

RM

TEARS

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Sabeel-e-Sakina



THE NIGHT OF MARTYRDOM

Black-robed, bare-footed, with dim eyes that rain
Wild tears in memory of thy woe-ful plight.
And hands that in blind, rhythmic anguish smite
Their blood-stained bosoms, to sad refrain
From the old haunting legion of thy pain,
Thy votaries mourn thee through the tragic night
With mystic dirge and melancholy rite
Crying to thee Husain, Ya Husain !
Why do thy myriad lovers so lament ?
Sweet saint is not thy matchless martyrhood
The living banner and brave covenant
Of the high creed thy Prophet did proclaim
Bequeathing for the world's beatitude
Thy enduring loveliness of Allah's Name !

Mrs. Sarojni Naidu



Dedicated to a very dear friend

SHERMOHAMED G. MOHAMED

whose untiring zeal and encouragement will always be remembered.

Born on 18-1-1928

Died on 14-4-1971

May his soul rest in peace.

INTRODUCTION

This narrative is a continuation of the grim tragedy of Karbala, for the "CAPTIVES' CARAVAN", after facing the gruesome massacre of Imam Husain (the Prophet's grandson) and his companions, is now faced with a second tragedy.

The moment Imam Husain's head was severed and mounted on a lance, the devil's forces stopped wielding the sword and got busy in other horrible and shameful deeds. Horses were shod afresh, and the cavalry was ordered to ride over the dead bodies of the martyrs, trampling them under the hooves of their horses.

The next move of the brutes was focussed towards Imam Husain's camp, which now contained only the helpless wailing ladies, the crying children, and Ali-Zain-ul Abedeen the ailing son of Imam Husain, lying practically unconscious with high fever. They plundered the camp and set fire to the tents. The gentle and noble ladies and the innocent children ran hither and thither between the burning tents of the camp, and some of the children are reported to have perished in the fire. The brutes then took the ladies and children as captives, and also the weak and ailing Ali-Zain-ul-Abedeen, now the fourth Holy Imam, bound in heavy chains.

After burning their dead, and leaving the bodies of Imam Husain and his martyred devotees unburied, the devil's forces left the plain of Karbala for Kufa, and thence to Damascus with the "CAPTIVES' CARAVAN".

THE NIGHT OF TRAGEDY

A thick pall of dust was hanging over the battlefield of Karbala as the sun was setting. The events of that day, the carnage and massacre of saintly souls had cast a gloom on that desert tract. An eerie silence was prevailing which was from time to time broken by the sound of drum-beating to celebrate the victory—the hollow victory achieved by a host of well-fed, well-equipped soldiers against a handful of brave warriors

tormented by three days of thirst and hunger, each of whom had fought every inch of his ground and displayed valiance which has remained unparalleled in the annals of mankind.

When the beating of drums had stopped, the desert wind carried the sound of wailing from tents pitched on a hillock, tents which had been plundered and burnt, tents which had been ransacked, looted and pillaged. These ramshackle tents were the remains of Husain's Camp. The moaning sound that was coming from them was of the ladies and children of the Prophet's house who had suffered untold hardships and indignities at the hands of Yazid's mercenary minions. Not long after the ruthless killing of Husain, Yazid's soldiers had marched on to the camp where the defenceless ladies and helpless children of Husain and his devoted followers stayed, and with ruthlessness and savagery which only these barbarians were capable of, had robbed them even of wearing apparel. There was not much that they could lay their hands on. The son of Ali and Fatima was not accustomed to worldly luxuries but what they found in his camp sorely disappointed them. The coarse clothes they could get had only immense sentimental value for the ladies and children who were deprived of them, because many of them had been woven by Fatima with her own hands. The small wooden cradle which they took away had inestimable value for Ali Asghar's mother, because it had associations with that child who had died a little while ago in his father's arm with his throat pierced by the arrow of Hurmola.

The widows and orphans who had, during the short space of a few hours, lost all their dear ones were brutally beaten and lashed by the ruthless marauders. Not satisfied with their heartless brutality, the enemy set fire to the tents. What a holocaust it was! A young child was seen rushing out of one of the burning tents with his clothes aflame. One of the enemy soldiers seeing his pitiable condition came to his help and put out the flames. The child looked at him with surprise because he had not expected to find even a spark of human feeling in the brutes who had come to inflict tortures on them. Seeing that he was somewhat different from the others he sobbed: "O Shaikh, when you have been so kind to me, do me one more favour and show me the way to Najaf." The man was very much surprised at this request. He asked: "Najaf is far away from here; in fact it is several leagues from here. But tell me why do you want to know the way to Najaf."

The child innocently replied - "I want to go to the tomb of my grandfather Ali in Najaf and tell him what your people have done to us—how our men have been butchered : how our ladies have been whipped. I want to tell him how the earrings were snatched away from the ears of Sakina, my cousin, and how she was left bleeding and in pain."

Zainab who was now in charge of the camp, according to the last wishes of her beloved brother, did not know what to do. Should she ask all the ladies and children to perish in the consuming fire rather than suffer the indignities they were subjected to? Whose counsel and advice could she take in this hour of trial, for, Ali, the ailing son of Husain, was lying unconscious on the bare floor of one of the burning tents? Even the mat on which this young Imam was lying had been snatched away. Zainab had no alternative but to turn to Ali Zain-ul-Abideen who, though seriously ill, was the only person whose decision in such a crucial matter had to be followed. She rushed to him and shook him hard saying : "O my brother's son, as our Imam I appeal to you to tell us what we should do in the present trying circumstances. Shall we remain in the tents and allow ourselves to be devoured by the fires that are raging, or go out of the tents into the open?" He opened his eyes burning with fever. With effort he rose and replied to Zainab, "My aunt, it is our religious duty to do all we can to save our lives. We must all leave the tents and go out into the open, however unpleasant it may be to us." On hearing this Zainab and Kulsum led out of the burning tents all the ladies and children. She helped Ali Zain-ul-Abideen out.

Soon the fires raging in the tents subsided. Only one tent remained though partly damaged by the fire. The ladies and children salvaged whatever they could of their meagre belongings and huddled together in the remnants of that one tent which afforded them some shelter.

With the advent of the night the moon appeared on the horizon. It appeared tinted with red. Whether it was due to the effect of the dust that was hanging heavily in the atmosphere or whether the silver orb was red with anger at the atrocities that were perpetrated on the innocent people of the Prophet's house, it is difficult to say. The thirsty children who were still without water, were going out of the tents to open

their mouths in vain attempts to catch the dew that may fall in tiny drops. But such was the heat radiated by the sand that even the dew drops were evaporating in the atmosphere.

The base and despicable instincts of Amr Saad and his subordinate officers were not gratified even with the inhuman tortures they had inflicted on the widows and orphans in Husain's camp. They were assembled to consider how they could further satisfy their thirst for revenge. Someone suggested that the bodies of the martyrs from Husain's camp may be trampled under the hoofs of horses after they had given a burial to their own soldiers. This suggestion led some person from the tribe of Bani Asad to get up and protest that they would not permit the body of any of Husain's followers from their tribe to be defiled in this manner. Others got up and similarly objected to such treatment being meted out to the corpses of Husain's companions belonging to their clan or tribe or in any way related to them. Amr Saad seeing the opposition decided that only the body of Husain may be trampled under the feet of horses. For this purpose horses were shod afresh and the brutes carried out their purpose. There was not a soul amongst them to say that, though Husain was not related to him, he was the Prophet's grandson and his blood relationship with the Prophet deserved better consideration if not in life, at least in death. Not one amongst them had the decency to say that the Prophet of Islam had expressly enjoined on them not to dishonour even the bodies of the fallen foes who had died in battles against the Prophet. When Zainab and Kulsum, the loving sisters of Husain came to know that only Husain's body was singled out for this barbarous defilement, their grief and sorrow knew no bounds. But what could they do in their utterly helpless predicament ?

