

I explained that the reason was that everyone was absorbed in his work.

"Of an evening", I added, "one can see groups of students in the Hostel engaged in dissertation, and in the morning¹ one sees them walking up and down the Hostel lawn with books in their hands."

Philosophy, Mathematics and History were discussed. I told him, in the Dining room, the Common room, the bath rooms and the verandahs. Those who were keen on English literature would practise all day and all night. Long conversing like Shakespeare, whilst students of mathematics acquired the habit of expressing all their ideas in terms of Algebra, and students of Persian exchanged ideas in (extempore) *rubaiyat*... Those who were keen on History.....

My father gave in!

All that remained was for me to fail and to put in my application for the next year.

In the meantime I corresponded with all my chums, who I felt sure would be my comrades in the following year, and I gave them the good news that the next year would always be a landmark in the history of the College, for I was coming to live in the Hostel, and was bringing with me wide experience of the life of a scholar, which I would place at the disposal of the new generation of students free gratis and for nothing.

I pictured myself in the Hostel as a sort of kind mother, around whom the inexperienced students would cluster like chicks round a hen.

I wrote to the Superintendent Sahib, who had once been a class-mate of mine, to tell him that I was coming to the Hostel, and that I hoped he would give me certain privileges, and I informed him that I

1. '*ala-s-sabdh*. Arabic—early in the morning.

should consider myself exempted from certain rules of the Hostel.

Having gone through all this, I just ask you to look at my bad luck; for when the result came out, I found that I had actually passed!

Besides the awful blow that it was to me, just look at the stupidity of the University officials, who by passing me had deprived themselves of a permanent source of income!

I AM A MUCH MARRIED MAN.

I am a much married man, subservient and obedient, and I regard it as one of my principles of life to keep my wife Roshanara informed of everything I do: I have always observed this principle, so help me God!"

And so my wife knows all about my friends, and the result is that they are just as odious to Roshanara as they are dear to me. Those very traits in my friends, which fascinate me, she looks on as a disgrace to anyone who prides himself on being a gentleman.

Please don't for one minute conclude that they are the sort of people one couldn't talk about in decent society, for, they are all shabby-genteel folk,²

1. *Khabd' mera anjam ba khair kare*: Literally—May God make my end well. This is generally used as a form of blessing on the occasion of a marriage, or with regard to ones own death, implying in the latter case that it is very doubtful that the prayer will be granted.

2. *Safed-posh*: people wearing white clothes; hence the notables in a village. Here it is used sarcastically.

which is partly due¹ to their own accomplishments, and partly thanks to their association with me. But what can I do when their friendship endangers the peace and quiet of my home life to such an extent that I cannot describe it? Take the Mirza Sahib for example—quite a good fellow, who, although holding an important appointment in the Forests Department, looks as sanctimonious as an Imam in a mosque. He doesn't gamble, he is not keen on tip-cat, and he has never been caught picking anybody's pocket. He certainly breeds pigeons², but that is his only hobby.

When any blackguard in our quarter of the town is put in prison for gambling, it is characteristic of my wife to go and offer condolences to his mother; or when anyone gets a black eye playing tip-cat, she will go and nurse him. She will cry for hours if anyone is arrested for picking pockets; and yet that holy man, whom all the world in never tired of calling Mirza Sahib, is referred to in my house as 'that damned pigeon racer'³. And whenever I chance to look up at the sky, and happen to see a kite, a crow, a vulture, or a sparrow hawk, Roshanra immediately jumps to the conclusion that I⁴ too have taken to pigeon racing!

1. *Tufail*: the diminutive of *tifh*, a companion, parasite, one who sponges (in this sense it is said to be derived from *Tufail*, a poet of *Kufa*, who was well known as a feast hunter). Here *ke tufail* means instrumentality.
 2. *Kabutar pindā*: to breed pigeons with the object of racing them and gambling.
 3. *Mūd kabutar dāz*: *mūd* is a form of oath used in *reḥabī*, i.e. the language of the *zandī*.
 4. A pigeon racer—hence one who wastes his time and does not earn his living; hence a waster, good-for-nothing.
- Note the use of the direct narration after *khayāl ho jātā hai kīh*.

Then she starts a regular *gasida* (but of abuse!)¹ about the Mirza, in the middle of which it will be diverted to me. Sometimes she will fairly let herself go and at other times will confine herself to cryptic and caustic remarks about me.

One day, on such an occasion, I resolutely determined that I would never let the wretched Mirza come near me again for, after all, one's home life takes precedence over all things; and of what importance is the happiness of one's friends compared to frank and open-hearted relationship between husband and wife? So, full of wrath, I repaired to the Mirza's house, knocked at the door, and he told me to come in.

