

DOCTOR MARGARET

In Delhi

(Book 2 of The Azadi Series)

By

Waheed Rabbani

Doctor Margaret In Delhi

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DEDICATION

For my wife, Alexandra, without her love, help and continuing support this work may not have been possible.

Also

In fond memory of my beloved mother and father, who unfortunately did not live to see this book in print.

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Although this is a work of fiction, the following sources, among many others, were of particular value during research, in setting the historical backdrop of this novel.

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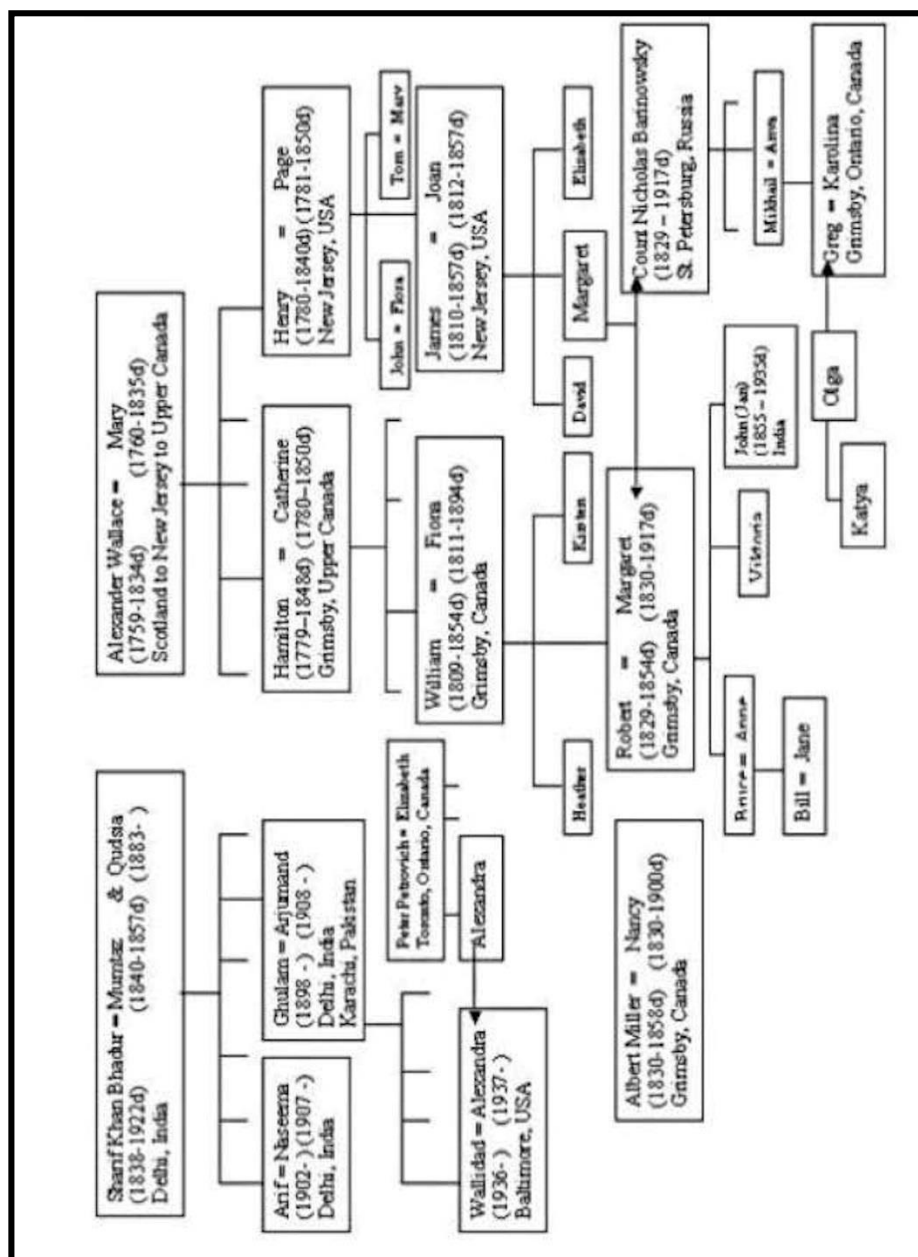
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The translations from Urdu to English of Bhadur Shah Zafar's couplets (at the beginning of Prologue and Epilogue) are my own efforts.

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FAMILY TREE: Wallace, Barinowsky and Sharif Family

Prologue

[Aik shakh-e-gul pe baith ke bulbul be shadman]

Sitting on a branch of flowers, the nightingale sings,

[Kanthee bicha diye mere dil-e-lalazar mein]

Thorns are scattered in my heart's leas

--Bhadur Shah Zafar, Delhi (1775 – 1862)

IT SEEMED AS IF I was back in Delhi, on another assignment from Johns Hopkins Hospital. However, on this visit at the insistence of my aunt and uncle, I was staying with them at our family's ancient *haveli*, Sharif Mahal, in Daryaganj.

It being a stifling night, and unable to sleep, I decided to go out for a midnight stroll. The full moon shone in the cloudless sky, lighting up the foggy laneway, from the *haveli* towards the Jamuna River, like a path into a mysterious destination.

Stunning mansions cast giant shadows onto impressive gardens that lay on either side of the street. But something seemed strange, for the houses had somehow warped back into their former glory, during the Mughal era. Paying no heed I glided forward, effortlessly. Finding the Daryaganj Gate of the city wall open, I hurried through it and was amazed to see water flowing in the Jamuna River's branch that had dried up a long time ago.