The night was progressing slowly as if time had come to a standstill. Though tired, exhausted and fagged out Zainab realised that she had to perform the duties which now had devolved on her because the illness of Ali-Zain-ul-Abedeem, the only surviving son of Husain, had become aggravated by what he had endured. She called her sister Umme Kulsum to her and told her that they had now to look after the orphaned children, according to Husain's last wishes, in the best manner they could. They both decided that they should first count all the children to see that none of them were lost in the wilderness during the pandemonium that

had prevailed as a result of arson, and after that they both should by turn keep vigil outside the tent.

Zainab called all the children to her and started counting and identifying each of them. They found that one child was missing. To her horror and dismay Zainab found that Sakina, the beloved daughter of Husain, whom he had particularly requested her to look after before marching out for the last time, was not there. In the dark night, dimly lit by the pale moon, Zainab and Kulsum started the search. In vain they were looking hither and thither but no trace of Sakina was found. With every minute of her vain search for Sakina, Zainab's anxiety was increasing. She knew not where to look for her. She was shouting : "O Sakina, my darling, tell me where you are. Where shall I look for you in this limitless desert." The echo of her voice was the only reply she was getting. In utter frustration she turned to the place where the body of Husain lay. Running towards Husain's body she cried : "Husain, my brother, I cannot find Sakina, your own darling child whom you had left to my care. Tell me brother, where shall I look for her in this wilderness?" As she came near the body, the moon which had been hiding behind dark clouds came out and lit the surrounding area with its pale beams. She saw Sakina clinging to the dead body of her father and sleeping with her head rested on his chest. For a moment Zainab thought that the child had passed away being unable to bear the torments she was subjected to since her father's martyrdom. Slowly she came near the child and gently cried : "Sakina, my child, I have come here after searching for you all over this desert." The child opened her eyes. Even in that dimly lit desert Zainab could see that Sakina's eyes were swollen as if she had cried her heart out embracing the body of her beloved father. She softly picked her up in her arms and said, "Sakina, tell me what made you come here? My child, how could you find you father's beheaded body in this dark night?" Innocently the child replied, "O aunt, I was seized by an irresistible desire to tell my father what these people had done to me. I wanted to tell him that his dear Sakina had been robbed of the earrings which he had so lovingly presented. I wanted to tell him that a man had not even cared to take them out, but snatched them away tearing my ear-lobes. I wanted to tell him that when I had cried with pain, I had been mercilessly slapped by that beast." The child continued sobbing : "When I left the tent I was running aimlessly in the desert shouting Father,

tell me where you are lying. Father, Sakina wants to come to you and tell you about all the sufferings she had endured since you left her! I felt that the wind brought a moaning cry from this direction as if my father was replying to me : 'Sakina, my own Sakina, come here, come here.' I came running in this direction and I found my father lying here. Zainab, my aunt, I narrated to him all that I had endured; all that you and everybody else had suffered since our parting with him. My narrating everything to him lightened my heart and I felt an urge to sleep on his chest, for the last time, as I had been sleeping so often when he was alive. So I kept my head on his chest and slept till you came to awaken me."

With Sakina in her arms, Zainab returned to the camp. Much as she had felt like remaining there near Husain's body and pouring her full heart before him as Sakina had done, she could not do so because she was conscious that her sister Ummu Kulsum and Sakina's mother were waiting for her and Sakina with fear and hope. She hurried back to the camp as fast as her tired legs could carry her. On reaching the tent, she put the exhausted child in the mother's arms with a request to put her to sleep. For Zainab, there were other duties to perform and to keep a vigil outside. It was not so much a thought of protecting any precious belongings, for, of these there were none; it was with the intention of requesting any possible intruder not to disturb the children, the hungry and thirsty children who were one by one falling a sleep out of sheer exhaustion.

She had hardly come out of the tent when she noticed that a group of people were advancing towards the camp. Their figures were silhouetted by the flame-torches they carried. Zainab was beside herself with rage at the callousness of these intruders who, she thought, would not even permit the children the little rest which sleep afforded them. She hurried towards these persons and when she was within hearing distance from them, entreated them to go back. "If you have come with the object of looting us" she said, "I can tell you that your people have not left with us anything of value. Our children have gone to sleep and your vandalism will awaken them. If at all you want anything, come in the morning. We helpless women and children cannot escape from your clutches during the night". She received a reply from a lady who was accompanying the batch. Zainab was

surprised at the respectful tone in which that lady was addressing her :
“My lady, we have not come to take away anything from you, for we know that what you have said is true and there is nothing left with you. We have brought some food and water for your children and the bereaved ladies of your camp.” Nothing could have surprised Zainab more than this reply. The people from Yazid’s army and the lady accompanying them had now reached Zainab’s tent. She could see in the flickering light of the torches they were carrying that what the lady had said was true. Some of the men were carrying on their heads large trays containing bread; others had in their hands pitchers full of water. What emotions this sight of water evoked in Zainab’s wounded heart! For this water each and every one of her kith and kin, her sons, her nephews, her brothers and Husain had craved till death, but not a drop was given to any of them. She controlled herself and took the lady into the tent. Try as she would, she could not recognise this lady who had spoken so kindly and respectfully to her since that evening. So she asked her who she was and what had induced her people to relent by sending food and water. The lady replied : “My lady, I am the widow of Hur, who last night came over to your brother Husain from Yazid’s army and died this morning fighting bravely in defence of your brother. My husband was a general in Yazid’s army commanding a thousand soldiers.” As soon as Zainab heard that her visitor was the widow of that brave warrior who had turned his back on the world with disdain to defend her brother Husain and laid down his life fighting most gallantly, she offered her condolences to the widow. “O sister,” she said, “we are all indebted to your husband for laying down his precious life in defending Husain. He was our guest, but alas, he came to us at a time when we had nothing left to offer him. May God grant you patience to endure your bereavement.” Hearing this, Hur’s widow replied : “My Lady, I know not how I can offer my condolences to you, for you have lost not one but 18 members of your family.” She brought the trays of bread and water-jugs and placed them before Zainab.

Zainab was reminded of the parting wish of her brother. Just before leaving he had told her that if she got water after his death, she should first offer it to Sakina. With a tumblerful of water she went over to where Sakina was sleeping and woke her up saying : “Sakina my child, at last there is water for you. Get up, my child, and wet your parched lips and throat with this refreshing drink.” Sakina got up from

her sleep and looked at her aunt. With childlike innocence she asked : "Dear Aunt, you too have remained thirsty for days. Why did you not drink it first before waking me up." She replied with a lump in her throat : "My child, it is usual to give food and drink to the youngest first. Since you are the youngest here, I have brought it to you." Hearing this Sakina took the mug filled with water from Zainab's hands and ran out of the tent. Zainab rushed out after her shouting : "Sakina, tell me where do you want to go in the dark outside?" The child replied: "I am taking the water to my brother Ali Asghar who is sleeping amongst the dead. Did you not tell me that it is usual to offer such things to the youngest? Ali Asghar is the youngest amongst us. I know he did not get a drop of water, for, when father brought his still body, soaked in blood from the battlefield, my mother had anxiously asked him whether any of the soldiers of the opponents had taken pity on his condition and given him water. Father could not say yes in reply to this question; he could only hang his head down with tears rolling down his cheeks. My mother and I understood that Asghar had died thirsty. I cannot forget how my young brother was turning his dried tongue on his parched lips since the morning. O Aunt Zainab, now that water is available, let me give it to him." This innocent reply of Sakina brought before the eyes of everybody the scene of that morning with the child Asghar's tragic request for water. All of them wept bitterly recalling the memory of that infant who had perished with parched lips. Controlling herself, Zainab caught hold of the child and said : "Sakina, Ali Asghar has been given water in heaven by your Grandfather and he is no longer thirsty. Let him sleep the eternal sleep of death from which nothing can wake him up. See, your father, your uncle Abbas and your brother Ali Akbar have not tasted water from the cool springs of heaven because they would not touch it so long as you, my child, remain thirsty. Drink it, my child drink it so that those who are waiting in Heaven for you to quench your thirst, may also taste the water of Kausar. Sakina silently took the tumbler from Zainab's hands and drank the water with hot tears rolling down her cheeks. Was she recalling how her uncle Abbas had gone out to fetch water for her, this same water that was now available to her to drink as much as she wanted, never to return?

