

The Judge's Will

By Ruth Praver Jhabvala

After his second heart attack, the judge knew that he could no longer put off informing his wife about the contents of his will. He did this for the sake of the woman he had been keeping for twenty-five years, who, ever since his first attack, had been agitating about provisions for her future. These had long been in place in his will, known only to the lawyer who had drawn it up, but it was intolerable to the judge to think that their execution would be in the hands of his family; that is, his wife and son. Not because he expected them to make trouble but because they were both too impractical, too light-minded to carry out his wishes once he was not there to enforce them.

This suspicion was confirmed for him by the way Binny received his secret. Any normal wife, he thought, would have been aghast to learn of her husband's long-standing adultery. But Binny reacted as though she had just heard some spicy piece of gossip. She was pouring his tea and, quivering with excitement, spilled some in the saucer. He turned his face from her. "Go away," he told her, and then became more exasperated by the eagerness with which she hurried off to reveal the secret to their son.

Yasi was the only person in the world with whom she could share it. As a girl growing up in Bombay, Binny had had many friends. But her marriage to the judge had shipwrecked her in Delhi, a stiffly official place that didn't suit her at all. If it hadn't been for Yasi! He was born in Delhi and in this house—a gloomy, inward-looking family property, built in the nineteen-twenties and crowded with heavy Indo-Victorian furniture inherited from earlier generations. Binny's high spirits had managed to survive the sombre atmosphere; and, when Yasi was a child, she had shared the tastes and pleasures of her Bombay days with him, teaching him dance steps and playing him the songs of Hollywood crooners on her gramophone. They lived alone there with the judge. Shortly after Yasi was born, the judge's mother had died of some form of cancer, which had also accounted for several other members of the family. It seemed to Binny that all of the family diseases—both physical and mental—were bred in the very roots of the house, and she feared that they might one day seep into Yasi's bright temperament. The fear was confirmed by the onset of his dark moods. Before his first breakdown, Yasi had been a brilliant student at the university, and although he was over thirty now, he was expected shortly to resume his studies.

More like a brother than like a son, he had always enjoyed teasing her. When she told him the news of his father's secret, he pretended to be in no way affected by it but went on stolidly eating his breakfast.

She said, "Who is she? Where does he keep her? I don't know what's wrong with you, Yasi. Why can't you see how important this is for us? Why are you asking me why? Because of the will. His will." "And if he's left it all to her?" Yasi asked.

"He'd never do that. Oh, no." Better than anyone, she knew the pride the judge took in himself and his ancestral possessions. "I'm sure she's a you-know-what. He must have taken her out of one of those

houses—he owns half of them, anyway,” she said, stifling her usual wry amusement at that sector of her husband’s substantial family properties.

A day or two later, the judge had to be returned to the hospital. He stayed there for a week, and when they sent him home again he began to spend all his time in his bedroom. Apart from a few irritated instructions to Binny, he accepted her ministrations in silence; now and again, he asked for Yasi—reluctantly, as if against his own inclination. It took him some time to overcome his pride and demand a visit from his son.

Binny was so excited. It was probably to do with his will, with the woman. “You have to go! You must!” she urged Yasi. He agreed, on condition that she not listen at the door. “As if I would!” she cried indignantly, though both of them knew that she would be crouching there—and, in fact, when he emerged from his father’s bedroom he found her hastily scrambling up from that position. “What is it? What did he say?”

On the rare occasions when the judge had tried to talk alone with his son in the past, Yasi had recounted the conversations to his mother, with some embellishments: how the judge had had to clear his throat several times and had still been unable to come out with what he wanted to say, and instead had babbled on about his student days in London and the wonderful English breakfasts he had enjoyed, bacon and eggs and some sort of fish—“kippers, I believe they are called,” Yasi had repeated, in the judge’s own accent, to entertain his mother.

But now it was as if he were protecting his father: he wouldn’t tell her anything. It wasn’t until she challenged him, “Whose side are you on?,” that he said, “He wants to see her.” “He wants to bring her here?”

“He’s sending the driver.”