Nobody was around. I walked up to the *ghat*, and stood by the riverbank watching the gentle waves lapping on the stone steps. The moon reflected in the water, as if bathing in it, scattering moonbeams. Suddenly, I heard footsteps, as if someone, no, two persons were running. I saw a woman, unmistakably European from her Victorian dress and long blonde hair flowing behind her in the wind, run out from the Daryaganj Gate. My heart skipped a beat when I recognized her to be the same lady of my dreams. Next to her was a darker woman, possibly Indian, except she wore Western clothes, and a shawl over her head and shoulders, likely her maid, no, her ayah, for she carried a fair haired child in her arms.

I waved at the women to stop, for I wanted to ask them, if I could be of any assistance. However, they ignored me, as if they did not even see me, and continued jogging along the river bank. They soon faded into the distance.

I wondered if I should follow the women, but I heard rhythmic footsteps, as if a group of soldiers were running in unison, on the double. A troop emerged through the gate. Their leader, a European officer ran at the front, a revolver in hand. He was followed by six sepoy's carrying rifles with fixed bayonets. I covered behind a tree, lest they spot and shoot me. They trotted away in the direction the ladies had vanished.

Troubled by what I observed, I trembled. I was trying to control myself, when I saw a lone figure emerge from the gate. He was a young Indian man, dressed in the Delhi style: kurta-pajama, black waistcoat, and a white *topi*. When he drew closer, I thought I recognized him, but still searched my brain for where I had seen him. It then dawned on me, he was the person in the painting that hung in my uncle's Connaught Place jewelry shop, but he looked much younger. He was ... I shouted, "Sharif-Dadda!"

On hearing his name, he looked surprised, and drew nearer. "Arrey ... *beta* ... it's you ... Wallidad?"

“*Ji, Dada*. It’s me.” We embraced and tears of joy ran down my cheeks.

We parted, but he still held me by my shoulders, and stared at me with his fierce eyes. “Where have those women gone? Did they not come this way?”

Overcome with emotion, I could not speak.

“Tell me. We have to help Doctor Margaret.”

When I tried to speak, but could not form the words, he shook my shoulder.

“Wake up, Walli dear. Are you dozing again?” It was my wife, Alexandra, squeezing my shoulder as she stood beside my chair.

“Oh! Sorry, darling. Looks like I had a little nap. What time is it?” I took the coffee cup she held towards me.

Alexandra and I had finished our round of golf, at the Baltimore’s Twin Oakes Golf and Country club, and while I rested in an easy chair on the club’s outdoor patio, she had gone to the washroom and returned with drinks from the coffee shop.

“Nearly one o’clock. Our friends should be finishing their round soon.” She sat on an adjacent chair. “They do move around well, even in their senior years.”

“Thanks, dear. I hope I can walk as well, in my old age.” I sipped the coffee and stretched out my legs. It being a fine summer’s day, I felt hot but refreshed from my little nod-off.

“Look, there they are.” Alexandra pointed in the direction of the four players.

I gazed out onto the green and saw our visitors from Grimsby, Canada, walking towards us, their golf caddies in tow.

Chapter One

Visitors from Grimsby, Canada

1967, July: Baltimore, Maryland

I STARTED MY BUICK station wagon and drove towards the golf club's exit; Alexandra sat next to me. Our visitors from Grimsby—Jane and Bill Wallace, and Karolina and Greg Barinowsky—were in the two bench seats at the back. I envied our friends' freedom; they were in their retirement years and on their way to a vacation in Florida. It being a Sunday, I was happy to have time off from my busy schedule at the hospital, and I imagined my wife was as well, from her law practice. We had just finished a round of golf and, while it had been an exhilarating afternoon, from the silence it seemed we each were engrossed in our own thoughts, likely about what had transpired in the club's parking lot earlier that morning.

“Thank you, Doctor Sharif,” the gatekeeper said, as I rolled down the window and handed him the prepaid, stamped parking slip and a tip. He raised the barrier and waved a goodbye.

I nodded to him and, exiting through the golf grounds' gates, continued onto the Beltway that would take us to our house. Mindful of the passing cars, I wondered what to make of Greg's

prearranged meeting that had taken place earlier in the parking lot with my patient Richard—who worked for the CIA—and his division chief. I was intrigued, just as surely Greg had been when he informed us of the CIA’s offer to help bring his daughter, Katya, out of the Soviet Union. What made their proposal more interesting was that in return, they only wanted him to locate dealers of Soviet-made arms. We had wondered—and Alexandra, the lawyer, had conjectured—that the arms were very likely destined for Afghanistan to be used by some rebel groups. But against whom? I could not believe that the rumored Soviet invasion of that country, which Alexandra’s father had mentioned, could be true. He had heard of it within the Russian émigré community in Canada.

While steering the Buick, rather sharply, from the highway onto a smaller road, I remembered the incident in Grimsby where, following a car chase, I had managed to evade some Soviet agents. That was when Alexandra and I had travelled to the Wallace Estates to deliver their Grandmother Doctor Margaret Wallace’s sea chest, which I had brought back from Delhi. As we learned from her diaries—found in the trunk—she had worked as a physician for the Rani of Jhansi around the time of the Indian Rebellion of 1857. The Rani’s exquisitely jeweled crown was also discovered in the sea chest. Upon the Canadian Soviet Embassy agent’s interference, Margaret’s other grandson, Greg, had handed the crown over to them, in return for a visa to the USSR and a promise of some reward upon his arrival there. However, then again, why were the Soviets so keen on possessing Margaret’s journals, as well? The Wallaces had lent those to me for reading and safekeeping, along with a request to write a biography of Doctor Margaret Wallace.

