

Samira

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Chapter 1

Samira waits for Habib

Samira was very happy. She was ‘in love’. In two weeks she was going to marry Habib. He was the son of her father’s friend Abdul and his wife Musserat. Habib was born in Britain but he was flying to Samira’s village in Pakistan to marry her.



Samira had a photo of Habib. She looked at it every night before she went to sleep and every morning when she woke up.

One day when she was cooking, the food burned because she was staring out of the window thinking of Habib.

Her mother came into the kitchen and she sighed.

‘Samira, stop dreaming. You will have trouble if you do not

keep your feet on the ground. Look! You are burning the food!’ Nasra put more water in the saucepan.

‘I’m sorry. I was thinking of how much I love Habib.’

Nasra said slowly, ‘It takes time to love someone. Love is more than a handsome face.’

‘Habib is handsome *and* good, mother.’

‘You cannot tell if someone is good from a photo Samira. Perhaps he is good but perhaps not. Your father and I hope he is kind. We want you to love each other. Your sisters are married but you waited to help me because your father was ill. Now is the right time for you.’

‘If I love Habib, I think he will love me. I want to marry him but I will be sad to leave you to live in another country.’

‘It is time for you to marry my dear. I pray every night you will be happy in your new country. Habib’s parents are very kind. His mother is my good friend. You must help Musserat the way you help me.’

A few days later Samira woke early because Habib’s family was coming to her house. When she was engaged Musserat sent Samira lovely clothes from Britain. Samira looked gorgeous now in the new dark blue and silver shalwar kameez that Musserat sent her.



Nasra was in the kitchen making bread. She stopped when her daughter walked into the room.

Nasra had tears in her eyes. 'You look beautiful, my dear,' she said.

Suddenly, there was a knock on the door. It was little

Amina from the end house.

‘Mother’s ill. Please can Nasra come?’ she asked.

Nasra’s hands were covered with flour.

‘I can go Mother,’ Samira said. She hurried down the road with Amina. The little girl’s mother Aneesah was pregnant and the baby was coming. Samira often helped her mother when women in the village had babies.

Samira calmed Aneesah. ‘You will be ok,’ she said gently. She held her hand. The young mother held Samira’s clothes tightly. Two hours later the baby was born. Samira put the baby in Aneesah’s arms. The nurse arrived and she said the baby was healthy. Everyone was happy. Aneesah thanked Samira and she walked home.

As she went into the house Samira heard the visitors. ‘It is Habib’s family,’ she thought. She felt so happy. She walked into the room, her face full of joy. She didn’t know her hair was falling out of her scarf. Her lovely clothes were crumpled where the young mother held them tightly when she was in pain.

Samira smiled at the visitors. She knew Abdul and Musserat. Her father and Abdul were cousins. They had holidays in Pakistan. She liked them. The other man was Habib’s brother Ali. Habib was not there. Everyone was very

quiet.

‘Have you been busy?’ Ali asked her gently.

‘Yes, I helped a lady in the village have her baby.’

‘Is the baby well?’ Musserat said.

Samira nodded happily. ‘Yes, the mother and baby are fine.’ They all smiled but Samira felt that something was wrong. They didn’t speak about Habib.

‘Where is Habib?’ she asked. Then she put her head down. It wasn’t good to ask. She must wait.

‘Come with me, I must talk to you Samira,’ her mother said. They went to the bedroom. Nasra held Samira’s hand.

‘My dear, I’m sorry but Habib doesn’t want to marry you. He is a modern young man and he met a girl called Malak in Leicester, two weeks ago and he wants to marry her.’

‘But Habib wrote and he said he loves me.’ Samira lay on her bed and cried. Her mother stroked her hair.

‘It is hard Samira but one day you will forget. You will love someone else.’

‘No, I will always love Habib.’ Samah wept.

‘You are hurt but it is best to know now. You don’t want to marry a man who loves another woman.’

Chapter 2

Difficult Days



The next few days were awful for Samira. She was very unhappy. Nasra wanted her to wear pretty clothes for the visitors but she wore black. Samira didn't speak very much and she cried a lot. Her face looked tired and sad.

Once when Samira was in the kitchen Ali came in.

'I asked your father if I can talk to you,' he said. 'I'm sorry you are sad about Habib but I must speak, because I'm going home tomorrow.' He laughed nervously. 'I am not handsome like my brother. I'm a little bald and a lot older than Habib.' Ali looked serious. 'But, I want to marry you

Samira. I have a good newsagent's business. I can look after a wife. Will you marry me?'

'How can I marry you when I love your brother?' Samira stood up. She was going to run to her bedroom but Ali caught hold of her hand.

'Don't run away Samira. I know you don't love me but we can learn to love each other.'

'I cannot marry you. I love Habib,' Samira said angrily and she ran out of the room.

In the bedroom she thought, 'I'm sure Ali is a good man but how can I marry him when I love Habib?'

