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

CHAPTER XI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Házári Mal said: 'You are right there, Mámá; the Begum
sahib is a most noble lady. Bless her! there is no doubt of that.'

And then in a low voice he asked: 'Tell me about the young
bride; what is she like? Is she of the same complexion as her
erlder sister, or of a different disposition?'

The Mámá said: 'Don't ask me about her, Lála. The girl is
of a noble family—true; but she is very stingy at heart. Even
a farthing's worth of anything she won't approve until she has
returned it four times. Ah, yes, in talent and accomplishments,
God keep her! she is far ahead of most married girls. Her
cooking is better than the best, and in needlework she could best
professional tailors and Mughláns. But, oh, Lála! she is not what you call well bred. At first she began to fuss and meddle even with me. You know, Lála, how spotless my work is. She soon got tired of that. As for the Begam sáhib, she is a saint; it is the saving grace of her life and conduct that keeps the family going. And we unfortunate creatures only hold on to her skirts. People have often tried to frighten the Begam about me, but—God keep her in peace! her heart was never clouded. She never took in a word of all their talk against me.'

Hazárí Mal said: 'I have heard the young bride had a very grand trousseau.'

Before he had finished speaking, the Mámá said: 'Rubbish! Not so fine even as the elder one's.'

'That is very odd,' said Hazárí Mal; 'the Khán sáhib was a Tahsildár, too, when she was married. He ought to have given her more than the elder sister.'

'Ah,' said the Mámá, 'but it was not the fault of the Tahsildár. He, poor man! I had made grand preparations. It was this little ill-bred pretender; she made them cut the items down, one after another, on the score of consideration for her parents, to win their favour.'

Hazárí Mal said: 'If that is the case, she, too, will be wanting to keep house for herself, like her elder sister.'

'Keep house for herself,' said the Mámá; 'she will make bigger roses blossom than that. The elder sister was ill-tempered—no doubt of that; but she was open-hearted; and this girl is smooth-tongued, but she is not sound at the core. One may wear out one's life in working for her, and give no satisfaction. And whatever she will say to you, be sure there's something more at the bottom. Her words mean one thing, but her heart purposes something else. No, my little father, this girl is not the one to get on with anyone for a single day. At this moment she is making her arrangements to go to the hills, to her father.'

'Has any letter come from Lahore lately?' asked Hazárí Mal.

1 i.e., women servants maintained by rich families to do fancy needlework and embroidery. The word is an Indian made feminine of Mughal, our 'Mogul.'
Chapter XI

bahu were to lend you her bracelets, just for one month, then the business might be put off. By pawning the bracelets only for the time, a half or a third of Hazari Mal's money would be made good. Within the month, either the master might send a remittance, or I could get you the money from some other banker.'

Muhammad Kamil's mother said: 'What are you mad? Take good care you don't let such a proposal pass your lips again. Should the house we live in be put up to sale, I would accept even that; but I have not the face to ask my daughter-in-law.'

The Mâmā said: 'Lady, it was only that I thought she is your daughter-in-law—you may say daughter—no stranger; and I had no intention—God forbid!—of selling outright. Just for a month—well, the things are not in her jewel-box; they are deposited with the banker. She might be perfectly at ease in her mind.'

Muhammad Kamil's mother said: 'Yes, but still there is a great difference between a daughter and a daughter-in-law. And a newly-wedded bride, too. Could anyone even mention such a thing? Take care, and don't let such a thing cross your lips again. Why, fancy, if it were to come to Mahmuda's ears, and she should go and tell her sister-in-law!'

The Mâmā said: 'The young lady was standing here just now, and listening. But she is a child. What does she understand about such things at her age?'

Muhammad Kamil's mother said: 'Go and fetch the doolie. At all events, I will go to my sister. We shall see afterwards what plan we can arrange for the best.'

