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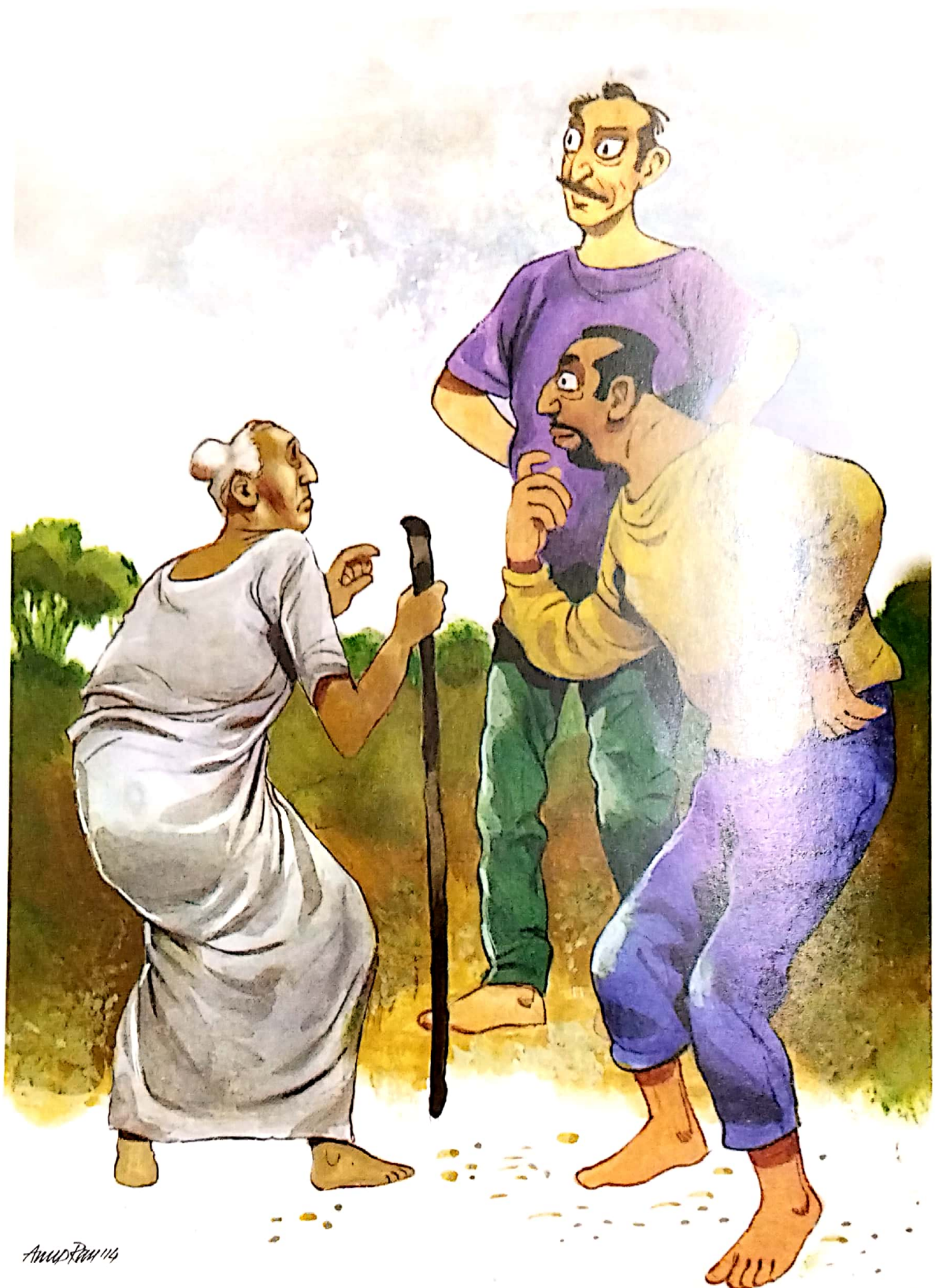
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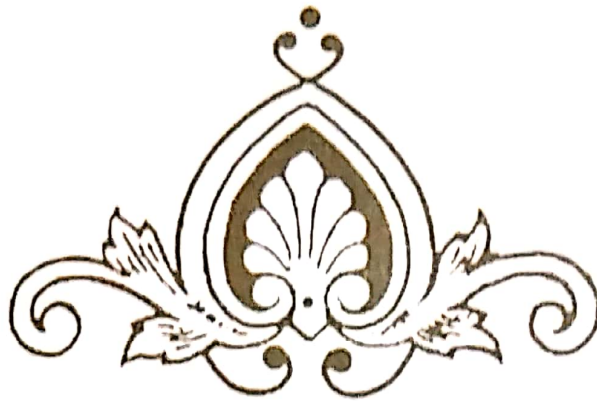
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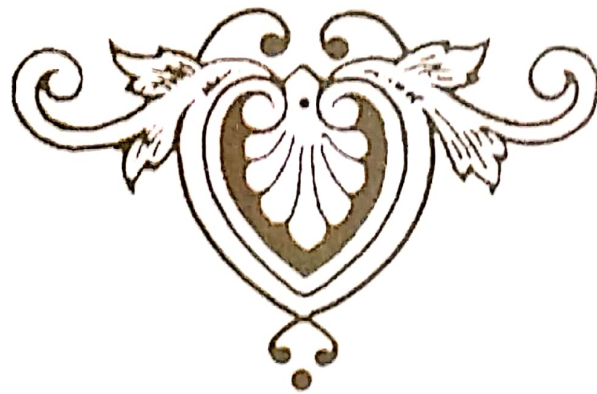
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THE STORY OF THE GREATER FOOL