Nasra came to the bedroom. She talked to Samira. 'We understand it is difficult for you to marry Ali now but your father and I think he is a good man. We like him. He can give you a comfortable life.'

'I cannot marry Ali. I love his brother,' Samira said firmly. Nasra nodded.

'Very well my dear. We will not make you marry.'

Ali and his parents went home. Samira was sad for many weeks. Everyone in the village knew she wasn't married. She didn't laugh or visit her friends. She didn't want them to be kind. She was afraid she might cry.

Samira's parents had sheep, chickens, dogs and two

cows. Samira loved the animals and she looked after them. She got up early every day to feed them.

One morning a letter arrived from Britain. Her mother shouted, 'Quick, Samira! Your father wants you to read this letter. He cannot find his glasses.'

Samira went into the house. She opened the letter slowly. It was not Habib's writing.

Dear Mahmood, Nasra and Samira,

My parents hope Samira is better. They want me to thank you for your kindness to us. I enjoyed my first visit to Pakistan very much. My parents talked about the village when I was a child.

I liked your animals. I want to be an animal doctor. In Britain it is very difficult to be a vet. In the evenings I study to pass my exams.

May Allah bless you.

Abdul, Musserat and Ali

Mahmood asked Samira to write an answer. 'My eyes are not good Samira,' her father said. 'I want my good friend Abdul to know that his family are always welcome in this house.' Samira wrote the letter for her father and an answer

came back two weeks later.

Dear Mahmood,

Thank you for your letter. My parents want you all to come for a holiday to their house in Leicester.

You can buy cheap tickets on the Internet next month. It is spring and a very nice time to come to Britain. Can you come?

Blessings of Allah on your family.

Abdul, Musserat and Ali

Mahmood spoke to his wife. 'You go to Britain with Samira. I can't go. It's very busy in work. You haven't had a holiday for years and Samira needs a holiday.'

Nasra said slowly, 'I'm afraid to fly.'

'Don't be afraid. It's more dangerous to cross the streets when we go to Lahore. Pray to Allah for courage.'

'You're right, Mahmood. We are going to Britain Samira. Insha' Allah!' Nasra said.

'I will telephone Ali and ask how much the aeroplane tickets cost,' Mahmood told them.

The days went quickly and it was time for Nasra and Samira to leave for Lahore Airport. They said goodbye to

Samira's father. They were very excited. They stared out of the window of the aeroplane. The houses and people looked tiny and far away.

Soon it was dark. Nasra slept. Everyone was quiet. Samira shut her eyes but she couldn't sleep. She was glad when the air hostess came to wake everyone with tea, fruit juice and a roll.

When they landed in Heathrow, Samira and her mother were nervous. Everything was different, the air, the clothes, the language. They hoped Ali was there to meet them. The two women felt cold and Samira was tired.

The customs officer was friendly. He said, 'Have a happy holiday in Leicester!'

Nasra and Samira were glad to see Ali at the airport.

'My parents are waiting for you,' he said. 'Are you tired Nasra?'

'No, I'm not tired because I slept on the aeroplane but Samira didn't sleep. I'm very cold.'

Ali laughed. 'Yes, Nasra! It's warmer in Pakistan. Come! I have a blanket in the car. The sun's shining and you will feel warm while we're driving to Leicester.'

Chapter 3

A Holiday in Britain

Nasra held Samira's arm. Ali took the trolley with the luggage. He said, 'You look tired Samira.'

'Yes, I am tired Ali. I was too excited to sleep.'

'You can have a rest when we are home but you will have to eat first. My mother cooked for hours every day this week. I think she wants to show she can cook like you Nasra.' The two women laughed.

Ali put the cases in the boot. He opened the car door for Nasra and Samira to sit in the back. He gave them a soft blanket to keep warm. In two hours they were in Leicester.

'Did you meet Ali with no problems at Heathrow?' Musserat asked.

'Yes, we saw him straight away,' Nasra said.

'Mahmood must come next time Nasra,' Abdul told her.

'Yes, Mahmood wants to come to visit you Abdul.'

Abdul nodded. 'It's a sunny day but it's very cold. We have put the fire on for you. Are you warm?'

'Yes, thank-you! Ali gave us a blanket in the car and the

house is nice and warm,' Nasra said.

Musserat took the two women upstairs to a large bedroom in the back of the house. It was clean and pretty. There were flowers on the table and a little box of chocolates and there were clean towels on the chair.

'Put your clothes in the wardrobe. The food is ready. Come down as soon as you have finished in the bathroom,' Musserat told Nasra and Samira.

They unpacked their cases and as soon as they went downstairs Musserat said, 'Come and eat'. She took the white cloth from the table. There was a feast under the cloth, rice, vegetables, lamb, pickles and fresh bread.

'You have food for twenty people,' Nasra said.

'Musserat wants you to eat it all,' Abdul laughed.