"No, I won't", I replied, and told him to come out.... I went in. He was sitting in the sun with oil rubbed all over his body², and with a pigeon's beak in his mouth³!

He told me to sit down, and I refused to do so—eventually I did sit down. I suppose I looked rather disgruntled⁴.

1. A *gasīdah* is a poem in praise of someone which should consist of twenty or more couplets. The first few couplets are often in praise of the spring or something beside the real object of the poem. This part of the poem is called the *ta'shīb* or introduction, after which occurs the *ḡayez* or diversion towards the praise of the object of the poem. In this case the poem starts off about the Mirza, and then turns to the husband who is the real object of her abuse. *Bahr* is the metre of a poem which may be long or short.
2. The whole of this difficult passage is therefore metaphorical. It is the custom of certain types of Indians during the winter months to sit in the sunshine and oil their bodies before bathing.
3. It is the custom with pigeon fanciers, when they wish to tame a bird, to put its beak in their mouths.
4. *Ma'ām hotā hai*: note the use of the present tense in description.

The Mirza asked me if anything had gone wrong.
"No, nothing", I replied.

32 He then asked me what had brought me round at that time of day; and my mind seethed with words in reply¹.

My first idea was to make a clean breast of it all straightway, and then to clear out. It occurred to me, however, that he might think that I was pulling his leg; and that therefore I had better start off tactfully²: but I couldn't think how to start off!

Eventually I said, "Mirza, old bean, are pigeons very expensive?"

The Mirza thereupon gave me detailed information of all the pigeons in the world, one by one, from China, all round the world, to America; and then went on with a brilliant discourse³ on the dearness of grain, after which he proceeded to make a speech about high prices in general.

I returned home that day without having achieved any result, but still determined to quarrel. But, by Heaven's decree, peace was made with my wife that evening⁴.

I asked myself what on earth was the use of quarrelling with the Mirza now (that there was peace in the family), and so on the following day I went and made it up with him.

Nevertheless, some friend or other of mine is always ready to mar my happiness.

Nature, it seems to me, has filled my character up chock-a-block with submissiveness and tractability,

1. Note the Urdu expression.
2. Note the Urdu expression.
3. *Gul afsoshant*: Literally: rose scattering.
4. Literally: Peace was made in my home.

for my wife is always finding in me traces of the disgusting habits of some friend or other of mine, and now there is nothing of my own personality, and individuality left. 33

Before I was married, I sometimes got up at 10 o'clock, otherwise it was at 11—but as to the time I have to get up now, only those can guess who, in their own homes, are made to come to breakfast punctually at 7 o'clock every morning.

Should I ever, on the grounds of human frailty, fail to get up like the cock at dawn, I am told that it is the result of my associating with that waster¹ Nasim.

Early one morning² I was having my bath, it was winter, and my hands and feet were shaking with cold; I was soaping my head, and some of the soap went up my nose when, though Heaven only knows what mysterious influence induced me to do so, I tuned up and began to sing the song:—"There's something in your flirting that's always new to me."³ This was considered to be the worst of bad taste on my part, and my friend the Pandit ji was accused of being the real cause of my vulgarity.

Just lately, however, an event has occurred which has made me swear to give up all my friends for good and all. 34

One morning, three or four days ago, Roshanara asked my permission to go and stay with her parents. During the whole time we have been married, Roshanara has only been to stay with her parents twice.

1. *Ni-khatu*—*ni*, not and *khatu*, a worker—hence a washer, loafer etc.
2. Note the effect of repetition in *subh subh*: the first thing in the morning.
3. *Tori*—vulgar for *teri*. *Night's* means novel, strange, etc.

Moreover, she asked me so simply and humbly that I couldn't refuse.

"So I shall go by the one-thirty train?" she asked.

"Of course!" I replied.

She straightway busied herself with her preparations, and thoughts of freedom filled my mind.

"Now let all my friends come", I thought, "and kick up a noise; and I can sing whenever I jolly well like; get up when it pleases me; and go to the theatre if I want to!"

"Hurry up Roshanara!" I cried, "otherwise you will miss the train" I went with her to the station, and when I had put her into a carriage, she told me to be sure and write to her.

"Of course I will, every day", I replied, "and mind you write to me too!"

"Have your meals punctually", she said, "and, oh, by the way you will find your clean socks and handkerchiefs in the bottom drawer of the cupboard".

35 After that we were both silent and just gazed at each other. Her eyes filled with tears, and I too felt very upset, and when the train had started I remained standing where I was, for quite a long time, dazed. At length, I slowly directed my steps to the book-stall, and turning over the pages of the magazines, looked at the pictures. I bought a paper, which I folded up and put in my pocket, and as a matter of habit turned to go home.

