

## KABULIWALA

The story The Kabuliwala is narrated by the father of a five-year-old Mini. The talkative and innocent Mini and Rahamat, a hawker of dry fruits from Kabul, are the central characters of the story.

One morning Mini saw a Kabuliwala through her window and called out to him. He was a tall, untidily dressed man with a turban on his head and a bag slung over his shoulder. As soon as the Kabuliwala drew close the house, Mini ran and vanished inside. Her father bought some dry fruits and chatted with him and came to know of him and his family at Kabul. Then he called Mini and introduced her to Rahamat, the Kabuliwala so that she would shed her fear of the Kabuliwala. Rahamat gave Mini some dry fruits from his bag.

Later Mini's father found that his daughter and Kabuliwala had struck up a happy relationship, and the two of them met practically every day. The Kabuliwala was a patient listener to Mini's tittle-tattle and also gave her loads of nuts and raisins. The Kabuliwala entertained Mini with stories of his motherland.

Mini's mother, Rama, was against the growing companionship between her daughter and the Kabuliwala and feared he would kidnap Mini one day and sell her off as a slave.

All of a sudden disaster struck the Kabuliwala. He was arrested and sentenced to several years of incarceration for stabbing one of his customers who owed him money. After his release from the jail, the Kabuliwala went to Mini's house to meet her. However, He found that Mini had grown up, and it was her wedding day.

Mini's father was not happy to see the Kabuliwala on that day and considered it inauspicious to let him see Mini. He persuaded the Kabuliwala to go away. Before going away, the

Kabuliwala left a few grapes and raisins for Mini. He then showed Mini's father a tatty piece of paper with a charcoal print of a tiny hand. It was his daughter's. Filled with pity for the Kabuliwala, Mini's father called Mini. When the Kabuliwala saw Mini in her bridal dress, he was surprised to find a young woman he could not recognise. Mini was embarrassed when she thought of their long-forgotten companionship and shied away. The Kabuliwala found it extremely difficult to reconcile with the reality. Seeing the predicament of the Kabuliwala, Mini's father offered him enough money to return to Kabul to join up with his daughter. Even though he had to cut down some of the wedding celebrations, he was contented with his humanistic gesture to a distressed father.