All the children were served food and given water after waking them up from their tired sleep. Can it be imagined how the ladies of the house of the Prophet partook of the food and water with the memory of

their dear ones, dying without any food or water, still lingering in their minds and eating up their hearts like cankers? The children were put to sleep again. Zainab asked all the ladies to sleep and undertook to keep a watch outside so that if any intruder came, she could warn them. In spite of the protestations of the other ladies, Zainab would not agree to sleep and let them keep the watch. "It was my brother's wish that after him I should assume all the responsibilities of this caravan of captives. I must fulfil the responsibilities that have now devolved on me according to his wishes" she said with a tone of finality.

Zainab was now taking rounds of the tent with a half-burnt tent-pole in her hands. She was sometimes looking towards the place where lay the corpses of all her dear ones, Ali Akbar, Qasim, Aun and Muhammad, and others. Sometimes she was looking in the direction of the river where lay the body of her brother Abbas. Often she was looking in the direction where lay the body of her dearest Husain. She was recalling how her brothers, nephews and sons had tenderly looked after her from the day she had started from Madina on the ominous journey and what a helpless and hapless state she was finding herself in, when they were all gone forever. With these thoughts she turned in the direction of Najaf where her father Ali was buried. To her mind came the memories of the days spent by her in Kufa when her father, as the Khalif, was having his seat in that town. With what respect she was treated in those days by these very people who had not in the least hesitated to hurl insults and ignominy at her on this day! How they had vied with each other in attempts to humiliate her? Her head was reeling with these thoughts. She swooned with grief which had become unbearable for her. In her unconscious state she saw one person galloping towards the camp as if he was coming from a long distance and wanted to reach there post-haste. His face was covered by a veil. In her subconscious state she felt that he was coming to torment the widows and children and so she shouted at him to halt. In her feverish delirium she entreated him not to disturb the ladies and children who were sleeping. She felt that her requests were not heeded by the rider. Burning with wrath she rushed towards the rider, caught hold of his reins and shouted at him : "O Shaikh, I am supplicating you to turn back and not to disturb us in our present predicament, but you are not listening to me. I am the grand-daughter of the Prophet of Islam and

daughter of Ali and Fatima. Have you no regard for the Prophet and his family that you are treating my earnest requests with such scant respect?" In her unconscious state she saw the person on horseback lift the veil from his face. She saw the face of her father Ali with deep sorrow depicted on it. She heard him burst into tears and say : "Zainab, I have come to take over from you the duty of guarding the widows and children of my Husain, his kinsmen and companions, O Zainab! what have these forces of evil and oppression done to you all?" Zainab felt as if she must unburden her heart to her father. "O Father, how late you have come! Where were you when my Ali Akbar and Qasim, Abbas and others fell on the battlefield? Where were you when your Husain's head was mercilessly severed from his body without giving him a drop of water? Where were you when Ali Asghar's throat was pierced with an arrow? Where were you when Sakina's earrings were snatched away mercilessly and when she was brutally slapped by Shimr? Where were you when Yazid's soldiers snatched away our veils and set fire to our tents?" These outpourings of her heart were shaking her body in convulsions. She regained consciousness to find that she was there alone lying on the desert sand with her clothes wet with the tears flowing from her eyes. The dawn was breaking at that time. She recalled with pain the events of the previous day—how at this time Ali Akbar had given the call for prayers and how the morning prayers were offered in congregation by Husain and his devoted followers! She shook off her tears, did substituted ablution on the sand and began her morning prayers. Her morning prayers finished, she laid down her head in prostration and prayed : "O Allah, give me strength to bear the woes that I have to face. Give me courage to carry on the mission which I have to fulfil. Give me fortitude and patience to bear the insults, ignominies and indignities which are to be inflicted on me—O Thou Who art the Source of all Power and Strength."

THE CAPTIVES' CARAVAN

When the sun rose on the morning of 11th Moharrum, it was dark red in colour with dust particles heavily laden in the air. This dark colour would appear as if it had become red with shame at the sight it had beheld the previous day and the sight it expected to behold that morning. It was rising slowly as if reluctant to cast its rays on the ghastly scene. It saw a very strange and unusual sight. Women and children were

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huddled together outside the remains of burnt tents. With no shelter over their heads the children were sleeping—or rather lying semi-conscious with exhaustion—and the women surrounding them as if they were expectantly awaiting some untoward event to occur. A look of uncertainty was writ large on their faces.

On the other side of this camp, the army was hurriedly making preparations for its departure. Amr Saad had called his officers for consultation as to what their next step should be. As a result of these consultations it was decided that the family of Imam Husain should be led as captives through Kufa and Damascus to the court of Yazid. Amr Saad in consultation with some of the generals of his army decided to march ahead to convey to Yazid the news of what had transpired at Karbala and obtain the reward which was promised. They decided that Yazid would be very pleased with them if they did their utmost to humiliate and to subject the family of Husain to the worst indignities and insults. They were vying with one another to suggest in what form they could be tortured and tormented. Somebody suggested that it would add to their grief and agony if they were made to march by the bodies of their loved ones. Amr Saad agreed to this suggestion. Shimr and Khooli were asked to accompany the caravan of captives and to ensure that they were conducted to Damascus with the utmost haste.

When the arrangements were complete, the officers who were appointed, went over to bind the women and children hand and foot. They subjected them to the most brutal treatment and tied chains round their necks, hands and feet. The women were put on camel-back without any saddles. The rope and the chains were tied in such a way that they linked the hands of the women with the necks of the young children. The caravan was then taken towards the place, where the dead bodies were lying. Such was the grief of the bereaved women and children that, on beholding the corpses of the martyrs, they could not control themselves. Several of them flung themselves from the camel-back, inspite of the ropes and chains that bound them, and threw themselves onto the dead bodies of their brothers, sons, uncles and other relations. The guards who were deputed to accompany them were ready with the lashes, and they mercilessly used them, not sparing even young children, whose only crime was that they could not bear the sight

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of the dead bodies of their dearest ones strewn all over the place without a sheet, or a shroud.

One by one, the women and children were again put on the camel-backs. They were not permitted to give vent to their grief and sorrow, or to weep over their dear ones. Ali Zain-ul-Abedeem, who was heavily chained and bound, was made to follow the caravan on foot, in spite of his suffering from high fever. The heads of the martyrs were carried on spears at the head of the procession.

According to plan, this caravan marched on rapidly towards Kufa. The plight of the captives was such that, if any child fell from the camel-back, the rope that tied it and the hand of some woman, became taut, resulting in her toppling over from the camel back. The soldiers who were accompanying them would immediately rush towards the child and the woman and use the lash before putting them again on the camel's back.

Within a few hours, with rapid marches, the caravan reached the outskirts of Kufa. Shimr and Khooli, who were the leaders of this caravan, held hurried consultations amongst themselves. They decided that the caravan should be stopped at the gates of the city, and a courier should be sent to the Governor to inform him about their arrival.

When Zainab and Kulsum saw the walls of Kufa, they were reminded of the period when they had stayed in this very city four full years, during the time of their father Hazrat Ali. Their father, at that time, was the ruler of the Islamic countries, the Leader of the Faithful, and recognized as the successor of the Prophet. At that time all the women of Kufa were vying with one another to secure the favour of Zainab and Kulsum, to invite them to their houses, to secure their blessings for their children. On every auspicious occasion, they used to be invited with the utmost respect and reverence. Now Zainab and Kulsum wondered what treatment they would get in this same city, where they had enjoyed the highest respect and honour; whether the women and children of Kufa would remember them; whether they would extend to them any sympathy in their sorrow and bereavement. On second thoughts they realised that this city had betrayed their cousin, Muslim Ibne Aqil, when he had gone there as Imam Husain's representative, and it would be futile for them

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to expect any consideration, any sympathy, any regard or respect from the people of this city, who had acquired a notoriety for the fickleness of their mind, and who had become notorious time servers.