It occurred to me, however, that there was no longer any necessity for me to go home, and that I could go anywhere I pleased: if I so felt inclined I could walk up and down the station for hours. I was just longing to turn somersaults (and rag about).

They say that African savages, who have been

kept in a civilised country for some time, although they have been very impressed with the glory and splendour of that country, scream for joy when they get back into their own forests; and something very like that happened to me.

I ran out of the station, a free man—with the voice of freedom I hailed a tonga, jumped into it, lit a cigarette, stretched my legs along the seat, and went off to the club.

On the way I remembered a very important matter, and had the tonga turned back to my house. On arrival, from right outside, I called the servant, "Amjad!"

"Yes Sir," he replied.

"Look here," I said, "just go and tell the barber

to come at 11 o'clock tomorrow morning."

"Very good Sir."

"Did you hear what I said—at 11 o'clock, in case he comes² at six as he always does!"

"Very good Sir," he replied.

"Yes, and if he does come before 11 o'clock," I added, "just beat him and kick him out!"

I then went on to the club. Before that³ I had never been inside the club at two in the afternoon. I went in and found it deserted—there was not a living soul to be seen.

I went all through the rooms, and found the billiard room, the chess room, and the card room

1. Note the word *sulqand*, to kindle something that burns with smoke; as opposed to *jalsand*, which means to set fire to something that burns with flames.

2. *Ward* gives the sense of coming like a calamity.

3. Note the use of the word *di* in direct narration, which is necessitated by description.

empty, and saw but one solitary servant in the dining room, who was sharpening knives.

37 "Hasn't anyone come in today, my man?" I asked him.

"You know perfectly well Sir," he replied, "that no one ever comes in at this time of day."

I felt very disappointed and wondered what I should do next, and as I couldn't think of anything, went off to the Mirza's; only to find that he had not yet returned from office; so off to the office I went. He was very surprised to see me. I told him why I had come, and he asked me to wait in an outer room, saying that he had very little left to do, and that he would be with me as soon as he had finished it.

He asked me what the programme for the evening was.

"The theatre," I replied.

"That's splendid," he said, "sit down outside, I'm just coming." In the outer room was a small chair on which I seated myself and waited. I took the paper out of my pocket, and began to read it—I read the whole of it from beginning to end. I had still an hour to wait till 4 o'clock (when the office closed) and I started to read it all over again. I waded through all the advertisements and then read them all over again.

38 At length I threw the paper away and yawned unceremoniously—yawn after yawn—I went on till my jaws began to ache.

Then I began to swing my legs till I got tired

1. *Be*—a disrespectful term used at the beginning of a sentence in addressing menials.
2. Note the use of the past tense to express an immediate future.

of it: then I drummed with my fingers on the table. I was very fed up, and opening the door, called out to the Mirza, "Hi there! Listen to me you mug; can't you get a move on, or do you wish to kill me with all this waiting? You blighter, you have wasted the whole of my day!"

We left there and went to the Mirza's house, where we spent a very cheery evening. We dined at the club, and then took some friends on to the theatre. I got home at half past two in the morning, and fell asleep as soon as my head touched the pillow.

39 Next morning, when I awoke, the sunlight was pouring into my room, I looked at my watch and saw that it was a quarter to eleven. I stretched out my arm, and took a cigarette off the table, lit it, put it in the ash-tray, and then dozed again. At eleven o'clock Anjad came in and told me that the barber had come. I told him to let him come in. It was ages since I had had the chance of enjoying the luxury of being shaved in bed! I got up in a leisurely manner, and after my bath, prepared to go out; but somehow did not experience that enjoyment which I had expected. As I went out of the room, I took a handkerchief out of the chest-of-drawers, and I can't think what on earth occurred to me, but then and there, I sat down on a chair and gazed at the handkerchief like one possessed?

I opened another drawer and saw a silk wrap of a greenish yellow colour, which I took out. It was very delicately perfumed, and I stroked it for quite a long time. I was overcome with emotion: my home

1. *Table ki gaten*: *gat* literally means an air or tune, but here the various rhythms played on a drum.
2. *Saaddi*: a madman. One who is suffering from melancholia.

seemed to be deserted, I did all I could to control my emotion but the tears ran down my cheeks which thoroughly upset me, and I confess that I had a real good cry.

I took all the clothes out of the drawers and looked at each of them in turn. I don't know what visions they conjured up in my mind, but the sight of them made me even more unhappy.

I couldn't stick it any longer¹, and went straight off to the Telegraph Office and sent a wire—"Missing you badly return at once."

