

Lilies

BLOOM ON SWAMPS

FARIS AL-TIMIMI

Edited by Jennifer Al-Timimi

Lilies Bloom on Swamps
Copyright © 2018 Faris Al-timimi

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced by any means, graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping or by any information storage retrieval system without the written permission of the author except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

Because of the dynamic nature of the Internet, any web addresses or links contained in this book may have changed since publication and may no longer be valid. The views expressed in this work are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the publisher, and the publisher hereby disclaims any responsibility for them.

Library of Congress Control Number: xxxxxxxxxx
Paperback: xxxxxxxxxx
eBook: xxxxxxxxxx
Hardcover: xxxxxxxxxx



30 Wall Street, 8th Floor
New York City, NY 10005
www.bookartpress.us
+1-800-351-3529

Contents

The New Morning	1
Glimpse From The First Country.....	8
On The Way To School.....	14
Visiting A Friend.....	19
The Marriage Of Ali - Husain's Son.....	38
Husain, Talking To Himself.....	46
The Airport Taxi.....	60
Frank And Brigitte: A Casual Chat.....	71
The Big City	82
Husain In His I'tikaf.....	88
Frank At Home.....	95
The Tea Session.....	102
Frank, A New Morning	116
Frank In Husain's House	124
New Immigrants And Politics	129
Brigitte And Carol.....	134
Frank And Husain Having Tea	139
Frank On His Way To School	166
Talk At The Dining Table.....	172
Ali.....	182
Husain And Glimpses Of The Past.....	192
Frank And The Decisive Position.....	200
Husain And Zainab, The Sudden Question.....	219
Frank Waiting.....	223
Husain Prepares For Travel.....	238
Frank And Sunday.....	245
Index:	255

Dedication

To all who have suffered from tyrannical rulers of
their countries,

To all those who were forced by tyrants to abandon
their homelands,

To all who have suffered unexpected consequences
from their emigration and blamed no one but
themselves.

THE NEW MORNING

Frank wakes up as usual in the morning, comes down to the ground floor of his home, and sits at the small kitchen table, waiting for his daughter to get ready so that he can take her to school.

His daughter, Carol, is nine years old, and because their home is not located in her school's catchment area, she is not entitled to the transport the other students get, which picks them from their homes in the morning and then brings them back at the end of the school day. So Frank has to take her to the school in the morning and bring her back home in the afternoon when school ends.

Brigitte, Frank's wife, insisted on registering Carol at this school because it is said to be one of the best public schools in the city. In order to do that, when

Carol was old enough to start school, Brigitte rented a house for more than a year that was situated in the school district in order to make sure that Carol would be accepted by the school.

This is what they had planned, or in fact what Brigitte herself alone had planned, and after about two years, they decided to buy a house in another area and move there to live. Of course, this was after their financial situation had improved, and they started to have a kind of guaranteed income that allowed them to repay the mortgage that they needed to buy the house. It was a difficult period when they had to persuade the school administration to let their daughter stay at the same school, even though her address was now outside the school district. It was Carol's intelligence and contribution to school activities, which were the main reasons that her teachers supported her and asked the school administration to permit her to stay with them. Indeed, some of Carol's teachers were sympathetic and looked at the situation as if it was happening to their child. Frank and Brigitte couldn't believe how supportive the teachers were being because they did not count on anybody to help them, and were not used to seeing people helping each other in such an altruistic way. In the end, as a result, they had to promise in writing that they would be responsible of Carol's day- to-day transportation.

At the kitchen table, Frank sat down but didn't know what to do while waiting. He had woken up early today earlier than usual, not knowing when Carol would be ready to be taken to school, because her mother, who is usually half-awake in the early morning, would be getting Carol ready and sorting out the things she needed to take to school with her. He wasn't sure if he had enough time to make

himself a cup of tea or coffee or if he could smoke a cigarette because he had to go outside before it was acceptable to light a cigarette.

He started thinking about this whole change in smoking behavior and could not remember when the law, or even how most people have made it seem like a law, has been passed, and everybody seems to be committed to it and wants to implement it without there being any policing or anyone being held accountable when they violate it. It has just become a common practice, like when everyone agreed that theft and killing of innocents should not be done by those who consider themselves to be human beings!

One might wonder what made people at this particular time respond so positively to this change without objecting. Everyone suddenly became increasingly keen to follow health guidelines. Or maybe, there was another reason that helped bring people together in agreement, when they might normally disagree on almost everything.

Is it possible that in the future, other positive behavior that is for the common good could become mere common sense and people would commit to it without needing to be supervised or watched by some others, who might hold them accountable?

Then Frank remembered at that moment that they had subscribed to an important newspaper delivered to their home, after they had been offered a tempting offer from the newspaper. Brigitte was willing to

subscribe to the newspaper, because she believed she should read the news, to strengthen her English language. She needed a good command of English for her job, and her daily life. She also needed it so she could follow the news because her shift work meant that she often missed TV or radio programs. She works as an assistant nurse in the big hospital in the city, and her working hours can vary. When she has night shifts, she misses most of the important programs on TV. She also still has difficulty in following the spoken word, so if she can read it in her own time, she can use a dictionary to help her understand the meanings of the words.

Frank got up and walked to the door to pick up the newspaper that the distributor had dropped at his front door. He took it and returned inside, to go back to his chair at the kitchen table. He looked at the headlines on the front page. There was nothing that had much to do with him and his family.

Some of the titles he read said:

The ruling party had decided to reconsider the preparation of a draft law on social welfare, which was expected to be put to parliament for a vote, in the next few weeks.

Another title said:

A real estate expert is expecting, a relative decline in the prices of residential properties because banks might raise mortgage interest rates. This often forces a percentage of people who can't pay the increased

bank interest to put up their homes for sale. This often happens every few years!

Most people own their homes on what could be called, an “ownership until further notice” basis! Many of them may have to resell their homes as a result of separation and divorce, when they are transferred to distant regions or provinces because of their jobs, or when it just becomes too difficult or completely impossible to keep their house, work or marriage life together.

How difficult is this life?

Is there any way to avoid some of its difficulties? Maybe, but the price to achieve that could be so great.

But is it really possible?

Despite Frank’s lack of interest in the news headlines, which didn’t seem important to him, he knows that they are really significant and could affect him, as well as any other person in society. However he couldn’t follow the headlines, because he was unable to understand most of their content, due to the language barrier, which prevents him from correctly understanding the news, particularly when colloquialisms are used. Frank still can’t understand much English, and he doesn’t bother to use a dictionary to improve his language, so he just settles for the titles to get a gist of what is going on in the news. Perhaps he will hear, here or there more than what he has read in the headlines of what is going on, and what is going to happen. Even

though he is actually not far from worrying about these problems, at least, for now, he has a suitable, rewarding and reasonable job which contributes in a large degree to providing a reasonable living for himself and his family. In addition, Brigitte also earns a good salary from her job at the government hospital.

The nature of his work as a full-time freelance taxi driver, gave him the freedom to help out with Carol's care, while Brigitte is working shifts in the evening. Brigitte is well aware that if he didn't have such a flexible job, they would have needed the services of a baby sitter, to look after Carol while they are both at work. This would have meant that, they would have had to sacrifice a large part of their monthly income, just to take care of their daughter.