Very soon the courier, who had been sent to the court of Obeidullah Ibne Ziad, returned with the message from the Governor, saying that all the preparations had been made and that the captives should be marched through the main bazars of the city. Receiving this order the caravan marched on. The captives saw throngs of people standing on both sides of the road. Women and children were at balconies and windows, to have a glimpse of the captives. The town-crier was posted with the caravan, to announce : "O people of Kufa, we are bringing to you Zainab and Kulsum, the grand-daughters of the Prophet and the other ladies and children of the family of Husain, son of Ali. To those of you who do not know, we advise that Husain, who had risen against Yazid and refused to recognise his authority as the rightful Khalif of the Muslims, has been defeated and killed with his followers on the battle-field of Karbala. The members of his family are now being taken to the court of Yazid, to face whatever punishment he wants to inflict on them. People of Kufa, this is the fate that awaits all those who question the authority of Yazid, and any person who tries to raise his finger against the Khalif, will not be spared."

Many listeners who had gathered there were thunderstruck by this announcement. There were not a few who recalled all the kindness that they had received from Zainab and Kulsum. They recollected that in times of their trouble and distress they had sought help from them and had willingly received it. They were surprised to see their plight; to see how miserable they were. They could well imagine their sufferings from their gaunt faces which bore marks of privations and afflictions. Many of them were crying, beholding their grief and suffering, but none had the courage to raise his voice against the forces of tyranny for fear that a similar lot may befall them.

When the caravan reached the main bazar, there was such a big crowd that it became difficult to make way through it to the court of Obeidullah Ibne Ziad. The caravan halted for some time. It was almost noon and the sun was blazing with all its fury. The children of

the Prophet's house, who had not had water during their march from Karbala to Kufa, were feeling extremely thirsty, not to speak of the pangs of hunger they were suffering. During this halt, the soldiers of Yazid, who were accompanying them, were partaking of food and water which they were carrying with them, and relaxing in the shade. Sakina was repeatedly asking her aunt Zainab for a little water; but Zainab knew that it was useless to request the guards for any mercy, or even for a drop of water. She had full recollection of the heartlessness of these very soldiers who had, till the end, denied even a drop of water to each member of her family—even to Ali Asghar, till his last breath. She recollected how her brother had been slaughtered thirsty on the sands of Karbala.

Seeing the plight of Sakina, a lady who was standing on her balcony, rushed down from her house with some water. Breaking the cordon which had been formed by the soldiers, she went to Sakina and offered to her a tumbler of cool water she had in her hand. With gratitude, Sakina took it from her and wanted to drink it; but the woman looking up at her said, "I know that you are extremely thirsty and you appear to have suffered terribly. Before you drink this water, I request you to pray to God that He may protect my children from a fate such as has befallen you and the members of your family. Pray to God that my children may not be subjected to such miseries and tortures as you are suffering today".

Sakina complied with the request of the woman and prayed to God. However, the words of the woman recalled to her how true it was that not so long before, her every wish was being complied with, with the utmost promptitude; how her every word was taken as a command. She could not help shedding tears at what she had lost, what she had suffered and what she was still suffering. For some time she held the cup of water without drinking, because she could not control her sobs. Zainab was seeing this and wondering who the woman was, who had so kindly brought water for Sakina. She had heard the woman's request, which had brought back to Sakina memories of her father. She thought that she could recollect the face of this lady, though two decades had elapsed since her leaving Kufa. With a little effort she recalled that this was Umme Ayman, who had been visiting her so often when she was staying in Kufa, who was so devoted to her and had always shown affection for her. She wondered whether Umme Ayman would recognise

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her. She had heard the town-crier announcing to the public their identity. Could it be possible that Umme Ayman had not heard the announcement and was not aware of it? To remove this doubt, Zainab turned to her and said, “Umme Ayman, I am thankful to you for your kind gesture to Sakina. May God bless you for the kindness you have extended to the bereaved family of the Prophet”. Umme Ayman looked at her with bewilderment. Apparently she had not heard the announcement about who the captives were. She looked hard at Zainab’s face, but it seemed that she could not recognise her. Zainab had covered her face with her hair, because her veil had been snatched away. Even if she had not covered her face, such was her suffering that she was looking several years older. The dust of the road had covered her face. Starvation and miseries suffered by her had brought such a change in her that a person seeing her after a few days could hardly have recognised her, much less a person who had seen her after 20 years. Umme Ayman, not recognising her, exclaimed in surprise, “Lady, I do not understand why you are referring to the Prophet’s family. For aught I know the Prophet’s family consists of my Lord Imam Husain and his sisters, Zainab and Umme Kulsum, who, May God bless them, are in Madina. What have you captives got to do with my ladies, whom I had the honour to serve and meet, whom I am always remembering in my prayers, and whom I am longing to meet again?” Zainab could see that Umme Ayman had not been able to recognise her. She brushed aside her hair from her face and looking her full in the face, she said, “Umme Ayman, I am Zainab, to whom you are referring and here is my sister Umme Kulsum. We are the grand-daughters of the Prophet, the same Zainab and Kulsum whom you used to meet. In what condition you are seeing and meeting us, that you cannot even make out who we are! My brother Husain and our other brothers, nephews and sons were killed in Karbala by the soldiers of Yazid. If you will look ahead, you will see the head of your Imam raised on the spear”.

When Umme Ayman heard Zainab say this, she turned in the direction indicated by her and saw on the spears several heads. One of them, she noticed, was turned in their direction. From the nobility depicted on the faces of the martyrs she could understand that they could belong to no other family than the family of the Prophet. She again looked hard at Zainab and her sister and recognition dawned on her. Flinging

herself down at her feet she cried "My Lady accept my sincerest apologies for what I have said. I could not recognise you. My God, what have the people professing the religion of Islam done to you ! I could not in my wildest dreams imagine that they would subject you to such tortures, to reduce you to such a state !" Umme Ayman was crying bitterly. She was holding the feet of Zainab and kissing them out of reverence.

The guards who were accompanying the captives saw this and feared that this display of respect for the Prophet's family might inspire others to come forward and befriend the cause of the captives. They rushed towards Umme Ayman with the whip. She was mercilessly whipped and thrown aside. The caravan was asked to proceed further immediately.

Wending its way through the narrow streets of Kufa, the captives reached the court of Obeidullah. The Governor was seated on a throne and holding his court. The captives were asked to march into the court.

When Zainab and Kulsum were brought before Obeidullah Ibne Ziad, he ordered Husain's head to be placed on a salver and put at his feet. He asked Shimr to identify each member of Husain's family, because he could hardly believe, seeing their faces that they could be the same Zainab and Kulsum, about whose dignity and bearing he had heard so much. He even mockingly remarked that his first impression was that some slave girls had been brought before him instead of the grand-daughters of the Prophet.

Zainab, who was trying to control herself and silently to suffer the insults that were being hurled at her, according to the promise given to her brother at the time of his departure in Karbala, for once lost her temper. Addressing Obeidullah Ibne Ziad, she said : "O son of Ziad we are the sisters of Husain, the grand-daughters of the Prophet whom you acknowledge as your Prophet. You and the other henchmen of Yazid have, for the sake of wordly gains, flouted all the principles of Islam, have desecrated the dead bodies of the martyrs, despite the fact that it is strictly forbidden by religion, and subjected us to the worst kind of ill-treatment, although the Prophet had enjoined on all believers to treat the captives and, particularly the women and children, with sympathy and consideration. Today you are gloating over your success

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and rejoicing; today you are thinking that you can insult and humiliate us to your heart's content because there is nobody to say a word to you on our behalf, because you see us in this helpless condition with none to befriend us, none to protest against the treatment you are meting out to us. But O tyrant, let me warn you that you will find your success ephemeral and very soon the Wrath of God will descend on you and those whose cause you are espousing. Very soon nemesis will overtake you and the others who have ruthlessly killed my brother and all the members of our family without the least justification, without the least compunction simply because they stood steadfast in their belief; because they refused to surrender their principles or compromise their ideals; because they refused to accept Yazid, whose stooge you are, as the spiritual leader of the Muslims on account of his being a known profligate, who had flouted all principles of Islam, trampled under foot all ethical concepts and reduced all human beings to an abject state".

