

SA‘ADAT HASAN MANTO

Green Sandals*

“I DON’T THINK I can put up with you anymore. Please divorce me.”

“For heaven’s sake, what kind of talk is that? You know what, your biggest problem is that now and then these strange fits take hold of you and you completely lose your senses.”

“And your senses—like they never leave you. When are you ever not drunk?”

“I do drink, I admit. But I never get drunk without drinking the way you do. And I don’t spew out nonsense.”

“So I talk nonsense—is that it?”

“When did I say that? But stop and think, what’s this all about asking for a divorce?”

“I just want a divorce. A husband who couldn’t care less about his wife ... what else can she ask for but a divorce.”

“You can ask me for anything, but not a divorce.”

“As if you can really give.”

“So now this is another accusation you’re piling on me. What other woman could be as fortunate as you are. In the house ...”

“Curses on such fortune.”

“Don’t curse it. What could have displeased you so? I love you dearly, honest. Believe me.”

“God save me from such love.”

“Okay, stop making these caustic jibes. Tell me, have the girls gone to school?”

“Why should you care whether they go to school or to hell? Oh how I pray that they’ll die.”

“One of these days I might have to yank your tongue out with a pair of red-hot tongs. Talking such nonsense about your own daughters ... Aren’t you ashamed of yourself?”

*“Sabz Sēṅḍal,” from the author’s collection *Manṭō Kabāniyān* (Lahore: Saṅg-e Mīl Publications, 1995), 640–45.

"I'm telling you, don't use foul language with me. It's you who should be ashamed. You talk to the woman who is your wife as though she's some street girl, rather than with respect and deference. It's all due to the bad company you keep."

"And the kink you've got in your brain—what's the cause of that?"

"You. What else?"

"It's always me you have to dump on. God knows what's happened to you."

"What's happened to me? Nothing. It's you who's gone off his rocker. Always breathing down my neck. I've told you, I want a divorce."

"Want to marry someone else? Tired of me?"

"Shame on you. What kind of woman do you take me for?"

"So why do you want a divorce. What will you do?"

"I'll get the hell out of here. Go anywhere that I can find a room. I'll work, work hard to put food on the table for my kids and myself."

"You, working hard—ha! You get up at nine in the morning and go back to bed after breakfast. After lunch you take a three-hour nap. Hard work—huh! Don't deceive yourself."

"Oh yeah, I'm the one who's sleeping all the time, and you, you're awake all day long. Just yesterday your office boy was here. He was saying that our *afsar* sahib is always dozing off with his head on his desk."

"Who was that son-of-a-bitch?"

"Mind your tongue."

"Oh, I'm just furious. When you're angry, it's hard to control your tongue."

"I'm angry too ... angry at you, but I haven't used such filthy language. One must never overstep the limits of propriety. You hang out with lowly people and have picked up their foul language."

"Just who are these lowly people that I hang out with?"

"That fellow who says he's a big cloth merchant ... have you ever seen the kind of clothes he wears: such crummy stuff, and grimy besides. Says he has a B.A. but his attitude, his manners, his comportment—God, they're revolting!"

"He's a *majzūb*, God-enraptured."

"What's that?"

"You wouldn't understand. I'd be wasting my time explaining."

"Oh, your time is precious. You can't afford to waste it explaining just one little thing?"

"What, exactly, are you trying to say?"

"Nothing. I said what I wanted to. Divorce me so that I'm finally rid of this daily sparring that has made my life a living hell."

“Even a word full of love makes your life hell—is there a cure for it?”

“Yes, there is. Divorce.”

“All right then, send for a maulvi. If this is what you want, I won’t stand in your way.”

“How am I going to send for one?”

“Aren’t you the one who is asking for a divorce? If I wanted it, I would have summoned ten maulvis in one minute flat. Don’t expect me to help you out in this. It’s your business, you find a way.”

“You can’t even do this much for me?”

“No. I can’t.”

“Haven’t you been telling me all this time that you love me without any limit?”

“Yes, only to be together, not to break apart.”

“What am I to do then?”

“That’s your business. And look, don’t bother me anymore now. Send for a maulvi, have him draft the papers and I’ll sign them.”

“What about the *mehr*?”¹

“What about it? You’re initiating the divorce. The question of payment doesn’t arise.”

“That’s really something!”

“Your brother is a barrister. Ask him. He’ll tell you that when a woman asks for a divorce, she forfeits her right to demand *mehr*.”

“In that case, you divorce me.”

“Why would I do such a foolish thing? I love you.”

“Spare me your wheedling. I don’t like it. You wouldn’t treat me so shabbily if you really loved me.”

“When have I treated you shabbily?”

“As if you don’t know. Just yesterday or the day before you wiped your shoes on my brand-new sari.”

“*I did not*. I swear.”

“So maybe it was the ghosts who did.”

“All I know is this: your three daughters were wiping their shoes with your sari. I even scolded them.”

“They are not so ill mannered.”

“But they are, quite a bit. And you know why—because you haven’t bothered to teach them good manners. Ask them when they’re back from school whether they were or were not wiping their shoes on your sari.”

“I don’t have to ask them anything.”

¹As required by Islamic law, the mandatory amount of money or possessions given at the time of marriage by the groom to the bride for her exclusive use.—*Tr.*

"What's gotten into your head today? If only I could crack it, I might be able to do something about it."

"You keep thinking about that something. I know what I have to do. Let's make it short: divorce me. There's no point in living with a husband who doesn't care a hill of beans about his wife."

"I have always cared for you."

"Do you know that tomorrow is Eid?"

"Of course I do. Just yesterday I bought new shoes for the girls and I gave you sixty rupees for their frocks a week ago."

"As if that was a big favor to me, why, even to my father and his father."

"No, it's not a question of doing a favor, to you or to anybody. Just tell me, what's bugging you."

"All right, if you want to know. Sixty rupees weren't enough. The organdy cloth alone for three girls cost sixty rupees. The tailor charged seven rupees for each of the three frocks. You think this is a favor to the girls and me? Hardly."

"So you made up the shortfall from your pocket?"

"If I didn't, who would have stitched their frocks?"

"Let me give you the difference, right now. Oh, I get it. So this is what was getting your dander up."

"The Eid is tomorrow."

"Yes, yes, I know. I'm ordering two chickens ... *saivaiyan*, too. And you—what preparations have you made?"

"Nothing—how can I?"

"Why?"

"I wanted to wear a green sari tomorrow. I had ordered a pair of green sandals to go with it. So many times I asked you to find out from the Chinese shoe shop if they were ready. But why would you? When did I mean a thing to you?"

"For heaven's sake. Now I see. So all this bickering is over the green sandals. But I already got them two days ago. The package is in your closet. You probably never opened it. You're always lazing around all day long." □

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—Translated by Mubammad Umar Memon