“So, Walli, how far along are you with Margaret’s journals?” Jane asked, from the seat behind me.

“We’ve just finished reading the first two volumes. They covered her life in North America and Europe. You may have those back.

We are about to start on Volume III, in which I believe she wrote about her experiences in India.”

“Yes, we’re looking forward to reading them, and are most anxious to learn what she wrote about her time in Grimsby,” Jane said.

Greg cocked his head within range of my rear-view mirror. “Walli, what about Katya’s book, *Lara’s Story*? The one you bought from her in Delhi. What does she have to say about Grandmother?”

“I haven’t read it yet, Greg, just glanced through it. It seems to start after Margaret’s arrival in St. Petersburg.”

“May I borrow it?”

“Yes, of course. I’ll read it after you,” I said.

Just then, the laneway to our house appeared and, turning into it, I parked on the driveway, next to the Wallaces’ shiny blue Cadillac with Ontario plates.

After a quick wash, we gathered in our backyard and sat on cushioned patio chairs under a shady umbrella. Colorful summer flowers were in bloom in the bushes dotting the garden. Jane said something about the fragrance of the roses to Alexandra. I served them drinks: white wine for the ladies, and red for the gents. While Alexandra was setting up the table with appetizers, salads and condiments, I fired up the propane barbecue and proceeded to grill steaks and sausages.

Having piled up our plates, we settled around the table. Still absorbed in our thoughts, but hungry, we ate in silence at first, but soon—following sips of wine—we relaxed and the conversation flowed gradually. There were compliments all around on my barbecuing skill and at having done the steaks exactly to everyone’s preference.

Alexandra, who had looked rather pensive for a while, said, “Jane, you asked earlier about Margaret’s diaries. Yes, we did learn quite a bit about her and her husband, Robert’s, life in Grimsby, but there is scant information about Albert Miller. You know, the one who accompanied them to Crimea. Do you know much about him or his wife, Nancy?”

At Alexandra’s question, I cringed a bit, for I didn’t think it was a good idea to discuss Albert. I was certain neither the Wallaces nor the Barinowskys knew what Albert had done to Margaret and Robert during the voyage and in Crimea. But I said nothing and continued to chew my food.

Jane replied, “No, not much, Alex. All we know is that he was a bit of a ladies’ man and died somewhere in Crimea or ... India, did you say, Greg?” She sipped her wine and looked towards Greg.

Greg swallowed his mouthful and nodded. “Yes, it was in India. At least, that’s what I heard from one of his grandsons. But no one knows where exactly Albert was killed.” Then he turned to me and asked, “It was likely in the Mutiny, or how did you call that war, Walli?”

“Indians prefer to speak of it as their First War of Independence, although most call it a Rebellion,” I replied. “However, the British still refer to it as the Indian Mutiny.” I noted amusement on everyone’s faces.

Alexandra put her knife and fork down and pushed her plate forward. “So, tell me, Greg, did Nancy go to India as well, with Albert?”

Greg took a gulp of his drink. “I believe she did. And you know what, she survived the war and returned to Grimsby. From what I heard, she never remarried and used to live alone in a mansion up on the Grimsby Mountain.”

Jane, joining in the conversation, said, “Yes. Well, you know her father, Colonel Mitchell, was quite an influential man in our town.

Not only was the commander of the cavalry regiment, he held several important political appointments as well.”

Bill, who had remained silent all this time, having finished his meal, put his plate aside. “I detest that man,” he said in a loud voice. “He was responsible for sending Grandfather Robert off to war and to die in Crimea.”

Jane quickly took Bill’s hand. “Now, now, Bill,” she said in a soothing voice. “There is no need to still be resentful about those events. They happened more than a hundred years ago. True, we do not speak to the Mitchells, but now with this wonderful return of our dear Margaret’s sea chest, through the kind efforts of Alexandra and Walli,” she waved her hand towards us, “perhaps it is time to make amends with Nancy’s family. Don’t you think, dear?”

“Do whatever you wish. Just don’t include me in it,” Bill replied and sipped his drink.

“Oh, I forgot to tell you, Bill,” Jane persisted. “One of Nancy’s granddaughters called the other day. She’d heard about the arrival of Margaret’s sea chest and wanted to come look at it. I told her we would see her, when we get back from this trip.”

Alexandra, likely trying to ease the tension, started picking up the empty plates. “Why, that’s marvelous, Jane, for the Mitchells to have contacted you. I’m sure you’ll have much to talk about. But you know, I’ve been wondering ... perhaps ... could you ask them if Nancy left a diary or something?”

“Yes, I will ask, for I’m certain they’d wish to see Margaret’s journals.”

Bill took a sip of his wine. “Oh, I’d let them wait. We’ve asked Doctor Walli to write Margaret’s biography. Let them buy a copy and read it.”

Jane patted Bill’s arm again. “Why not, Bill? Asking if Nancy had a diary seems like a good idea.”

Bill said in a gruff tone, “Why? What good would that do? What could *her* diary tell us we don’t already know?”

Alexandra put out the dessert plates. “Bill, it may not say much, but it would be interesting to get Nancy’s side of the story.”

I was glad that Alexandra hadn’t elaborated on what “story” she referred to. It looked certain that, not having read Margaret’s journals, the others did not know what had transpired in Crimea. I felt it was not the proper moment—might spoil their vacation—to go into a discussion about it. It seemed more appropriate for them to learn the details of the incidents surrounding their Grandfather Robert’s death in the privacy of their home and to grieve in their own way.