Obeidullah Ibne Ziad was stunned by this bold address of Zainab. He had never thought that she would dare to speak out so boldly in her helpless condition. He had thought that she would be terrorised by the awe-inspiring atmosphere of this court, particularly at a time when she had suffered such calamities and cruel blows and undergone so much hardship. Not only he but the courtiers who were present in his court became speechless and listened with rapt attention to her peroration. After a while, he looked around him to see the effect which her speech had produced on those present in the court. He could see that everyone listening to her was hearing every word she was uttering with rapt attention. From the look on their faces, he could discern that they could not help admiring her wonderful courage in speaking the truth in spite of her helpless position. He thought that many must be comparing her plain and forthright speech with the addresses of her illustrious father Ali, delivered to vast congregations from the pulpit in the mosque of Kufa. For a moment he became scared that, if she continued to speak in this vein, she might be able to sway the masses. He tried to stop her by shouting at the top of his voice and ordering her to hold her tongue and threatened to visit the worst kind of punishment imaginable on her and the other captives, if she failed to hold her silence.

If Obeidullah Ibne Ziad had counted on silencing Zainab by threats, he found himself mistaken. Undaunted by such threats, Zainab con-

tinued to speak with vehemence. She recapitulated how her brother and the other members of her family had disassociated themselves from all power politics and devoted their lives to the service of mankind; to helping the poor and downtrodden; to befriending the widows and orphans. She contrasted their ways of living with the living of Yazid and his henchmen, how the latter had abandoned all sense of decency and indulged in vices which would disgrace even the meanest of mankind: how Yazid had by his utter disregard of all sense of decency, in spite of claiming to be the "leader of the faithful", cast a slur on Islam itself; how his preachings and precepts had demoralised all those who were looking up to him as their kind and spiritual leader. She eloquently narrated the inhuman atrocities perpetrated by Yazid's forces in Karbala and how they had abandoned all humanitarian principles and sense of decency. Her words were sinking into the minds of all who were present there and, though most of them had sold their souls for a mess of pottage, they could not help admitting to themselves that every word of what she had said was fully justified. Several of those present in court were moved to tears. One of the aged companions of the Prophet who was blind, rose to admonish Obeidullah Ibne Ziad for subjecting the Prophet's family to such indignities.

It did not take Obeidullah Ibne Ziad very long to assess the situation. Cunning and crafty as he was, he realised that if he did not get rid of the prisoners from Kufa, there might be an uprising against him. He shouted down the companions of the Prophet and ordered him to be removed from the court. He rose from the throne and hurriedly dismissed the court. He ordered Shimr and Khooli to take the prisoners post-haste to Damascus before they had any opportunity to address the public of Kufa. Both these servile minions were quite relieved to receive these orders, because they too had sensed the danger that lay ahead if Zainab got an opportunity to speak out. After hurried consultations, they decided immediately to take the prisoners out of Kufa by the least frequented roads to Damascus, so that they may not have to face any surprise attack or ambush if sympathisers knowing about the tragedy of Karbala took upon themselves to avenge the martyrs.

The captives' caravan marched on and on through the deserts of Mesopotamia. The guards were instructed to let loose their worst vengeance on the helpless women and children and the ailing Imam Ali

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Zain-ul-Abedeem, who was following the caravan on foot. Due to sheer exhaustion, he used to fall down at every few steps, because a heavy chain was put round his neck and feet, which made marching at a brisk pace most difficult, particularly in the condition he was. Every time he stumbled and fell, some brute would jump down from his horse and mercilessly whip him.

During this march, Sakina fell down from the camel's back. Zainab who was riding on the camel next to her, raised an alarm, but the soldiers did not pay any heed to her. She did not know what to do in her desperate state, for she knew that if Sakina, who had fainted on falling down from the camel was abandoned in the desert, she would perish without any food or water. In her desperation she turned towards the spear in front of the caravan on which her brother's head was elevated, and cried, "Brother Husain, you had asked me to look after your beloved Sakina, but see in what a helpless condition I am. Your Sakina has fallen down from the camel back and there is nothing that I can do to help her". After saying this, she silently offered prayers for the safety of the darling child. Such was her boundless faith in God that she knew that her prayers would not go in vain and something would happen to save Sakina.

The caravan had hardly gone a few steps ahead when the spear on which Khooli was carrying the head of Husain, fell down from his hand and got planted on the ground. Khooli jumped down from his horse to pull out the spear from the ground but, try as he would, he did not succeed in plucking out the spear. It remained stuck in the ground as if it had been firmly cemented there. Khooli was at his wit's end as to what he should do about it. He knew that if the other guards saw this strange phenomenon they might get terrified, and even desert their posts. Quietly he went over to Shimr and whispered into Shimr's ears what had happened. The warped mind of Shimr had a solution for Khooli's problem. He went over to Ali Zain-ul-Abedeem with the lash in his hand, and demanded to know what was responsible for the spear becoming so firmly planted that it could not be moved from its place even by a strong and burly man like Khooli, whose physical strength was the only quality he possessed. Ali Zain-ul-Abedeem looked up at his father's head. He thought he saw some tears trickling down the cheeks on the top of the spear. He looked in the direction of his aunt Zainab. She caught his eye and shouted to him that Sakina had toppled

over from the bare back of the camel and, inspite of her entreaties to the guards to pick her up, they had paid no heed to her. Shimr immediately ran back and picked up the child lying unconscious due to the heavy fall and the injuries she had sustained on account of it. As soon as Sakina was put in the arms of Zainab, Khooli was able to lift the spear from the ground. The caravan resumed the march as if nothing had happened.

The march through the Syrian desert, with the prickly thorns strewn all over was a cruel ordeal for Ali Zain-ul-Abedeem, who was made to run on his bare feet with the camels. At night the caravan used to halt for a few hours when the guards used to indulge in feasting and merrymaking, giving the least possible food and water to the prisoners—barely enough to sustain them.

One night, they rested in the mountain-top hermitage of a recluse, who had devoted his life to prayer and meditation. Shimr gave the heads of the martyrs to him for safe keeping. Just one look at the face of Imam Husain convinced the hermit that it was the head of a saint. He took it with him and keeping it near his bed, retired to sleep. At night he dreamt that all the Prophets and angels had descended from heaven to keep a watch over the head. He woke up from his sleep, startled and baffled as to what he should do. He decided to ask the leader of the guard-force about the identity of the persons whom they had beheaded and whose family they had taken prisoners. Rushing out of the monastery, he woke up Shimr and demanded to know who the martyrs were. When Shimr told him that the grandson of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.) to acknowledge his spiritual suzerainty, had been killed by the army of Yazid and they were carrying the heads of all the persons who had been killed in Karbala, the hermit was shocked beyond words. Recovering himself, he said : “You cursed people, do you realise that you have committed the most heinous crime by beheading your own Prophet’s grandson, who undoubtedly was a great saint. Fie upon you cowards, that, not satisfied with what you have done, you are brutally treating his innocent ladies and children and subjecting them to such atrocities !”

These words of the hermit enraged Shimr, who would even otherwise have lost his temper with him for waking him up from sleep in the dead of night. With one sweep of his sword, he chopped off the hermit’s

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head. This brute had little regard for the Prophet's injunctions and orders, granting fullest protection to those who had retired from the world and dedicated their lives to prayers and penance. When the life of the Prophet's own grandson was not spared by him, what regard could he be expected to have for the commands of the Prophet?

With hurried marches the captives' caravan reached Damascus. On reaching the gates of the fortress surrounding the city, the caravan was halted, and a courier was sent to inform Yazid about their arrival and to seek his permission to lead the captives to the court. For one full hour in the blazing heat of the sun, the women and the children were made to wait near the door of the city with throngs of people coming over to see them at close quarters. Many of them did not know who they were. They had a faint idea that some prince had arisen against the authority of Yazid and had been defeated in a skirmish with the forces of Yazid.

They were told that all the dependants of the prince had been taken prisoners and were being taken before the Khalif to receive whatever chastisement he considered necessary for them, in keeping with the gravity of their leader's crime against the ruler and his undisputed authority. It appeared that Yazid, who had received a discreet hint from Obeidullah Ibne Ziad about the scene in his court at Kufa, was afraid to make known the identity of the prisoners in Damascus, although he and his father had complete sway over the people for at least a quarter of a century. In hurried consultation with his confidants, Yazid had decided that, until the prisoners were brought into his court, their identity should not be disclosed. He ordered that an announcement be made that a rebel against his authority had been defeated by his unconquerable armies and, to set an example to others, he had ordered the heads of the rebels to be brought to his court with their family. He had proclaimed that day to be observed as a day of rejoicing, to celebrate his victory. He had decreed that his court, the bazaars and the streets and every nook and corner of the city should be gaily decorated to celebrate this day with full pomp and regalia befitting the occasion.

