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“Did Uncle say anything about me before . . . before . . . ?”

Sarwat broke in. “No,” she replied with finality. “There was and is nothing for you.”

“That isn’t what I meant,” said Husna.

Kamila softened. “Look, whatever you had with my father is gone now. If you took care of him in these past months, you were rewarded. You’re young, you’ll find other things. You think that you’ll never heal, but you will, sooner than you think. Go on, go back to the annex.”

Now Husna stood. She had reached the bottom, her pride arose, her sense of wanting to be dignified now, to accept the inevitable. For her, dignity and pride and memory would be all and everything from this moment forward. “I have no power. You are important people, and I’m nothing, and my family is nothing. I have to obey.” The finality of this rang true, the absence of appeal, countering their dismissal of her.

Just as she approached the door, Rehana called to her. “There’s one other thing. They tell us you have a number of trunks in your room. We will not ask what you have in them. You may take those with you. But nothing else.”

Reaching the annex, staggered, Husna sat on the side of the bed and buried her face in her hands. She had hoped that Rehana, the foreign one, the aggrieved one, would take her side—yet it was she who pronounced the harshest words. At the end their estrangements were less than their contempt for her. They had closed up against her—family, blood. She tried to tell herself that she had gone to the sisters hoping for nothing, with nothing in her heart but sadness at the death of their father, who had loved her. She should have said something cold, should have refused their last insulting offer.

“For him I should have said, ‘I came with nothing, I leave with nothing. I leave with the clothes on my back. I served your father, when you were far away. The shame be on your heads.’”

But she could not afford even this gesture. The next day two men loaded the trunks onto a horse-drawn cart and carried them away to the Old City.

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