Frank heard Carol coming down the stairs. She went to the kitchen to tell her father that she was ready. She is nine years old, full of life and activity. She seemed eager to go to school, and, after telling him she was ready, she went to the living room next to the kitchen, to get her school bag. Then, her mother Brigitte came down from upstairs, to check on Carol before she left with her father, and started to prepare her a small sandwich of toast and cheese and a glass of milk. She also started to make another sandwich of toast and a cold cut of meat, which she took from the fridge, adding some soft cheese, which she then placed in a ziplock plastic bag. She put it in Carol's school bag for her, and then reminded her to wash her hands before eating the sandwich at lunchtime.

Frank was watching what was going on between Carol and her mother, with a smile on his face from time to time. He was delighted to see his daughter, who seemed to be active and loved going to school. He also loved to see his wife's joy. She was so keen to care for her daughter, and devote herself to her in every way.

GLIMPSE FROM THE FIRST COUNTRY

Franks reflected back years in his thoughts, remembering how he used to go to school in his village school. It was so dilapidated and close to collapse. He remembered how the teachers treated the children, and how much he hated the school, for the beatings he and the other kids got from the teachers. It was not only when he was a young child, when the beating just hurt him physically, which he could usually forget soon afterwards; but when he went to high school, the beating was more humiliating as teenagers, violating their dignity and crushing their self-esteem.

Many teachers tended to carry sticks in their hands, strutting around in the school yard. They did not hesitate to strike any of the students, just to break their pride and dignity without any obvious reason! Most of the teachers adopted this method in those schools, in villages and rural areas, and it probably went on more in the larger cities. Many teachers were

sent to work in village schools, at the beginning of their careers in the country he came from. However, he still sometimes yearns for his home, even though he cannot forget these dark memories.

Families in his native land mostly, naïvely, thought positively about school. They considered them to be essential centers to educate their children, and believed that everything happened at school is good and helpful for the future of their children. However, they were not expecting miracles accomplished by their children. The problem seems to be whether the person (teacher), can distinguish objectively between his duty to teach the students, and his own personal problems either at work or personal. So they never thought about complaining about the cruel treatment of their children. Indeed they often considered their behavior to be positive, as it was in the best interest of their children, as they needed to be disciplined, to be successful in their lives in the long run.

Many schools in rural areas and more in crowded cities were based on two shifts of students attending, because there weren't enough school buildings to accommodate everyone at the same time. So one group would attend the morning session until the midday, and then, straight after, another group would attend the afternoon session. Furthermore, some schools even accepted three shifts, where the third one was for adults who were too old to attend regular school. They are those who had not

completed their education, when they were younger, and worked during the mornings and afternoons.

When it is raining in autumn and winter, a period of extreme suffering starts when the children have to walk to school along unpaved, muddy, slippery roads. They didn't know how to cross without their feet sinking in the mud. The mud would begin to crawl up their legs, until it reached their knees and sometimes beyond. The boys rarely reached school, without the lower half of their bodies being covered with mud. As soon as they arrived at school, they started trying to clean themselves and their clothes as best they could, with whatever they find around them. The rain also soaked their clothes, so they would start suffering from the cold, as they sat on the rickety benches in those cold, wet classrooms. Their broken glass windows failed to stop the rain water from coming inside, or the cold air currents from blowing around.

*Oh my God how hard life was there!
The suffering was futile and had no meaning.*

Frank couldn't yet understand why, people carried on living such a life of perpetual suffering, where they had no hope of experiencing even one good day. It felt like they suffered more than farm animals, which are bred and kept waiting to be slaughtered, when they reach their peak of usefulness, in terms of meat and their coats. These animals do not know what their owners are hiding from them. They trusted their owners from the start because,

they think that their owners are keen to feed and take care of them, and meet their every need. Then one day, when the end comes, the true face of the owner will be revealed. But it will only be for a few minutes after the animal realizes this... before it is dead, and before it can pass this discovery of truth, of the owner's intentions to warn its fellows!

It is like scenes from a horror film, where the killers kill because they are psychopaths!

It is like when the killer does not know why he is killing, and the victim will never know why was killed!

Here in particular Frank remembered how his aunt used to tell him, whenever she asked him to slaughter a rooster or a chicken of the flock she owned to take it away from the rest of the flock, so that the others did not see the killing!

Frank didn't understand why she used to tell him this. He asked her why every time.

Would the chickens escape or migrate from the house if they saw their mate had been slaughtered?

Or will they get sick, so they won't be useful after that?

His aunt was a simple woman. She didn't know what to answer him, so she said, naively:

- My son, it is forbidden!
- Auntie, how is it forbidden? I never heard that anything like this is forbidden!

- My son, it's not forbidden, like eating pork, or the flesh of the dead, but it is still forbidden. The Prophet said: "If you want to slaughter an animal, your knife must be sharp so that the animal is slaughtered and relieved, and not suffer a lot!"

Frank heeded that Carol was putting her hand on his shoulder, leaning her head softly on his chest, and saying:

- Daddy, we have to go to school or we'll be late.
- Yes, yes, my dear, I'm ready.

Then he got up, holding her hand, feeling as if he was looking after the whole world, in her by looking after his daughter, whom he loved and cared for so carefully and his wife, who helped him overcome the difficulties he'd encountered, in settling down in his adopted country, which had now become the only country for him. It is a country that values life, not only day-to-day but also in terms of the importance and value his new country and government attributes to his life. He was raised in a country that totally different from his new home. He now feels fully aware that his life is of value and that the country has embraced him. He feels that his legal rights cannot be violated by anyone. How can he not feel the value of his life here, especially after witnessing the hardships of life in his native land? This is what pushed him to the point of being willing to embark on the experience of immigration and asylum, which many people at that time were afraid of. They were frightened about what would

happen if they did not succeed. But, to this day, he still can't understand how people still live in there, and what life must be like for them. They have no idea that there are so many forms of pleasure in this life and, perhaps, even now, he is only standing on the first rung of the stairs that reaches up to the top - and that seems to be long—very long.

*Oh, poor people from my native land,
There are so many things you've been missing!*

ON THE WAY TO SCHOOL

The morning of that mid-November day was beautiful. It was late autumn and close to the beginning of winter. The sky was clear, with a few clouds, but here was no sign of rain. Two days ago it had rained heavily all day and night, however, this didn't affect the movement of public life at all, either during it or afterwards.

The constant rain had not caused any emergencies. He hadn't heard of any houses, where rainwater had leaked through the roofs, to give the people nightmares, or, worse still, that the roofs had caved in on their heads!

He hadn't seen or heard of people who have spent their night trying to get rid of the rainwater that flooded their homes from the streets. This just did not happen. It might have happened somewhere in the older houses, but it was never so bad as to interfere with their daily life or make it unbearable.

This was not the first autumn and winter he had witnessed in this country. He had lived here almost

thirteen years, since he left his homeland almost fifteen years ago. He had spent nearly two years travelling over land until he was able to obtain immigration approval or asylum. The church had been very helpful, which was essential for his papers to be accepted in the country where he wanted to claim asylum.