Chapter XII

Muhammad Kamil's mother got into her doolie and departed to the Khânam bâzâr, and Mahmuda went off and rehearsed the whole conversation to Tamizdar bahu. Only one course seemed open to Aghari. She sat down at once and wrote the following letter to her elder brother, Khairandeh Khan:

1 Pronounce Umeer, with the accent on the last syllable.
‘To his excellency, my gentle brother, the honored, the revered, health and peace! After my benedictions, I make known to you an urgent request, as follows: For a long time I have not written anything about myself to your honor, because I felt sure that the communications which I have in duty addressed to my honored father would also pass under your eyes. But now a special matter has arisen, of such a kind that I think it proper to be made known to you in particular. It is this: Since I came to my father-in-law’s house, I have experienced no kind of annoyance; and those matters about which my elder sister used to complain—through your prayers, nothing of the kind has happened to me. Everyone treats me with affection, and I myself am happy. But at the hands of one Máma Azmat alone I experience such annoyance as would not befall me from a cross-tempered mother-in-law, or a scolding sister-in-law. This woman is an old servant of the family, and all the business of the house, inside and outside, is in her hands. She has been plundering the family, and brought it to the verge of ruin. The debts now amount to such a sum that no means of paying them off are visible. There is no kind of management. I took it upon myself for a few days to look into some of the ordinary items of housekeeping; peculation and fraud were discovered at every turn. This interference on my part has made the Máma my enemy, and she has ever since been set upon stirring up some new cause of ill-feeling every day. She has not been successful so far in doing me any real injury. Still, I have the strongest objection to this Máma’s staying on in the house. But, on the other hand, to get rid of her is no easy matter. All the indebtedness to the different shops has been incurred through her agency. If she heard a rumour of her impending dismissal, she would go off and excite a panic among the creditors. And then the debts are neither by bill nor by book. The whole of the traffic is done orally by guesswork. What I want is that the accounts of all these people should be investigated and put into writing, and that in each case instalments of a due proportion should be fixed for future payment, and the practice of borrowing henceforth be abolished, and that the Máma should be dismissed. I take it for

granted that you, too, will come home with my honored father for the Ramazán. All I ask is that you should be so kind as to come round by Lahore, and that by some means or other you will induce my good father-in-law to come home with you for a fortnight at the very least. When all of you gentlemen are present, the whole of this business will be settled admirably.

‘I write this letter in a state of grievous disquietude. The Máma recommended that my bracelets should be pawned. My dear mother-in-law has just this moment gone to my dear aunt’s house to make arrangements for some money. No more.’

At the same time that Asghari wrote this letter to her brother, she sent a verbal message across to her aunt, saying that she was alone, and asking her aunt to let Tamásá Khánám come and stay with her for a couple of days, since she had heard that Tamásá Khánám was at present on a visit to her mother. Accordingly that same evening Tamásá Khánám duly arrived. As she got out of her doolie she called out: ‘Upon my word, Madam Asghari! I did not think anyone could be so unfriendly. I sent a message to ask you for uncle’s letter, and you never let me have it!’

‘You don’t say so?’ said Asghari. ‘Who came with the message?’

‘Well, you can see her yourself,’ said Tamásá Khánám. ‘She is here; this Máma Azmat. Say, old woman—that Friday you came to our house—did I tell you, or not?’

Azmat said: ‘Yes, Lady; it is true. She did tell me. I forget everything now, worse luck! By the time I reached this place it was driven out of my head by the housework.’

‘Yes,’ said Asghari in a low voice; ‘you only recollect how to plunder and how to sow strife.’ Then she said to Tamásá Khánám: ‘The letter is here, and there is another new book just come, full of interesting passages; you can take that home with you when you go.’

Asghari related to Tamásá Khánám the whole story of Máma Azmat’s misdeeds in detail. Tamásá Khánám was a girl of a very hot temper. She was on her feet directly, with her
shoe in her hand, eager to give the Mámá a beating. Aghari caught her by the arm, and made her sit down again, saying:
'Sister, for God’s sake! no such violence. Don’t be in a hurry yet awhile; everything will be spoilt.'

Tamásha Khánám said: ‘You allow yourself to be set at
naught with this circumspection of yours. Sister, if I were in
your place, by God’s oath! I would make this carrion so smooth
after shoe-beatings that she would remember it all her life long.’

Aghari said: ‘You will see. Please God! in a few days’ time
God’s judgment will fall on this dishonest woman.’

After that Tamásha Khánám asked: ‘What is the reason of
your mother-in-law going to her sister’s house?’