I quickly finished my meal and asked if anyone wished to have another steak or a sausage. All declined, saying they had overeaten, except Greg said, “The filet mignon is delicious. I’ll have another small piece, please.” I got up, served him, and refilled everyone’s drinks.

Alexandra, with help from Jane and Karolina, cleared the table and brought out a freshly baked hot and aromatic apple pie, and a bowl of whipped cream. I rushed in and carried out the tray of percolated coffee and cups. While we nibbled on the tasty dessert and sipped coffee, my thoughts turned towards Greg’s daughter, Katya, whom I’d met in Delhi.

“Greg, when did you last see Katya?” I asked.

Greg, although he seemed hesitant at first, replied, “Oh, it must have been about forty years ago. It was just before Karolina and I left St. Petersburg.” He glanced towards Karolina and continued, “She was about ten then ... lived with her mother. Of course, I didn’t tell her I was leaving. You said she worked for the Soviet Embassy in Delhi?”

I nodded. “She’d contacted the Delhi hospital, offering that their government, would be happy to take over Margaret’s sea chest.”

“Did she say why the Soviets wanted the trunk?” Greg reached for his coffee cup.

“I don’t believe so. My chief surgeon, Doctor Rao, inquired with the hospital’s Board of Directors and they refused. They wished the trunk to be returned to the rightful descendants of Doctor Margaret. Therefore, I ended up bringing her trunk all the way from Delhi to Grimsby.”

“And we are ever grateful to you for it, Walli,” Jane said, sipping her coffee.

“Greg, when did Katya join the Soviet foreign service?” I asked.

“I don’t really know. It must have been after she finished university. Her heavily censored letters were few and far between. However, I was astonished when you mentioned that she’d written a book! Where was it published?”

“She said she’d had it translated, into English, and published in Delhi. I’ll fetch it.” I quickly went up to my study and, locating the hardbound volume—which had a red dust cover and title in golden letters, *Lara’s Story*—brought it out and handed it to Greg.

He took the book in his hand and, turning it around, examined it with a look of admiration. He flipped through the first few pages and said, “Yes, Walli, you were right. It starts in her great-grandmother’s house in St. Petersburg. It seems Lara is unhappy because her husband is leaving on a journey. An interesting beginning, don’t you think?”

“Yes, quite so,” I replied. “I’m sorry that I’ve been very busy at the office, I haven’t had the time to read it.”

Greg sipped his coffee. “Did Katya say it was a true story?”

I thought for a moment and tried to recall what Katya had told me. “I believe she said it was based on her grandmother’s life. When I asked her if it was anything like *Doctor Zhivago*, she laughed and said it was much truer than that novel.”

Alexandra seemed puzzled. “Bill, now why did Margaret choose to go to India, from Crimea? Why did she not return to Canada or to ... New Jersey? Wasn’t she originally from there?”

Bill took a sip of wine. “Oh, I’m sure Robert’s parents would have wanted her to come back to Grimsby. You know her two children were with them. But her parents had gone to India as missionaries to work at the American Mission at Futteh ... how is it called, Walli?”

“Futtehghurh,” I answered. “Her father was a Presbyterian minister, was he not?”

Bill nodded. “Yes, and Margaret’s mother had taken up a teaching position at the school there.”

While finishing dessert and sipping coffee, the conversation moved on to other matters. We discussed current events and other issues concerning the United States, Canada and the rest of the world—particularly the conflict still brewing between India and China.

In the late afternoon sun, it was getting a bit hot, even under the shade of the umbrella in our quaint garden, and I noticed Bill was nodding off. Alexandra suggested he might go inside and rest a bit? Bill readily agreed and getting up walked towards the backdoor; Jane followed him. Greg refilled his wine glass, saying that he would go in to the living room and start reading his daughter’s book. Karolina helped Alexandra and I take the empty dishes into the kitchen. While the two ladies washed the dishes, I retired to my home office to look over the files of my patients I was to see on Monday.

The next day our guests departed, to continue on their journey to Florida. They left promising to visit us again, and we undertook to call on them soon in Grimsby. They had taken back Volumes I and

II of Doctor Margaret's journals. As requested by the Wallaces, I had drafted in a narrative style, from these volumes, the story of Margaret's life in North America and Europe into a manuscript giving it a working title, Book I: *Doctor Margaret's Sea Chest*. My Book II would cover her life further, and I was anxious to start reading Volume III of her diary.

That evening after dinner, Alexandra and I, wineglasses in hand, sat snuggled together on the living room couch. The journal was in our laps. It was written in flowery, Victorian-style handwriting and started as follows:

Volume III

My Life in India

By

Margaret Wallace

Chapter Two

Arrival in Calcutta

1855, January: Calcutta, India

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT, the stillness of the ship woke me. I lay on the narrow bunk bed in the tiny cabin, wondering what could be the matter. After spending weeks—which had seemed nearly a lifetime—rolling and pitching about, and trying to keep my belongings secure in the cupboards, the eerie tranquility was unbelievable. Were we there already? I did not think so, for just that morning the grey-bearded Captain had said, “It’s still one more day to Calcutta, ma’am.”