They enjoyed the food. After the meal, they talked. Samira was tired. Her eyes closed. Ali noticed.

'Samira you look tired, why don't you rest?' he said.

Nasra agreed. 'You go to bed daughter, I slept in the plane and I'm not tired.'

Samira went upstairs. She was glad to get into bed. She went fast asleep. She slept all afternoon and all night. She didn't wake until late the next morning!

When she woke the sun was shining through the window.

The house was quiet. She remembered she was on holiday in Leicester with her mother. She looked at the table by her bed. There was a note from Nasra.

Dear Samira,

I have gone to the shops with Musserat.

There is food and a drink in the kitchen. Mother

Samira washed. She looked at her clothes. There was a pretty yellow skirt and top that Musserat sent to Pakistan weeks ago. Samira dressed. She put earrings on, gold bracelets and her yellow hijab. She walked downstairs. Someone was coming through the front door. Perhaps it was her mother and Musserat?

Samira waited on the stairs to say hallo but when the door opened she saw Habib! She was shocked. She wanted to run away but Habib spoke.

‘You must be Samira?’

‘Yes.’ Samira was shy and looked down at her feet.

‘Please come downstairs. I must talk to you.’

Samira didn’t know what to do.

‘Please Samira, my father is here. It will be ok for us to talk together.’

Samira walked slowly downstairs. Habib went to the kitchen. He pointed to the big chair. ‘Ssh,’ he whispered. ‘My father is sleeping.’ Abdul was snoring.

Samira wanted to go to her bedroom because Abdul was asleep. She didn’t want to be alone with Habib.

‘I must speak quickly Samira because my mother will come home soon. I’m sorry I didn’t come to Pakistan to marry you. I met Malak. I thought I loved her. I wanted a “love marriage”.’

‘I understand Habib. It’s better to be honest. I don’t want to marry a man if he loves another woman.’

‘You are much more beautiful than your photo.’

Samira wanted to go. She walked out of the kitchen. ‘I must go to my room,’ she told Habib. Suddenly, the front door opened. Musserat and Nasra came in. They had many bags of shopping.

Chapter 4

Does Habib really love Samira?

‘Habib! When did you come?’ Musserat hugged him.

‘You are awake, Samira? You slept a long time.’ Nasra smiled at her daughter.

Habib’s father woke up. ‘I was having a quiet sleep and now the house is full of people,’ he grumbled.

‘I will make tea,’ Musserat told him.

Abdul spoke to Habib, ‘I hope you said sorry to Samira, my son?’

‘Yes. I asked Samira to forgive me.’ Habib stared at Samira. She looked away.

‘Habib is more handsome than his photo,’ she thought.

Soon everyone was drinking tea. Ali came home.

‘You slept a long time Samira,’ he laughed.

‘Samira needed sleep after the long flight,’ Habib said.

‘Yes, of course,’ Ali answered.

The family watched a film. Habib sat next to Samira but her mind was not on the film. Musserat went to the kitchen to get food. Samira followed her. ‘Let me help you, Musserat’, she said. ‘I slept for hours. I feel lazy.’

‘You’re a good girl Samira. Please put the cakes on plates for me.’ Samira looked for plates in the cupboard.

The telephone rang and Musserat answered it.

Suddenly, Samira jumped when someone put a hand on her arm. She turned round. Habib was in the kitchen! He was standing near her. He looked very serious.

‘Please forgive me Samira. I made a terrible mistake. I love you. You have stolen my heart. Only you can give my heart back to me. You’re the woman I want to marry. I will tell Malak. You are the woman for me.’

Samira’s heart was beating fast. Habib looked very handsome. She still loved him.

Musserat finished the phone call and she came back into the kitchen. After eating, Habib went back to his flat. In the night when Samira was in bed, she talked to Nasra.

‘Habib said he loved me Mother.’

‘Do you still love him, my dear?’

‘Perhaps, I do.’

‘Don’t worry. We have three weeks in Britain. You have plenty of time. Perhaps you will know if you want to marry Habib before we go home to Lahore.’

Every day Musserat and Abdul drove Nasra and Samira to lots of places. They went to London, to the sea, to the

country and to visit friends and family.

Habib lived near the station. Ali slept in a flat over his shop. Ali worked hard because he had exams soon. Their sister Mariam was in France with a school trip.

On Friday Samira and her mother walked down the road to shop for Musserat. She wanted meat and chillis to cook a special meal because Mariam was coming home from France. They crossed the road to buy chillis.

When they came out of the shop Habib was there. He spoke to Nasra, 'I love your daughter. I'm sorry I made a mistake. I want to marry her.' Samira felt her heart jump.

'You must talk to your parents,' Nasra said.

'I really love Samira. I want to tell you, her mother.'

'You talk to your parents Habib. We must go now. Your mother is waiting for the meat.'

When they walked home Nasra said, 'Habib is very sorry. What do you think?'

'I don't know mother,' Samira answered but her heart was singing.