Aghari said: ‘She, too, poor thing, all owing to this ill-conditioned Mámá, is driven about in despair from door to door.
There is some banker to whom a sum of money is owing. The
Mámá came back to-day, and said he was about to file a suit.
She has gone to contrive some plan for his money.’

Tamásha Khánám asked: ‘Who is the banker who is going to
sue her?’

Aghari said: ‘I don’t know his name.’

Tamásha Khánám asked the Mámá: ‘Azmat, what banker is it?’

Azmat said: ‘Hazári Mal, Lady.’

Tamásha Khánám said: ‘What? The Hazári Mal whose
shop is in the Jauhari bázár?’

‘Yes, Lady—yes,’ said Azmat, ‘it is that Hazári Mal.’

Tamásha Khánám said: ‘Why, he keeps the accounts of my
husband’s family. My goodness! what nerve has that wretch
got to file a suit? I will tell your cousin1 when I leave this place.
You will see how he will settle matters with him.’

Tamásha Khánám remained two days with Aghari. On the
third day she took her leave, and as she was starting she said:
‘Aghari, dear, I adjure you by my head—when your father-in-
law arrives, and all this affair comes on for trial, mind you make
them send for me, and then—you just put Azmat under my charge.’

In the Khánám bázár Muhammad Kámil’s mother was hos-

1 Meaning her own husband.
Muhammad Kamīl's mother said: 'You are very kind, dear. I will take the chain. But his money has reached a terrible amount; one chain will not go far.'

Her sister said: 'Come, my dear; you know he promised that he would procure you a loan from another banker. Get into your dress, with God's name on your lips. He will be back directly, and I will send him after you.'

In due course Muhammad Kamīl's mother arrived at her home. As she got down at the entrance she saw the notification posted on the doorway. In a state of dismal depression she went in silently and sat down. When Asghari heard of her mother-in-law's arrival, she came down from the roof and paid her respects. Seeing her mother-in-law in trouble, she asked: 'Mother, dear! your face looks very said today.'

Her mother-in-law said: 'Yes; the banker has filed his suit. I cannot see how to raise the money any way. Amir Begam, too, has disappointed me, and now a notice has been stuck on the house. What will become of me?'

Asghari said: 'Don't let your honor have the least anxiety. If Hazārī Mal has filed his suit, it is no harm. He has dealings with Tamaša Khānam's husband's people also, and she promised me that she will take him to task. And if he does not give in, some way will be found of raising the money. What is to be gained by fretting over it?'

Her mother-in-law said: 'If Kamīl were here, I would send him to Hazārī Mal.'

Asghari said: 'Of course, that is as your honor pleases; but in my opinion it is not proper at all to show any fear of the banker, for otherwise he will have greater boldness in the future, and be holding out the threat of a suit every day. Far the best plan will be to make no sign from here, but to bring some influence to bear on him from outside, so that he may abandon the prosecution of his claim.'

Muhammad Kamīl's mother said: 'Tamaša Khānam is still only a girl. What does she know about the law courts and offices? How would it be if the business went wrong through relying upon 

1 la, her own husband.

her, while the time for doing anything slipped out of our hands?'

Asghari said: 'No doubt Tamaša Khānam is a girl, but I made it all thoroughly certain, and I have every confidence.'

While they were still talking, Miya Muslim gave a shout at the door. Asghari said: 'See, there is Muslim come. He will have brought some news about the matter for certain.' Then she made a gesture to Mahmūda, who went into one of the side-rooms. And she called Muslim inside, and asked him: 'Muslim, what news have you brought?'

Muslim said: 'My sister sent you her salaam, and asks after your health, and told me to say that she had Hazārī Mal sent for, and gave him a thorough good frightening, and he made a promise there should be no suit.'

When she heard this, Muhammad Kamīl's mother was comforted to some extent. But Asghari was amazed. How could this be, that Tamaša Khānam should send such a message, and yet Hazārī Mal have already filed a suit independently of it? And then the circumstance of the attachment was altogether extraordinary, for she was in the house all the time, and heard nothing about it. If it had been an attachment issued by the judge, surely some chaupasie, or office-runner, would have called out to the inmates and given them notice.

CHAPTER XIII

When Muslim had taken leave, Asghari said to Mahmūda: 'Go quietly, and tear off the paper which is affixed to the outer door.'