Throwing off the covers, I jumped out of bed and peered through the small porthole. In the foggy darkness, I could only discern the outline of some thatched-roofed huts and flickering lights on the shore. Indeed, we had reached our destination! Unable to contain my excitement—and taking care not to awaken the lady who slept snoring on the opposite bed—I put on a petticoat, a dark gown and a bonnet. I made sure that I tucked in my long, fair hair, for I did not wish to get it wet in the mist. I tiptoed out of the cabin and proceeded towards the companionway. Despite the late hour, I could not wait to take a first look at India, the land I had read and heard so much about; the country of my dreams.

As I stepped on deck and walked up to the railing, the warm, misty night air and a rotten eggs like stench, from the floating sewage, engulfed me. Sailors bustled about, shouting instructions to each other, doing the chores needed to anchor the ship, while I stood with my elbows propped on the handrail and gazed out into the steamy, gloomy night. Where were all those lovely buildings I had heard some of the passengers talk about?

“Is Calcutta out there?” I asked one of the sailors.

“No, ma’am. We be just at the mouth of the ’Ooghly. A bit o’ the ways to go yet.” He touched his cap and hurried along.

So, it would still be some time before I would see my dear parents, sister and brother again. I sighed. While I believed the Calcutta Government House would have informed them of my arrival, I wondered if any of them might be at the docks to receive me. Likely not. For one thing, the

American Mission at Futtehgurh was quite a distance up the Ganges River. I was not certain whether even Papa would be able to come all the way down. My thoughts turned to the last time I had seen them.

It was about five years ago, when I had just graduated from the Women's Medical College in Philadelphia. My husband, Robert, had come down all the way from Fort George in Niagara, Canada, to take me back to our first home. He looked very smart in his cavalry officer's red jacket. What is more, he had spared no expense and rented a carriage; we were to travel in style! I had protested that I could have ridden a horse, but he would hear none of it, saying that I had far too many portmanteaux, books and other paraphernalia. Indeed, there was quite a collection of medical books. Although, I suspected he was mostly considering my condition, for I was expecting our first child.

Robert helped me up onto the carriage and followed to sit beside me.

"Shall we go by Elizabethville?" I asked.

"Are you sure?" Robert looked at me with raised eyebrows. From his eyes I knew he wondered if I still wanted to see my parents, even though they had not replied to my letters and attended neither our wedding nor my graduation.

I nodded.

"Well, all right. Going via New Jersey won't be much of a detour. About time we made peace with your parents." Clucking his tongue, he slapped the reins on the horses' flanks and we were off with a jolt.

The next day, by mid-afternoon, we reached Elizabethville. The town did not appear to have changed much during my nearly two-year absence, but tears came to my eyes when I saw the familiar tree-lined street and my childhood home loom ahead. We passed by the Presbyterian Church, where I had listened to countless sermons delivered by my father, the pastor. People were going in for the evening service. My teenage sister, Elizabeth, wearing a faded old dress, stood outside the entrance gate to the house, talking to some friends. I waved to her. Upon seeing me, she immediately turned around and ran along the front path, up the porch steps and into the house. She was just the same.

Robert pulled on the reins and stopped the carriage in front of the gate. We alighted and as we walked on the path up to the house, Mamma and Papa emerged and stood on the porch. Mamma looked her usual tired self, her golden hair all disheveled, wearing an apron over her old blue dress. Papa looked well, dressed in his customary black suit and white collar. He was holding his dark coat in one hand and started to put it on. David and Elizabeth stood next to them, looking curiously at me.

While Mamma did smile and called out our names, Papa said nothing. His stern face said it all. He came down the porch steps.

I hurried to him, and put my arms around his broad shoulders. "Papa!"

“Excuse me, Margaret. I’m late for my sermon.” He pried my arms from his shoulders and proceeded to walk towards the gate.

I stood aghast, staring at his back.

“Good afternoon, Uncle,” Robert said with a bow, as his father’s cousin walked by.

Papa stopped, put his black hat on, and nodded. “Robert.” He then calmly strode out of the gate towards the church.

Robert remained motionless, in stunned silence.

Mamma flew down the porch steps and embraced me. I sobbed on her shoulder and she ran her hand over my head, as she used to when I was little. After I calmed down, she led us inside.

Ushering us into the parlor, she darted into the kitchen, saying she would put the tea kettle on.

The parlor looked the same. While the furniture showed its age, its arrangement had not changed. On the back of the couch, I saw some rips in the fabric and proceeded to smooth them.

Mamma must have seen me when she came in and said, “Oh, not to worry, Margaret, I’ll sew them up soon.”

“It looks beyond repair, Mamma. Isn’t it about time you got a new set? Look, their legs are about to collapse.”

“Yes, dear. We will soon. It’s just that your Papa is a little short ...” She trailed off, realizing Robert was in the room.

“What’s the matter?” I asked. “Are you in financial difficulty?”

“We’re not exactly in the poorhouse,” she said, looking apologetically at Robert. “It’s just that everything costs so much more, and your Papa’s salary hasn’t increased ...” She again grew quiet and stared out of the window.

“But what about your school?” I remembered it had a large enrolment during the time I was a teacher-cum-charwoman there. “Surely there is some income from it?”

She looked at me blankly for a while. “Oh! I suppose you haven’t heard. I had to close it. With the opening of much larger institutions around us, there isn’t much room for small establishments—” The kettle whistled and she hurried off towards the kitchen.

Now I stood at the railing, wiping the tears that had welled in my eyes from those nearly five years ago recollections, and remembered that it was a year or so later, in Canada, when I had received a letter from Mamma. It was not really a surprise to read that Papa had decided to accept a position at the American Mission at Futtehghurh, India. I was not certain if his decision was entirely due to economic circumstances, for he had been considering serving as a missionary for some time. What was more interesting, Mamma had added that she would be teaching at the orphanage school there. Hence, the whole family were to depart for India shortly.