'We have one week left. If you want to marry Habib we must talk to your father on the phone. He can speak to Abdul and Musserat before we go home.'

That night Habib and Ali came to eat because Mariam

was home. Everyone was happy to see her.

Habib sat near Samira. He made her smile and laugh. Once he whispered. 'You are the most beautiful girl in the world.' Samira shook her head. 'Yes, you are wonderful.'

'Ssh,' Samira whispered. 'I don't want you to speak like that Habib. It's not correct,' but she smiled a little.

When Samira turned away from Habib, she saw Ali staring at her. He looked sad. Samira was sorry. She didn't want to hurt Ali. He was kind and she liked him.

Samira thought. 'Habib wants to marry me and I want to marry him. Tonight it is a secret. Tomorrow, I can ask mother to speak to father on the telephone.'

Mariam was friendly. She liked Samira and she showed her the photos of the school trip in France.

At nine o'clock Ali stood up. 'I must go, I have to study,' he said. Habib went back to his flat too.

Chapter 5

Musserat has an accident

On Saturday, Abdul and Musserat walked to town with Nasra and Samira. Nasra loved the big shops and she wanted to buy presents to take home. They finished shopping and crossed the road but a car came round the corner. Musserat crossed slowly and the car knocked her down. She groaned in pain.

A policeman ran to help. He used his mobile phone and he called for an ambulance.

‘I will go to the hospital with Abdul and Musserat. Go to Ali, Samira. Tell him about the accident,’ Nasra said.

The ambulance men put Musserat on a stretcher. After they went away Samira walked to Ali’s shop. She told him about the accident. He gave her a key. ‘Go to my parents’ house. Make a cup of tea Samira. I will phone the hospital. I must talk to Mariam and Habib too.’

Samira went to the house. She opened the door and she walked quietly in. The radio was on and she heard voices. One voice was Habib and the other voice was a young woman. Habib was angry. He was shouting.

‘Why have you come to my parents house Malak?’

‘I am here, because you don’t answer the phone in your flat. I rang your mobile too, Habib.’

‘I cannot answer you every time you ring Malak. I come to my parents’ house to meet the visitors. I must be polite to them. I will see you when the visitors go home.’



‘Do you love me?’ Malak asked.

Habib’s voice was quiet but Samira heard what he said.

‘Of course I love you Malak. I will always love you. You have stolen my heart.’

Samira wanted to run away but she could not move.

‘Do you love Samira?’ Malak asked.

‘You silly girl. I don’t love Samira. I never loved her.’

Samira didn’t want to listen any more. She tip-toed

upstairs. She wanted to hide. She didn't want Habib to hear her. She walked quietly to her bedroom. As she opened her bedroom door she heard Habib's voice.

'I can't see you for two weeks Malak.'

'Why can't I meet Samira?' Malak asked.

'Samira isn't happy because I love you,' Habib told Malak. 'I don't want to upset Samira.'

Malak sighed, 'You are kind to everyone Habib. All right, I will go home now. I can wait two weeks.'

Samira opened the bedroom door and she sat on her bed. She was shaking. Her mother was right. A photograph cannot show if a man is good. Habib was not good. She didn't want to marry a man who told lies.

A few minutes later Malak left. Samira heard the front door shut. She waited in the bedroom because Habib was downstairs. She didn't want to see him now. She didn't want to speak to him.

Samira waited in her room. Fifteen minutes later she heard Ali open the front door. He called her. She went downstairs. Habib walked into the hall. He was shocked to see Samira.

'I thought you were in town?' he said.

'I came back to the house half an hour ago.'

Habib saw on her face that she knew what he had said to Malak.

‘How is your mother?’ Samira asked Ali.

‘What is the matter with mother?’ Habib said.

‘She has broken her leg, brother. It’s bad. She will be ok but she must have an operation. I came to get a case. Please Samira can you pack a case for mother?’

‘Yes.’ In a few moments she carried the case to Ali.

‘Thank-you! Mariam knows about the accident. She is coming home from her friend’s house in a few minutes. We are going to see mother. You can come, Samira.’

‘Do you want to come, Habib?’ Ali asked his brother.

‘No, Ali. Mother has enough visitors. Tell her I will see her tonight’.

Habib grabbed his jacket from the arm of the chair and he hurried out of the house. He didn’t look at Samira.

Samira was glad when Habib left. Now, she did not care if he was handsome. He wasn’t a good man. She didn’t want to marry him.

Musserat stayed in hospital for ten days. Abdul asked the doctor, ‘Can my wife come home soon?’

‘Yes, if someone helps her in the house,’ the doctor said. Abdul told Nasra he was worried because his wife needed help in the house.

Chapter 6.

Nasra goes home

Nasra talked to Samira that night. ‘Can you stay in Britain for a few weeks to help Musserat? Mariam will be here but she must go to school. She is too young to manage the house. I must go home to look after your father.’

