

So Ahmed lived with us at home all summer during the university vacation. Radi changed with the arrival of his son. He became calmer and better than before. He no longer hit my mother or abused her. I also noticed a change in my mother when she looked at Ahmed, his son. I noticed my mother changing day by day. I paid attention to the signs of this change from the beginning, a long time before the people started to whisper behind her back. I saw my mother for the first time making herself beautiful when she was at home. She started to change bit by bit. Her dream was to marry a young man like him, not a drunk like his father or an imbecile like my father. My longstanding habit of spying enabled me to discover the hiding place for the bottle of perfume my mother hid inside a plastic bag inside the sack of lentils. In secret he had brought her some makeup. Makeup for the new wife of his father.

I discerned this spontaneous smile on my mother's face when he sat down on the sofa in the room after taking a shower and his hair was wet. Sometimes he sat with my mother in the absence of his father and would tell us about his life at university in the big city, it was full of his adventures with women and the resonant laughter from his heart. To begin with I felt hatred towards my mother, because I felt that this man, who took up all the space in the house and all my mother's attention, was supposed to be for me. My mother had her own man, the drunkard who slept with her at night and who, with his son's arrival, had turned into a timid puppy. I was sickened by my mother's fawning over him and the attention she paid to her hair and to painting her nails, and the cheek of that good-for-nothing who made my mother serve him in that way.

Who was he? A mere student with negligible prospects; the son of that drunken pimp who slept with my mother.

I did not like him to begin with. I found him clichéd. Handsome but effeminate in a way. He would sing songs around the house, and though there was something pleasant in his singing, the songs were full of rude words that made me and my mother blush. How would he turn out? A drunk like his father. Except my mother told me that he would become a big shot in the city where the armed men would not be able to touch him.

But he was the cause for there to be an atmosphere of fun at home for the first time in my life.

When it grew dark, my mother would light the oil lamp and hang