the doctor declared for the first time that day that he was now fairly out of danger.

Soon after the doctor had left, Hem opened his eyes. "Where is Gopal?" he asked
"Here I am, darling, what do you want now?" said his grandmother
CHAPTER XXXVII.

SASANKA AND HIS NEIGHBOUR HARIDAS

LEAVING his attendant behind, Sasankasekhar left Calcutta that very day and reached home before dark. Almost as soon as he set foot in the house, Svarna came to him. "How is my brother?" she inquired, eagerly looking up into his face.

"Oh, he is much better," said the priest. "I trust he will soon come round."

"When may I go down to Calcutta?" asked Svarna, much relieved of her anxiety.

"When your brother gets perfectly well You can understand why I object to your going there now. But why, Svarna, aren't you comfortable here?"

"Oh, I am quite comfortable. Only I think if my brother were with me now I could take good care of him."

"Depend on me, he is taken as good care of just now as one could wish. There is a boy there named Gopal, who keeps by his side night and day. Indeed he is most diligent in his attentions to him. I think he is the best and gentlest boy I have ever seen."

Svarna was supremely happy to hear Gopal so highly spoken of. She said no more, and Sasanka retired to
rest for a little time. After that he came out, walked to the door, and, calling his servant, ordered him to fetch their neighbour, Haridas Mukerjee.

Haridas quickly appeared "Friend Haridas," said Sasanka, "I want to have a talk with you."

"What about?" asked Haridas.

"You will know presently, but we must be alone. Come along with me, please." And the two strolled out together in the direction of the river. The sun had gone down, and, while in the western sky a flush still lingered, there was the moon peeping above the horizon in the east. It was the time of spring, and the sweet scent of wild flowers was in the air. A little way down, the river made a sweet murmuring noise as on it flowed to join the distant sea. It was indeed the most delightful time of evening, when there might be many pouring out their hearts in sweet communion with the Great Maker of the universe. But let us hear what Sasanka and Haridas have to say to each other.

Having reached the river-side they sat down on the grass. "Come, make haste, it is night already, and I have my devotions to attend to," said Haridas.

"Well, you mustn't be in a hurry," said Sasanka. "I am about to refer to a subject equally important to us both."

"I really don't know what you are speaking about."

"Well, then I must come to the point at once. You know that Burdwan girl—the same to whom you were so anxious to marry your son?"

"Well, what about her? But go on."

"Bipradas, you know, was a very good fellow. You must remember what his reply was to the letter I wrote to him some months ago when he was living.
Why, his very words were, 'Since you recommend this young man there should be no objection.' No doubt he had a great regard for me, but it must be said that he was a little too fond of his son.'

"I know all that."

"Patience. Had his son not been in the way, he would have been glad to contract an alliance with you."

"That's nothing new."

"Patience is a very good thing, my friend. Well, Baprades had several other offers, but he liked not one of them. He was a man of the old school, and he cared more for money than for anything else in the world."

"Then why was not my son preferred? Though I am not rich, at least I have a competence."

"True; but, as I have told you, he was a most indulgent father, and never liked to oppose his own beloved son. The son argued that as Svarna's portion was sufficient to make her comfortable in life, she should be given in marriage to a young man of promise, even though he be poor."

"My son is all that and more. He is a B.A., and you must own he is handsome too."

"Well, if everyone saw with your eyes, your son would be the handsomest young man in the world."

Haridas looked up as if he was offended. "Don't take any offence, my friend," said Sasanka. "I do not mean to say that your son is ugly. On the contrary, I think he has every right to aspire to the hand of the daughter of my friend. But——"

"But what?" said Haridas, seeing that he hesitated to speak out his mind.

"I fear you will be offended with me if I say it."

"Why should I be offended? Speak, please."
"Well, if I must speak the truth, your son cannot hold a candle to the boy Hem would have his father pitch upon."

"You certainly disparage my son, who is a B.A."

"If you saw the boy I speak of, you would not say so. I have seen the boy myself, and I consider him the gentlest and prettiest lad in teens I ever set eyes upon. Such bright intelligent eyes he has! Indeed he is a very promising lad, and takes the greatest pleasure in learning."

"Then why should Bipradas not give his daughter in marriage to this best of boys in the world?"

"Why, haven't I told you that he was more a respecter of wealth than of person? And the boy's father is in the humblest of circumstances. Yet, you know, Bipradas wanted time to consider, and would, if he had lived, have surely yielded to the wishes of his beloved son."

"The son is free to do as he likes now that the father is dead."

"Well, yes, but the boy has little or no chance now."

"Why?" said Haridas, looking eagerly up to the face of Sasanka.

"Now listen." And Sasanka drew himself up and looked his companion straight in the face. "Now listen," he repeated, "Hem is confined to his bed by smallpox. The doctor says there is very little hope. Well, if his case proves fatal, about which there seems to be no doubt, why then this boy has not the least chance in the world. For the old lady, poor Bipradas's mother, you know, does not wish to contract an alliance except with one who has got plenty of money."

"And do you think I have any chance in that case?"
SASANKA AND HIS NEIGHBOUR HARIDAS

"I believe I have a great influence with the old lady."
"Well, that's good, but the young man must die first."
"I will tell you what. He cannot live longer than three days at most. So when he is gone, you may be quite sure of the girl and her money. For, believe me, I can easily conciliate the old lady."
"But a man may go as far as death's door and yet live."
"Well, if the young man should live, though there are a thousand chances to one against that—"
"Why, then I think we must put it out of our heads altogether," said Haridas, interrupting him.
"Not so, I should know what to do in that case."
"What do you mean?" asked Haridas.
"I can secretly join their hands, and in such a clever way as you would never think of."
"How is that possible unless you can get the girl here, and in your own house too, which, I believe, would be a most difficult thing to do?"
"That is none of your look out. If you rely on me, I promise you will have what you want."
"But the question is, how you can get the girl to your house."

Sasanka was capable of doing anything for money. Haridas knew it well, but he knew also that he was full of cunning and deceit. He therefore said, "I must first see the girl, or I must wash my hands of it."
"Well, I will bring you to see the girl, but before I undertake this business I must know what you can pay."
"What do you want?" said Haridas.
"What do I want? Why, I am sure it is such a
delicate affair that no one can pay enough for it."
"That may be true," said Haridas; "but I cannot
pay more than a thousand rupees."
"You speak like a child," said Sasanks, laughing.
"Why?"
"What's that sum compared to her portion, pray?"
"What does it matter?" said Haridas; "I haven't
got it. And there is many a slip between the cup and
the lip, you know. But I may tell you that it is not
for her money that I am willing to have this girl for my
daughter-in-law."
"Oh, certainly not. You are willing to accept her as
your daughter-in-law because she is a poor little orphan,
having neither beauty nor a friend to stand by her."
"Oh, no, no," said Haridas, laughing.
"Why, I think I am not too dull to see your noble
intention. And you talk of paying me a thousand
rupees because I am willing to act in the matter. You
are a noble-minded man!"
"Oh, you are facetious, but I was only joking," said
Haridas, breaking again into a short laugh.
"Then will you truly tell me what you can pay?"
"Truly, five thousand rupees. That is the utmost I
can give."
"Oh, you are still joking, I can see."
"No, not joking. I am really in earnest. Why,
you know, there is not more than fifteen thousand rupees
in the will; and then just think of the trouble and
expense I should have to be at, for there is no avoiding
a lawsuit to get this business done. The brother of the
girl will never forgive our playing such a trick as this,
but will be sure to go to law, and thus a portion of the
money, that will come to me by my son’s marriage with the girl, will be frittered away in lawyers’ bills. Besides, a lawsuit means a hundred other things to pay for, you know. And what shall I have left after all this expense, if I pay you more than five thousand?

