

said, "The boy is much younger than they told us, and he is sickly."

Baap quieted her. "Don't worry our daughter. There is nothing to be done now. You heard them say he is ill with flu. He will soon be over his sickness. As for his age, there is plenty of time for him to grow into a man."

Before they left, Baap brushed my hand with his and slipped me a coconut cake.

It was night when the last guest left. Mrs. Mehta, who as Hari's mother was now my sass, took my arm, holding it as I have seen women in the marketplace holding a chicken's neck before they killed it.

"You can sleep in Chandra's room," she said. "Hari is sick. He must stay with us so that I can take proper care of him. Take off your silver earrings and give them to me for safekeeping."

From what I had overheard my maa and baap say, I had guessed that the Mehtas had not been honest with us. How could I trust Mrs. Mehta now? Stubbornly I shook my head. I knew if I defied her