Mahmūda tore the paper off and brought it in. When Asghari read it, the order was about conservancy; there was not any mention of a suit in Court. She guessed at once that this, too, was Azmat's trickery. She did not, however, make this fact known

1 Mahmūda and Muslim being contemporaries and approaching marriageable age, it was not etiquette for them to see each other.

2 A chaupasie is a man who carries a budge (chapraś) with his employer's name on it.
to her mother-in-law; but she assured her in the most positive manner that there was no fear whatever of a suit, and that she might remain perfectly at ease.

Her mother-in-law said: 'As far as the suit is concerned I feel more easy from what you tell me; but the Shabebarat and the Ramazan are coming on to worry me. In both of these festivals it is nothing but spend, spend. From Lahore, even letters have stopped coming. The anxiety about this makes my very blood dry up.'

Asghari said: 'There are a good many days yet before the Ramazan. God is called "the Causer of causes"; by that time some provision from the unseen will be made manifest. True, there are only four days left now before the Shabebarat; but that is not a festival on which any great expenditure is required.'

Her mother-in-law said: 'In my house, year after year, twenty rupees goes at the Shabebarat. You can ask for yourself; this Ammat who spends the money is present.'

'Her spending,' said Asghari, 'is nothing to be astonished at. But there are some expenses which cannot be avoided, and there are others which can. And there is nothing so urgent about the Shabebarat to involve the expenditure of so much money.'

Her mother-in-law said: 'Sister, the Fatihah2—for the saints and the prophets, the great men and elders of our race—is of the first importance, and then there is the sending about to people's houses—most necessary. Why, it is but a small matter to mention—I must have five rupees, if there are to be fireworks enough to satisfy your husband and Miss Mahmuda. Muhammad Kamil is married, but what of that? God preserve him! his nature is as full of childish fun as ever it was. Until he has got a hundred

1 Lit., 'The night of immunity (from sin and sorrow),' a festival analogous to our All Hallows' Eve. It falls in the month preceding the Ramazan. Pronounce Shubbay burrat, with the accent on the last syllable, and the 't' sounded as in 'art.'
2 Fatih is the name of the opening chapter (seven short verses) of the Qur'an, but the expression here means food consecrated by the recitation of the Fatih over it, and then distributed.

CHAPTER XIII

fire-fountains1 and twenty bundles of crackers out of me, he will worry my life out; and Mahmuda, too, will make herself ill with crying.'

Asghari said: 'Five seers2 of sweets will be quite enough for the Fatihah, and as for the sending about, what comes to us can be despatched elsewhere. And I will talk to Mahmuda; she shall not plague you for crackers this time. You shall see, I will manage the business of the Shabebarat all right somehow. Leave it to me, and do not worry about borrowing money on that account.'

These were her words to her mother-in-law, but Asghari herself was in some trepidation as to how she could keep her husband away from his fire-fountains and crackers. At last she hit on the following plan for conveying her wishes to him so cleverly that she managed to say all she wanted, and yet he was not in the least annoyed.

In Muhammad Kamil's presence she herself broached the subject to Mahmuda by asking: 'Well, sister, what are your plans for the Shabebarat?'

Mahmuda replied: 'When my brother brings home his fireworks, he will give some to me, too.'

Before Muhammad Kamil could put in a word, Asghari said: 'You don't suppose your brother will bring you such silly things? What pleasure is there in fireworks, Mahmuda?'

Mahmuda said: 'Sister dear! is it not splendid when they go off?'

'Well,' Asghari said, 'there will be hundreds of them let off in the mohulla; you will be able to watch them from the roof.'

'What!' said Mahmuda; 'and we not let off any?'

'Are you not afraid?' said Asghari.

Mahmuda said: 'I? I don't let them off with my own hands.'

1 Called anar; lit., pomegranates. They are cups of earthenware about the size of a pomegranate, filled with powder and steel filings. There is a very small aperture at the top, and when the cup is set on the ground and lighted the effect is that of a fountain of fire.
2 A 'seer' is about two pounds.
THE BRIDE’S MIRROR

CHAPTER XIV

To one after another of all the persons on her list entitled to receive a portion a portion was duly sent. The Shabebarat was kept well for an outlay of two rupees.