“And do you think the brother will spare me if he should get well? Not he. He is a hot-tempered youth, very unlike your son, who is meek and gentle as a lamb; and he cares not the least bit for me, though I am their priest. He has adopted all the English customs, even in matters of food and drink. As for his English books, they have taught him nothing good. If I need dread any one, I have most need to dread such a character as this. Yet if I have half the girl’s portion in the will I will do the business for you, and I care not what may follow.”

“Half the sum! That’s too much.”

“Well, if you think so, let us say no more about it.” And Sasanka rose as though he meant to be going.

“Come, come, be reasonable,” said Haridas, taking hold of his hand and making him sit down again.

“What I have asked is quite consistent with reason. I will not take less, you may depend on that. But if you cannot agree to my terms, why, we had better drop the matter for good and all.”

“Well, well, I will consider and let you know tomorrow. But what about the girl? You must let me see her.”

“You are welcome to have a look at her this evening if you like.”

“This evening? You don’t mean it.”

“I do though. Am I the man to joke!”
Sasanka and Haridas went down to the water's edge to perform their evening devotions. Sasanka, who worshipped nothing but money, touched the water three or four times, and, having finished wonderfully quickly, rose, saying to Haridas, "Make haste, my friend!"

Haridas was quickly ready for going home with Sasanka, and when he had seen the girl, he said to himself, "Why, she is quite in Sasanka's grasp!"
CHAPTER XXXVIII.

SVARNA A PRISONER IN SASANKA'S HOUSE.

Hem was now convalescent. But he was not as yet able to leave his bed. Day and night Gopal kept him company as before. He was ever by his side to feed him with his own hand, to wipe his face, or to talk to him. His company was as balm to Hemchandra, for whom it was impossible to love his friend more than he did now.

Every morning, while Hem was confined to his bed, Sasanka would travel by train to Calcutta to see him, and return before dark the same day. For this Svarna's grandmother felt very very thankful. How was it possible for the old lady to see through his garb of benevolence?

As for Svarna, she could not be sufficiently thankful for it. Was it a small kindness, as she thought, that rather than make any other arrangements, the priest should himself go and see him every day, which meant a journey of several miles, and not mind the trouble? And each day, when it was near time for Sasanka to come home, she would go and wait at the door to look out for him, and when she saw him at a distance, she would run to meet him and inquire about her brother. Could any one have taken a more lively interest in their
affairs! Was not Sasanka the greatest of their well-wishers in the world? So indeed she thought him, and so she told him one day. The deep gratitude, which she felt towards him, and which she could not express without crying, was a reproach to his guilty mind. He could not look on her—a simple artless girl, but in contrast with his own hypocritical self Wretch as he was, he knew he was going to do her a great wrong, but it was only for a moment, and then, as he could never resist the temptation of gold, he laughed at his own weakness, as he called it, and, rising, proceeded to see his neighbour, Haridas.

"What are you about? writing?" said he to Haridas, seeing him.

"Oh, sit down, please. Only some accounts. Two minutes more and I have done."

"Well," observed Sasanka, "you have no time to lose. You must be ready as quickly as you can."

"Oh, never fear, but you, I must say, are a little too hard upon me."

"Let me know once for all what you can pay," said Sasanka.

"Six thousand rupees."

"Well, I accept your offer, for really I don't like haggling. The day after to-morrow, mind, is the day fixed for your son's marriage with the girl. So in the meantime be ready, and good-by till we meet again on the wedding night."

Svarna was in quite good spirits. For was not her brother gradually recovering, and did she not have daily tidings of him? Why, she hoped that in a fortnight or so she would be allowed to go down to Calcutta to live with him. Oh, how cheering was the thought!
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She was up quite fresh every morning, ate her food with relish, and seemed to greatly enjoy the company of the girls of the neighbourhood. Such a sweet gentle girl! Little did she dream that Sasanka, whom she thought to be their greatest well-wisher in the world, was but a wolf in sheep's clothing, that he had been secretly negotiating with Haridas, and was so utterly depraved as to be prepared to do her an irreparable injury for money.

Night came on space; and, according to his wont, Sasanka now left the house, and bent his steps towards the river-side to perform his evening devotions. Shortly afterwards his children fell asleep, with the exception of one, a sturdy boy, three or four years old, who rather capriciously took it into his head not to go to sleep without Svarna, and, whining and fretting, obliged his mother to call her. As Svarna appeared, "This naughty boy," said she, "has thoroughly made up his mind not to go to sleep without you, so will you stay here for a little while, my child?"

Svarna went to him, and the boy at once held his peace, and quickly fell asleep. A cool gentle breeze was blowing, and sleep almost imperceptibly stole upon her.

On his return, at the usual hour, Sasanka went to his wife. "Who is there with the boy?" said he to her.

"Svarna," answered his wife

"Is she awake or asleep?" he said in a whisper

Svarna was wide awake now, for she woke up almost as soon as Sasanka set foot in the house. But she shut her eyes again and pretended to be asleep when she heard whispers near the door. Sasanka's wife approached
the bed. "Asleep," she whispered, stooping over her to make sure.

"Then just come here to me," said Sasanka in an undertone.

As his wife returned to him, "Look here," said he, speaking as before, "do you see these two keys? The one belongs to the front entrance, and the other to the back door. Both these doors I have locked. Now, you are to keep a sharp look out and see that no one tries to get out of the house by any other means."

"What do you mean? Why should any one not be allowed to get out of the house?" said his wife with some surprise.

"That's none of your business."

"I must know or I will make a fuss."

"Well, well," said Sasanka, laughing defiantly, "I don't care at all if you do know it. Then in a cold, business-like way he acquainted his wife with the atrocious business he had taken in hand, which simply filled her with horror.

"Why look like that?" said Sasanka again, eying his wife significantly. "But I don't care a straw for your feelings. And, now mark me," he added, giving her a savage look, "if you should give the game away, I will——, but I need not say it." Sasanka walked off to the outer house.

Svarna's feelings at what she overheard may be more easily conceived than described. It was impossible for her to feign to be asleep any longer, so she gave the child by her side a punch in the arm. As he instantly woke up with a shrill outcry of pain, Svarna, as if disturbed in her sleep, moved, rubbed her eyes, and slowly raised herself up in bed. "You fell asleep, child?" said
Sasanka's wife "Yes, mother," said Svarna. And she rose and abruptly left the room. Coming away she at once ran to the back door. She found it locked. She turned and ran to the front door. This was locked from outside. Oh, what should she do! Like a bird shut up in a cage, she fluttered and flew this way and that, but in vain. She was a close prisoner in the house, and Sasanka was a monster who meant to eat her up. She could never have believed that he was such a fiend, but she could not doubt her own ears. To her the house seemed to have the look of a dungeon, dark and dismal, whose very air was poisonous, and she longed to be out of it. Full of horror she ran back to the room she had so recently left, and as she sank down on the floor she looked so ghastly that Sasanka's wife was greatly frightened. "Why," she cried, "what's the matter with you, Svarna?"

It was impossible for her to suppress her feelings. "I have overheard every word," she cried, bursting into tears. "Oh! take my life. It is better to be dead than live to be miserable."