‘Yes, mother. I am happy to help Musserat.’

In the hospital Nasra spoke to Musserat. ‘Do you want Samira to stay for a few weeks to help in the house until you are well. Mahmood is quite happy if she stays.’

Musserat started to cry. ‘Oh, yes. Thank-you! Thank you! Are you sure you don’t mind Samira?’

Samira smiled. ‘I’m happy to help you Musserat. It will be interesting to live in Britain for a few weeks.’

On Friday, Ali took Nasra, Samira and Mariam to Heathrow. They waited with Nasra until her plane left for Lahore. Then Ali drove Mariam and Samira home to Leicester.

It was 7 o’clock in the evening when they arrived back home. There was no-one in the house. Abdul was in the hospital with Musserat.

‘Do you want to wash and change your clothes, after the drive to Heathrow?’ Ali said.

‘I’m very hungry Ali,’ Mariam said to her brother.

Ali smiled. ‘You’re always hungry. We can go to a restaurant to have food before we go to the hospital.’

Samira changed quickly into fresh clothes. When she went downstairs Ali looked at her for a long time without speaking. She was very pretty. When Ali stared at her, Samira felt shy. She picked up a book to look at. Samira was glad when Mariam came.

Ali knew the manager of the restaurant. The food was delicious. The waiters were worried because Samira did not eat a lot. When Ali went to pay Mariam giggled, ‘I heard the manager ask Ali if he is engaged to you. Ali said, “No, I wish I was engaged to her”.’ Samira blushed.

After eating, they went to the hospital. Musserat looked cheerful. ‘I told Ali to take you to a restaurant. Have you had a good meal?’ she asked the two girls.

‘Yes. It was very nice,’ Samira said. Musserat noticed Samira’s eyes were shining with happiness. She didn’t know how beautiful she looked.

‘The doctor said I can come home on Monday,’ Musserat told them. She looked happy too.

Samira went home in the car with Abdul, Mariam and Ali.

The new few days Samira worked hard. Mariam was friendly. She talked a lot but she didn't like housework.

Samira wanted everything nice for Musserat when she came home from hospital. She cleaned every room. She washed clothes and ironed them. She cooked food and put it in the freezer. When Musserat came home Samira helped her to wash and dress. Samira did everything.

Abdul was kind and she liked him. He said one evening. 'You're very helpful Samira. Mariam and Ali have important exams and they haven't time to help.'

Ali came to the house a lot to see his father. He always asked Samira if she needed anything. He took Samira and Mariam to shop in Asda on Saturdays.

Mariam asked Samira about Pakistan. Samira told Mariam about her parents and life in the village.

'Ali said that you sometimes helped village ladies to have their babies Samira. Were you frightened to watch?'

'Oh, no! My mother often helps when the women have babies. I knew what to do.'

'I'm afraid to have a baby,' Mariam said.

'I'm not frightened Mariam. It's wonderful to see the birth of a baby.'

Habib came to the house once with Malak. When Malak

went home Abdul said to Habib, 'Perhaps it is better for Malak not to come when Samira is here.'

Habib looked at Samira. 'I don't think Samira is upset if I bring Malak. Are you Samira?' Abdul and Habib looked at Samira.

'No, I'm not upset. I think Malak is very nice. I can see she loves you Habib.'

Samira wanted to say, 'I'm glad I'm not going to marry you. I hope you don't hurt Malak,' but she didn't say this. Soon Habib left the house.

Abdul said, 'I'm glad you're not angry with Habib.'

Musserat's neighbour Mrs Hunt was very kind to Samira. She asked her to come to her house and have a cup of tea. Mrs Hunt was a widow and she lived alone. Mrs Hunt talked about when she was a child and she lived on a farm. Samira liked to hear about the animals and about life on a farm in Devon in the West of England.

Sometimes Mrs Hunt gave Samira a plate of scones - little round cakes with fruit. When they were still hot she cut them open and put butter on them. They were delicious. Samira showed Mrs Hunt how to cook rotis. Mrs Hunt loved the fresh bread.

Chapter 7

Samira helps

Samira was very happy in Leicester. She felt useful. She was glad to help and Musserat was grateful.

‘What present can I buy you Samira?’ Musserat asked Samira one day.

‘I don’t want a present. I’m glad to help Musserat.’

But she asked every day, ‘What can I buy you Samira?’

Once Samira said, ‘Will you help me to read English?’

‘Perhaps I can help,’ Musserat said with a nod.

The next day Samira cooked dinner for the family. Habib and Malak ate with the family too.

After the meal, Ali gave Samira a parcel. He said, ‘My mother asked me to buy this for you.’

Samira opened the parcel. She saw two English books “Jane Eyre” and a book called “Black Beauty”.

‘Thank you,’ she said as she kissed Musserat.

Malak looked at the books and she frowned. ‘They are very difficult to read,’ she said.