After sending the wire I felt a little comforted, and was sure that Roshanara would come as soon as she possibly could. This bucked me up a little² and I felt as though a weight had been taken off my mind.

On the following day at noon there was to be a card party³ at the Mirza's. When we got there we found that some friends of his father had come to call, so we thought it best to go elsewhere. My own house was empty, and so the whole gang repaired there.

I told Amjad that if he didn't prepare the *chikams* well it would be a bad day for him, and that the betel nut should be passed round continuously so as to keep the pot boiling.⁴

Only we men will be able to guess what happened after that.

1. Note the Urdu idiom.
2. *Dhāras bandhna*: to keep up the spirits, take heart etc.
3. *Tāsh kī na'raka garm honā thā*: Literally:—the battlefield of cards was to become hot.
4. *Tāndā bawāh jāe*: *tāndā* literally means a train or line; e. g. *gāyon kī tāndā* etc. This expression therefore means, should be continual.

To start off with, they played cards seriously and observed the rules, and whatever (card) game they played, they played sensibly, strictly in accordance with the rules; all as sober as judges: but after an hour or so they began to get jolly, and to look at each other's cards. Things got to such a pitch that if anyone looked away, some one else had a squint at some of his winning cards; at which everyone roared with laughter.

Three hours after that it got to such a pitch that some of them were singing and keeping time with their feet, whilst others were whistling, resting on their arms on the carpet, and another repeated time after time some joke he had heard at the theatre; but still the card game went on.

After a while some of them began horse-play. Whilst these pranks were in progress some wag proposed a game which ends up by one player being made the King, another the Minister, the third the Police Officer, and the one who has lost the most is made the thief. Everyone said that it would be great fun, and that it was a splendid idea.

One of them said that whoever became the thief would have a very thin time.¹

"Yes rather, of course he will!" agreed someone. Well, it is no ordinary game—all about matters to do with kingdoms—*Kingdoms* mark you!

The game commenced, and as bad luck would have it I was made the thief, and they thought out all sorts of punishments for me—one of them proposed (to the king) that I should run off bare-footed to the sweet shop and buy them some sweets. Another proposed that I should fall down on my face before

1. Note the Urdu expression.

each player and take two smacks from each, another that I should stand on one foot and dance.

Eventually His Majesty the King said, "We order that a paper dunce's cap be put on the thief's head, his face smeared with black, and in that state he go inside and bring us out a *chilam* filled and ready to smoke."

Everyone remarked what a wonderful brain he had, and what a splendid punishment he had thought out.

"Hip-hip-hurrah!" they shouted.

I was enjoying myself immensely, and said that I didn't mind. "I happen to be the thief to-day," I said, "It will be somebody else's turn to-morrow."

I submitted my face to them cheerfully. Laughing, I put on the silly hat, and with a devil-may-care attitude, picked up the *chilam*, opened the door of the women's apartments, and went through to the kitchen. The room behind me was echoing with laughter.

As soon as I got into the courtyard, the outside door opened, and a lady clad in a *barqa* entered. 43 She pulled aside her veil, and there was Roshanara!

I couldn't breathe, and was attacked with a sort of ague. I couldn't utter a word. There, in front of me was Roshanara, to whom I had sent a wire asking her to come at once as I was so unhappy! Here was I with black smeared all over my face, with a dunce's cap on my head, carrying a *chilam*; whilst shouts of laughter were to be heard from the men's apartments.

My very spirit froze, and my every sense refused to function! For a while Roshanara just stood look-

1. Note Urdu expression.

ing at me without saying a word; and then she said:but how can I describe what she said? I just heard her voice as though I were in a dream.

You must have realised by now that I am, in myself, one of the most noble characters you will find, and if only I am judged by my own entity, you won't find a better husband in the world.

All my in-laws are of this opinion; and this I too steadfastly believe. As a matter of fact, it is these friends of mine who have disgraced me.

Therefore I have made up my mind that in 44 future I will either stay at home, or go to my work; but I will not go out to call on anybody, nor will I let anybody enter my house; except, of course, the postman or the barber and with them I will be as short as possible. For example:—

"A letter?"

"Yes Sir."

"Give it to me: go away!"

"Cut my nails!"

"Buz off!"—and that is all the conversation I will ever have with them—just you see!

THE PIR OF MURIDPUR!

Many people are astonished that I never mention 45 my home, and some are amazed that I never go there now.

Whenever any body asks me the reason for this, I always avoid the subject and turn the conversation, and this gives rise to much speculation. Some surmise that a law suit has been instituted against me

1. *Muridpur ka Pir*: Literally—The spiritual guide of the city of disciples.