Frank remembered all this after his memories of school flashed through his mind—the teachers, their cruelty and the violence they used to hand out to children and teenagers alike in the school.

He also remembered and laughed, while driving, about how he slaughtered chickens for his aunt, whenever she wanted him to do so!

All those memories of his homeland, which he had been trying to the best of his abilities to erase from his memory, after he had arrived in his new homeland, were just below the surface, buried in his subconscious. Obviously he couldn't forget them completely.

In the village where he was born and raised, most people would be happy when propitious signs of rain were noticed. They considered that to be positive sign that God, the Creator, is happy with them. So they often prayed for rain when it was late in coming. But when it actually came, which was not necessarily after their prayers, nor as a result of them, it often destroyed their houses and damaged their crops!

Almost all the people would be badly affected, and they wouldn't be able to carry on normal life for days, until sometime after the rain stops! Transport and trade would be very badly affected, because the majority of unpaved roads would become impassable until the weather improved. It could become a major problem for the whole country!

In his new home town, in his new country, people were more likely not to want it to rain. Well, apart from farmers, who are cautious about expressing their opinions to the general public, because they actually welcome the rain, and rely on it for their livelihood.

Frank never heard of anyone praying for rain any more. But he heard a lot of people complaining about the weather, especially when the sky was loaded and heavy with clouds, because it prevented them from enjoying themselves outside. Even when the meteorologists predict the weather on TV, they often seem embarrassed when they read the bulletin on rainy and dull days, as if they are responsible for the weather themselves and its volatility and disadvantages!

How can people's views and standards differ so much from one region to another in the same world?

Are people the same around the world?

They are certainly the outcome of their life experiences and there are no constant criteria or behavioral measurements.

There is probably nothing in this world that could be considered constant!

Because of all of that, it appeared to Frank as if people in his home country, were oppressed by everything around them, even the rainfall, if it rained or didn't. Their lips were sealed as if they were dumb. They couldn't even voice their own opinion about the rain, in case someone heard them and misunderstand their opinion as a criticism of the force behind the rainfall!

What kind of miserable, stupid life, are these poor people living?

Who was the first one to take them along this path of misery and desperation?

While Frank was driving the car, pursuing his thoughts and memories, he felt his daughter, Carol, who was sitting on the back seat, touching his shoulder to alert him that he had passed the exit to the street leading to the school. She was confused because her father was not paying attention to the route to school. Frank noticed Carol's reminder and assured her that he would make a U-turn at the end of the street back to school. Indeed, he did what he said, and also tried to forget the memories, which had been stirred up in case his day dreaming caused an accident. It would be too late to regret it after the event. He had already placed himself in more than enough danger in the past.

After he reached the school, Carol got out of the car to go in. He watched her and felt relatively relieved and comforted. He had delivered her to what he believed was a safe place for her, and she loved this place the most.

He didn't want to go back home, because he knew that Brigitte would be asleep, because she had been on a night shift at the hospital, until six o'clock in the morning, and she wouldn't be waking up before noon. So he thought he would stay in the school car park, for a few minutes to smoke a cigarette, keeping the windows open, as well as thinking about where to go to have breakfast. A muffin and a cup of coffee or tea would tide him over until the afternoon. He was on alert for a call from taxi office, in case there was a job for him. However, he wasn't really expecting anything at this time of the morning, although there was a chance of an airport run. The airport was only thirty kilometers from the city. So this was what he was hoping for. If he was lucky he'd get an airport, which was easy and well-paid. He had no problem with these kinds of calls, as they were straightforward. He definitely preferred them to those where he had to find his way through the old narrow streets of the city's crowded residential area. The customers could be difficult and, sometimes, troublemakers.

VISITING A FRIEND

Then it suddenly occurred to him that he could visit his friend, Husain, who owned a grocery store in the same plaza as the coffee shop. He could pick up a muffin and cup of tea, and take it over to Husain's shop. Hopefully he would find him there, and not his wife or his son in his place. It was almost two weeks since he had last seen him, and there would be a lot to talk about if he was there.

Husain was one of his closest acquaintances in the city. Although he was older than Frank, by nearly twenty- five years, they had a lot in common, particularly their homeland and present concerns about their new country, including their attempts to adapt to life there. The country has opened its doors to everyone who wants to come and live in it peacefully.

Husain was a man who knew a lot about the members of the Arab immigrant and refugee community, and the Iraqi community in particular, through his work for the past twenty years in his shop. Many Arabs visited his shop, not to actually buy things, but,

just so that they could meet other members of their community and talk about the latest news. This particularly applied to those who didn't have close friends or relations who they could chat to. Each of them obviously wants to hear news of people from their community. Needless to say, most of them don't really want to hear good news. They would rather hear bad things, so that they can quench their constant feelings of envy, towards all the others who are doing well for their lives, and revel in their misfortune. This poison had built up in their souls, throughout the years they were being oppressed by the tyrants in power back home.

It is one of the methods the secret police used to use in their native land. They were pioneers in this kind of investigation into its people, gathering information about them! They can't escape from their legacy of secrecy and deception. They suffered for many years because of it. However, they might have got used to it and now, probably, can't live without it! Who knows?

Frank came to this country as a refugee. Husain had also arrived with his family as refugees more than ten years earlier. Since his arrival, Frank had often needed Husain's advice on how to behave in the right way, with respect to the intricacies of both government bureaucracy, and with the people in general. This particularly applied to his dealings with the immigrant community, and refugees from their country. Frank quickly realized that, the

members of the immigrant community from his country, behaved differently from how they did back home. The way they dealt with official matters was surprising. Similarly, their relationship with other members of their community is confusing. It takes a new arrival some time, before they can discover who they can safely deal with, and with whom they can relax and talk openly and honestly.

Of course, this generalization does not apply to everyone, but it certainly affects the behavior of those, who have lived under repressive regimes for long periods of time. These regimes impose on their subjects lives dominated by secrecy and stealth. People feel unable to talk frankly, and openly. Clearly they are impotent to do anything about it. Yet some still believe that they should act like this in their new country, because they fear that, they might suffer if they give anyone an opportunity to invade their privacy. Many of them were very reluctant to reveal their political beliefs or whether they had supported the government. They were supposed to have fled their country because of oppression, and had claimed asylum on this basis, so they had to be careful to keep their story straight. However, there are, of course, many others who clearly enjoy their freedom in their new country, and always love to speak frankly, without any hesitation to say exactly what they feel inside themselves. It must be said that, there are as many different points of view as there are people, so it could be difficult to make a decision, as to which is the right way to act. Also, it is true that they inherited

their hatred towards their governments, and the rulers and sultans, who ruled their countries over the centuries. It is not an exaggeration to say that people from these countries, have inherited their agony and sadness, because of living their whole lives under this kind of terror and oppression. It is even clear in their poems, songs and music. Even when they try to express their happiness, they would never forget to add a taste of sadness and grief. This emanates from the words they use, and reflects what they believe. Sadness is never far away from them. This is how they think and, as a result, they always tend to blame the government for every bad thing and event they face. It is not an exaggeration to say that, many generations lived their entire lives scared to feel happy. Some even believe that, the devil offers mankind happiness, in an attempt to lure them to sin.