Whilst the city was assuming a festive look, and all the lanes and by-lanes were being decorated with festoons and bunting, the poor victims were suffering under the scorching sun, without any food or water. The

children were crying with hunger and thirst. Some of the women from amongst the onlookers were, out of compunction, without knowing to what family these children belonged, threw dry dates towards them as a sacrifice for the well-being of their own young children and to ward off all evil from their own dear ones, according to the custom of those days. The hungry children were catching these dates thrown towards them to satisfy their hunger but Zainab and Umme Kulsum were asking them to throw them away. They were telling the children that the Prophet had forbidden his family to eat any such sacrificial offering and asking them to suffer hunger rather than go against the Prophet's orders. They were requesting the women not to throw such offerings towards the children because they were from the Prophet's family. Many of the bystanders were baffled to hear these words of Zainab and Umme Kulsum, because they had no inkling about the identity of the prisoners. Many of the women were looking on with gaping mouths at Zainab and Umme Kulsum, who had covered their faces with their long tresses in the absence of veils. The ladies of Damascus were whispering to one another whether it could be true that the prisoners were from the Prophet's family. They could not help seeing the remarkable nobility stamped on the faces of the prisoners. Though their faces and bodies were smeared with the dust and desert sand, there could be little doubt that they were from some princely family.

After a wait of one full hour, orders came from the court of Yazid to bring in the prisoners. All preparations were made in the meanwhile to summon the courtiers and ambassadors of foreign countries to the lavishly decorated court. When the prisoners were led into the court, Yazid was seated on an elevated throne, richly decorated with gold, and had seven hundred gilded chairs around him, wherein were seated nobility and foreign emissaries. Yazid ordered the head of Husain to be placed on a gold salver and put at his feet.

When the prisoners were brought before Yazid, he could not for a minute believe that those before him in tattered rags, covered with dust and blood oozing from the lacerated wounds and cuts in the flesh from tightly tied ropes and chains could be the grandchildren of the Prophet. He was quite drunk at that time and without caring to look at their faces, he flew into a rage and bawled out : "Amr Saad, these are not the sisters and daughters of Husain and members of his family. Are you trying to

cheat me by letting them get away and substituting in their place some slaves". He was quivering with rage as he said this and his eyes were blood-shot.

Amr Saad who was present in the court and conjuring up dreams of the rewards his master would bestow on him for accomplishing the task for him, was scared out of his wits. He knew that Yazid had the habit of acting and thinking thereafter. This particular trait in him was accentuated when he was drunk, and he could see that on this occasion Yazid was far from sober. Flinging himself abjectly at Yazid's feet, Amr Saad mumbled : "Mercy, O commander of the Faithful. Your humble slave has done exactly according to your august command and the prisoners you behold are Zainab and Umme Kulsum, grand-daughters of the Prophet of Islam, and the sisters of Husain. The young girls you behold are Sakina and Rokayya, daughters of Husain. The other ladies before you are Umme Laila and Umme Rabab and the widows and orphans of Husain's friends and relations. And here before you is Husain's son, Ali Zain-ul Abedeen.

Saying this, he raised his head a little from the ground to see the reaction on his master's face. Yazid had now focussed his eyes on the women whose names Amr Saad had mentioned. He saw that all of them had completely covered their faces with their tresses. In particular he noticed that one woman was standing behind an aged woman from the prisoners, as if she was being shielded from Yazid's gaze.

"Ah, there," he bawled out, pointing in the direction of the woman who had been screened off by the aged maid, "who is that one who is trying to seek shelter behind the old woman and why?" Amr Saad, rising to his feet, bowed abjectly and said, "Your Majesty, she is Zainab, daughter of Ali and Fatima, and the old woman standing in front of her is Fizza, the Abyssinian princess, who takes pride in calling herself the slave of Fatima and Zainab".

"I shall not let anyone protect my prisoners before me", shouted Yazid in a rage. He asked Shimr, who was standing guard over the prisoners, to throw aside Fizza, so that he could have a full view of Zainab.

Seeing Shimr advance towards her, Fizza turned to the Abyssinian slaves, who were standing behind Yazid's throne with bare swords as his

bodyguards, and said : "O brothers from my native land, what has happened to your fraternal feelings that you silently watch an aged lady from your country being molested in this manner? With your drawn swords, can't you offer protection to your aged princess from the lashes of this tyrant, who has been our tormentor throughout the march from Karbala to Damascus?"

Hearing these words of Fizza, some of the slaves stepped forward and addressing Yazid, one of them said : "Your Majesty, ask Shimr to hold his hands and not to use the lash on our princess Fizza. If he does anything to her, today blood will flow like water in your court".

Yazid was flabbergasted at this affront of his slaves. Drunk though he was, he had sense enough to realise that they were serious and meant what they said. The coward in him panicked at the sight of the bare swords glistening in the light of the chandeliers. He immediately shrieked a command to Shimr : "Stay where you are, Shimr, and do not budge an inch otherwise I shall have your head chopped off." Then turning to the slaves with a dry smile, he said : "My good fellows, I know you are all so devoted and faithful to me and always ready to protect and guard me I shall not allow anything to be done to touch your sense of honour.

Yazid knew that the scene created by the slaves had humiliated him in the eyes of his courtiers and even the foreign emissaries. To show off his triumph and wreak vengeance for his humiliation, he took the cane with a gold knob lying by his side, and started beating Husain's head with it. Using the cane on the lips and teeth of Husain he shouted : "Ah, were not these lips receiving the kisses of Muhammad? How delighted would be my forefathers to see that I have avenged them for the defeats they suffered in the battles of Badar and Hunayn at the hands of Muhammad? How happy their soul must be today to see that I, Yazid have taken revenge for their defeats, from Muhammad's grandson and his family!" He was chuckling with glee and drinking goblet after goblet of wine, which was making him more and more inebriated. All the women of Husain's family and Ali Zain-ul-Abideen were standing there weeping silently. Whilst he was still busy with satisfying his vengeance, the ambassador of one of the foreign countries, who was feeling disgusted at the callousness and brutality of Yazid, could not bear the sight anymore. He rose from his seat and addressing Yazid said : "O King, I would like

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to know who the person was, whose head you are having at the foot of your throne and whose lips you are hitting with your cane. What heinous crimes had he committed that you are treating him like this even after death, and subjecting the ladies of his family to such harsh treatment?"

Wine had by now gone so much to the head of Yazid that he became boastful of his achievements. He told the ambassador of the foreign country that he had put to sword all the members of the family of the Prophet of Islam for not accepting and acknowledging him as the Khalif and spiritual leader of the Muslims. He added that he had all the women of the Prophet's house before him as his captives and he would subject them to such punishment as the world had not witnessed before, so as to serve as an example to all people who might be having even the faintest idea of challenging and questioning his authority, and to deter all such persons from raising their voices against him.

The foreign emissary, who was a man of learning and who had heard a lot about the Prophet and his descendants and the nobility and piety of their lives, was surprised and shocked to hear this from Yazid. He could not help feeling the deepest admiration for Husain, who had defied this tyrant and refused to sell his conscience even though he had to suffer such a cruel fate. For once he forgot all diplomacy and protocol and said to Yazid : "O King, you have committed the greatest crime, not only against your own religion but also against humanity, by brutally killing the godfearing grandson of the Prophet of Islam and the male members of his family, and taking as prisoners the ladies and children of his house".

This bold rebuke took Yazid aback, as he had least expected it. Before he could say anything, the ambassador continued : "My people are giving me the highest respect and honour because I happen to be a descendant of one of their prophets. You lack all sense of decency to have so brutally butchered your own Prophet's grandson who, for aught I know, was so dearly loved by him".