Azmat was consumed with rage at this arrangement, and no wonder, since a great item of her perquisites was abolished. Whatever used to come from outside she used to take, and of what was sent from the house she used to purloin half, and for months afterwards she would munch the dried-up sweetmeats that she kept from the Shabebarat instead of a cordial.

CHAPTER XIV

When the Shabebarat was over, the time drew near for the arrival of Asghari’s father, and the next few days passed in no time. Four days before the Ramazán Dürandesh Khán sáhib arrived in Dehli.

Asghari had taken care to mention her father’s coming beforehand, and had settled with her mother-in-law and husband that on whatever day the Tahsildár should arrive she should go home to see him. As soon as she received intimation of his arrival, she at once ordered a doolée, and was set down at her father’s house. Her father clasped her to his breast, and was moved to tears; for a long time he kept on asking about her, and giving her an account of himself, and then he said: ‘Khairandesh Khán has gone to Lahore in accordance with your honor’s order, and, please God, will arrive here to-morrow or next day with your father-in-law.’

A letter from him reached me on the road. ‘Your father-in-law has obtained his leave.’

So that whole night and all the next day Asghari remained at her mother’s house. Shortly before the evening she said to her father: ‘If your honor will accord me permission I will now go away.’

Her father said: ‘Heh, my dear, you must stay a week. I will send a message to your mother-in-law.’

1 Lit., with my ‘co-partner in fatherhood.’ The English language has no term for the connexion between the parents of a bride and of a bridegroom.
Aghari said: 'I will do whatever your honor determines, but I think it will be the correct thing for me to be in the house before my father-in-law arrives.'

Her father reflected for a bit, and said: 'Yes, that is quite right.'

Accordingly Aghari took leave of her father, and was at home again before sunset. Next day, exactly at the dinner-hour, Muhammad Kâmil's father, Maulavi Muhammad Fâzil, suddenly appeared on the scene.

I must mention here that the Maulavi's sâhib was estate agent to the chief of Lahore. He had a fixed salary of fifty rupees a month from the estate, and the chief was responsible for his house and travelling expenses. Khairandesh Khán had gone to Lahore in accordance with Aghari's written request, and had shown her letter to the Maulavi. When the Maulavi read it he was overjoyed, and though in the ordinary course of things he would probably not have taken leave, yet now in his eagerness to see his daughter-in-law he exerted himself to persuade the chief so as to get a month's leave, and he accompanied Khairandesh Khán on his journey home.

Since Aghari had not yet appeared before her father-in-law after her marriage, when she saw him arrive she went up to the roof, and stayed there out of bashfulness. Muhammad Kâmil's mother was in a state of bewilderment, not understanding why her husband had come. When the meal was over they began to talk. The Maulavi said to his wife: 'Listen to me, madam! your younger daughter-in-law has dragged me hither.' And then he informed her of Aghari's letter, and of Khairandesh Khán's coming, and then he said: 'Fetch the daughter-in-law in.'

The mother-in-law went on to the roof, and said: 'Come, daughter, you need not be bashful; why, you used to play in his lap.'

Aghari got up at her mother-in-law's bidding, and went with her, and having made a most respectful obeisance to her father-in-law, sat down.

1 This word, pronounced Mowlâsee, is equivalent to our Doctor (of Divinity or Law).

The Maulavi said: 'Listen, my brother! I came here only because you sent for me, and when I saw your letter my soul rejoiced within me. God send His blessing on your youth and grace! In very truth it was a happy day for us when you entered our house. Now I feel sure that better days are in store for it, and to-morrow, please God, we will arrange matters in accordance with your wishes and your judgment.'

For two or three days, however, the Maulavi—as was only natural in a man just returned to his home—was occupied in seeing his friends, and after that, for the first few days of the fast, he did not feel disposed to attend to house affairs on account of his fasting. But one day he sent for his daughter-in-law, and made her sit beside him, and then called to Mâmâ Azmat, and said: 'Mâmâ, while I am here you must make out all your accounts. Let me take down in writing all the debts which are due to or from anyone. Then I can pay to each of them what may be fitting, and if there is anything left over, I can arrange for paying that by instalments.'

