

## A sudden decision

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“Kind abjees!”<sup>1</sup> The sound echoed in her ears and settled deeply in her mind. She leant against the seat and complained of “sound pollution”.

The voice grew louder and louder. It passed through her fingers and sank into her ears; “Abjees, kind abjees! Please buy one, for the sake of your dear ones. Dear abjees!”

She removed her hands from her ears. The boy lingered behind the metal barrier. His two hands were raised and his chin was moving. “Abjee, abjees! You should be proud of me. Would you have been satisfied if I had become addicted? Would you? Would have you helped me then? So now...”

The driver announced loudly “Mokhber-o-dolleh”. The brake creaked and the boy’s eyes turned towards the kind abjees getting on the bus and those who were sitting.

Her look remained fixed on the boy’s fresh face and shining hair. The bus speeded up and the boy’s voice rose: “I’m not of noble birth. Am I?” A woman on the next seat grumbled, “What grandiose claims, being a beggar and making such a fuss!” Another woman reached out and gave him a 100-toman bill and bought a scouring pad. The boy smiled and started up again, “Kind abjees, please buy one. I’m not a beggar.”

The hands exchanged the money and the scouring pads. Whenever the driver announced the names of the stations the boy fell silent and stared at the kind Abjees getting on; then his voice was heard again: “Dear abjees, God knows living is too expensive; buy one. These scouring pads are original. They’ve got the best quality. They’ve really been made in a foreign country. Believe me, I’m telling the truth, on my mother’s life.”

She stretched out her hand to the boy and gave him a crumpled 200-toman bill and murmured: “Damned it! Now I have to walk.”

At the Jomhuri and University stops, the hands of kind abjees didn’t reach out for the boy’s. But he still called, “Kind abjees, for the sake of your dear ones, buy some scouring pads. Kind abjees! I have to pay the living expenses of my old mother and four small children.”

No hand reached out to him. The boy’s hands fell, “Will you be satisfied if I beg?”

She gave her seat to the passenger who was standing. She made her way through the women standing in the middle of the bus, and passed under the steel bar separating women and men. On her way she bumped into a man who was standing next to the boy. The man complained, "Hold on there! What are you doing? Don't you understand the permissible and the forbidden?"<sup>2</sup>

She took two scouring pads out of the bag hanging on the boy's shoulder, turned towards the women and shouted, "Superb scouring pads for soft and delicate hands..."

She touched one of the scouring pads and continued, "Dear ladies, he is right! Take his word for it. This scouring pad is excellent. Buy one."

They looked at her. No hands moved. She displaced her little purse on her shoulder and turned towards the men "Gentlemen! This is a mobile supermarket. Buy one."

Some turned their faces towards her, some hid their faces in their hands and their shoulders shook with burst of laughter. She smiled, "There is nothing to be surprised about. This is just a scouring pad, a superb one. Buy one for your wives, your mothers, your sisters, your daughters, or for your offices. Don't laugh, dear son! Buy some of these and give them to your fiancée or girlfriend, in addition to other birthday gifts. There is no argument about this scouring pad! They come in every color."

The woman's voice rose. Raising her hands, she coordinated the movement of her legs with the boy's and her voice mixed with the boy's voice. The driver announced: "Fakhr Razi." He handed the 500-toman bill round till it reached the woman's hand, then he said, "Abjee, give me five of those.", and pulled away again.

The break creaked. The driver said, "Aboureihan," and she brought the last scouring pad out of the bag and held it in front of the man who had complained *you don't understand the permissible and forbidden*, "Haj Aqa! This is your share. Cough up 100-toman."

**1. Abjee: Turkish for "sister".**

**2. In Islam the physical contact of stranger men and women is forbidden**