The soul of Sasanka's wife melted into pity. She left her boy, whom she had put to sleep again, and went to Svarna. "Don't weep, my child," she said, speaking very kindly; "I will contrive to free you from the clutches of my cruel husband."

"Will you? do you promise? Oh, be kind to me." And Svarna clung to her feet and wopt piteously. Sasanka's wife drew her to her side, and wiped the tears from her eyes and spoke words of comfort to her. And when Svarna was comforted a little, she said, "Can you write, my child?"

"A little," said Svarna.
"Are you able to write a letter?"
"Yes, but to whom am I to write? My brother is too weak to get out of bed yet"
"Is there no one else to whom you can write?"
Svarna blushed and hung down her head. "I cannot think," she said.
"Why, what's the name of that boy? Yes, Gopal, I recollect it now. He is a clever lad, I am told. Why not write to him?"
Deeper now was the blush on her face. "I think I had better write to my brother," she murmured.
"What's the good of writing to your brother? He cannot do anything, now that he is confined to his bed?"
"No, but he will be sure to show my letter to Gopal."
"Well, then write to your brother." With this the good woman rose and left her. She quickly reappeared with the writing materials, and Svarna commenced at once and soon finished her letter. The next morning, almost the first thing Sasanka's wife did was to take the maidservant into her confidence, and, secretly handing her the letter, bade her put it in the post office on her way to the bazaar.
CHAPTER XXXIX.

GOPAL TO THE RESCUE.

Although Svarna’s letter was due to reach its destination before ten o’clock on the following morning, somehow or other it was delayed on the way and did not arrive until four o’clock in the evening. Gopal took in the letter, and read Hemchandra’s name on the cover. Where did the letter come from? Those previously received from home were all written by the *gamasta*,¹ but this was in a different hand. A female style of handwriting, but very neat and legible. Could it be Svarna’s hand? He had never seen it before. But, if it was, wasn’t she as clever as she was pretty?

“Here is a letter for you,” said Gopal, going to Hemchandra. Hem took it. “It is from Svarna, read it, Gopal,” said he, handing back the letter.

Gopal opened the letter with a trembling heart. As he read it to himself his face grew red and his eyes flashed fire. He never could have dreamed that Sasanka was capable of such baseness. Happily, Hemchandra’s eyes were not on him, and he did not observe the visible signs of indignation in his face. Gopal, however, made an effort to look unconcerned, and when Hem asked

¹ *A collector of rents.*
what she had written, he only said, as he put back the letter into its cover, "She has asked after you, and is very anxious to come here". Hem asked no more, but turned over on his side and quietly went to sleep. Gopal felt that he had no time to lose, and he quickly appeared before the old lady and communicated the contents of the letter to her. So great indeed was her indignation at what she heard that she cursed Sasanka and called him a rascal, and swore that he should rue his rascality. Gopal begged her not to make any fuss, lest the excitement should prove too much for Hem and bring on his illness again. He said that, as it was past four, and the marriage was to take place at six o'clock in the evening, he must start at once if he was to be in time to prevent it. He quickly dressed, and, with a hand, boldly set off for the Howrah station to catch the 4-30 train. He had scarcely gone fifty paces when it occurred to him that he had forgotten to take any money with him. He went back at once. "Quick, quick, let me have some money," said he, appearing before the old lady. She promptly opened her cash-box and handed him a twenty-rupee note. Without looking at it, he thrust it into his breast-pocket, and, asking her to tell Hemchandra that he had left for Bhowampur on urgent business, and might not be back till next day, set out again with all haste.

A little way on he met a hackney-carriage coming. "Stop, stop," said he to the driver. And as the man drove up and pulled up his horse, he jumped in. "To the steam-ferry, quick," he cried. "And I will pay you well if I catch the 4-30 train!"

The horses were strong, and as the man lashed them furiously, they dashed along at a gallop. In a very short time the wharf was reached. Out Gopal jumped,
but when he found that the old lady had given him a twenty-rupee note, he was at a loss what to do. He must have change, and he bustled up and down, for there was the steamer, that ferried passengers to the Howrah station, all ready to start. In the midst of his perplexity some one took him across the street to a man from whom change was to be procured. "Give me change, quick," said he to the money-changer as he handed him the twenty-rupee note. When he received it he paid five rupees to the driver, and dashed on in hot haste to the steamer. Just then the signal to start was given, and it was followed by a long loud whistle. He pressed forward with all the speed he could make. But when he got upon the jetty the steamer had started, and was noisily moving in her course with her full complement of passengers.

There was not a minute to lose, and Gopal ran down to the ferry, and sprang on one of the boats lying there. "It is a few minutes past four," said he, slipping a rupee into the ferryman's hand, "and I want to catch the 4-30 train. So look sharp, my friend."

"Sit there, sir," said the ferryman, "and I will row you across in the shortest possible time." Gopal was soon being rowed across, and quickly reached the Howrah side. Just then the train gave a loud, sharp whistle. Gopal landed in a trice. The ferryman asked to be paid, but he hurried on without paying any heed to his words. The fellow, however, would not have it so, and quickly went and put himself before his way. "I have paid you already," impatiently cried Gopal. "I have only had my tip, sir," said the ferryman. Gopal, to get rid of him, paid him another rupee and ran to the station. He had just gained the platform when the
train started. Like a desperate man he sprang forward, opened the door of one of the compartments, and jumped in. There was no time to get a ticket, but what did that matter? He could pay the fare when he arrived at his destination.

On entering the compartment, Gopal's head was in a whirl, there was a blur before his eyes, and he caught hold of the iron railing to prevent himself from falling. For weeks together he had gone without his proper nourishment and his natural rest at night, and now the desperate effort made by him to catch the train was too much for him in his weakened state of body. Soon he lay down on the bench. There was a cool, gentle wind blowing, and, as the train moved on, he fell asleep from sheer exhaustion.

Never had he slept so soundly before. And while he slept, numbers of passengers got in and out, till at length the train arrived at Burdwan at nine o'clock at night. Carriage-doors were being opened, and tickets were being collected. It was all bustle and confusion at the station, yet still he slept. At length a Eurasian railway-officer opened the door of the compartment in which he was. Seeing that he was asleep, the ticket-collector pulled him gently by the leg, saying, "Get up, Babu, get up." Gopal got up with a start. "Is this Sreerampur?" he asked.

"You are dreaming," said the Eurasian officer. "This is Burdwan. Give me your ticket, come on."

Gopal's head was again in a whirl, and his feelings seemed to choke his utterance.

"Quick, give me your ticket; why don't you move?" said the railway-officer.
"I haven't got one, but I am ready to pay the fare," gasped out Gopal.
"I suspected as much," said he. "Come along with me to the station-master."

As the station-master was too busy, Gopal had to be shut up in a room for the night.

Oh, what a terrible night it was for him! "Must I," sighed he, "give up the thought of Svarna for good!"
Though Gopal had said nothing to her, yet he had fondly cherished in his heart the hope that one day Svarna would be his own. But that she was another's now and he must no more think of her—oh! he could not bear the thought. "Why did I not communicate the contents of her letter to Hemchandra," he exclaimed, in an agony of grief. "He might have been able to take prompt measures to frustrate Sasanka's design, and rescue Svarna from his hands. Oh, why did I fall asleep! How can I return home to him! How can I look him in the face again! He has been a most loving brother to me, but oh! how I have wronged him! By falling asleep I have allowed an irreparable injury to be done to Svarna, from which I can never forgive myself. The dissembling wretch! The rascally Sasanka! But who ever thought him capable of such baseness as this! Hemchandra will be distracted with grief and rage when he hears it. Svarna, at this moment, is no doubt blaming her brother, but, oh! she knows not that it is my unfortunate self that is to blame for it."