I was taken out of my reverie when I heard, “Good morning, Margaret. Goodness, you are up early!” A tall person wearing a British officer’s uniform—complete with the cross belt and holster—and smoking a cigar, approached me.

It was Colonel Humphrey, an elderly gentleman who, having spent years of service in India, had gone back home and was now returning on another assignment. Being a widower and having daughters in their twenties—about my age—I dare say he had taken a fancy to me. I had not minded his attention, for he was good company during the long voyage. He used to engage me in pleasant conversation and provided me with valuable insight into India, the land and its people. Also, since his constant addressing me as “Mrs. Wallace” was getting rather tedious, I had suggested he call me “Margaret.”

“Oh, I couldn’t sleep any longer. How about you, Colonel? What brings you up on deck at this hour?”

“I’m usually up early.” He stood beside me and took a puff on his cigar. But then, lifting it in the air, asked, “Do you mind?”

“Not at all. The air is much worse than your smoke, Colonel.”

He guffawed and, after taking another puff, threw the nearly finished cigar into the water. “Won’t be long now before we reach Calcutta.”

“I just can’t wait. Why are we anchored here?”

“For the tide and daylight, and the pilot, I suppose. You’ll see how crowded the river will become. It should be much busier now, with the change of the Governor General about to take place.”

“Is Lord Dalhousie leaving?”

“Yes. Being replaced by Viscount Canning, the former Postmaster. I am sure many Indians won’t shed a tear on seeing old Dal depart!”

“Why, is he that unpopular? We admire him in Canada. His father served there, you know. How long has he been here?”

“Nearly seven years. To give him credit, from what I’ve heard, the fellow’s a work-hound. Toils at his desk from morning till late into the night, and on other days rides around all over the country. On top of it all, he’s waged several wars against the Sikhs and the Burmese.”

“Then why is he so disliked here?”

The old Colonel, with both his hands on the railing, stared into the distant shore for a while. “Well,” he began, “I wasn’t here during his administration. I left with his predecessor, Hardinge. But we did get some disturbing reports in London of his activities.”

“What sorts of reports?”

“To be fair, the fellow is only trying to do what he thinks is best for the East India Company and, naturally, Britain as well. He’s virtually recreated the government here based on the British model. However, by doing so, he’s stepped on many Company officials’ toes and annoyed a number of

influential natives as well. Although, we have to admit his numerous reforms are for the good of the people. You know, things like building schools and hospitals, like the one you are going to, as well as railways and canals; he brought in the telegraph; and, what's more, he also introduced a system of post offices like back home."

"Post offices!" I smiled. But, a bit confused, I asked, "Er ... however, the locals don't like all these changes, do they?"

"Well, for one, he's made a lot of *zemindars* unhappy."

"You mean those tax-collecting landowners, like our squires and lairds? Why should they be unhappy with all those post offices and railways around them?"

"The money for all these expenditures has to come from somewhere!"

Just then, three Indian men—an older person, accompanied by two younger ones—dressed in flowing white robes and carrying small brass tumblers, came towards us. They were probably on their way to the washrooms for their morning ablutions, which I had learned was customary prior to their prayers. I had seen them earlier, but had not met them, for they kept pretty much to themselves. I was informed by another passenger that they were the emissaries of an Indian raja, and were on their way back, having gone to London to plead a case before the East India Company's Board. They put their palms together and bowed to us.

"Good morning, Mr. Bapurao. Sorry to hear that your petition was not accepted," Colonel Humphrey said, facing the eldest.

"What can poor people do, Colonel sahib?" he said with a sad face. "It's the *Sarkar's* wish. Our raja will have to give up his kingdom."

"Cannot be helped. The Dalhousie Doctrine of Lapse applies to all, you know," Colonel Humphrey said.

The three did not say anything, but looked at me inquisitively. In fact, one of the younger men, who sported a huge handlebar moustache, stared at me with his dark, piercing eyes.

Colonel Humphrey quickly introduced me. "This is Doctor Wallace, on her way from Crimea to work at a hospital in Delhi."

"Pleased to meet you," I said.

While Mr. Bapurao bowed to me, the younger man, who had been staring at me, remarked something in Hindustani to the other man, who snickered.

"What did you say?" Colonel Humphrey bellowed, and in a flash, like an expert boxer, with his right fist punched the man hard on the jaw. The man went flying across the bridge and hit his head on the bulkhead, then lay motionless. The Colonel also quickly drew his revolver and pointed it at the men. "Jackasses! You didn't think I understood Hindustani, did you?"

"Sorry ... Colonel ... sahib," Bapurao stammered. "He ... no say ... bad thing."

“Why, yes he did! Most disrespectful to this young lady.” Colonel Humphrey waved his pistol. “Be off, you dogs, before I call the Captain and have you put in chains.”

The two men quickly picked up the third and dragged him away.

All this time I had stood mesmerized. Finally regaining my composure, I asked, “What did the man say, Colonel?”

“Something about the Crimean widows. You needn’t bother yourself.” He holstered the revolver.

“No, I wish to hear. What about the widows?”

“If you must know, rumor has been going around that the British are sending the Crimean widows to India to convert the young men!”

“How thoughtless of them. Thank you, sir, for standing up for me,” I said. Then, wishing to change the subject, I inquired, “And the Dalhousie’s Doctrine of Lapse? What’s that all about?”