Frank arrived at the plaza where Husain's grocery store was located. After parking his car in the parking lot, he went straight to the grocery store to see if Husain was there or not. He saw him through the store glass, standing behind the cash register, serving customers. Frank opened the door and waved to Husain with a smile and said:

- Just a minute and I'll be with you. I'm going to the coffee shop to buy a cup of tea.

Hussein responded with a wave greeting him, saying, "Okay!"

Frank returned minutes later, carrying a cup of tea with a muffin and entered the grocery. Husain, as usual, said in his sarcastic Iraqi way:

- What was it that brought you here today?
Did you lose your way?

Frank replied to him in a similar tone:

- I knew you'd be free, having nothing to do, so I came to keep you busy with something, so you wouldn't feel bored!
- Where can you escape from us?
- We are your cousins and we are behind you, always and forever!
- This is true. I'll never feel bored, as long as your cousins occupy the world around us, with their noise and troubles!
- Sure, I do expect that!
- Do you think God created us for nothing—problem-free? I'm sure if our people stop causing problems, it will be a unique day and time in history, isn't that true?
- No, it will not be a unique day in history, the truth is: there won't be any more history! Do you know why?
- When I come here, it's only to listen to you, my great uncle Husain! I have been listening to your advice all these years, and you have never let me down. I have never been disappointed not once. I owe you everything I have learned all these years. I owe it to you and no one else

but you. I'm grateful for everything you have had to tell me. You are my mentor and my professor, in the science and art of life. You are more important than all the many cousins, I have around me, who came from the old countries, from:

My Country...Habeeby*

My Largest Homeland!

- Yes, you will have a piece of information, and you will not need to know another thing afterwards.
- What is this information, if I might ask that you are honoring me with, my dear (Abu Ali)?
- Tell me so that I can add it to the other pearls of wisdom that, you have imparted. Then we can turn to something else. The telephone could ring at any moment with a job and I would not be able to stay with you longer.
- If your telephone rang with a job, I would kick you out of here to go to your business, instead of wasting your time. You are a different kind of person. You would not miss anything if you miss their news. Leave their news to me, I have been fated to listen to them because of this shop. I cannot escape from them. Would you like to swap jobs with me? You wouldn't believe how much I miss my freedom when I look at you. You work in your car and you see those who God sends to you. On the other hand

God sends me those, who create problems and I have no choice.

- But you don't really mean that you want to give up the shop. I know you could have easily sold this grocery store, years ago. There are plenty of people in our community who would love to have the opportunity to buy it. They are always eyeing it up.
- I can see that you have some news. You are not like those people who are: "*sleeping with their legs exposed to the sun*"!
- That's the first time I ever hear such a saying: "sleeping with their legs exposed to the sun". Who are these people who sleep with their legs exposed to the sun? God bless you, my uncle Abu Ali, what does this saying mean? I suppose it's an old proverb. Please, Abu Ali, tell me what it means?
- Frank, O Frank! Your question makes me think you don't really deserve to come from the land of Mesopotamia. You really deserve the name, Frank. Frank and Brigitte got married and they had a daughter called Carol. How can a person who came from the oldest civilization on earth expect Frank, the husband of Brigitte and the father of the Carol, sweet Carol, to know an example of a proverb which could date back five thousand years, or even more! Yes, more than that, because every day we hear new facts and information. They tell us that the words of our Iraqi ancestors had different accents—

Sumerian, Acadian, and Babylonian—and all of them date back between three to five thousand years. We simple people do not know the truth from the lies and exaggeration that researchers tell us. But if this is true, it means that we all have a depth in history which goes back five thousand years, but none of those researchers tried to find out, why we are the descendants of these ancient civilizations, cannot find people among us who are decent, and have the enthusiasm about their past, and care enough not to let murderers and thieves destroy our country. The country was destroyed by its own people with their bare hands, long before it was destroyed by its enemies!

The country is desperate for those people, who are not ready to sabotage it.

Those who are not ready to plunder it...

Those who do not take advantage of the welfare of poor people...

Frank interrupted:

- I only asked you about this proverb, and I still want to know what it means. I have many questions I wanted to ask you, and I'm worried that the phone will ring before I find out the meaning of the proverb.
- I was going to tell you another proverb before this one occurred to me. The other proverb is a good example which is to do with, what is

going on and what will happen here, because of our arrival, as immigrants, and the arrival of our cousins and relatives of the new generations of the civilizations of Mesopotamia, and other civilizations of the Near East, to which millions of people claim they belong. There are stories that God created the people of the countries of the ancient world, the Near East, and then regretted it afterwards. But, it was too late. So God decided to leave creation alone after that, and no longer had any interest in what happened in this land. So the land became the kingdom of criminals and killers.

- Do you know why?
- I only came here to listen. I'm not like our cousins who, once they hear something, start a controversy and make hundreds of mistakes in everything that is said, as if they are the only ones who know anything.
- I'm in front of you. I can hear you and won't open my mouth. I won't let you down!
- Listen, my dear son Frank, the parable I wanted to tell you initially, before I used the phrase "*sleeping with their legs exposed to the sun*" is not really a proverb that people use; rather it is a combination of words inspired by those days of our youth. I mean when I was almost your age, or actually younger than you are now, back in the early seventies, when our country was ruled by Nebuchadnezzar* of the

twentieth century, we began to notice events and changes around us.

This was as a result of the fear and oppression that surrounded us. We were a group of young people, who had begun to notice the changes that had started to take place in society. These changes were amongst those who represent the totalitarian dictatorship regime and, those who hold a religious background and orientation, who were obviously not scared of the dictatorship's oppression. The common people were surprised to see youth with such belligerence, which began surfacing for the first time! It was suggesting that the emergence of this tyrannical force, which frightened everyone, and the sporadic emergence of powerless, yet fearless, religious youths, meant to some that it was a sign of the reemergence of the "*Commander of Time*"*!

By the way, do you know who the Commander of Time is?

- Yes, Uncle Abu Ali, I know him. Of course I know him, definitely. I am not completely ignorant about this. Don't forget that I am a descendant of the ancient regions of Sumer and Babylon!
- Well, very good, in fact I asked you that, because I had expected, when you became Frank, you might have forgotten the original Nebuchadnezzar and Hammurabi* and their families! You should know more than others,

about them because you are their descendant. What was important is to point out that, the Commander of Time was a symbol we used every time we saw a strange phenomenon in society or if anyone behaved strangely, whether man or woman. We used to try to minimize the impact and shock, of what was going on around us in different ways. So our comments would be mixed with different jokes, which we consider as one of the signs of the reemergence, and appearance of the Commander of Time. Due to the intensity of the oppression and pain we are experiencing, we were trying to reduce our agony with black humor, while we watch the years of our lives, flowing away as if by a torrential river. The river was carving us like when water erodes rocks over the years. This is why I believe it is fair to say that, such torrents can polish our essence! Yet others don't think that this was polishing our essence, but, rather, skinning us. This is why we became so sensitive to the slightest breeze blowing on us.