Thus sorrowing and lamenting he passed the night. "I shall be set free," said he to himself, "as soon as it is morning; but, alas! I have failed to free Svarna from the clutches of that scoundrel, Sasanka."
CHAPTER XL

SVARNA'S NARROW ESCAPE.

There are great goings-on in Haridas's house. The father of the bridegroom has procured a band from Calcutta. The yard of the outer house is full, the boys filling the greater part of it and making the very air ring with their murth. The bridegroom, an ill-favoured youth of twenty-four, with a rough, dark exterior, has a rather repulsive look in his bright red wedding garment. He has a seat in the midst of a merry group, chiefly composed of students.

Brides and bridegrooms have always the tenderest attentions paid to them on the day of their marriage. The friends and relations of the bridegroom are most diligent in their attentions to him. Every one seems to feel proud of being talked to by the bridegroom, and every acquaintance is anxious to thrust himself upon his notice. Those who have known him from a boy are as eager to see and talk to him now as those who are perfect strangers to him. The bridegroom has to be called away sometimes when his presence is required in the ladies' quarters; and, on every such occasion, he pretends to be very unwilling to leave the company of his friends.
“You are not to take any food to-day,” said Sasanka to Svarna, calling her early in the morning.

“Why?” said Svarna, looking as though she were unable to understand his meaning.

“Why? Because you are going to be married to-day,” said Sasanka, breaking into a horrid laugh, which startled and frightened Svarna.

Sasanka was a man of gigantic appearance, and Svarna now really began to feel she was in the hands of a giant, from whom there was no running away.

“Yes, because you are going to be married to-day,” repeated Sasanka; and he again laughed horridly.

Svarna’s fear at once changed to anger. Burning with indignation that quite drowned her sense of decency, she exclaimed, “Who is to marry me, and to whom am I to be married?”

“I am to marry you,” said Sasanka, speaking very calmly, “though it would have been none of my concern had your father been living. I need not tell you to whom you are going to be married, for you overheard every word of what I had lately been saying to my wife.”

Svarna’s surprise was as great as her indignation; for how could Sasanka, unless through some mysterious process, know that she only feigned to be asleep when he had a talk with his wife the other night? “What a good and kind protector you will be!” she, however, said in a bitterly sarcastic tone.

“I may be a bad man,” said Sasanka, “but your father would have approved of this match, you may depend on that.”

“My father! no, never. It is a lie.”

“Well, never mind your father, since he is not
amongst the living. This match, you may know, has my approval and sanction.”

“What does it signify whether it has your sanction or not?”

“Well, I am sure we could never arrange a more suitable match than this. The young man, I tell you, is worth his weight in gold.”

“What care I what the young man is worth? I will not have him. There is no compulsion in things of this kind.”

“Well, this is a pretty state of affairs. I don’t like girls that are self-willed. And what makes them so is often the little learning that they get, and that is so dangerous. Come now, you are to make no fuss, for I will not put up with any nonsense in such a serious affair as this.” And Sasanka rose and prepared to leave the room. “Oh, stop,” cried Svarna. “What right have you to hold me a prisoner here? Unlock the house-door and let me out, I say. I must go down to Calcutta.”

“Well, there is no hurry about it. You can go after the marriage is over.”

Svarna rushed to the door, exclaiming, “I will alarm the neighbourhood by crying ‘murder!’” She was just about to rush out when Sasanka caught her by the hand and tried to pull her inside. She struggled and pulled the opposite way; but she quickly had to yield to the giant strength of Sasanka, who, standing outside, easily locked the door as he pushed her from him. Svarna screamed and wept and cried, but he only said, “Now, lie there, and cry your eyes out if you like.” With this he quickly went out, and, going to Haridas’s brought the drummers to his house. “Beat on your drums, my men,” he called out to them, “and beat
harder whenever you hear any weeping and wailing in the house.”

Svarna wept and entreated and threatened, but all to no purpose.

“Oh, have pity on me,” she cried. “Do send me to my brother, and I promise you will have double the sum which you are getting for doing this great wrong. Nay, if you will not be satisfied with that, you shall have the whole of my portion in the will.”

“You know not what you say,” said Sasanka. “You have not yet acquired the title to this money”

“But I say I will give you my portion, and I swear to this by all that is sacred”

“All these promises are of no avail. Sasankasekhar is not the man to trust in promises”

“What do you want then?”

“I want nothing but to see you smoothly through the ceremony, and then to have done with you altogether”

“You have a daughter, would you like to give her away in this way?”

“Why, it is very fine to hear you talk like this. Let a girl into the mysteries of reading and writing, and you spoil her. That’s proverbial.”

Svarna was abashed, and said no more

Sasanka lived within easy distance of the railway station at Sreerampur. Svarna could hear the trains as they approached the station whistling and puffing, and she kept hoping that some one would come to her rescue. And now she said as she heard a low distant noise, “Ah, there is a train coming. It must be from Howrah.” And she brightened up at the thought that her rescue might be at hand. For about half an hour
she waited patiently, but after that she grew restless and flitted about the room like a caged bird. Presently she stopped to listen. There was another train coming. Could it be from Howrah? It stopped. It started again and went puffing past. After a time there was another, and then another again, but no welcome messenger came from her brother. Then it seemed to her that the trains were all running to, and not one running from, Howrah.

Time wore on, and at last Svarnalata saw through an open window facing the west that the sun was about to go down. The marriage was to take place at six o'clock in the evening. What were her feelings when she thought of that dreadful hour being close at hand? By and by the sun went down, leaving a glow in the western sky, and Svarnalata expected that Sasanka would soon come to lead her to what she thought would be her death. But it suddenly struck her that perhaps Sasanka had not told the truth when he said that her brother was gradually improving and would get perfectly well. Was her brother dangerously ill, or had the worst happened? Though she could scarcely think of the latter without a shudder, her mind now misgave her cruelly, and so great indeed was her suffering that for a time she quite forgot her own dangerous position.

The shades of evening deepened. A little cloud came over, sullying the clear light blue of the sky, a cool breeze blew, and the bridegroom and his party arrived. Then it was all bustle and confusion. In the midst of the blowing of conchs, while the band played, the bridegroom was led into the reception-room in Sasanka's house. The seat of honour in the middle was occupied by the bridegroom, while his friends and relatives sat
all round. The young man was encumbered with a superfluous quantity of garlands, and had his forehead plentifully smeared with sandal-paste. The guests were all merry and talkative, and the boys were very jolly, and cracked jokes with the bridegroom. But where was Sasanka now? He was busy counting the money of his bargain with Haridas.

After a while, when Sasanka found it was all right, he rose and went to put the money under lock and key, then returning quickly, he joined Haridas, and they went together to the guests. They were well pleased with each other, for everything was as it should be. But time was getting on, and Sasanka proposed that he should go and bring the bride. "Yes, go and fetch the bride," cried several voices at once.

Sasanka was off in a moment. As he unlocked and opened the door, Svarna rushed forward and threw herself at his feet. Weeping, she said, "Oh, tell me truly how my brother is, or I shall not leave this room."

"Your brother is gradually recovering health," said Sasanka, "though he is too weak to leave his bed yet."

"For God's sake speak truly."