“The Doctrine affects the raja, or the ruler of a state under the East India Company’s influence, who dies without leaving a direct male lineal heir. Hence, as there is no monarch, the state is ‘lapsed’ and annexed by the Company.”

“And what is the reason given for such a policy? Is the ruler not permitted to choose a successor?”

“No. Avoidance of possible mismanagement by the beneficiary is the main justification.”

“How about adopted children? Are they not permitted to take over the throne?”

“No. They are not recognized as legal heirs. Although, from what I’ve read in some of the petitions, the Indians consider adoption a long-standing tradition, and claim it to be legitimate.”

It sounded like a peculiar policy. More like a land grab, I thought but, mindful of the Colonel’s rank, didn’t express my view. I simply asked, “Has Lord Dalhousie applied this policy to many states?”

“Yes. And quite forcefully, too. In the last few years, at least five kingdoms were taken over. These men you just met were representatives of one such state. It’s all for the good of the natives, you know,” he replied solemnly. He took his cigar box from his jacket pocket, and turned towards me. “I say, would you mind? I need to have a smoke.”

I shook my head. While the Colonel proceeded to light up, I looked across the river to the bank, which in the increasing light had begun to show signs of life. A cool morning breeze blew over the waters and across the ship.

The events of that morning had distressed me. Wrapping my shawl about me, I faced the Colonel. “Would you excuse me, sir? I am a little tired and should return to my cabin.”

“Why, yes, of course, Margaret. Do get some rest before breakfast. Are your parents coming to receive you?”

“I hope so, sir.” I wished the Colonel a good day and, thanking him again for defending my honor, walked towards the companionway.

One deck below, I made a quick stop at the privy and proceeded to my cabin. I was happy to be sharing it with a non-commissioned officer's wife. I had travelled by ship from Crimea to Alexandria and then via train to Cairo, followed by a bumpy carriage ride to Suez. There the Captain of this vessel had asked me if I would mind travelling in the cabin with a sergeant's wife, for it was the only berth available. I assured the Captain that I had no qualms about it. It was either that or having to wait some weeks for another ship. I wished to be with my parents as soon as possible.

"Is that you, Margaret?" a sleepy voice from the far bunk asked when I entered the cabin. Then, upon seeing me, she said, "Aww ... you've been up on deck already, have ya?"

"Yes, Mrs. Willoughby. I couldn't sleep," I replied while undressing.

"But in your condition? You ought to be more careful going up and down the stairs in the dark."

"I was careful, Mrs. Willoughby. It's getting light already."

"Are you all right? And the baby? It won't be long now, will it?"

"Yes. I'm well, and the baby too. Another five months to go, I believe."

"Aww ... won't it be so nice to 'ave your mother at 'and. It's your fourth one, isn't it?"

"Third," I corrected her. I recalled having told her that a few times already, as I slipped into my bed.

"Two for me were enough. I'm glad I left 'em behind with me mum and dad. They'll get proper education there. But, you know what, I'm beginnin' to miss them already. Did you say you were goin' to bring your two over from Canada?"

I was starting to doze off, and the mention of my children brought a lump to my throat. I barely managed to reply, "They are with their grandma. I'll try to have them sent over, as soon as I've found decent accommodation and a school for them in Delhi."

"You'll have no difficulty, you being a doctor an' all. My Frank, 'e's only a sergeant, y'know. We can't afford to have the childa here on his pay, he tells me. But I say to him, the good Lord giveth and families ought to stay together. But you know, life is difficult here, amongst these strange people. Did you know they don't like to eat our food? Think it's polluted or somethin'. Will break their caste, they've told me. Fear they'll be reborn as a monkey or somethin' or the other. But I tell them ..."

She kept talking on and on as I wiped more tears. Finally, when sleep was taking me away into a dream world, I was able to say, "Goodnight, Mrs. Willoughby."

"Goodnight, Margaret. Do rest up. You've a long journey ahead of ya. Is your father goin' to be at the dock?"

I believe I fell asleep before I could reply in the affirmative, possibly fearing that it might be a lie.

This time, it was the motion of the ship and sounds of shuffling feet on the deck above that woke me. It seemed as if I had slept barely five minutes, but judging from the bright sunlight shining

through the porthole, it must have been longer. I noted Mrs. Willoughby had already left, and her trunk and other boxes looked packed and ready for disembarkation. I had crammed my sea chest earlier, but a few more things remained to go in there.

I went to the tiny washbasin in the corner. Mrs. Willoughby had thoughtfully left fresh water in the jug. I quickly washed myself and put on a clean blue dress. Running a comb lightly through my hair, I made sure the ringlets still held in place. I put on the straw bonnet—purchased at a bazaar in Alexandria—for it was already stifling hot in the cabin and likely hotter outside in the sun. Stuffing the remaining items into my sea chest, I locked it. I made certain I did not leave behind my dear Robert's service revolver, and placed it in the portmanteau. Reticule in hand, I strode out of the cabin. The aroma of brewing tea guided me towards the dining room, for I was hungry even for the watery soups, biscuits, salted pork or beef and dried fruits for dessert, served all during the voyage.

After a refreshing breakfast—or lunch, rather—I went up on deck to join the crowd at the railing. All were eager to get a first glimpse of Calcutta, while the ship gently maneuvered its way up the river. Slowly the scenery along the banks changed. The continuous rows of mud huts with thatched roofs gave way to sizeable buildings. Just as the Colonel had predicted, the waterway was swarming with vessels of all types. Finally, the buildings of Calcutta loomed ahead. Beyond the onion-shaped domes of mosques, pyramid-style temples, and stone structures of larger edifices were visible. They reminded me a bit of London's skyline, which I had seen when travelling up the Thames Estuary, from Canada with my dear Robert—a lifetime ago, it seemed.

