift transition into summer and then in May, Zohra sprang another surprise, that was for

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them almost a bombshell, on her family. For, she announced very calmly that she had applied for and secured an appointment in her old College and was beginning work almost immediately. In vain did her father and mother beg her to give up the idea, she was adamant and nothing could make her change her mind. To Mehr, it seemed that her children were destined to bring woe to their house, for to her Zohra's taking up a job was not only undesirable but a disgrace for the family.

"What will people say?" She cried. "As if we haven't enough to feed our children! My young unmarried girl to go unprotected among strangers!"

"Mother, this is most unfair," retorted Zohra, "I'm not going among strangers. I'm merely going to work at my old College. There will be no difference at all. I'll go in the morning and come home in the afternoon just as before."

"And take a salary!"

"Yes, are you not happy to find that your daughter is able to earn her own living."

"But you don't need to."

"That's not the point."

"And what about your getting married?"

"I thought we had finished with that subject."

"What do you mean? Finished with that subject indeed! Do you want to remain single all your life?"

"I don't say that but —— perhaps in a few years' time."

"You're now nearly 24 years old. Who'll want to marry you in a few years' time?"

"Many!"

"Zohra don't talk in that shameless way."

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"Mother dear, don't provoke me!" Zohra smiled and put her arms round her mother. Mehr's face softened, "One day, you'll be proud of a daughter, who is able to stand on her own feet."

"You talk as if all of us, who have married and have happy homes are a burden on others! A woman's place is in the home and I would be proud of you if you were a good wife and a devoted mother."

"The old story again! Oh mother! Please stop lecturing me. We don't see eye to eye. We look at the world from different angles, you and I." Zohra was irritated again.

"Do you mean to tell me that you have made up your mind never to marry?"

"I've never said that: but I have always told you that when I marry, it will be a husband of my own choice"

"And you know that such an idea sounds shameless to me, but if you do intend to marry sometime, I don't see how this idea of taking a job fits in."

"But, mother dear, marriage and a job are not incompatible. I shall continue to work until I marry and even afterwards."

"Afterwards? I think you're mad! How can you keep a home, bring up children and have a job all at the same time?"

"I could."

"Poor home and poor children!"

"Anyway that's for the future to decide. Just now ——"

"Just now, you are determined to break all conventions and to put us to shame!" Her mother cut in bitterly, "Why must you modern girls try to ape the men? Believe me, Zohra, happiness does not come that way! Let us keep to our own sphere and let the men do the work that they are meant to by nature."

"Nature made woman better teachers than men anyway. We have more patience and understanding."

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"I, for one will not be confined to the home. I'm a citizen as well and have a duty to my country —— besides I want life and adventure and independence."

"Independence! Independence is everything! May Allah help you children to realize that the freedom of the individual must be limited by the good of society."

Zohra looked at her mother in surprise, for she had never realized that the simple ideas of her quiet mother could sometimes sound like class-room philosophy.

"All of you my children," continued Mehr "are continually unhappy, and it seems to me that this is because you are selfish in your hankering for personal happiness. If you would only accept life and try to harmonize your actions with your environment, happiness would come easily to you."

"Mother dear, I shall never accept things as they are. There is so much tbat we must, that we shall change."

Her mother sighed and turned away for she had realized that nothing would shake Zohra in her resolve.

A few days later, Zohra went to work, and once having given into her, the family was quite excited ab,out it and soon Jamaluddin was talking proudly about his daughter, who was a 'lady professor'. To Zohra's surprise her friends and relations took it remarkably well and many of them even complimented her on her brave decision.

Meanwhile, Sughra's interest in politics was growing every day, and she was absorbed in her social and political duties. She felt that Muslim women were at last having to face squarely the problems that confronted them and that they stood on the cross-roads. Either they must come forward now and begin to take their place bravely beside men in the national struggle for freedom, or they would be releatged to the four walls of their homes for generations to come. Her political work, especially her work among women, had become an absorbing passion with her, and facing the greater problem of the many, she forgot to some extent the tangled problems of her own life. Zohra looked at her sister from a different angle, and to her it seemed as if Sughra's strong feelings had made

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