Because of this, we started to say that he “the Commander of Time” wants to reappear and reveal himself. So any unusual signs are portents of his reappearance. He is sending them as signals suggesting that, his reappearance is getting closer! Since then, whenever I see something strange, I say that this is a sign of his reappearance. Simple, naïve people have been promised the reappearance of the Commander of Time numerous times, but it seems he has

decided to retire and will not reappear, just like when the Creator decided to give up his creation, and chaos and war started between people.

He finally decided to refrain from reappearing, because his followers did not deserve his help. So it became necessary to change the plan!

Now that you have listened to my story about the Commander of Time, I can tell you now, what the metaphor “sleeping with their legs exposed to the sun” means? It is hinting at how naïve some simple live are. They sleep and stay asleep even when the sun rises, and shines on their legs. The sun burns their legs, but it is not enough to wake them up, from their sleep and carelessness. But, who are those sleeping with their legs exposed to the sun?

This is what we will all probably discover in a few more years!

Frank replied:

- I was expecting to find you enjoying your morning, with your usual good humor and cheerfulness. That was why I decided to drop in, and pass the time with you. But, obviously you are not in your usual happy mood. Has one of our cousins been to blame for your bad temper and depression?
- Yes, you're quite right.

Didn't I just tell you that the Commander of Time is about to reappear.

We all need him to emerge, not just to save us from his enemies, but to protect us from his fellows. We know who his enemies are. We know the battle between him and his enemies has lasted an eternity. But, we don't know or understand the tactics he is using. Part of the time he shows himself, as some of his fellows claim, and other times he is completely hidden. Between his emerging and hiding, those monsters of his fellows, would be revealed in the worst possible way, and every time we are the ones who pay a high price, for his emergence as well as his hiding, every time, just us, the sons of miserable mothers.

He has been trying to reemerge for some time, but he didn't like the prevailing condition, and his associates' behavior! Those who speak in his name and on his behalf have made his existence ridiculous to wise people. Even those who once believed in his existence have abandoned their faith, because they saw his followers are simply different kinds of thieves and killers, particularly those hypocrites, who get their living from peddling religious myths. In the old days, we respected his memory and looked on him as a savior who will bring justice to the world. But that was because we didn't know any better. We can't accept that

any longer. Almost all of his followers totally lack any ethics.

We have lived in fear for a very long time, unable to talk about ourselves. Now we are here in our new country, and we have gained so much. The most important thing being that we can speak without fear.

Do you notice this difference, Frank?

I'm sure you've already got over a lot of the fear and horror, which you brought here with you. If you don't, you will probably pass it on to your daughter subconsciously. I know your wife is strong and brave and she will make the most of her life here. But you need to rid yourself of the fear once and forever. You should speak for yourself, just like what you did when you changed your name. You were also very bold when you changed other more important things!

- Yes, yes certainly, I have already got over most of the fear, which hounded me and was causing me nightmares. I'm trying to forget whatever I went through, when I was living in the country of the successor of the great Nebuchadnezzar! As for my courage in changing other things, I will need a long time to explain my position on those things.
- You cannot forget anything, Falah, even if you actually turned into Frank! The past will stay with you, and you will need it as you need the

present, to live your future normal new life. By the way, I once asked you how and why you chose the name Frank.

- I don't remember what you answered me? Did you even answer me?
- I might have forgotten your answer.
- I was just going to answer. I don't remember why I didn't complete my answer, it was many years ago, my dear Abu Ali. It's a long story and I don't know if we have enough time to tell it now. I always liked to remember and talk about it, because it was the beginning of my new life which has provided me with so much comfort.

Just then four teenagers who, had been hanging about outside, came in. They seemed to be looking for trouble. They walked up and down between the aisles. Husain went on alert as soon as they entered. Frank stopped talking as well and tried to watch what they were going to do. Husain was expecting them to steal small items such as small bags of sweets. Then one of them approached him and asked if he could buy just two cigarettes. It was illegal to display cigarettes in grocery stores as part of the global campaign against smoking. They used to be on show behind the cash desk. Husain answered that, first of all, he did not sell cigarettes individually, and secondly, customers had to be eighteen years old to buy cigarettes. The teenager tried to answer the question but he couldn't find the words. He turned and pointed to his mates to leave.

One of them took a small pack of chewing gum, and put it in his pocket, then left. Husain shouted at him to come back and pay for it. The teenager turned back to say he was sorry, but had forgotten to pay for it. He asked him how much it cost. When Husain told him the price, he said that he didn't realize it cost so much. He left it on the counter and walked towards the door to join the other three who were waiting for him outside the grocery. Husain turned towards Frank to say:

- I wish the cousins, who envy me, could be here now to see what is going on that they wouldn't normally notice. These teenagers are just at the beginning of their lives of crime. It's a pity that the government and society, don't do something about it, to try and set them straight so that they don't become criminals.

Frank agrees:

- Our cousins seem to have forgotten the past, and can't live in the present. They became like the Crow. What was the parable?

Can you help me to memorize it, Abu Ali?
How does the saying go?

- It says: Just like the Crow, which lost the two walking gaits!

Let's go back to what we were talking about, before these teenagers came in. What were we saying?

- You mean why I chose the name Frank, instead of Falah?

I am still Falah, officially, and Frank is nothing more than an attempt, to fit in with this new world, which was kind enough to accept us, as human beings, so that we can live in peace. I always try to remember that I need to get rid of that old world—the world of the dictatorships of the Nebuchadnezzar of the twentieth century—and those who came after him. They claimed to be ideologists, but in reality, they were nothing but thieves and killers. It was true in the olden days and in the present too, became dictators successively then after.

But I also like to remember how, as you mentioned earlier, I was brave when I changed other things too.

Going back to why I chose the name “Frank” for myself, it started when I knew that I could call myself any name I liked, and ask people to use it as my name. I could even change it officially and legally, if I wished. This seemed to me the greatest freedom I could think of! You know back in our old country, if we were only to think in this, we could have been in trouble, and you could be imprisoned for false representation. You know we are born to this world and our names born with us. We have no way to change them or to change anything that is born with us. Again I know you will ask why specifically it was “Frank”? I have chosen this

name, because I heard it from someone I met, when I was leaving Iraq. An Iraqi woman, living in a Western country, where some refugees had tried to settle, was talking on the phone with her mother who was living in Iraq. It was just a few days after the death of a well known singer, whose first name was Frank. I'm not sure of his full name. She was asking her mother if she had heard about "Frank's death, the poor guy!" When her mother heard her saying that, she hung up, but not before swearing at her and at the poor singer, even though he hadn't done anything bad to her.

I liked that story, but I don't know if it is true. It just goes to show that, there are always stupid people around, who insist on living in their own world, and they never notice what is going on around them, no matter what the situation. So when I decided to have a new name, this name was in front of me. I know many people of our cousins will be swearing at me because of it.

Do you know who the famous singer was?