‘You are like me Malak,’ Habib laughed, ‘You don’t like reading books.’ He stood up. ‘I want to take you home now,’

he said.

When they left the house and the dishes were washed Samira sat in the kitchen. She wanted to read the new books. Musserat came out to the kitchen.

‘I am going to make rotis,’ she said.

‘I will do the rotis for you.’ Samira stood up to help.

‘No, you sit and read the book Samira. I like making bread. It will be good for me to do something.’

Ali walked into the kitchen. He laughed when he saw his mother put flour in the bowl. ‘Ah! You are making rotis? You must feel better mother,’ he said.

‘Yes, my son. You help Samira. I will make bread.’

Ali was surprised. ‘Do you want help Samira?’

‘Yes,’ she said shyly, ‘English is difficult for me.’

‘Your English is good but the books are difficult. They are classics. Which book do you want to read?’

‘I want to read the book about the black horse.’

Musserat listened while she was cooking.

Every evening for the next few weeks Ali came to his parents’ house. After the meal he sat in the kitchen with Samira and his mother. Ali’s English was excellent and he explained words to Samira. The story was very sad. Samira had tears in her eyes when she read how the black horse

was cruelly whipped.

Ali smiled gently. 'Don't be upset,' he said.

Samira thought, 'What a lovely smile Ali has. He is kind. He is a better man than Habib.'



'I can't read tomorrow because my exams are on Thursday', Ali said to Samira.

'I understand. I will read the book myself'.

The next day Samira went to Mariam's school. The teacher wanted her to tell the children about Pakistan. The teacher said the children enjoyed the talk very much.

The evening was boring because Ali didn't come to read. Samira went to bed early. The next day Ali came to the house.

'How were the exams?' Abdul asked his son.

'I think they were ok Dad.'

‘When will you know if you have passed?’

‘I have to wait a long time, until August.’

‘It is good the exams are over, my son,’ Musserat said.

The front door opened and Habib and Malak came in.

‘Father, Malak said she will marry me? Can you talk to her parents?’ he asked Abdul.

‘We mustn’t talk of marriage,’ Abdul frowned.

‘I’m very happy for Habib,’ Samira said with a smile.

When Samira smiled Abdul and Musserat kissed Habib and Malak. Ali shook his brother’s hand. Everyone was happy.

On Saturday Ali was late. Ali’s parents and Samira finished eating but he didn’t come. His father went out to see a friend. Ali came after eight o’ clock. Musserat said, ‘You’re late. Are you hungry Ali?’

‘Yes, mother.’

She nodded. ‘I will heat your food in the microwave.’

Ali spoke to Samira, ‘I’m sorry about Habib and Malak. I know you loved my brother, Samira.’

‘Thank you Ali but I am happy for them,’ Samira told him.

‘You are nice Samira. Habib was crazy not to marry you.’

Samira felt shy. Ali’s big brown eyes looked so kind. She looked out of the window. Ali touched her arm. ‘I have

brought something I think you will like.’ Ali showed Samira a video of “Black Beauty”.

After Ali ate his food, he put the video on. His mother sat in the room with them but she went to sleep. The film was sad. Samira started to cry. She looked for a tissue. Ali took a big white handkerchief from his pocket and gave it to Samira. ‘Remember the story is happy in the end?’ he whispered. She smiled while she wiped her tears.

When Samira was in bed that night she thought, ‘Ali is a lovely man. He is a much better man than Habib.’

Chapter 8

Samira leaves Britain

One day Musserat said, 'I am well again now Samira. I must not keep you here. I will be sad when you go home but your parents will be glad. You must feel homesick.'

'Thank you, Musserat. I want to see my parents but I'm not homesick. Leicester is like my home now. I will miss you, Abdul and Ali. '

'And Ali?' Musserat smiled at Samira. She had a twinkle in her eye. Samira looked away quickly. Musserat took her hand. 'I hoped perhaps you and Ali...'

'We are good friends,' Samira said quickly.

'Do you think you can be more than friends?'

'Ali is kind Musserat. I like him very much.'

Samira said no more. It wasn't correct for her to say she loved Ali. She gave Musserat a little hug. 'I am glad I came for my holiday in Britain,' she said.

Samira had only a few days left in Leicester.

'You are not sad about Habib now?' Musserat asked Samira one day when they were alone together.

'No, Musserat. I didn't really know Habib. I loved a photo.

Malak loves him and I hope they are happy.’

She spoke to her parents one night. ‘Ali has booked my ticket. My aeroplane is landing in Lahore on Saturday.’

When Samira put the phone down Ali said, ‘I will drive you and my parents to Heathrow.’

On Friday night Abdul and Musserat had a party to say good-bye to Samira. Habib and Malak came and lots of friends. Abdul said to everyone, ‘We are sad Samira is going. She is like a daughter.’

Friends brought presents for her. They told Samira she must come back soon. Sometimes when Samira looked at Ali, he looked at her. She wanted to tell him that she did not love Habib. Ali was kind to everyone but perhaps he wanted Samira for a friend now, not his wife.