The Mâmâ said: 'If it were one man's bill, perhaps I might keep it in my head to tell you straight off. But the banyas, the cloth-merchant, the butcher, the grocer, the confectioner—there is money owing to all. And Hazâri Mal's account is separate. Whatever your honor may be willing to give to any of them let me have it, and I will go and give it them; the money shall be placed to your honor's credit in their books.'

The Maulavi sâhib was a good, simple-minded creature. He was on the point of paying the money over to her. Aghari said: 'What is the use of paying sums on account in this fashion? First of all find out what is really owing to each, and then pay each one of them after due consideration.'

The Mâmâ said: 'When I get leisure after dinner I will go round and ask them.'

'What will be the good of your going to ask?' said Aghari. 'Let each man who is to be paid come here and give in his account.'

1 The use of this term shows that he wished to put her on an equality with himself.
The Mámá answered: 'Lady, you have said what is easy to say. How am I to go wandering about calling people here at this time? And do you suppose they are likely to leave all their business in order to come with me?'

Asghari said: 'It is not a question of sending for them every day, Mámá. It is only for one day. Go and ask them to come. Some arrangement shall be made for the evening meal; you do no other work to-day but this. And as for the creditors, they will run when they hear of payment. Hazrí Mal went to the Court—a distance of four miles; are his feet swathed in henna bands for coming here? And what distance is it? The greengrocer, the butcher, the banyás, and the confectioner all live in this lane. It is only the cloth-seller and Hazrí Mal who are at any distance. Keep them over for to-morrow, and let the odds and ends of the accounts be settled to-day.'

It was not Azmat's wish by any means that the accounts should be gone through at all, but Asghari so overcame her with arguments that she had not a word to offer in reply. First of all the confectioner came. It was asked: 'Well, Lálá, what have you to receive?' The confectioner said: 'Thirty rupees.' It was asked: 'What things came from your shop? The thirty rupees you talk of is a great deal too much.' The confectioner said: 'Sir, is thirty rupees such a large sum? Why, fifteen rupees' worth of things was had this very Shab-heerát. There is one item alone of ten seems of sugar.'

Muhammad Kámil's mother exclaimed: 'Oh you! what sugar! All that was used in the house this time for confectionery was bought for ready money in the bázár.'

When Mámá Azmat heard this she grew quite pale; she said to the confectioner: 'What made you enter those ten seers of sugar to their account? I took that for another family, and, moreover, I told you so much.'

The confectioner said: 'You never mentioned anyone else's name to me. You took it for this gentleman's house. What good should I get from entering another person's things to his

name? Besides, I have not an account with any other gentleman's family.'

The Mámá was reduced to mere incoherent expressions of her anger. The Maulavi áshib said: 'Well, let the item of the sugar stand over. Tell us the other things.'

Accordingly the man named in the same way a whole number of other things which had never entered the house in its lifetime. Four seers of hálíahálí for the 'Illustrious Birth,' and the best of it was that in this family no one had ever held a birthday assemblage.² In the end some six or seven rupees alone were found to be correct, and the rest all false.

The Maulavi áshib's soul took fire at this, and his wrath knew no bounds. He cried out: 'How now, you rascally Azmat, have you contrived to put the debts of the whole world upon this family! Have you levelled this house with the dust simply for fun?'

When the confectioner was done with the greengrocer came. He said: 'Master, my account is a standing one—two annas' worth of vegetables a day.'

Muhammad Kámil's mother exclaimed: 'What's that? Only one seer of vegetables comes to this house. Is that two annas a day?'

The greengrocer said: 'Your highness, the Mámá takes three seers from the shop.'

The Mámá said: 'Yes. I take three seers—one seer for you, one seer for my daughter, and one seer for another family. Do I deny it? This wretch charges the whole of it to you.'

The greengrocer said: 'Eh, you wicked, dishonest old woman! you have been taking that amount for years against the account of this family, and whenever I have got my money it has been from this family that I got it.'