- Yes, I know him. He was Frank Sinatra. He was one of the most famous singers in the West. He had a great voice. Now that I think about it, it was a very good choice. You didn't choose the name of someone unknown. He was well known all over the world since the 1940s. We knew him in Iraq, when we were young and were enjoying some kind of private freedom, we would love to hear the music of singers

like Frank Sinatra. Sadly, we lost all that when the nightmares started to attack us in ways we never thought of.

THE MARRIAGE OF ALI - HUSAIN'S SON

While Frank and Husain were talking, a woman entered the grocery. She looked as if she was in her mid to late fifties, and she wore an Islamic Hijab. She was accompanied by a man who was walking with her, but entered after her. She enthusiastically walked towards Husain, and, with a broad smile, greeted him, saying:

- Alsalamu Alaikum, Brother Abu Ali, how are you and how is Um Ali, the children and grandchildren? God bless you all. You have now become a large number, and it's difficult to remember the names of your grandchildren.

Then the man who was with her also greeted Husain, but in a short, formal way. It was clear that he didn't want to go further than a simple greeting when he said:

- Alsalamu Alaikum, Brother Abu Ali, how are you. I hope you are well, God willing.

Husain answered both of them with the same answer, in a way clearly devoid of courtesy saying:

- Welcome, we are okay, God willing, and how about you? I hope you are okay.

The woman answered him as if she had prepared and memorized the words beforehand. She had a lot to talk about, if she could have the time. Then she continued to say to him:

- We are fine, fine. I really decided to drop in to say hello. I didn't just come here to buy milk but also to congratulate you on the marriage of your son, Ali, God bless and save him.
- The marriage of my son, Ali?!
- God, I had no idea that he was getting married. He didn't even invite me to the wedding reception. Maybe there wasn't one. I don't know!
- What do you mean?
- You mean Ali is not getting married?
- So how come everybody is talking about Ali is getting married? Where did they get this from? People are really strange.
- I really don't know. I didn't know Ali had become a celebrity like a rap artist. I've never seen him singing or dancing. He seems to be depressed most of the time. He must have inherited that from me!
- No, no, Brother Abu Ali, God bless your son, Ali. Everyone here looks up to him and thinks he is very moral and reputable. When I

heard the news of his marriage, I asked myself who might be lucky enough to be his bride? But, sadly, it looks as if the news is not true. However, if you want to find him a wife to marry, I know many daughters of respected families!

Husain interrupted her:

- Are you sure this news is something you've heard from other people? Or is it something that you wanted for him? I must thank you for your good wishes, but I ought to say that when he wants to get married to any woman, I won't be able to stop him. And he wouldn't take any notice of me if I tried to introduce him to someone, even if she was the daughter of my closest friend.

Frank was watching the exchange between Husain and the woman. Her husband was keeping himself busy walking around the grocery, distancing himself from the conversation, as if he was not convinced about, why he had accompanied his wife to the shop. But she looked quite domineering. Her husband was one of those men, who would rather do anything for a quiet life, by agreeing with everything and not objecting to anything.

Frank intervened by talking to Husain, trying to reduce the aggravation the woman was causing. It was evident that Husain didn't know anything about what she was talking about, so Frank went on to say:

- I really wanted to ask you about Ali. How did he get on during his recent visit to Iraq?

As soon as Frank finished his last sentence, the woman intervened again to say:

- “Masha Allah,” God bless, was Ali in Iraq, how long did he remain there?

Hussein replied briefly, without interest, addressing Frank:

- Yes he went there. I don’t know what happened over there. But he came back as if he was on another planet.

Then the woman tried to change the subject, when she realized that Husain was unwilling to talk to her. So she addressed Frank:

- Brother, I have seen you before, but I don’t remember where. I know you are Iraqi.

Frank quickly replied:

- Yes I am an Iraqi. It’s obvious from my appearance.
- What is your name? Mine is Um Muhammad, and my husband over there is Abu Muhammad!

She turned to point her hand towards her husband, who was a few steps away. He had heard everything and raised his hand without enthusiasm to greet them again. Frank tried to avoid answering her question, because he felt she would start on a new interrogation, if he told her his name was Frank. Then he remembered his friend’s advice a few minutes ago, to be brave in front of everyone, when

revealing information about himself, so preempting her, he replied:

- Frank, my name is Frank. I'm from southern Iraq. It's a strange name, isn't it? Especially when someone comes from south of Iraq!
- No, my brother, no. Why should that be strange?
- We are used to seeing everything here. We no longer consider anything to be strange. Actually I already know you. I know you from your wife's name, Birgit, who works as a nurse in the hospital?

Frank quickly responded, in a strong tone mixed with laughter and mockery, trying to correct his wife's name compared to the way she had pronounced it, and said to her:

- Her name is Brigitte, Um Muhammad. My wife's name is Brigitte, and she is an assistant nurse, not a nurse.

Then he turned towards Husain to complete his words and said:

- Do you not see, my dear, how important a distinguished name is?

It makes you known to millions!

Husain nodded to him in reply, and expressed his annoyance at everything the woman was saying. She was quick to answer Frank's jibe, about her mispronunciation of his wife's name by quickly saying, as if the words were racing round her mind before she spoke them:

- Yes, yes, I know my English is not good, but I am trying as much as I can. My children always alert me to this, I think I need to register in a language institute, myself and Abu Muhammad.

She looked to her husband, who seemed to be uncomfortable. He knew that his wife was so boring and unbearable. So he pointed to her, without talking, indicating that she must finish talking and leave. She replied to him:

- Yes, yes, but I have to buy what I came here for.

My God, I've already forgotten what was in my mind?

Husain followed by saying:

- Um Muhammad, you came here to greet and congratulate me on the marriage of Ali, and to buy the milk which you like to buy from my grocery. But what I can't understand, how one liter of milk is enough for more than two weeks. Because I have not seen you here for more than two weeks!

She replied with a laugh, indicating that she felt that Husain had underestimated her words:

- May Allah protect and bless you, Abu Ali. You count everything. In fact I feel lazy sometimes and buy milk from other closer shops. You know that your grocery is a fair distance from our home.

- Well, Um Muhammad, I don't know where your house is located. So I don't know whether you are close or far from here.

At this point, Frank heard his phone ringing. He took it out of his pocket, and saw that the Taxi office was on the line. He walked a few steps away to talk privately, spoke for a few moments, and then hung up. Directing his words to Husain and, out of courtesy, to Um Muhammad he said:

- Abu Ali, once again, we couldn't complete our conversation, but I'll come back later, maybe tonight, if I get a chance, or tomorrow. But I've got an airport run now.

Husain replied to him, saying:

- Don't worry about talking. There's plenty of time for talking. But, for now it's important for you to earn your living. Call me before you come next time, to make sure I'm here. You go now. God bless you.

During Husain's conversation with Frank, Um Muhammad was listening attentively, as if she was trying to pick up, every letter from each of the words she was hearing. She smiled a light smile, tinged with profanity, flattery and obvious hypocrisy. She was an example of mischief, intrusive beyond the limits of understanding. She finally left together with her husband after apparently having to buy a liter of milk, which she could have bought from any other grocery store.