A shrill sound, the likes of which I had never heard, startled me from my thoughts. I looked around at the other passengers' faces, wondering if they knew what the problem was. Had our vessel run aground? However, all seemed calm as ever, as if this was a common sound one heard regularly.

"It's nothing, Margaret," a familiar voice called out to me from behind. It was my mentor, Colonel Humphrey. "It's only the sound from a conch shell being blown by one of the priests in the temple, yonder. Listen, there it is again."

True enough, the strange shrieking noise came again. I peered in that direction and noticed a priest, wearing only a dhoti and white paint marks over his forehead and arms, standing at the embankment, a conch in hand. Behind him, the rose-colored temple loomed at the top of wide stone steps leading up from the water.

"Thank you, Colonel. With this welcome, I believe my introduction to India is now complete?"

"It never is. India is a fascinating country. It's full of different customs, religions and novelties. You will encounter something new every day." He withdrew his pocketbook and, opening it, said, "Margaret, in case I do not see you at the wharf, here's my card. Do call on me whenever you are in Calcutta."

"Thank you, sir ... er ... Colonel Humphrey. I will," I said, although I did feel a bit apprehensive at him paying so much attention to me.

The ship dropped anchor in midstream and the passengers were ferried across in tenders that plied from the ship to the quay. I tried to spot my parents among the throng of people lined up at the

dock, waving at us. After a while, I gave up, for it seemed a futile attempt to locate them, and moved towards the line-up for the ferryboats.

There was a tap on my shoulder. It was the portly Mrs. Willoughby. "Margaret! I've been lookin' all over for you." She sounded out of breath. She handed me a slip of paper. "Here's our address in Delhi. We're in the Civil Lines. I know it will be a while before you get there, but as soon as you are there, do visit us. Frank and I will be delighted to see you."

I accepted her note and, opening my reticule, took out a paper and searched for a pencil. "Here, Mrs. Willoughby, let me give you my parents' address in Futttehgurh."

"Aww ... not to worry. I know exactly where they are. My Frank goes to the military station there ever so often."

"Good. Please do look in on us, whenever you are there."

"We surely will. Now let me find a porter. Do you want your luggage brought up too?"

"Yes, please. Here, let me pay you for him." I tried to fish for some coins in my reticule.

"Aww ... not to worry about that." She kissed me goodbye and hurried off.

Soon enough the tender, filled with anxious travelers, thumped the side of the wooden jetty. The small boat rocked as the passengers scrambled up the dock's steps. I climbed up slowly, holding the hem of my dress in one hand and the handrail with the other. Eventually I emerged onto the pier, followed by two red-turbaned porters who had carried up my sea chest and portmanteau. They placed the luggage at my feet and, putting their palms together, bowed and scampered back to the tender.

Just then, nausea and extreme tiredness overcame me. I cannot say whether it was due to the bright sun or not getting my land legs yet. The sea chest looked inviting enough and I tried to sit on it, but could not stay there and slipped down onto the ground. I recall hearing shouts and screams and the sound of feet running around me, but nothing else. I had passed out.

The next words I heard were someone calling my name. "Margaret, Margaret! Are you all right?" It was dear Papa. Squatting down beside me, he held me in one arm. What looked to be a bottle of smelling salts was in his other hand.

"Papa!" I cried and, putting my arms around him, sobbed.

A crowd had gathered. Seeing that I had been revived, they clapped and cheered.

A gentleman who looked to be in his early forties, dressed in a white suit and a pith hat, also knelt beside Papa. "I see your daughter seems to be all right, James. Shall we get her into the carriage?" he said in a slight Scottish accent.

Papa kissed me on the forehead and asked, "Are you well, Margaret? Can you get up?"

I nodded and both Papa and the other person helped me up. There was more clapping and cheering from the onlookers, as I trudged towards a waiting carriage. Helping me onto a seat, Papa sat next to me, while the gentleman took the opposite bench.

I put my head on the side of the padded, dark leather seat. Although I had regained full consciousness, overcome with too much emotion, I could not speak. Papa looked just the same. Despite the heat, he was still dressed in his dark suit and cravat, although he had put on a beige pith hat. His blonde moustache looked neatly trimmed on his square-jawed clean-shaven face.

We looked at each other for a while. I believe he was also speechless, likely from seeing his long-lost daughter faint before his eyes.

I finally said, "You look funny in that hat, Papa."

He laughed. "Your Mamma makes me wear it! Now are you certain you are fit to travel, Margaret? Shall we get you to a hospital?"

I shook my head. "I'm all right, Papa. It was only the sun." I must have smiled, for the heat was not the only reason.

The gentleman leaned forward and examined my eyes closely. "Hmm ... yes. I think you are healthy enough. But, we will have to get you one of these." He touched his hat. "Although it is the cold weather season, the sun is still fierce."

Porters secured my baggage at the back of the landau and it rolled forward. As I looked out of the window, I was jolted to see the same three Indian men, one with a swollen jaw, standing on the side of the road. While Colonel Humphrey might have overreacted, showing off his boxing skills, I did feel that the young man had no right to make such a lewd remark about me. They glared as the carriage rolled by. I had a strange feeling that I would likely see them again.