“The fool, the first-class idiot,” Binny said. Her scorn for the judge soon turned to angry defiance: “What do I care? Let him bring her—bring all the women he’s been keeping for twenty-five years.” But, beneath it all, there was a sort of thrill—that at last something dramatic was happening in their lives. There was nothing dramatic about the woman the driver brought the next day. She arrived in a plain white cotton sari and wearing no jewelry—“as if she were already a widow,” Binny commented. Binny herself was a far more appealingly feminine figure: short and plump, in tight-fitting harem pants and very high heels, draped with the costume jewelry she preferred to the family jewels; at the salon they had bobbed and curled her hair and made it gleam with golden streaks. By contrast, Phul—that was her name, Phul, meaning “flower”—was as austere as a woman in constant prayer. Leaving her shoes at the threshold, she glided into the judge’s bedroom; and though Binny lingered outside, no sound reached her to indicate what might be going on.

This performance, as Binny called it, was repeated the next day, and the next. After the fourth visit, she declared to Yasi, “This can’t go on. You have to do something.”

She had always depended on Yasi to get her out of difficult situations. In earlier years, when she still had a few woman friends, Yasi had helped her cover up some secret expenditures—such as losing at cards, which she and her friends had played for money. She appreciated the way Yasi had

circumvented the judge's disapproval. She had always been proud of her son's intelligence, which he had inherited, she had to admit, from his father.

Friends had asked her why she had married the judge, who was in every way so different from her. But that was the answer. Before meeting him, she had lived in an adolescent world of flirtations carried on in the cafés and on the beaches of Bombay. The judge, some twenty years older than she, was already a highly regarded lawyer with a private practice in Delhi when she met him. He was working on a professional assignment in Bombay with Binny's father, an industrialist, who had invited him to the family table—usually the duller place in the world for Binny. But, with the judge there, she had sat through every course, not understanding a word but understanding very well that the guest's attention sometimes strayed in her direction. Afterward, she lingered in the vestibule to give him the opportunity to talk to her, though all he did was ask, in the weighty tones of a prosecutor in court, about her studies. A tall, heavy person, he habitually wore, even in the humid heat of Bombay, a suit, a waistcoat, and a tie, which made him stand out from everyone else, especially from her friends, who floated around in the finest, flimsiest Indian garments. She loved describing him to these friends, who exclaimed, "But he sounds awful!" That made her laugh. "He is awful!" By which she meant that he was serious, sombre, authoritarian—everything that later oppressed her so horribly. One day, after posing his usual question about her studies, he went to her father to ask for her hand—for her hand! How she laughed with her friends. Wasn't it just like an old-fashioned novel—Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet! Or, from another book on their matriculation list, Heathcliff. In fact, she began to refer to him as Heathcliff, and to think of him as the gypsy lover who had come to steal her away.

The driver was sent to Phul every day, and every day she remained with the judge in his bedroom. Although this bedroom had meant nothing to Binny for many years, now her thoughts were concentrated on it, as they had been at the beginning of the marriage. The judge had been an overwhelming lover, and those nights with him had been a flowering and a ripening that she'd thought would go on forever. Instead, after about two years, the judge's presence in their bed was changed into a weight that oppressed her physically and in every other way. It had been a relief to her when Yasi was born and she could move with him into her own bedroom. She never returned to the judge's, and, when he came to hers, she was impatient with his need. Mostly she used Yasi as an excuse—"Sh-h-h! The child is sleeping!"—ignoring her husband's protest that a boy that age shouldn't still be in his mother's bed. The judge's visits became less and less frequent, and finally they ceased altogether.

She hardly noticed, and, until Phul came, thought nothing of it. On his good days, Yasi was always there for her, and she for him. He had a large group of friends and went out most nights. She would wait up for him, and, however late he came home, he would perch on the edge of her bed to tell her about the music festivals he had attended, the poetry recitals, the places where he had dined and danced. He was quite frank with his mother about the girls he slept with—she knew the sort of modern, fashionable girls who formed his social circle, and had even learned to recognize the subtle Parisian perfumes that clung to him.

Then there were his bad days, when he didn't get out of bed, and, when he did, he was silent and sombre—yes, just like his father. But whereas the judge's anger was always contained, controlled, Yasi's was explosive—sometimes he would hurl a glass, a vase, a full cup of coffee, not caring where it landed. A few times he had struck her, suddenly, sharply. Afterward she pretended that it hadn't

happened, and never spoke of it to anyone, and certainly not to him. This silence between them was a mutually protective one. Living so closely together, perpetually intent on each other, each was wary of disturbing the other's balance, so precariously achieved, of anger and resignation, revolt and submission.

Alert to every sound from Yasi's room, one night she heard voices from there that made her tiptoe to his door. She found it open and the judge standing inside, ghostlike in his long white nightshirt. He was talking to Yasi, but as soon as he saw her he shut the door in her face. She had every right to open the door, to know what her husband was saying to their son, but it was not only the judge's prohibition that prevented her, it was Yasi's, too; for there were times when he was as forbidding as his father.