Husain stayed alone thinking over what had happened to him, with how the woman had behaved. He hardly knew her, even though she occasionally shopped at his store. He didn't even know her name. He didn't know much about her husband, other than what he had heard from other people. However, the general impression about the man and his wife was that, they were like hundreds of others, who always try to take advantage of everything the country had to offer. They had already been given shelter and protection. One of the most common mistakes made by the governments of rich countries is, to decide who deserves to be given the right of asylum and who doesn't. There is a big difference between the two. Giving asylum to someone who doesn't deserve it could mean that, life is still unfair and the scales are unevenly balanced. And refusing someone who really deserves it would mean, putting an end to the hopes of everyone, who could have been very useful members of society.

HUSAIN, TALKING TO HIMSELF

Husain used to seeing incidents like the one happened today, throughout the twenty years he has spent in his grocery. However, there was something special about today that made it different from before. There was something he didn't understand and had not felt before, something suggested that the coming days, would not be like those when he first arrived in the country. He believed that he had reached a place, where he felt secure enough not to worry about his wife and children and did not fear the bad old days and people. But, he could not feel secure enough for himself! He did not feel that he, himself, had escaped harm, and also felt he was not safe from himself!

Then he went over yet again what had happened today with the annoying woman. He mulled over it for a long time. He didn't know much about her, apart from the name she went by "Um Muhammad," which means (Muhammad's mother), which wasn't

her legal name. How can a person try to fool others in such a tedious and deplorable way, like she did?

Her husband's case was even stranger than hers. He didn't know or care much about him. It was clear that he did not like Husain who knew this very well, as Husain was always straightforward, and frank about everything. Because of this he was disliked by people like this man, who was so devious and secretive, even to the extent of not revealing his true name.

The woman called herself Um Muhammad and her husband Abu Muhammad, as if they were legally registered in government documents by these two names. This is the formula that is often used by people, such as these two, to give themselves a touch of fake respectability. They were still living the same way they were living in their home country. However, they are now enjoying freedom of movement and speech in their new country. They do not need to feel bored, but their main entertainment coming from, the need to talk about other people's lives and then passing on the news here and there.

This man, Abu Muhammad, together with his wife and children, were totally unacquainted with the smallest aspects, of how things were done in the West, when they arrived in the country, claiming asylum. They didn't have the slightest ability to take control of things for themselves or do anything without the help of others. They could neither deal with their own community, nor with Western values and ethics, which were entirely strange to them.

They needed to make a lot of effort to learn how things were done, in their new country, and, more specifically, the administrative system of the new country. They were keen to learn the weak points of the system, which could be exploited for their benefits. Why shouldn't they exploit them for their benefit? Wasn't this country, which is now providing them shelter, involved, one way or another, in the destruction of their native land? So, why shouldn't they have the right to take back, whatever they could within their rights from their new country? Actually they believed they should take "their rights" in any way possible, even if they committed fraud by lying to the authorities! Didn't they use deception and fraud, for the purpose of obtaining asylum in the first place? They consider any lie on any form, to be perfectly legitimate for them. Didn't they inform the social workers that they were separated, so that they could be given two separate houses, each one lives in a house with some of the children, while, at the same time, renting the empty rooms or basement of the house to others. It's true that the issue of fraud against the host country, was not invented by Abu Muhammad and his wife, but by other people who used it, succeeded and were able to use it for their financial gain for years. Eventually it became well-known and people weren't surprised, or resented them for doing it. They looked on it as common practice. People are still getting away with it now.

This man insisted on appearing to other members of his community, as religiously committed and maintained his relations with them on this basis.

This is why he was uncomfortable meeting Husain, and those who have the same character and ethics as Husain, as they belonged to the same mentality and morality. He did not waste a moment to exploit any opportunity that allows him to earn a cent. He didn't care if it was lawful or unlawful, as he lived by his own standards. Maybe he had his own religious Fatwa* which he was applying!

Who knows?

There are people who consider the money they embezzle from the state, any state, is legitimately theirs, even by religious standards. Many of their religious leaders advise them to do so. They consider this money theirs lawfully because it is not clear to them who owns it, or is responsible for it, and has the right to keep or dispense it. This was also part of the reason why people like Abu Muhammad and his wife actively participated in robbing their own country—Iraq. They did this by making several short visits to Iraq to take part in robbing it. They weren't stopped by their religious preachers or the authorities. It was huge robbery and those who did it, did not have the slightest ethical consideration, which might have prevented them from doing so.

Abu Muhammad wasn't ashamed to enter Husain's grocery store, and hang around while his wife satisfied her desire, to hear people's news and openly tell lies to justify her behavior and talk about things that were none of her business anyway. Husain knew that Um Muhammad did her shopping in places like Costco, which sells good quality food and

merchandise at low prices that he couldn't compete with. So she was lying when she said that she liked to buy milk from Husain's store. Why Husain's? His answer had been sarcastic when he had told her that he was surprised how one liter of milk would be enough for more than two weeks for a large family.

Husain was exposed to this kind of thing every day, by the different members of the immigrant community. Many might have felt like, they had a share in a shop like his. In a situation where a community lives in a country of exile, the owner of a business, in this case Husain, should feel honored that they had come to his shop! It is strange and maybe too difficult, even for someone like a psychiatrist to understand. Many of them don't spend more than a few dollars a month with him, but they believe that if they don't, he go bankrupt and close the business!

Then Husain started to look back on his own life, particularly when he first entered the country as an immigrant. He loved his new home and felt he had been treated very well. He was confident from his very first day that, he and his family would be safe, even though they had arrived in the middle of winter, and the cold was like nothing he had ever seen before. It was a January day and the temperature was about fifteen degrees below zero. He was told about the weather conditions, by the immigration office in the transit country, and he, his wife, and three children were advised to wear heavy clothing.

On his arrival, he was accompanied by his wife, Zainab, his two daughters, Laila, who was twelve

and Su'ad, who was nine and his son, Ali, who was five years old. His three children went to school in their new country. Ali benefitted the most from his education, because he started from the first year, and quickly learned the language, and managed to fit in with the community, and got on well with people. His two daughters were also able to get a good education, got married later and had families of their own.

Husain wondered how he should describe himself. Was he the kind of immigrant who was grateful to the country, which had given him hope of a new life? Or was he one of those deniers, who were ungrateful to the country which had given them so much? He could not forget his motto and the principles he always followed. He also insisted on ensuring that his family also followed it. It is based on a proverb he heard from his father, uncles and senior members of his extended family, ever since he was young. It goes like this:

“O Ghareeb be Adeeb”, which means:
“Oh Stranger be Polite”

Husain still reminisced, recalling memories in his native land, and how his life was then. His days were never easy. They were filled with suffering, fear and terror. He was always wondering how much those days meant to him, and how he now feels about them?

What does he like and admire about them, when he looks back?

It's a very strange sensation.

Is this what they call: "the one desire to hurt oneself?" Is it really an inherent characteristic of people who come from our country?

Yes, those who came from his country, who didn't know along the history of the country, what it meant to lead a safe, secure and peaceful life. He didn't even know why and how they called his country:

"Dar Al Salam", "The Country of Peace"?!