When the butcher's and banyás's accounts were gone into a thousand frauds were discovered in them also, and it was proved

¹ A kind of sweetmeat, so called from its powdery surface, hálí meaning sand.
² A gathering, partly social and partly religious, at which certain texts and prayers are recited in commemoration of the birth of the Prophet.
that the Mámá had been helping to keep her own daughter Khairatán, and the families of two or three neighbours out of the purchases for this one family; may, she would have a purchase debited against the house, and then sell it elsewhere. But to proceed—all the petty miscellaneous accounts were finished by the evening; there now only remained those of the cloth-merchant and Hazári Mal. The Maulavi sáhib said: ‘Have done with it now for to-day; we will see to the rest to-morrow.’ But he added in a low voice: ‘It won’t do for Azmat to run off.’

Asghari said: ‘It is hardly likely she will run away now and leave her family and all her belongings, and her house and children. True, if she has any sense of shame she may eat or drink something, but if she were of that sort how should she act in such a manner? Certainly she ought to be looked after, but only so far that someone should keep a watch over her when she is going backwards and forwards.’

Orders were then given privately to one of the servants who had come with the Maulavi to keep an eye upon the Mámá’s movements.

CHAPTER XV

When the dinner was well over the Mámá got up stealthily and went outside. The servant followed behind. First of all the Mámá went to her own house, and from thence, having thrust something under her arm, she went as straight as an arrow to the house of the cloth-merchant, and hailed him. The cloth-merchant came out astonished, and said: ‘You here at this time, old lady!’

Azmat said: ‘The Maulavi sáhib has come home. The accounts of everyone whom he has to pay are being gone through. Tomorrow you too will be summoned, and then—don’t you say anything that may bring about my disgrace.’

The cloth-merchant said: ‘What is there in the accounts that should cause disgrace to you?’

I.e., take poison.

The Mámá replied: ‘Lála! can’t you understand? this wretched covetousness is a bad, bad thing. In the master’s name I have taken for myself too, now and again, from your shop a piece of long cloth, or muslin, or English stuff.’

The cloth-merchant said: ‘How am I to know what things you have taken on your own account?’

The Mámá said: ‘I have not my wits about me at this moment to reckon it up, but four pieces of English stuff, and some rolls of muslin, and ten yards of red calico will be the outcome of what is mine. Here, take these four bangles—off my own wrists—they are sixteen rupees’ worth—perhaps one rupee less now for wear—knock off fifteen rupees from the total against their name, and if there should be a few more rupees found due from me I am prepared to pay them.’

The cloth-merchant said: ‘Well, I will take the bangles, as you give them to me. But it is night now; my books are at the shop; without looking at them how can I tell what is gone, and how much is due to me?’

Azmat said: ‘This time my honor is in your hands. Screen me however you can.’

After leaving the cloth-merchant she went straight to the house of Hazári Mal. He too was amazed, and said: ‘What! you here at this time of night!’

She fell at his feet, and, bursting into tears, began saying, ‘I have done something wrong.’

Hazári Mal said: ‘What is that?’

‘Oh, promise me,’ said Azmat, ‘that you will forgive me, and then I will tell you.’

Hazári Mal said: ‘Say what it is, can’t you?’

Azmat said: ‘Four months ago some money for the house came from Lahore, and the Maulavi sáhib sent one hundred rupees for you. All of that money I spent, and out of sheer fright I never made it known to the master’s family. Now the Maulavi sáhib has come, and he will send for you to reckon up with him. I will make some arrangement to secure these rupees, but I want you not to let the amount be known.’

Hazári Mal said: ‘If it were a matter of two or three rupees I
could keep it dark, but a lump sum of a hundred rupees could not be hushed up whatever I did.'

The Mámá said: 'What, is not my credit good even for a hundred rupees?'

Hazári Mal said: 'The plain truth is that your credit is not even good for a cowrie. When you have behaved in this manner to a family whose bread you have eaten all your life, is it likely you should prove an honest client to anyone else?'

'Ah, Lálá,' said Azmat, 'when bad luck befalls a woman her friends become her enemies. Well, then, if you will not trust me—here, take these bracelets and armlet of my daughters in deposit.'

Hazári Mal said: 'Yes, that is talking business. Only, if it were daylight the things could be assayed, and then we should know what they are worth. But, at a guess, the whole lot will be worth from fifty to sixty rupees.'

Azmat said: 'Oh, oh, Lálá, don't be so cruel! it is just four months since I had the things made. They cost me a hundred or a hundred and twenty-five rupees.'