The next day, she impatiently waited to question him. But he had hardly begun to speak when she interrupted him. "Probably he's left her everything. Very good! Let her have everything. Only don't think I won't get the best lawyer in the world to see that she has nothing."

"He knows how difficult it will be for you to accept the will. To accept her. He says she has no family at all."

"She doesn't? Then where did he find her? Wasn't there a whole tribe of them, in one of those rooms where they play music and people throw money?"

"He took her away before she was fifteen, and she's stayed all those years where he put her. So now he thinks she's like some tame thing in a cage—with a wild creature waiting to get her as soon as she's released. He made me promise to protect her."

"Against me?"

She shouted so violently that he shushed her. They were speaking in English but they knew the servants would be listening and, even without understanding the language, would be perfectly aware of the drift of the conversation. Now she spoke more quietly, and more bitterly. "That's what he's wanted from the day you were born. To turn you against me. To have you on his side—and now on hers, too."

Tears, rare for her, streamed from her eyes, streaking her makeup, so that she did at that moment look like a wild creature. At first, Yasi felt like smiling, but then he felt sorry for her, as he had felt sorry for his father, that proud man pleading for a promise.

Binny had never allowed her circumstances to depress her. She had been very impatient with her women friends' constant complaints about unreliable servants, bad marriages, worse divorces. By the time she was in her fifties, she had dropped all of them except one. And, finally, there came the day when this friend, too, had to be abandoned. It happened over cocktails in their favorite hotel lounge. Binny was speaking about her close relationship with her son when the other woman interrupted her: "It's all Freud, of course."

"I see," Binny said, after a long silence. "Freud."

She got up. She took out her purse and deposited her share of the check on the table. She gave a brief, cold laugh. "Freud," she repeated. It was the last word she ever spoke to this friend. So nowadays she comforted herself with her own amusements: shopping for new outfits and jewelry, intense sessions at a salon run by a Swiss lady. Her last stop was always Sugar & Spice, for Yasi's favorite pastries. If the judge warned her that Yasi was getting too fat, she suppressed her own observation that Yasi was getting too fat. She countered that it was the judge himself who should be careful: a man with two heart attacks, she reminded him.

But that morning when she arrived home with the pastries and said to the servant, "Call Yasi Baba," she was told that he had gone out. "In a taxi?" she asked casually, licking cream off her fingers. The servant said no, Judge Sahib had sent Yasi in the car—and by the way he said it, with lowered eyes, she realized that it was something she wasn't supposed to know. She stood fighting down a flush of anger, then suddenly she shouted, "Don't we have any light in this house?" All the shutters and curtains were closed to keep the sun out. The servant turned on the chandelier, but its lustre was absorbed by the Turkish rugs, leaving only a thin shaft of silver light. Binny alone illumined the dark room, with her embroidered silks and the golden glints in her hair.

The judge's longtime driver was always at her disposal, and she had arranged with him that some of her destinations should be kept secret from his employer. She hadn't realized that the judge had made a similar arrangement. It didn't take her long to persuade the driver, to whom she had always been generous, to reveal the address where he had taken Yasi, as well as his instructions to take him there again the following night. She called for a taxi for the same time and went there herself.

It was across the river, in one of the first new colonies to be built in the area some twenty-five years before, far from the judge's prestigious neighborhood of shady old trees and large villas. Binny's taxi took her into a lively bazaar—the open stalls lit up with neon strip-lighting, the barrows of fruit and nuts with Petromax lanterns. Radios played film songs; chickens hung in rows from hooks. Opposite Phul's residence was a clinic, with patients waiting inside, and next to it a shoe shop, where Binny could try on a variety of ladies' footwear. This absorbed her so much that she almost missed Yasi's arrival. She glanced up at the opposite house when she heard the downstairs tenant assuring Yasi that the upstairs tenant was at home. Then she quickly returned her gaze to her feet, which were being fitted into a pair of bright-blue sandals with silver heels, which she liked so much that she bought them there and then.

Yasi returned home very late, and as usual he perched on his mother's bed to tell her where he had been and what he had done. He had attended a music festival, he told her, and he sang her a phrase and swayed to it, his eyes closed. He loved music, which was something he'd got from Binny, though for him it was classical music, whereas she loved swing and jazz.

"So that's where you were all night?"

Alerted by her tone, he opened his eyes.