A decorative flourish on the left margin, featuring a vertical scroll with three stylized flower heads.

Two friends were passing through a street when an old woman saluted them both with a *salaam*. The friends began to quarrel as to whom the woman had *salaam*-ed, and when they could not come to any settlement of the dispute, they resolved to refer the matter to the old woman. So, they ran quickly after her crying— ‘O Mamma, Mamma, wait a moment and resolve our doubt.’ The woman stopped and asked what the matter was. The friends said— ‘Mamma, whom did you salute?’ The old woman

replied— 'I saluted the greater fool of you two.' Then each began to claim superiority over the other in folly and stupidity. The woman said— 'I cannot decide such a delicate question on your mere assertions; let me hear your histories and then I will give my award.'

One of the friends then related his story in the following words—

Once upon a time in a hot summer day I was taking a walk in a garden. When oppressed with heat, I laid myself down to sleep by the brink of a well. I was soon lost in deep sleep and when I awoke I found that my turban had fallen into the well and that my shoes had been taken away by some dog or thief. I was very much troubled what to do and knew not how to return home. However, mustering courage, I ran home bare-footed and bare-headed, but covering the head with my hands. My maid-servant, seeing me running homewards in this condition, ran weeping to her mistress and informed her— 'O Begum, some great misfortune has befallen us, as *Mian* is running here barefooted and striking his bare forehead.' As soon as the news of my coming reached the family, they set up loud wails and lamentation. When I reached home I found all weeping and tearing their hair. I did not know that I was the cause of all this grief. I naturally thought that some great calamity must have befallen our family; so, I also without any enquiry sat down amongst them and wept very bitterly. Our cries brought in the neighbours, who also out of sympathy

joined in the chorus. After an hour or so of weeping the neighbours asked me— 'Friend, who is dead?' I said— 'I do not know, ask my family.' Upon this my servant said— 'Heigh Sir, we wept because we saw you run home in a distracted fashion.' When I told my story, all cried out that I was the greatest fool alive.

The other friend then told his story thus—

I was invited by my father-in-law a few days after my marriage to a feast. My friends advised me, all saying— 'Beware how you behave yourself there. It is not good-breeding for a son-in-law to eat or drink much or to show that he is hungry. So, be circumspect in your diet.' I promised to do as they advised. When I reached the house of my father-in-law, I found great preparations had been made to receive me. Dishes nicely cooked were placed before me, and my mouth watered to taste those delicacies. But true to my promise, I did not eat a single mouthful, and when my mother-in-law pressed me to eat, I excused myself— 'I have got stomach-ache and indigestion; so kindly excuse me.' Thus I fasted all the day, but when it was midnight, my hunger was so great that I would have gnawed my own bones to satisfy it. So, I groped my way to the kitchen, to see whether I could find anything to eat there. I searched here and there but without success, till I found some eggs in a corner. I took as many as my hands could hold and ran towards my sleeping room. But unfortunately in my haste I fell down with a loud noise, just at the door of my bedchamber.