Hazári Mal said: 'What is there to fret about? Your property—it may be worth a hundred, it may be worth two hundred—no one is robbing you of it. But when I have got it weighed, it will be known exactly what the value of it is.'

When she had made all these arrangements the Mámá returned to her house, and the Maulavi sáhib's servant recounted all the circumstances to him, as he was shampooing his feet.1 Asghari, too, was made acquainted with all the facts by Muhammad Kámí's mother.

The next morning Hazári Mal and the cloth-merchant were sent for. As the accounts proceeded objections began to be raised. The Mámá's voice grew louder and louder in the discussion. The cloth-merchant said: 'Old woman, what are you making such a noise about? Here, pick up those bangles of yours; you declared they were worth fifteen rupees; they value them at nine in the bázar.'

Upon this Hazári Mal produced the bracelets, and armlet; and

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1 To induce sleep.
2 This implies that he had thrown them down in front of her.
was written out on stamped paper then and there, and four respectable citizens attested it.

Then the Maulavi sahib said to Azmat: 'Your honor will now be pleased to take your departure in peace. For a disloyal, treacherous, deceitful woman like you there is no room in my house.'

Asghari said: 'She possesses one other quality besides disloyalty; shall I tell you what that is? She spent her time in devising schemes for sowing mischief in the household. Eh, Azmat, do you remember about the karâdâ which Mahmûda's brother expressed a wish for, and you went and delivered a lying message from me that, 'the bride says she has a headache'? Speak out now, and tell us when did you mention any wish of his to me, and when did I make the excuse of a headache?'

Azmat said: 'Lady, you were reading the Qur-ân on the roof. I went up to tell you, but when I saw you reading, I came back again.'

'And the story of the headache,' said Asghari, 'was your own invention!'

Azmat said: 'What I thought was this—you had been reading the Qur-ân from the early morning to that time; was it likely you would bother your head about cooking?'

Asghari said: 'Well, then, how do you explain your saying that I was going to the hills? Did I ever take you into my confidence? Did you ever hear me speak of such a thing?'

To this question Azmat could make no reply. Then Asghari produced the notification, and threw it down in front of the Maulavi sahib, saying: 'Just look at that; my lady Azmat here is capable of this kind of thing. She herself tore off the notification from the gate of the Mohalla, and she herself posted it up on this house; and then she herself went running all the way to my dear mother to tell her about it.'

While Asghari went on recounting these facts the Maulavi sahib's countenance grew redder and redder. On the other side of the room Tamâša Khânâm was grinding her teeth. The Maulavi said: 'It is not enough to turn you out. You are a thoroughly wicked woman.' And having said this, he shouted to his servant, and said: 'Bahâdur! take this unclean creature to the police-station, and, stay—I will write all her story in a note at once.'

But Asghari said to the Maulavi sahib: 'It is enough; she has reached her own punishment. Spare her from the police.' And she made a sign to Azmat to take herself off. Indeed she went with her as far as the outer door.

So after all her pranks was Mâmâ Azmat turned out of this house. When she got home her daughter fell upon her like a fury, crying out: 'Did I not say to you: "Don't, mother, don't go in for robbing on this scale. If a hundred days last for the thief, one day is sure to come for the merchant; take care lest one day you be caught!" Whose words did you care for? The right thing has happened. As you did so you have received. But don't make my name evil now in my husband's home. Go away wherever your God may lead you. There is no work for you in my house. As for the jewels, I have submitted to Providence; if it be written in my fate they will come to me again.'

CHAPTER XVI

In this manner, after many prayers, Asghari succeeded in routing her enemy, and freed the whole family from an incubus. When Azmat's case had been decided, Asghari asked permission a second time to go to her father, which being gladly accorded, she took leave, and arrived at her mother's house. There she stayed for a whole week; and everything in which she desired her father's advice was discussed by her in full. Her father asked, 'Has Azmat been got rid of?'

Asghari said: 'By your honor's gracious favours everything has turned out well. If my elder brother had not gone to Lahore my father-in-law would never have come, nor would this account of years have been settled, nor would Azmat have been dismissed.'

The Khân sahib asked: 'And how will the management of the house go on now?'