She said, "That's not what I was told."

Yasi said, "He sent me with the driver. I couldn't say no. She played her harmonium and sang. It was horrible, and I left as soon as I could."

"Then where were you until two in the morning?"

"I told you: I was at the music festival. You always think the worst of me. Oh, I'm sick of it! No, don't talk to me! My head's bursting!" And, indeed, his face had changed in a way she knew and had dreaded since the first breakdown.

The next day, he slept late, and she sat beside him in his bedroom, where he lay with the tousled, tortured look of his sickness. She blamed herself for having been angry at him. She looked at the array of medicine bottles on his bedside table—she didn't know which were his sleeping pills and which were those prescribed for his moods, or how many he had taken. Usually so particular in his personal habits, he hadn't even changed out of the shirt he had been wearing the night before. A faint smell rose from it, not the delicate scent of his girlfriends but the heavy bazaar perfume she smelled whenever Phul entered the house.

Her pity for him turned into rage against his father. In earlier years, whenever she had felt her life to be intolerable, she had packed her suitcase and announced her decision to return to Bombay. At first, the judge had used a defense attorney's arguments to dissuade her; later, he had said nothing but simply waved his hand dismissively over the packed suitcase. And after a while she had unpacked it again. But this time she would not do so, would not retreat from her decision; for now it was not she who had to be considered but her son.

Leaving Yasi asleep, she walked through the house, through the many unused rooms, some shrouded, others shuttered, and, before she had even closed the judge's door behind her, she announced, "I'm taking him to Bombay."

These days, she hardly ever entered the judge's bedroom. Everything was still in its place—his colonial armchair with the extended leg rest, his big bed and bigger chest of drawers, its brass handles too heavy for her to pull, and the mirror too high for her to look into—but there was a subtle change of atmosphere. Well, not so subtle! For there was Phul squatting on the floor by the judge's feet, massaging them as any devoted wife might do. He was gazing down at her with a look that Binny recognized as the expression—of father as much as of lover—that had so thrilled her in her youth. When Binny entered, Phul turned and smiled—partly in apology but also with some pride at fulfilling a duty that she clearly felt was her right. She was a woman in her early forties, but her smile was peculiarly childlike: her teeth were as small as milk teeth and her gums showed up very pink against her complexion, which was much darker than Binny's. When she noticed that her sari had slipped off her shoulders, she tugged it back, though not before Binny had seen that she was very thin and with no breasts worth mentioning.

"Get up, child," the judge told Phul, his voice as tender as his gaze on her.

Child! Binny thought. Never since the day of their marriage had he called her anything except Bina—never Binny or Baby, as everyone had called her at home in Bombay. And now, as he shifted

his eyes from Phul to her, his expression changed completely: for Binny was not at his feet but standing upright and facing him in hostility. She said, "We're taking the evening plane."

"The boy stays here," the judge pronounced.

"Here with you? And with her?"

Since the judge's last return from the hospital, a carved Kashmiri screen had been placed around the washstand installed for his minor ablutions. Although husband and wife were speaking in English, which she couldn't understand, Phul had quietly retreated behind this screen. Her absence made no difference to Binny, who continued, "And now you're sending him to her house at night! Shame on you—your own son! To take her off your hands and do what with her, with a woman old enough to be his mother?"

"You're an educated woman," the judge said. "You can count. You know that she would have had to be a very precocious seven-year-old to become a mother."

"Not a day longer in this house! We're going to Bombay. He has to see a doctor."

"We have very good doctors here."

"And what have they done for him, stuffing him full of drugs meant for psychos. He's nervous, high-strung, like his mother—yes, I know you think I'm strong as a horse and, yes, I've had to be, to bear almost forty years of marriage with you. But now—today, he and I . . ."

The judge was facing the door and he saw Yasi before she did. "Your mother wants to take you to Bombay," he told their son.

Binny spun around. "Tonight. The seven-thirty plane."

"Why do I always have to be caught between the two of you?" Yasi said. "Between a pair of scissor blades." He spoke in Hindi, and his parents looked warningly toward the screen. There was no sound or movement from behind it. Binny said, "Come out," but it was not until the judge repeated the command that Phul emerged.

Yasi made a sound that was not like his usual laugh but was meant to express amusement. "I think we're in the middle of an old-fashioned French farce."

"This is what your father has become, an impotent old man in a farce with his young what's-it, except this one isn't young." She smiled grimly, expecting Yasi to smile with her.