The next day Ali came to the house with his big car. Samira was sad. She loved Ali but he didn’t know. She was going home and he might marry a different woman.

‘Let me take your bags Samira,’ Ali said. He put Samira’s suitcases in the boot of his car. He helped his mother and father to sit in the back and he gave them a blanket. Then he opened the car door for Samira.

It was difficult for Samira when Ali was near her. She wanted to touch his hand. She wanted to say, ‘I love you,’ but

she didn't move and she didn't speak.

They waited two hours at Heathrow. Everyone felt a little sad. When it was time for Samira to go to the aeroplane Musserat and Abdul hugged her.

'Tell your parents we hope they can come for a holiday next year with you,' Abdul said.

'Yes, I will. Good-bye Musserat and Abdul. Ali, will you write and tell me if you pass your exams?'

'Certainly!' He looked surprised. As she turned to go Ali put something in her pocket. He said, 'Look at this on the aeroplane. We hope you like it.'

Before Samira went through the door to her plane she waved. They all waved too. They were like family now.

Chapter 9

Home is not the same

On the aeroplane Samira didn't want food. She looked out of the window and wiped the tears in her eyes. Ali didn't know she loved him and perhaps she wouldn't see him again.

Suddenly, she remembered he put something in her pocket. She opened the little parcel and gasped. In the box was a beautiful gold necklace and earrings. They must have cost a lot of money! Samira had never had any jewellery so beautiful and expensive. There was a card in the box. It said, 'To our special friend, Samira. Thank you! From - Abdul, Musserat and Ali.' Samira held the box close to her for a long time. Later she put it safe in her bag.

Samira slept a little on the aeroplane. Hours later she landed in Lahore. Her parents came to meet her.

It was lovely to be home. Nasra cooked good food and people from the village came to welcome her. Samira was happy but home was not the same because she missed Ali. Her parents said she could keep the necklace and earrings. Sometimes she put them on. She thought, 'Ali must like me. He helped his parents to buy a lovely present for me.'

Three weeks later a letter came from Britain. Nasra called Samira. She was feeding the chickens. Samira looked at the letter Nasra was waving.

‘It is a letter from Ali about his exams. Please can you put the letter on my bed?’ she asked her mother.

Nasra went away with the letter. Suddenly, her mother shouted, ‘Samira, I must go out. My friend is ill.’

‘Ok, mother. I will cook the food tonight.’ Samira said. When Nasra left the house Samira hurried to the bedroom. She kissed the letter before she opened it.

Dear Samira,

I have good news. I passed my exams and I am going to College to study to be a Vet.

I cannot work in the newsagent when I’m studying and I cannot help my parents so much. They ask if you can come to Leicester. Can you help them when Mariam and I are studying? I wrote to your parents today to ask if you can come.

Blessings of Allah on your family,

From Ali

Samira felt sad. Ali did not write of love in his letter. ‘I

cannot go to Leicester if I'm not married,' she thought. 'My father will say "no".'

Samira cooked the meal. She saw a letter for her father in the kitchen. It was Ali's writing.

One hour later her father came home from work. He read the letter. He didn't speak about the letter to Samira. When Nasra returned, Mahmood said, 'Come and speak to me, Samira is cooking.'

Samira was worried. Was her father cross with Ali? She put food on plates and her parents ate dinner. Samira ate very little food. She and her mother washed the dishes.

Samira was going to her bedroom when her father called. 'Samira! Come and talk,' Samira sat down with her parents.

'Samira, Ali said his parents want to know if you can help when he goes to College but I cannot let you go. It was different when Musserat had an accident.'

Samira nodded sadly. Of course, her father thought it was not correct for her to go alone. 'I understand father.'

'I must tell you what Ali wrote,' her father said. He says, 'My parents said Samira can stay with them as a friend of our family.' Her father waited.

'I can help Musserat if you want me to father,' she said.

'Wait! I want to read the letter. Listen daughter! Ali writes,

“Samira can come to Leicester but I must tell you I love Samira and I want to marry her”.’

Samira looked down at the floor. She felt tears in her eyes. She didn't speak. Her heart was so happy. She thought, 'He loves me. Ali really loves me.'

Samira's father looked sad. 'It's alright Samira. You don't have to go. We will not make you marry. We know you don't love Ali. I will write to him.'

Samira whispered, 'Father, I want to marry Ali.'

Nasra put her arms round Samira. 'I'm so glad, my dear, I think you will learn to love him. I think he is a very kind man.'

'Are you sure you want to marry him?' Mahmood looked worried. He loved his daughter and he wanted her to be happy.

Samira giggled. She said firmly, 'I do want to marry him, I'm sure father. You were right. Ali is a good man.'

Mahmood laughed, 'So, we can have a wedding soon - more work for you Nasra!'