"I am telling you nothing but the truth. Your brother will get perfectly well in time. He cannot get out of his bed yet. If he could, this marriage would never take place. If the worst had happened, then I might have waited, and not be in such haste about this business." Svarna could see that there was some truth in the words which he spoke. So she only said, "Do not, I beseech you, sacrifice me to your greed of gold."

"Nonsense," cried Sasanka.

"Oh, spare me! If you insist on marrying me to this
man's son, I will commit suicide, and you will have my
death to reproach yourself with."

"What care I for what you may do after the marriage
is over?" And Sasanka stooped, by main force, to
compel Svarna to quit hold of his feet, which she held
firmly in both hands. But all of a sudden Svarna let
go his feet, and flitted to the farther corner of the room
Getting the loose end of her cloth round her neck,
and tying a noose with the greatest possible prompt-
ness she stood ready to draw it at a moment's notice
"Stand where you are," she cried, "if you move a
step I will take my life"

"Svarna," cried Sasanka, laughing as only a fiend
could laugh, "I am quite sure of you, you cannot escape
me."

"You need not be too sure of anything," said Svarna
"Wicked girl!" cried Sasanka, and advanced a step
or two

"Stop or I will draw in the noose," exclaimed
Svarna, in a determined tone of voice And she would
have taken her life without doubt, had not Sasanka,
at that instant, been startled at noticing a sudden blaze
lighting up the sky in front of the open window, that
made him rush to it in alarm And what were his
surprise and confusion when, on looking out, he saw that
his chandimandap ¹ was on fire

¹ See page 118
CHAPTER XII.

SASIBHUSHAN KNOWS HIS WIFE AS HE NEVER KNEW HER BEFORE.

On his return home from Ramsundar's, Sasibhushan told his wife what a cold reception he had met with there, how the *amlas* had slighted him, and how dearly he was to pay if he wished to be spared by them. When his wife had heard all, she shook her head, sighed and said nothing. She then rose, and was just about to leave the room when her husband said, "You are going, my love? Will you not give me a little of your company?"

"I shall be back soon," she said, and then went to seek the company of her precious mother.

What property Sasibhushan possessed was in his wife's name. The house he had built, the lands he had acquired, and such Government paper as he owned, were all in Pramada's name. Added to this, any loose cash he had was also in the safe custody of his wife. Nothing could be better than Pramada's having her husband's property in her name. In this she was directed by prudence. While his property was in her name, Sasibhushan might be sure of its being as safe as it could possibly be. Far more secure than if he had had it in his own name, as then perhaps he would some day be in danger of losing
it, for who knew what might turn up any day?

Formerly, when he lived jointly with his brother, he used
to pay the rent of the whole of the landed property
left them by their late father. But, after his separation
from his brother, he paid the rent only of his own half
of the property. Bidhubhushan was not able to pay
the rent of his share. He was in arrears with the
zamindar, consequently his property was sold, and
afterwards it was bought back by Sasibhusan in his
wife’s name.

Ornaments rather than money were Pramada’s aim
“Money is quickly spent,” Pramada would say to her
husband, “but ornaments are a sort of provision in
a house against any future pecuniary difficulty.” She
also used to say that if any one was in trouble, which
he could get out of by the payment of a certain sum of
money, though he might have no money in hand, if
his wife had a number of jewels, he need not lose heart.
Sasibhushan was ever ready to give Pramada credit for
being the most prudent, if not the most peaceful, woman
in the village.

Now, as we have seen, when Pramada, after hearing
all from her husband, left the room rather abruptly,
Sasibhushan’s mind misgave him, he knew not why.
The amlas had agreed to spare him on condition that
he paid them four thousand rupees and afterwards
resigned his situation. The bribe must be given. Was
Pramada unwilling to let him have the money? Could
she possibly forsake him in his time of need? Sasibhu-
shan could not brook such an idea. “No, no,” said he, “Pramada is certainly better than that. Why,
she cannot let her husband be ruined for ever.”

Leaving her husband Pramada went downstairs to

\footnote{See page 210.}
her mother. "Is there any one by, mother?" she said in an undertone. Her mother stepped out to look.

"No, my love, there is no one by," said she, returning to her daughter. "Then sit here," said Pramada to her, seating herself on the bedstead.

Pramada's mother sat close beside her, as she eagerly whispered, "Well, what is it you wish to speak to me about, daughter?"

"Move on and don't lean on me, I say," said Pramada.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, dear, I didn't see," said her mother, as she hastened to move aside.

"Why, it is quite easy to say that, but you have a pair of eyes in your head to see just as any one else has."

"I am very sorry, my love."

"Well, have you heard anything, mother?" said Pramada, softening her tone.

"No, my love, I am sure I haven't."

"Why, do you mean to say that you live in the house with your ears stopped with cotton-wool?"

"How am I to know anything unless you tell me, dear?"

"Well, then I will tell you. The sahib came the other day. Do you hear, mother?"

"Sahib?"

"Yes, hold your tongue now. Well, my husband has to render the past ten years' accounts. That means nothing more or less than his ruin, you know."

"His ruin! Oh, what shall we do then!" exclaimed Pramada's mother.

"Hush! if you cannot listen quietly to what I have to say, you must leave the room."
“Oh, I can listen, dear. Please excuse me”

Pramada forgave her mother, and said, resuming the subject, “Yes, his ruin. He knows he has not been an honest man in the service of his master. And he has unfortunately made enemies of the amitas, who are determined not to spare him. Such faithless rogues these fellows are. They would not hesitate to rob their master without pity, because you know, the master is a dead drunkard, and worse than useless. The saburb of course will never spare my husband, as he is the headman. The punishment—who, it may be imprisonment, it may be worse—transportation.”

“Transportation!”

“Yes, far over the sea to a place they call pulapolou, from which there is no returning.”

“Oh, pity! what will become of us! But is there no help, daughter?”

“Help? Yes, but there is no counting on that. The amitas can so contrive as to let him escape if he will pay them four thousand rupees in advance. He tells me so, but I believe that’s only to trick him out of the money, for there is no trusting these poor, pitiful, thievish rogues, you know.”

The mother, who had lived all her life in poverty, and had never seen so much as fifty rupees together, looked puzzled at the mention of four thousand rupees. She had not the least idea of such a sum as that; so she dared not open her mouth.

“Well, mother, why do you keep quiet?” said Pramada.

“What did you say the sum was, dear?”

“Four thousand rupees.”

¹Colloquially, a convict settlement.
The mother looked hesitatingly up into her daughter's face. "Is that as much as two score or more?" she said.

"The devil take you! Are you a child?"

The mother was silenced.

"Well," said Pramada again, "to pay four thousand rupees is to part with all my jewels, and the Government paper. Now, what do you think, mother?"

The poor woman was in a fix. She had to say something. Yet she knew not what to say so as not to displease her daughter. She could not think of anything when Pramada said again, "Why, it is easy to see that this is only one of their tricks, but I am not going to be cheated out of any money in that way. Yet if we stay here we cannot get out of paying the money. The only way of escape is to flee from here. Let us, I say, take my jewels and all cash and the Government paper, and leave this place as early as possible. Why should I stay here and give up all I have if, by so doing, we cannot save him from ruin? Save him from ruin we cannot. Why then lose my jewels and all and make beggars of myself and my children? And who will be a beggar, if he can help it?"

"Who, of course?" said Pramada's mother at last, now greatly relieved to know what her daughter would have. "Can there be anything more foolish than for any one to give up all that he is worth, and then go and beg from door to door?"