Instead he was looking at Phul, as was the judge. She stood humbly, wrapped from head to foot in her widow-like sari, and she pleaded in a low voice, "Send me home."

"Home?" Binny cried. "You are home. This is your home. You can move in right now with my husband—please, I beg you, the house will be empty. I'm taking my son to Bombay."

Before she had finished speaking, Yasi had sunk to a footstool, embroidered years ago by a great-aunt now deceased. He buried his head in his hands and sobbed.

His parents exchanged helpless looks. Binny said, "He's not well. It's his headaches. He mustn't be upset."

And the judge said, "You're right. We mustn't upset him." United in concern like any two parents, they spoke as though they were alone in the room.

Now Phul came up behind Yasi and laid her hands on his forehead, pressing it as she had done with the judge's feet. He seemed to relax into her touch, and his weeping stopped.

Binny noticed—and hoped the judge did, too—that Phul's fingers were thick and coarse, unlike Binny's own, which were adorned with several precious rings, some of them inherited from the judge's mother.

Yasi resumed his lively social round and soon became so preoccupied with helping one of his girlfriends with a private fashion show that he was often out all night. So he was absent the morning the driver returned alone from his daily mission with the report that Phul was sick. At once, the judge asked for his three-piece suit, but when Binny found him trembling with the effort of getting his thin legs into his trousers—how frail he had become!—she put him back into his nightshirt and forced him into bed again. He pleaded with her to ask Yasi to take a doctor and some medicine to Phul. "She's alone," he told his wife. "She has no one." Binny regarded him with angry concern, then turned away. "Yes, yes, yes," she agreed impatiently to his request.

It was almost night when she called for the car and driver. The bazaar was even more alive than on her previous visit—music and lights and announcements on megaphones, vegetables trodden into the gutters, bits of offal thrown for the overfed bazaar dogs. She took the outside staircase that Yasi had climbed as she watched him from the shoe shop. The room she entered had a very different ambience from the one in which Phul presented herself in the judge's house. Gay and gaudy, with little pictures and little gods, and hangings tinkling with tiny bells, it seemed more innately Phul's, as though arising from memories of the places and the people among whom she had lived before meeting the judge. A garland of marigolds had been hung around an image of a naked saint with fleshy breasts. Amid the few bolsters scattered on the floor, there were only two pieces of furniture, both large: a colonial armchair, the twin of the one in the judge's bedroom, and a bed, on which Phul lay. She wore a sort of house gown, as crumpled as the bed and with curry stains on it. When she saw Binny, she started up, and her hand flew to her heart—yes, Binny thought, she had every reason to fear the judge's wife, after he had kept her holed up in this secret den for twenty-five years. But it turned out that her fear was for the judge—that there was bad news about him that would leave her forever penniless, alone, unprotected. She let out a wail, which ceased the moment she was reassured. Then her first words were of regret for her inability to serve a guest. She blamed her servant boy, who regularly disappeared when needed. She spoke in a rush and in a dialect that Binny found hard to follow.

When the servant boy reappeared, Binny sent him for the doctor from the clinic next to the shoe shop. Phul lay resigned and passive on her bed, though her moaning grew louder at the doctor's arrival. He

was dismissive—some sort of stomach infection, he said. It was going around the city; he saw dozens of cases every day. He scribbled a prescription, ordered a diet of rice and curds. To Binny, it seemed that the room itself was a breeding ground for fevers and infections, with sticks of smoking incense distilling their synthetic essence into the air shimmering with summer heat. There was only one window, which was stuck. Watching her visitor wrestle with it, Phul got up and tried to help her and in her weakness almost fell, before Binny caught her. Struggling then to free herself—“No, no!” she cried—she threw up in a spasm that spattered over Binny’s almost new blue-and-silver shoes. Then she allowed herself to be carried to the bed and lay there with only her lips moving. What she seemed to be saying was the English word “sorry”—Binny thought how typical it was of the judge that among the few English words he had taught her was this abject one of apology.

Binny was wiping the judge’s face after his meal when he asked, quite shyly, “Is she better?”

“For all I know, she may be, but not well enough to come here and infect us all.”

She wrung out the facecloth in the basin behind the screen. When she emerged, she saw that he was deep in thought. He made a gesture as though communicating with himself; his hand was unsteady but his voice was determined.

“Yasi must take care of her. He promised. Send him again; send him every day.”

“If you go on fretting this way, you’ll have another attack and kill the rest of us with having to nurse you.”