Chapter 10

The Wedding

Nasra and Samira worked hard to make the house look lovely. Big parcels came from Musserat with beautiful clothes. She sent Samira a wonderful traditional red and gold wedding dress.

When Ali got the letter from Samira's father he was very happy. Mahmood wrote, 'Samira says "yes" and Nasra and I are pleased for Samira to marry Ali.'

Ali sent Samira a beautiful engagement ring. It had a large sapphire in the middle and a circle of little diamonds around it. Everyone in the village thought it was beautiful. Ali wrote, 'I bought a sapphire ring because I read that brides in the British royal family have sapphire engagement rings. To me you are more special than a princess. I hope you like the ring.'

Samira thought it was wonderful. Ali also sent Samira's father a cheque. He wrote, 'Please use the money to help pay for the wedding. I want Samira to have a wonderful wedding. If there is money left I hope you will use it to visit us in Leicester.'

The week for the wedding came. Samira was excited. She wanted to see Ali again. Zahra her friend asked, 'Will you be upset to live in Leicester, Samira?'

'Oh, no. I like Leicester,' Samira said. 'The people are very kind. And, she thought, 'I will be with Ali.'

On Sunday, Ali, Musserat, Abdul, Habib and Mariam arrived in Pakistan. They stayed in a hotel in Lahore.

On Monday, Musserat and Mariam went to Samira's house to meet all the women for mehndi. They painted mehndi on their hands and one of the village women wrote Ali's name in the pattern on Samira's hand. She said Ali must look for Samira's name on the wedding night. They played music and danced.

Musserat said to Nasra, 'I love Samira. I'm happy she wanted to marry Ali. I love her like my daughter.'

'I am glad to have you for a sister,' Mariam said.

The second day was quiet because the men had a mehndi party. Samira was glad to have a rest.

On the third day they went to a big tent at the end of the village for the wedding. Everyone in the village came to the shaadi. The nikah happened first. All the legal papers were signed in front of the molvey. He was a friend of Mahmood and he was from the local mosque.

After the papers were signed they had the wedding. Samira looked lovely in her beautiful red and gold wedding dress. She never looked at anyone. She kept her head down all the time. The flowers over her head were beautiful and she could smell the perfume.

Samira felt shy when she sat next to Ali. She did not want to look at him. She was nervous. Perhaps, he was sorry for her? Perhaps Ali thought she loved Habib. Samira was tired and afraid. She wanted to cry.

She was going away from home. Everyone in her village was friendly. She didn't know many people in Leicester. Britain was a long way from her mother and father. Samira felt tears and she tried to wipe her eyes. Ali noticed she was crying. 'Be happy,' he whispered, 'I am very happy to marry you.'

Samira went home with her parents and it was time for rukhsati. Ali came with his family to fetch his new wife. All Samira's family and friends in the village were crying when Samira left her parents house. Samira cried too. They drove to the hotel in a big white taxi.

In the hotel room later, Ali talked quietly to her.

'I'm not taking you away from your parents Samira. I can help your parents the way I look after mine. We can see

them every year and I can pay for your family to come to Leicester to visit us.'

Samira felt very happy when Ali said this. Next, he opened a little box. 'Let me have your hand, Samira.' He put a gold wedding ring on her finger. 'You must listen,' he said. 'I know you loved Habib and I'm happy you married me. I can wait for you to love me.'

Samira shook her head but she was smiling and there were tears in her large dark eyes. 'You don't have to make me love you Ali,' she whispered, 'because...' She stopped.

He looked into her eyes. Samira felt shy. She wasn't able to speak. But there was no need to speak. Ali saw love on her face. He smiled. 'It's alright Samira. I can see...'

He stood up and she stood next to him. He hugged her quickly.

'Come,' Ali smiled. 'We must go downstairs. We are going to eat with my family tonight. They are waiting for us. Tomorrow your family are coming to a party here at the hotel. On Saturday, I can take my beautiful wife home to Leicester. I am the happiest man in the world.'

Some unusual words explained:

'keep your feet on the ground' - *to be sensible, stop dreaming*

'twinkle in the eye' - *to tease gently*

shalwar kameez - *the trousers and overgarment worn by many Asian women*

insh'Allah - *God Willing*

molvey - *the religious official at a Pakistani wedding*

nikah - *signing of the legal wedding forms*

shaadi - *the wedding ceremony*

rukhsati - *the formal handing over of the bride to her husband after the wedding. This is a very emotional occasion for everyone when she leaves her home and goes to the care of her husband.*

SAMIRA

by Gill Winn

Illustrations: Genji

This is the story of a young woman from Pakistan who is engaged to a British man called Habib. His parents arranged the marriage. They used to live in the same village and they like Samira and her family.

Habib is handsome and Samira loves to look at a photo of him. She is very upset when his family come to Pakistan to tell her that Habib is not going to marry her because he is in love with another woman.

Her mother Nasra says Samira will love someone else one day. Is it possible?

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