Having concluded that they must leave the house and not delay longer than they could help, Pramada rose and went back to her husband.

"Where have you been, dear?" Sasibhushan asked his wife.
"Oh, mother is unwell," said Pramada, ready with an excuse.

"Unwell? Well, but when will you let me have the money, dear?"

"Why," said Pramada, "I am sure there is no hurry about it. You don't want it to-night."

"No, not to-night," said Sasibhusan, "but I must have it to-morrow."

Pramada said no more, and Sasibhusan dropped the matter for the nonce, thinking that he was sure of the money from his wife.

Next morning the cashier, Ramsundar, accompanied by two peons, called at Sasibhusan's house. As soon as Sasibhusan heard of his arrival he hurried downstairs and gave him a friendly reception. Then Ramsundar said, "Well, sir, a manager has come at last. You are to go with the peons there, for your presence is urgently required at the office. Now go and bring the money, you understand me, and you have nothing to fear from us. You must look sharp, sir, for there is no time to lose."

When Sasibhusan had heard him, he decided not to waste a minute, but left him immediately. Appearing before his wife, "Now, dear," said he, "give me those papers and some of your jewels as an equivalent for a thousand rupees."

"What! now!" cried Pramada, as though it were quite unexpected.

"Why, dear, it cannot possibly wait," said Sasibhusan.

"Well," said Pramada, "four thousand rupees in itself is a fortune. But what good do you expect from paying this money?"

1 Messengers
“Good, dear! Why, only then I should not be sent off to prison.”

“You think so,” said Pramada, “but who knows you are not going to be sent off to prison? Who knows you are not going to be tricked out of your money?”

Sasibhushan looked up in astonishment. “What is my money to me,” said he, rather bitterly, “if I am going to be sent to gaol?”

“It may be nothing to you; but what I mean is that we are not going to beg from door to door if it can possibly be helped.”

These words sent an arrow into Sasibhushan’s heart. “Why should you,” said he, “beg from door to door? I have thirty bighas of good rent-free land, yielding abundant crops of rice I have also other landed property. And I have built this house which will not need repairs within some twenty years hence. But come, why should we not hope for the best? Do please let me have the Government paper and some of your jewellery, and I can assure you things will be soon all right again.”

Pramada neither moved nor spoke a word. “Oh, come,” said Sasibhushan again, speaking coaxingly, “be quick, love. There is no time to lose. Now, get up, do, there is a good dear.”

Pramada was still sullen. Her husband got annoyed. “Get up, I say,” he cried, “will you or will you not?”

“Why, how you storm!” said Pramada, taking advantage of her husband’s somewhat ruffled mood. “Do you mean to lay violent hands on me? Go to! I refuse to give you what you ask.”

1 A measure of land varying from half to three-quarters of an acre
"A thousand pardons, dear, ten thousand pardons. There is Ramsundar babu waiting for the money, and I am to go at once with the peons. Oh, come, make haste, dear, and don't let us waste time, for I have not a moment to lose."

"Oh, you are a hard-hearted man," exclaimed Pramada, weeping. "For some time your brother gave me endless trouble, and now you are determined not to let me alone. What a pity I can never enjoy one moment of my life. Why did my father know no better than to arrange my marriage with your father!" And Pramada covered her eyes with her hands and wept. Sāmbhushan only stood like one struck stupid. "You never cared about making provision for me," she said again, weeping, "and now you are going for good."

"O Pramada," exclaimed Sāmbhushan, in agony, "I should not—I must not go, only let me have the money. But is it possible you are not willing to let me have it?"

Pramada only sobbed as though her heart would burst.

"Make haste, Sasi babu, we cannot afford to wait any longer," bawled Ramsundar babu from downstairs.

"I am coming," cried Sāmbhushan. And falling on his knees before his wife, and weeping, he begged and entreated her to have pity on him.

At this Pramada uttered a shriek such as made her mother run to her. "O father! O mother! why could you have brought me into this bad world! why could you have given me in marriage to such a heartless man!"
“Oh, dear, don’t blame me,” cried Pramada’s mother. “I was dead set against it, but your father would have his own way and not listen to me, and so you were married against your poor mother’s will, dear. But my life has become a burden to me, and I have no desire to live any longer. Oh, Gadadhari! Gadadhari! And do I still live without you, child!” And mother and daughter, mending their tears, wept aloud as though they were resolved upon Sasibhusan’s ruin.

“What do you mean, Sasi babu?” cried Ramsundar babu again. “Do you mean to keep us standing in this way? We have waited over half an hour, and will not wait one minute more.”

Sasibhusan now felt that he was a lost man. “Woman,” he cried, in a tone of voice which showed that he was prepared for the worst, “I never had thought you could treat me in this way, but you are up to anything. You poisoned my ears against my brother, and I was a fool indeed, as you often indirectly called me, to believe you. To think of all my brother had to suffer, because you would have him crushed and trampled under foot—oh! that is enough to break my heart. Poor Sarala! she was so very good, but you have murdered her. And when it was all over with her, I felt that something dreadful was going to happen to me. You are a murderous woman, but I must suffer for my own folly. Can one cherish a viper in his breast and not be bitten by it?”

When he had spoken these words, for a moment he looked wildly round, and then abruptly left the room. Going to Ramsundar, he said, “I will go with you to the manager.” And when he stood before him, to the great surprise of the almades, he confessed his past
transgressions and said that he might do with him as he liked.

The manager was a deputy collector. He felt some commiseration for Sasibhushan, but he had to do his duty. So he took a note of all his confessions. The amlas and the cashier, Ramsundar, were all of them found more or less guilty; and they were ordered with Sasibhushan to the lockup. The deputy collector next thought that as Sasibhushan's offence was very grave, his property should be sold to compensate the zamindar for his loss; and in view of this, lest any of his possessions should be removed, this cautious officer ordered the police to keep a strict watch at night over Sasibhushan's house.

Well, it was dark. The sub-inspector with a constable had just arrived. This constable was no other than Rames, with whom the reader is well acquainted. Suddenly the sky became overcast, and immediately afterwards the wind rose, shaking the trees and making a howling noise. Soon, however, the storm abated, and was quickly followed by a downpour of rain. This in its turn did not last long, but still long enough to render the night air extremely cold. It was not a very pleasant business to keep watch on such an evening, and the sub-inspector was not accustomed to such work, so after having been on duty for about an hour he began to feel rather cold and uncomfortable. "Rames," he said, calling his assistant, "I am so dull and cold."

"I am always at your service, sir," said Rames. "You have only to tell me what you want done, and it is done."

"Well, then something to warm one would not be a bad thing, my friend."
Rames was off in an instant. In a little time he returned with a bottle which the sub-inspector took from his hand. Then into the neck of it he put his finger, at the same time slanting the bottle so as to allow the liquor to flow to its mouth. After wetting his finger, as he set the bottle by, he held it across the flame of his lighted bull's-eye. The liquor, however, failed to catch the flame, which showed that it was not good. "The fellow Ramdhan," said he, "is not afraid to cheat a policeman!" As he was about to take a sip, someone cried, "Rames, Rames!" Rames went off at once to find this person, and when he returned the sub-inspector had finished his drink. "Here, Rames," said he, handing back the empty bottle, "another drop if you please, but take care, friend, you are not cheated again!"

In short, when he had finished his second supply he began to dream of beds of down. And he thought he would stretch himself on one of them when, overpowered by the influence of liquor, he measured his full length on the ground. When Rames saw that he was down and senseless, he quickly approached Sasibhusan's house, and walking up, knocked gently at the door. In a moment it was opened and Rames went in.

