

THE FORTUNATE BOY*Ali Abbas Hussaini (1899- 1969)*

Translated from Urdu by

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Holding small Hameed's hand, old Rahiman came out of the house. On the dry hands of grandmother, the smooth fingers of grandson were like fresh buds among the dried leaves. Rahiman had a back-bent. There were wrinkles on the face. There were tiny dots around her eyes. Her cheeks had squeezed due to the absence of teeth. Her chin was almost absent. Her legs trembled while walking. The support of stick seemed necessary – There was a torn 'burkha' on her body. Its lowered part was filled with mud. There were old fashioned patched shoes in her feet.

With a lowered head, the child accompanied her. Great sorrow was visible through his choked voice, flooded eyes, face and the torn clothes. The old woman said, "Son, it's a great fortune to have a job at the age of 8-9 years. Thank God, He listened to my prayers. Look, you must be thankful to God."

"Yes, Granny" said Hameed with the lowered neck. The lady said "And son, buy a four paisa cap for you in the fair this time. *Masha-Allah* you have a job now." "Very well, grandma" Hameed said as earlier. The lady said, "And look son, remove the sandals you are wearing now, keep it safe. Wear it on Eid. You are sensible now. Future's care should be taken. In normal days, there is no problem in walking with bare feet. If on festivals the sandal is there, you will also walk in pride with all."

Hameed's neck bowed a little more and in a choked voice again he said, "Very well, grandma."

It was morning. The light was clear. The cocks had stopped announcing. The sounds of prayers from the mosques and *shankhas* from the temples were audible. The village women with veils met grandma in couples and groups. Each of them would see Rahiman and her grandson but didn't talk for fear of being a

hindrance. Yes, they pathetically watched the two turning again and again.

These two were moving slowly by the farms. Old Rahiman had become silent after explaining Hameed the duties of the job, master – servant relationship and mercy of God upon His devotees, in simple sentences. Hameed had listened to all the things and on each question by the grandmother, he had answered, “Yes, grandma, very well, grandma”. But after listening to all the things when he would raise his neck, he could see the same bright road and could not find any sign of the destination.

The sun started peeping out of its golden circles. Now the villagers were seen with livestock and carrying the staff on their shoulders in the farms. Some are singing, some are yelling after the bullocks and some are making fun of the devils returning from the jungle. The Aheer boys (cowherds) are collecting the animals of all village for grazing. The shepherds are shouting “Hurr, Hurr” after the herd of sheep. The yellow road is shining before them but even a misty sketch of the destination is not visible.

They saw Manglo, the cobbler, coming from the front. There was a stick on his shoulder. A new shoe was hung in it. There was a small *pagali* on his head. There was a shirt on the body and a

yellowish dhoti around the legs. He was on his way humming happily. He was startled to see the old lady and said, “Where are you going, aunt?”

The lady said, “Gashainpur, Bhaiya, Hameed has got a job there.” “O, aunt! Work? at this age? Its for play not work.” He said humbly.

The old lady replied, “Yes, Bhaiya, but he is the only man in the house.” Then asked, “Where are you coming from?” He smiled shyly, “from the in-laws’ house”

Hameed pulled granny’s fingers. He looked up. The road was there. Gashainpur was miles away they were moving without any sign of destination.

They met Molvi Sahib ahead. The palanquin was under the neem tree and the bearers were just resting nearby. There was school going ceremony of Khan Sahib’s son. Molvi Sahib was going there for Bismillah ceremony. On looking the old lady, he said, “O Rahiman, where are you going at this time of the day?”

The old lady greeted him and said, “To get a job for this child”

“Yes! Mashallah, going to work at this age. Good.... Very good. But have you taught him Namaz?”

The old lady’s yellow face turned red, “Yes, Molvi Sahib I have taught him

Namaz myself. We, the poors, also know to remember God.”

Molvi Sahib was confounded, “No, No, Ya, Ya, Mashallah” and the two travelers moved ahead. One old, another young. One had completed the boundaries of age, another was entering the life. Both were shivering, both were weak. One with over work, another with inexperience. But helplessly they were on their way. The heat was increasing. The destination was miles away, unknown, but the feet didn't stop.

They entered the borders of Gashainpur and saw well built houses and sky scrapers. There was a blind beggar sitting near the entrance of the city. “One paisa for the blind! One paisa for the blind beggar!” he was persistent. His yellow teeth could be seen. His beard was dirty and entangled. In place of eye bolls, there was mud in his eyes. He sensed the feet of these tired travelers and turned towards them. He spread his thin yellow hands to them, “One paisa for the blind!”

The old lady held the grandson's hand tightly. Going near the beggar, she said, “Baba, we had learnt, you want a servant”

The beggar's tone was different. Earlier there was humbleness, now authority. He said, “You have brought?” and started searching with hands. The old

lady pushed Hameed near him and said, “Yes see, Mashallah it's the ninth year”

The blind beggar examined Hameed from top to bottom just as a butcher does the goat in a bargain. Then said, “Seems strong. What's the name? ”

The child replied in a choked voice, “Hameed”

“You will support me to move from village to village”

“Yes”

“You will be able to sing with me?”

“Yes! If you teach”

The blind man collected the things and picked a stick. Putting his hand on the child's shoulder he stood up. Then said, “Let's go. You get nothing sitting here. Let's go on a round.”

Hameed looked at granny pathetically then glanced at the long road. No chance to stop no place to halt. Destination was miles away, completely unknown.

He started walking with the blind. His hand was on the child's shoulder, and he was calling with him, “De De Baba! One is blind, another is a child. One Paisa, Some flour. De De Baba!”

One sound was proud, another was sad. One was claiming his lot; another was lamenting upon the situation.

Rahiman watched with her week eyes the vanishing face of her grandson for

a long time, then wiping the tears; she looked towards the sky and said,
“Thanks to you, my Lord! You made my child so fortunate as to be employed at the age of nine.”