But it was she herself who went every day, with specially prepared dishes of healthy food. She ascribed the slowness of Phul’s recovery to the unfresh air in her room. With the one window now propped open, the incense and the bazaar perfume blended with the street smells—wilted produce, motor oil, and a nearby urinal. And what was worse were the unhealthy thoughts in Phul’s mind, the despair that kept her moaning, “What will happen to me?” One day, Binny found her up and dressed and ready to go to the judge; she sank back only when Binny asked her, did she really want to expose that sick old man to her infection? Then, for the first time, Phul spoke of Yasi and begged to see him. It was also the first time that Yasi was told about her sickness. “Oh, the poor thing,” he said. “I’d go to see her, but you know as well as I do that I catch everything.”

“No, no, of course you mustn’t.”

He promised to go once the danger was past. Binny couldn’t help warning, “Only don’t stay with her all night and then tell me lies about music and poetry.”

“If you’d just listen for once in your life!” His exasperation lasted only a moment and he continued patiently, “I never stayed all night. I tried to get away as soon as I could, but she’s very clinging. And she’s also very stupid. And her singing, oh, my God, I wanted to pay her to stop. It’s his fault. It was her profession to entertain but he took her away to keep for himself before she could learn anything. Would you believe it, she can hardly read and write. I’d try to teach her, but it would be hopeless. Poor little Phul, and now’s she’s over forty.” He had accumulated a fund of feeling, first for his mother and then for all women whom he considered to have had a raw deal.

In the early years of their marriage, the judge had taught Binny to play chess. Now, alone with him in his convalescence, she brought out the neglected chess board and set up a table in his bedroom. He was a keen player, but that day his mind was not totally on the game. Instead of deploring her wrong moves, he asked if Yasi was looking after Phul. She said, "He's done enough for you. Send someone else."

"There is no one else. I have no one."

"No one except her? And all she's thinking is: What will happen to me? That's all I ever hear from her—Yasi ever hears," she corrected. "That is what she thinks about. Not about you, about herself." "I've told her about the will and the boy's promise, and still she's afraid."

"Of me? Tell her she can vomit all over me and still there's no need."

The judge clicked his tongue in distaste. He pointed at her castle, which she had just stupidly exposed. He wouldn't allow her to take the move back, but scolded her for not keeping her mind on the game. It was true: she was distracted. If she hadn't been, she wouldn't have made her next move, which put his bishop in jeopardy. She was usually more careful—she knew how much he hated losing. Intensely irritated, he reproached her, "It's as impossible to have a serious game of chess with you as it is to have a serious conversation."

She reared up. "Then let me tell you something serious. Whatever happens, God forbid, she's safe in her cage: there's no wild creature waiting for her outside. She can have everything. Tell her! Yasi and I want nothing." Without a qualm, she took his bishop.

In a voice like thunder, the judge shouted, "Call him! Call your son!" He had leaped up and with one sweep of his hand he scattered the chess pieces, so that some fell in her lap, some on the floor. This sudden strength frightened her. She grasped his shoulders to make him sit in the chair again and, though withered, they still felt like iron under her hands. She had to match her strength against his; it didn't take her long to win, but what she felt was not triumph.

She bent down to pick up the pieces from the floor and tried to replace them on the board. He waved her away, as though waving everything away.

"You can't do this," she said. "In your condition."

"Yes, my condition," he echoed bitterly. "Because of my condition, I lose my bishop to someone with no notion of the game."

He allowed her to lead him from the chair to his bed. She brought him water, and after he had drunk it he gave the glass back to her and said, "I'm sorry."

"Oh, my goodness!" she cried in shock. He had often done this—scattered the pieces when he was losing—but he had never before apologized for it. She understood what this was about and tried again to reassure him. "Everything will happen as you want it, the way you've written it. You have my promise, and Yasi's promise."

“The boy is weak. It’s not his fault—no, not yours, either. You’ve done your best.”

“Who knows what is best and what is not best,” she said. Freud, she thought, bitter in her mind against her friend.

“Fortunately, you’re strong enough for both of you. Sometimes too strong.” He smiled, though not quite in his usual grim way.

He was looking at her, considering her, as she was now, as she had become; and though what she had become was not what she had been in her youth, he showed tolerance, even affection. It made her put her hands to her hair; she could guess what it looked like, what she looked like to him, how wild. She was overdue at the salon. She had been meaning to go for weeks—but what time did she have, between the judge and Yasi and this home and the secret one across the river, day after day, running from here to there? ♦

Published in the print edition of the [March 25, 2013](#), issue.