Pramada, according to a previous arrangement with Rames, had taken all her jewels and all her husband's cash, and was now waiting with her mother for that rogue of a policeman to come and lead them out of the house. "You are ready?" whispered Rames, as he entered. "Yes," said Pramada's mother, in a whisper, "I will walk a little way with you to see you off," said Rames, speaking again in whispers. "Now then, follow me."

sv.
Pramada had charge of her cash-box, while her mother had charge of a pretty large bundle of clothes. Thus equipped they followed Rames out of the house.

A little way on they stopped, and Pramada’s mother paid Rames what he had been promised.

Alone and in the darkness of night they made as quickly as possible in the direction of the river. From the first, Pramada had made up her mind to go to her father’s, and with this object in view had previously hired a boat. So, on arriving, they found it ready waiting for them. In a minute they were seated in it, and in another they were on the way to their destination. But they were scarcely ten minutes on their way when a cloud overspread the sky, deepening the gloom of night. The wind rose again, and every now and then a flash of lightning was followed by the deep rumbling noise of thunder. But soon a deeper gloom prevailed, and the wind became furious. The heavens looked as though they would come down and crush the earth with their tremendous weight. Then came hail and rain together, and the fury of the wind now knew no bounds. Trees were blown down and birds dropped dead into the river. A shriek broke simultaneously from Pramada and her mother, and the next instant they were struggling amid the foaming waves. The boatmen swam to the bank which was close. Pramada’s mother, supporting herself on her bundle of clothes, boldly pushed on to the bank till she too gained it in spite of the wind and waves. As for Pramada, in one hand she firmly held her cash-box while with the other she swam as best as she could. She had in this manner nearly reached the bank, but by this time so great was the cold and exhaustion that she could no longer hold the precious cash-box, which
slipped from her benumbed fingers and disappeared in the swirling water. Doubtless she, too, would have followed it had not a mighty wave, coming in the nick of time, borne her on to the river bank, where for the present let us leave her.
CHAPTER XLII

SASANKA'S DEATH

When Sasankasekhya found his chandimandap in a blaze, for a minute he stood astounded, and then, as the force of the flames grew greater, he hurried out of the room and ran toward the fire. On opening the door he had put the key near the window, and now in his agitation he had no thought of it or of Svarna. When Sasanka had gone, Svarna looked out of the window and saw the blazing chandimandap. At the same instant one of the thatched houses, that was nearest, caught the flame, and Svarna trembled as she saw it. Then what a struggle there was to save life and property! What a great stir and tumult, and what clamorous crowds blocked up the pathway in front of the burning houses! Svarna now thought it was high time to make her escape. Here was an opportunity such as she never had dreamed of, and she must on no account miss it. She ran to the front entrance, but, perceiving a crowd there, she turned and ran to the back-door, here her foot slipped, and she fell down and hurt herself. It was a struggle for life and liberty. She utterly disregarded the pain, and right glad was she when she found the back-door open. She darted out almost into the arms of a
crowd, but turning swiftly managed to avoid it. Then on
she pressed, no matter in what direction, her only care
being to get as far away as she could from Sasanka's
house. It was not long before she came to where two
paths lay before her, one to the right and the other to
the left. Here for a moment she hesitated, and then
turned to the left and went on. She had not been
running for five minutes when she felt the touch of a
hand on her shoulder from behind. She screamed, and
redoubled her efforts. Her fright, however, wore off
when she found it was only a woman. The woman
laughed, walked up and spoke to her. Then Svarna
knew her to be Sasanka's maidservant. Thinking she
had been sent to chase and take her, she was again
seized with fright. "Oh, let me go or I will scream,"
cried Svarna, "I will not go back with you."
"Fear nothing," said Sasanka’s maidservant. "I
haven't been sent to take you. I have run away like
you from the wicked Sasanka. Look here," she added,
showing her a cash-box, "I have stolen it from him."
Svarna had now no reason to disbelieve her. "Where
are you going now?" she asked.
"To my aunt’s," said the maidservant.
"Where does your aunt live?"
"On the other side of the river. I mean to stop there
for to-night. To-morrow I will go elsewhere. I wish
you would go with me."
Svarna readily agreed to her proposal. They then
struck into a by-path, and, after threading this and that
narrow way for a time, they at length reached the riverside.
But they had to wait a long time before they could
be carried over.
"I trust I am safe now," said Svarna as, after landing,
they walked on together. "Yes, you are safe," said the maidservant, "but I am not as safe as you are."
"I wish you had not robbed your master."
"Why, I have only served him right. I wish I had cut his throat too. Such a scoundrel he is! Was there ever a greater scoundrel in the world? He is hoarding up money by robbing other people. And where is the sin in robbing a man whose business is to rob other people?"
"Well, but how did you steal the cash-box?"
"I know the chest in which he kept his cash. I often had looked for an opportunity to run away with his cash-box, but in vain. This evening, when he entered your room, I saw him leave the key near the window. I thought I would steal it, for I had often seen him open that chest with it. Well, while he was in, I couldn't find courage enough to take it. But when, on seeing his chandsmandap on fire, he left the room in great haste, I said to myself, 'Now or never.' So I went at once and got the key. Then, opening the chest, and taking out the cash-box, which felt pretty heavy, I quickly made with it toward the back-door. Just then I saw you run to the front. I had the key of the back-door, and so was able to get off in a moment. Immediately after you found the back-door open and got off too. You were soon some way ahead, for more than once I had to skulk to avoid people hurrying in crowds in the direction of the fire. And when at length I came up with you, I thought I would just surprise you; so I crept up and touched you lightly on the shoulder. But you were frightened, for you thought I had been sent on after you." And here the maidservant broke into a loud laugh.
"Indeed I thought you had been sent to pursue me," said Svarna.

They talked as they went on, and at last the maid-servant cried, "Do you see yonder hut? My aunt dwells there."

"How am I to go down to Calcutta? To-morrow I shall have to cross the river again to take train."

"You need have no concern about that. To-morrow morning we shall see what can be done for you."

As we have seen, Sasanka first noticed the fire from the room in which Svarnalata was. In a room adjoining the chandimandap was a wooden seat, in the middle of which was a panel with a keyhole in it. This, when unfastened, could be lifted like the lid of a box. Into this repository, a little while before the fire broke out, Sasanka had put the money which he had received as the result of his bargain with Haridas. At first when he noticed the fire, his confusion was very great, but after a moment he ran towards it. It was the month of February, and everything combustible was as dry as possible. First somehow or other the adjoining room took fire. Then the flames spread fast and set two or three adjacent houses on fire. There was a great rush of men, and loud was the uproar. Yet Haridas did not despair of his son's marriage. He kept holding his son's hand and that of the priest, and, standing at a safe distance, hoped that the marriage might be accomplished when the fire had subsided.