He then turned in the direction of Ali Zain-ul-Abideen and said: "Ali, from what I have seen and heard today, I am convinced that your father was the noblest soul on earth to put up a fight against the forces of tyranny, oppression and injustice, as embodied in this usurper. Here and now I declare my faith in this religion, to defend whose principles

your noble father sacrificed his all, and I want you, as the only true believer in this assembly of men, to bear witness to this fact. I do not care for the consequences of proclaiming my faith and denouncing the errant usurper, who is seated here on the throne and who is the very embodiment and incarnation of the worst qualities in mankind and an epitome of all that is evil”.

Hardly had he finished saying this, when Yazid, now mad with rage and smarting under the insults and exposure, such as he had never expected, shouted a command to his guards to drag away the ambassador and to chop off his head. His orders were carried out by his bodyguards immediately.

A pin-drop silence descended on the court. All the courtiers were stunned by the boldness of the foreigner who had spoken the truth, in spite of knowing the dire consequences that would follow. Many of them admitted in their heart of hearts the truth of all that he had said and contrasted their cowardly approach with his courage.

Yazid continued gulping down cup after cup of wine to soothe his frayed nerves. Everybody was waiting anxiously to see on whom he would wreak his vengeance for the insults he had suffered in open court. They had not long to wait, for the tyrant, turning in the direction of Ali Zain-ul-Abedeem, shouted : “You there ! You were responsible for the insults which that wretch hurled at me and I shall make you pay dearly for aiding and abetting him, for encouraging him to denounce me and praise your father”. He paused for a while as if his intoxicated head was muddled and confused in conjuring up the worst punishment he could inflict on Ali Zain-ul-Abedeem. After a few seconds, he continued : “I shall have your head cut off here and now, in full view of everybody—before your mother, sisters and aunts and before all who are assembled here”. Then, as if on second thought, he added : No, No, killing you will not be enough. I shall torture you to death so that you will die by inches. I shall subject you to such tortures the like of which the world has never seen, so that your life will become a living death, so that every day, every hour, every minute, you will yearn and pine for death to relieve you of all your sufferings.”

As if this diabolical thought of devising cruellest tortures had soothed his sadistic mind, he burst into a loud, coarse laughter. It was the hysteri-

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cal laughter of a drunken demon who had no control over his nervous system.

At this stage, Ali Zain-ul-Abdeeen in a feeble but clear, ringing voice said "Yazid, the tortures and ingnominiacs which you have so far inflicted on me can never be surpassed by anything that your crooked mind can think up. For me the worst possible torture has been standing here with my mother and sisters, with my aunts and cousins, without any veils to cover their heads and faces. Do not for a moment think that I am scared or frightened by your threats. We, descendants of the Holy Prophet of Islam, peace be on him, have been trained from our childhood to face afflictions and suffering. We know that those who are loved by God are tried by Him and if they remain steadfast and true to their faith in Him, then only he bestows His Divine Favours on them in the life hereafter, which is permanent and not transitory like this worldly life."

This retort of Ali Zain-ul-Abdeeen evoked spontaneous murmurs of admiration from the courtiers who, in spite of themselves, could not help admitting to themselves that he was a true scion of the house of Muhammad, whose faith in God, whose belief in the cause of Islam, nothing could shake or diminish.

On hearing the murmurs of admiration, Yazid, despite his drunken state, became scared. His reeling head conjured up possibilities of his courtiers staging an uprising against him in favour of Ali Zain-ul-Abdeeen. The cunning nature which he had inherited from his crafty father came to his rescue. He feigned a loud laughter and said : "Why are you blaming me, Ali, for what has befallen you all ? It was God who inflicted this punishment on you and your family for your father's obduracy and defiance of my lawful authority. You got what you deserved according to the will of God".

"No, Oh tyrant", said Ali Zain-ul-Abdeeen, "do not dare to distort and misinterpret the words of God. He in His infinite Wisdom gives time and opportunities to men to see whether they act with justice, or tyrannically ride roughshod over helpless, defenceless people. His punishment always overtakes the tyrants, sooner or later. Does not the Holy Quran narrate the instances of the prophets of God suffering untold hardship at the hands of the people to whom they had come to preach?"

This forthright reply rendered Yazid speechless. His befuddled mind could not think of anything to reply to Ali's retort. One of his subservient courtiers, who was very anxious to curry favour with him, thought up a plan to relieve the tension that was mounting. Getting up from his seat, he bowed before the throne and said : "Your Majesty, I beg of you to bestow Husain's favourite daughter Sakina on me as a slave in reward for the services I have rendered to you".

Hardly had the wretch concluded these words when Zainab, who was till then standing silently, with her head bowed, with Sakina by her side, became infuriated as she had never been before, and in a loud and ringing voice she said : "You wretched, servile minion of Yazid, have you lost all sense of shame that you want to enslave the Prophet's grandchildren. Is there none amongst you to object to the shameless request of this cur?"

Behind Yazid's throne, a velvet, gold-embroidered curtain had been drawn where the ladies of his harem were seated. As Zainab was protesting against the preposterous request of the courtier for enslaving Sakina, Yazid's favourite wife, Hinda, entered the enclosure reserved for his harem. She was a devout and pious lady who had, before her marriage with Yazid, served as a lady-in-waiting in Zainab's household during the time of Maula Ali's Khilafat. She had even after her marriage retained her love and devotion for Zainab. Yazid, knowing this, had carefully concealed from her his plans for killing Husain and had taken good care to see that she was not informed about the aftermath of Karbala. When she heard from behind the curtain the voice of Zainab and the mention of enslavement of the grandchild of the Prophet, she became extremely perturbed. As if by premonition, she had become restless for several days and was seeing in her dreams Zainab and her sister Umme Kulsum, both weeping bitterly and telling her that they had lost their all in this world. She had, as if by intuition, gathered that her evil-minded husband was bent upon some heinous crime which she could not figure out.

When Hinda heard the words of Zainab, she could not contain herself. In a moment of frenzy she rushed out of the enclosure without a veil, demanding to know who had dared to talk about enslaving the children of the Prophet's house. Yazid was so perturbed by his wife, known for her matchless beauty throughout his kingdom, coming into

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the open court without her veil, contrary to the custom of those days, that he hurriedly shouted orders dismissing the court, gave instructions to Amr Saad to lead the captives to the darkest dungeons in the fort and to await his further orders. He then rushed from his throne and, throwing his robe on Hinda's head, he led her away into his palace. The good lady kept on requesting him to tell her what had transpired that day, who the prisoners were and why somebody had mentioned about the enslavement of the grandchildren of the Prophet. He gave her evasive replies and tried to allay her fears by saying that the prisoners had nothing to do with the Prophet.

The captives' caravan concluded its journey in the dark, desolate dungeon of the fort of Damascus, which was infested with snakes and scorpions. As soon as the doors of the dungeons were locked, both Zainab and Ali Zain-ul-Abideen engaged themselves in prayer. They both prostrated their heads and prayed to Almighty God to grant them strength and courage to bear what was in store for them. They both thanked Him for sustaining them through their greatest hour of trial, for enabling them to put up with unparalleled humiliations without a word of complaint against His Dispensation.

DEATH IN PRISON

It was dark inside the room of that house though the sun was blazing in all its glory outside. It would not be correct to call that place a house, because it was in fact a prison, a prison that had been used for years for the confinement of the worst type of criminals. For years it had remained out of use, and its stone walls were damp and crumbling. It was difficult for any person entering the room to see the persons who were kept inside, for there was no light visible. Only when the eyes got accustomed to the darkness, were some figures discernible in that dreary cell. There were some women and children huddled together, and there was one man with them, lying on a piece of cloth spread on the damp floor. If one were to look closely at the inmates of the cell, one would find that the prisoners looked haggard. Those careworn faces depicted indescribable suffering. Those emaciated faces reflected the calamities suffered which seemed beyond human endurance.

Who were the occupants of the cell, and what was the crime they had committed which had brought them to such a stage of suffering? If

faces could be the index of their character, even a cursory look at them was enough to convince anybody that they were not capable of any offence, much less a heinous crime which alone could merit the treatment meted out to them. And what possible crime could the women and children have committed? Was it the man, young in years but ill and emaciated with privations and suffering, whose actions had brought so much despair to his near and dear ones? Even that does not seem possible, because even in the dark corner of the cell his head is prostrated in prayer. Can a man who in the face of such trials and tribulations does not forget his Maker, who in spite of his illness and suffering sings the hymns in praise of his Lord, be capable of any atrocious crime.