Now, when Sasanka came close to the flames, without a moment's delay he rushed into the room where he had left the money. Some bedding was on the couch, which he flung away with great violence. His money! Oh, his money! But where was the key? He fumbled
about his waist, but in vain. So he ran back into the house. There was everything where he had left it, but there was no key. Oh, how trying it was! In agony he struck his forehead with the palm of his hand and cried, "Oh, I am undone!" He ran frantically about for an axe. At length he found one. In great haste he ran back to the room. He was just about to rush in again for his money when Haridas caught hold of his clothes. "Where is the bride?" he cried. "Why not go to a neighbour's and there have their hands joined?" Sasanka only lifted the axe over his head as he turned fiercely round. Haridas uttered a shriek and started back in horror. Sasanka then sprang upon the couch and struck it with his axe. It did not give way; so he struck blow upon blow, but in vain. The seat was made of sal wool, and did not seem likely to yield easily. Meanwhile the flames roared over his head. The mud walls might give way at any moment. He grew impatient and struck a blow once again with all his force. The shock made the whole chandimandap tremble, when, detached from the roof, down came a blazing beam upon his shoulder. Instantly he fell heavily upon his axe and received a deep cut in the breast. And while the blood gushed from the wound, the flame of the burning beam quickly set his clothes in a blaze. "Help, help," cried Sasanka, in a most piteous tone. "Oh! drag me out, men, and leave me not to perish in the flames." Not one, however, ventured to risk his own life to save him. Sasanka roared in agony. He was in too woeful a plight to help himself, and he repeatedly urged the men outside to save him. The mud walls threatened every moment to sink in, and no one was prepared to throw away his life in the effort to save
his. And suddenly, as the walls gave way, down came the blazing roof with a crash, and Sasanka was burned alive in the flames. Thus ended his life.

Haridas, who never had despaired of his son's marriage, now gave up all hopes of it, and returned home much vexed and greatly disappointed. His son perhaps was not less disappointed, and he too, after lounging about for a time in company with some of his friends, was obliged at last to turn his steps homeward.
CHAPTER XLIII.

TRANSPORTATION OF RAMES

In the morning after the accident which happened to Pramada and her mother, intimation was sent to the police of the escape of two females from Sasibhusan's house, and of the sinking of the boat in which they set off. The head-constable, on receiving this intimation, went at once to Sasibhusan's house to confer with the police on duty. He was greatly surprised when, on arriving, he found his superior officer insensible, and looking, as he lay on the bare ground, like one whose last moments were near. His breathing hard, his limbs stiff, and his eyes closed. What was the matter with him? The constable, Rames, knew nothing of it. He was at his post at the back-door all night, and had found the sub-inspector in this state when he was relieved in the morning. Then, too, he had heard of the escape of two women from the house, and of the going down of their boat. What on earth could be the matter with his superior officer? Could he have been bitten by a snake? The head-constable began to examine his feet very carefully. He, however, could detect nothing like a puncture made by the fangs of a snake. Rames then stepped over to his head. "Why, I think his
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breath has a smell of liquor," cried he, stooping low, so as to be very close to his mouth. The head-constable examined for himself. "Quite so," said he.

"I am a policeman, sir," said Rames.

"You are indeed a very clever fellow. But what's to be done now? Try such means as may bring him back to his senses?"

"No, nothing of the kind, if you will take my advice."

"Why?" asked the head-constable.

"Why? Because you see, should he never return to his senses, we may be hauled to court."

"What's your advice then?"

"I would rather have this matter brought to the notice of the deputy collector."

"That will do him maternal injury. He will be degraded, or may even be dismissed."

"Can't help it," said Rames. "As one sows, so one must reap."

"So one must reap, indeed," said something in Rames's heart. And as he thought of that, he straightway thought of his own transgressions, which filled him with the horror of detection.

"Well, yes, we must take no responsibility on our shoulders," said the head-constable. So without loss of time the matter was brought to the notice of the deputy collector. And while preparations were being made to remove the senseless policeman in order to take him before that officer, a bottle was found near where he was lying. Rames picked it up. "It gives off a smell of liquor," said he, smelling the bottle. "Let me throw it away. What shall we do with it?"

"Do with it! Why, how foolish of you to say that! Let me see if there is any liquor in it."
"There's none," said Rames, turning the bottle upside down. But as he did so, a few blackish drops that were left flowed out and trickled to the ground.

The head-constable was vexed. "What did you do that for?" cried he. "Why did you let those drops fall to the ground? You are a policeman and you could be so foolish as to do that? Give me the bottle, I say."

Rames's hand shook visibly as he handed the bottle. "What makes you so nervous?" said the head-constable, eyeing him from head to foot.

"Oh," said Rames, moistening his lips with his tongue, "I feel shaky from having had to sit up all night." But his voice shook as he spoke, and the head-constable looked so as to let him plainly see that he was not at all satisfied with his explanation.

The sub-inspector being brought in, he was laid down before the deputy collector, and the head-constable put the bottle by. After inspection, this officer sent him in custody, and with him the bottle, to Krishnagar. He next appointed the head-constable to the task of investigating the other matter—the sinking of the boat in which the two women belonging to Sambhusan's house had made an attempt to escape.

Accordingly, the head-constable, accompanied by Rames and two or three others, proceeded to the quarter in which the boatmen lived. Then, with the boatmen whose boat had been hired, the police walked down to the river side. They got all the information they wanted out of them, and then they ordered them to fish up the things which the women had taken with them. The boatmen were able to recover a few clothes, but nothing more. For the cash-box they dived and dived long, but in vain. And when with the assistance of more
men the boat was fished out, there was nothing found in it.

The head-constable next repaired to Saibbushan’s house to inquire as to how Pramada and her mother had succeeded in making their escape. He first inquired of Rames. How was he to know? He was at his post at the back-door, and he assured him that he never had left it for a minute. The head-constable then saw Gadadhar’s mother and said, “Who let you out of the house last night?”

“Why, the man who kept watch over my son-in-law’s house,” said she

“His name?”

“It is a pretty name I am sure. Why, I mean the fellow who always pretended to be a very great friend of my son. The wretch tricked Gadadhar out of his money, and then had him sent off to Pulipolou.”

“Well, if you don’t remember his name, you can point him out?”

“Of course I can.”

“Well, madam, how did this man trick your son out of his money?”

“O, friend policeman, in an evil hour did Gadadhar make friendship with this rogue of a constable! Every one knew how very simple my boy was. Would he ever have thought of intercepting any registered letters if that fellow had not put it into his head? At first the rogue had more than half of the misgotten money. But when after a time the matter came to be inquired into, he demanded of my son a hundred rupees more, and threatened to betray him into the hands of the police if he refused to pay it. I was so afraid for my son, for where was a poor woman like myself to get that sum of
money? I am not, like my daughter, a rich man's wife, you know. However, I had some ornaments and I said to my daughter, 'Here, Pramada, keep those ornaments and let me have a hundred rupees.' Pramada is such a dear, you know. To oblige her mother she kept them. She kept the ornaments and let me have a hundred rupees to go to that fellow. And how did he repay it?' Pramada's mother was about to say how, when, seeing Ramu coming, she exclaimed, 'Now, there comes the fellow. Ramu had been off on some errand, and, as he came, he and stood by the side of the head-constable, she spoke to him, saying, 'Constable, you, what's your name? Indeed it was very bad of you to give up my son after you had had nearly all the money.'

'Who had had nearly all the money?' asked the head-constable.

Pramada's mother pointed to Ramu.

'Who? What?' said Ramu, pretending not to understand her.

'Why, weren't you at the bottom of that dirty affair?' said Pramada's mother.

'What dirty affair? I really don't understand what you mean, madam.'

'Don't you, constable? I mean the intercept of the registered letters in which you were implicated.

'I implicated in that dirty business! You are mistaken, I must say.'

'Impossible,' said Pramada's mother. 'Why, constable, it is not the first time I've seen you. You used to call frequently at our house, and you were very intimate with my son. But such rogues as you were guilty of! Do I not know that you last got a hundred rupees from my son? And only last night you got