Suddenly the door of the cell opens and admits some light into the cell. In that light it is possible to see that not only the man but even the women are engaged in prayer. With the small amount of light coming in through that door it is possible to make out that all the women have grey or white hair. It is obvious that it is not age that has turned their hair grey, but their untold and excruciating pain and pangs of sufferings. Amongst the women there is one who is offering her prayer seated. Even a glance at her face is sufficient to reveal the reason why she does so. She looks so emaciated and starved that she does not have the strength to stand.

The person who has opened the door brings in a tray on which are placed a few stale morsels of bread. There are a couple of pitchers of water with him. If you count the inmates of the cell, and the bread that he has brought as their food, it is obvious that the food cannot suffice for all. Can that be the reason for the look of starvation of the woman sitting? Could it be possible that she gives her own ration to the children and starves herself? Yes, surely that must be the reason, for how could Zainab, sister of Husain, eat her fill when her beloved brother's children, and the children of those who laid down their lives for him, have not enough to eat? Had not Husain at the time of his last parting commended the children to her care? Even if he had not done so, Zainab was the daughter of Ali and Fatima who used to go without food for days but could not bear to see a prisoner, a wayfarer, or an orphan remain hungry.

Somebody had said: "Stone walls do not a prison make: nor iron bars a cage." Perhaps he meant that a prison could confine the bodies of the captives but not their thoughts which soar beyond, breaking all

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shackles, all barriers. If so, can you imagine where the thoughts of these prisoners must be? No, it is not difficult to imagine. The thoughts of each one of them must be going back to that plain of Karbala, to the morning when they had with them all those who loved them and whom they loved, to that afternoon when there was an incessant procession of dead bodies being brought in by the aged Imam; to that evening when there was a hush on the battlefield, when there was nothing to be seen near the tents except the dead bodies of those whose strength and valour had only a few hours before struck terror in the hearts of the enemy. And undoubtedly their thoughts must be going back to that night when the tents were ablaze, when the thirsty children were running helter-skelter from one burning tent to another, when their belongings were being plundered and looted.

The prisoners have partaken of their repast and are engaged in prayer again. This is their routine. In some corner a woman who has finished her prayers is trying to suppress the tears that continue to swell up in her eyes due to the constant memory of the loved ones she lost on that fateful day. In spite of her best efforts she cannot any longer suppress her sobs and weeping. She weeps to give vent to her pent-up emotions which would otherwise choke her.

Now the night has descended. There is no more food for the prisoners. The young children drink a little water and go to sleep. As each child drinks water, a sob is heard. Is it the remembrance of the brothers, the uncles and the father who died seeking water till the end?

In the dead of night Sakina gets up with a shriek. She bursts into torrents of tears. Her weeping and wailing arouses everybody. Zainab goes quickly to her side and tries to console her. "My beloved child, how often have I told you that the last wish of your father was that you should endure all the sufferings that are inflicted upon you with complete resignation to the Will of God?" The child tries to control herself and replies: "Dear Aunt, I know that, but in my dream I saw my father. He came to me and said": "O Sakina you have suffered enough. My darling, the days of your suffering are over. Now I have come to fetch you. Come with me!" O sister of my beloved father, I narrated to him in my dream all the suffering I had endured since he did not come back from the battlefield. I told him how I had gone in the dark night in

search of him. What a dream it was and what a disappointment it is for me to know that in reality I shall be away from my beloved father!" Such was the grief of the child that all the women lost control over their emotions and the wails echoed through the prison walls.

Yazid in his palace adjoining the prison was pacing the floor. He heard the bemoaning and lamentations and sent for his slaves to enquire about the cause. Soon they hurried back to report what had happened. When Yazid was told that Sakina had seen her father in her dream and was disconsolate he asked his men to put the head of Husain on a silver salver, cover it with a silken cloth and take it to the prison.

In the dead of night the prison door was opened and Yazid's men entered with a covered tray. They placed it before Sakina. The child cried out : "I am not hungry and I do not want food. I only long to see my father. Why has he left me after promising me that he would not leave me alone?" One of Yazid's attendants removed the cloth from the tray. Sakina beheld the face of her father, the face that she had kissed a million times. It was the same dear dear face, though the beard was smeared with blood. With a cry she flung herself on the tray and snatched the head from it, hugging it to her heart. In indescribable grief she bent down over the head putting her small cheeks against the cheeks of her father as she used to do when he was alive. Within a few moments her sobs stopped and with it stopped her heart beat also.

When Zainab saw the child lying motionless on the head of her father, she went over to her and whispered with tears in her eyes : "O Sakina how long will you lie on your father's head?" She touched Sakina's hand, only to find that life was extinct. Sakina had gone to her father never to return to this world where she had known nothing but torture and torment since becoming an orphan. Zainab realised that Sakina's beloved father Husain had kept his promise given to the child in her dream.

HOMeward - BOUND

The captives were at last allowed by Yazid to leave for Madina, as he knew that by now the people were convinced that he (Yazid) was solely responsible for the tragedy of Karbala.

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Accordingly, Yazid sent for one of his Lieutenants, Noman bin-Bashir, and ordered him to make the necessary preparations for their departure.

They first came to Karbala and halted there for a few days. The sight of Karbala reminded the ruined family of Husain, of their past misfortunes, and of their irreparable loss unparalleled in the history of the world. They spent a few days in mourning, and then started for Madina. Zainab refused to accompany the party, saying, that she could not show her face to the young afflicted daughter of Husain, who was left behind at Madina due to her illness, and she preferred to spend the rest of her life at the grave of her brother Husain. After great persuasion by Imam Zain-ul- Abedeen, she agreed to leave with them for Madina.

When the turrets of the city of Madina were sighted, the Imam asked the escort to stop. Tents were pitched here and Noman bin Bashir was asked to enter the city and announce in the Mosque of the Prophet the martyrdom of Husain and the destruction of the holy Family. The Imam sat down with a black garment on. Noman proceeded, and in a pathetic tone, went on reciting in the streets the woeful story of Husain's slaughter. Crowd after crowd followed him with loud cries of mourning, until they all reached the Prophet's Mosque. Here Noman put on a torn piece of black cloth round his neck and began announcing the arrival of Imam Zain-ul-Abedeen within a short distance from the gates of the city. The whole of Madina ran frantically out of the city to meet the shattered and ruined family of the Prophet and to condole with the Imam on his sad bereavement. After violent mourning, the residents of Madina, accompanied by the Imam, entered the city. But Zainab went straight to the Prophet's sepulchre and spread the blood-stained garment of Husain and his turban torn in many places by the blows of swords, lances and arrows, on the grave, and began crying, "O Grandfather ! this is the present we have had from your disciples. Your beloved Husain who played on your chest and rode on your shoulders, was mercilessly killed, his head was severed from his body and raised on a lance, and then horses were made to trample over him."

In the meanwhile, Fatima, the ailing daughter of Husain, reached the Prophet's grave and asked her aunt what had become of her father.

Again the family of Husain and other Madinites raised a chorus of sad cries. For many days, the whole of Madina was in mourning and all those who passed through its street found the inhabitants in black dress and shedding tears, bearing often the name of Husain on their lips.

Browne In his 'Literary History of Persia' writes :

As a reminder, the blood stained field of Karbala where the grandson of the Apostle of Allah fell at length, tortured by thirst and surrounded by the bodies of his murdered kinsmen, has been at any time since then sufficient to evoke, even in the most lukewarm and heedless, the deepest emotion, the most frantic grief and the exaltation of spirit before which pain, danger, and death shrink to unconsidered trifles. Verily on the tenth of Moharrum, the tragedy is rehearsed in Persia, in Turkey, in Egypt, wherever a Shia community or colony exists. As I write, it all comes back; the wailing chant, the sobbing multitudes, the white raiment red with blood from self-inflicted wounds, the intoxication of grief and sympathy.

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