Husain knew from his extensive knowledge of history, that his ancestors, who had their roots in the area for thousands of years, had migrated, and then migrated again throughout the ages. They were always on the move. We don't really know their motives for these moves. Historians of the time often wrote biased accounts. They wrote them the way they liked, subjectively, depending on what they were trying to achieve. This is still done today, even though ordinary people are quite able to document events for themselves, using new technology and social media.

Although history has always told that Mesopotamia was one of the richest countries in the world, and it was the home of an ancient civilization, perhaps the oldest human civilization in the world. However, this did not stop Abraham from migrating from Ur, and heading towards the land of Canaan, far from

his home. History tells different stories about this, but none of them were documented. Many details were hidden, which lead to the darkness of pain and legacy of misery, and unfairness until our present day. It doesn't seem that the negative results of Abraham's migration, could end before the end of the mankind in that old region, or maybe when a big catastrophe happens, which would take those people to what makes them forget, all the catastrophes happened before!

It was said that Abraham migrated from the land of Mesopotamia. However, his migration was not documented by any contemporaries who have been reporting major events, maybe because he was an ordinary, simple man. History does not care about anyone, apart from the leaders and powerful people, and those who have a direct influence on people's lives and minds. Then, maybe as a result of the need and poverty in his new land of Canaan, he decided to emigrate to the land of Pharaoh. History takes us away again and we are lost between its dark pages and again without reliable documentation.

Why would Abraham migrate from the land of Canaan, the promised land?

As history tells us, he was initially happy in his new homeland. But he soon emigrated to the land of

Pharaoh, even though there were suggestions that the Pharaoh, who was ruling over Egypt at that time, was unjust and cruel.

So why would Abraham insist on emigrating there? It's interesting to remember that he was not harmed by this Pharaoh. Nor did the Pharaoh hurt any of Abraham's followers. On the contrary, when they left the land of Pharaoh, and returned to Canaan they were carrying many gifts and were loaded with lots of goods.

So didn't Abraham care what might happen to him, at the hands of this ruthless and unjust Pharaoh?

Or is there something missing from the story?

Then history actually put things right again, when the first generation of descendants of Abraham grandsons, decided to emigrate to the land of Pharaoh again, because of drought, scarcity and hunger, they found life was good there. They decided to stay, and forgot Canaan, which was supposed to be the land promised to their grandfather, Abraham!

Would the descendants of Abraham have stayed in the land of Pharaoh, if they didn't enjoy a comfortable life, full of blessings, which pushed them to forget their misery in their promised land? Was the land of Pharaoh at that time similar to the West today? It offered all the good things that people were looking for.

Was it like America, Canada, Britain, Sweden and the other rich countries, that people are desperate to reach to improve their lives?

Didn't the story of Joseph, tell us that when he was Vizier, a position only second to the Pharaoh,

he, himself, supervised the distribution of food to the starving, during the drought and famine, that were inflicted on the people at that time? Wasn't the food that they were producing, from the land we know today as the Nile Valley?

Doesn't the world of today know how great the Nile Valley was those days?

Then, after several generations, the grandsons of Abraham left the land of Pharaoh again, to start looking for their promised land yet again?

They were desperate and oppressed, and many of them cursed Pharaoh. Yet there were others, as it appears from the story, who didn't want to leave the land of Pharaoh, for reasons we don't understand!

How many ordinary people know this fact now?

But the story still insists that Pharaoh was ruthless, and oppressed his people, without telling us how. This was how stories began to spread, about the Pharaoh being unjust and ruthless, and how the world continued thinking of him in this way.

Oh God, the media has been so influential for millennia. People have always believed in rumors. They liked to spread them until they eventually became history. A history we study it, believe in it, and behave according to it.

But was it our destiny to continue to live as immigrants?

Who was the one to blame for the immigration of people in the past, and then our immigration recently? Are they the ones who forced us to emigrate for some reason?

It was in their interests that we emigrated.

Or did we leave because of our principles and feelings?

Or it is those who ultimately received us in their countries, those who were very generous and offered us things, we never saw in our old countries that encouraged us to leave?

We were told that, when our grandfathers migrated, they always did it of their free will and that they took all their belongings, principles and ideologies with them. Then they imposed themselves on a new land, whether rightfully or by force. Wherever they settled, they imposed their beliefs on the land and its people. They were pushed to move on because their needs were not being satisfied. We were also told that, they didn't worry about what might happen to them, when migrating, even if they needed to use force. On the other hand, in our case, we move to new countries forced by many things, mostly against our will, scared and terrorized, begging anyone to accept us in a new country, any new country, although some insist on asking for more, saying:

“No, no, not every country deserves us! There are big differences between the countries, and we won’t accept just any country.”

Asylum seekers take certain factors into consideration, when choosing where to claim refuge, among them are the nature and power of the country. These people want to spread their ideology and believe it is desperately needed in their adopted countries. They believe that their views are so important that, they should have a role in other people’s lives, even if they were rejected by others, who had no interest in their ideologies and motives. Even if they were oppressed in their home countries, and then achieved important positions in their new countries, which had so generously provided them with shelter, they still think that, they have vital information to give to their new countrymen—vital information from God!

Yes, they have such self-confidence in their principles and ideology that, they should rule over others.

They believed in their stature in the world, whether others like it or not.

Such was the approach of these people to other countries from the very beginning.

When our grandfathers used to move from one country to another in the old days, they were honest about their motives from the beginning. They weren’t secretive.

They thought that it was to their credit, because they were mostly trying to improve, and cultivate the new land. It might not have been by their own hands, but by using the hands of those who knew how to cultivate it - in other words, the local people.

Well, at least, they were not abusing it, or that is what we were told in some of the history books. But when we recently started to emigrate, many things had changed. Many of the emigrants, as soon as they reached their final destination, turned their backs and bared their teeth, at those who were once so kind to them!

Which of these two kinds of migrants is the right one, the grandfathers or the grandsons?

This cub is the son of that lion.

What we know for certain, is what has happened in our own experience. Maybe what is happening to the grandsons is the same, as what happened to the grandfathers—maybe!

It might be, because of their grandfathers' stories, myths and exaggerations, when they tried to embellish their activities, and make themselves seem better than they really were. In this way they would appear as very impressive to the countries they were going to.

It's difficult to really know for sure what happened in the past. Many of us know some of it, but may have reasons not to reveal it. Don't the countries which so generously provide shelter for so many people,

without question, have any interest in finding out their reasons for emigrating?

Are they stupid?

Or is it we who don't have a clue, about what is going on around us?

Husain continued going over these questions, with his mind flitting from one idea to another, until he thought he was going to collapse and started to sweat profusely. He felt as if he was being suffocated, and about to vomit. He struggled to control himself. The questions he was asking himself were the core of everything, which he had been feeling since he started to realize what was going on around him, for the past fifty years - nothing had changed. He might be enjoying more freedom of thought now, which has given him the chance to talk to himself about what, in the past, he was even too scared to contemplate. One would need to know on how many fronts should a truthful, honest man fight, to maintain his honesty and peace of mind.

THE AIRPORT TAXI

On his way to the address he had received, from the taxi office for the airport run, Frank couldn't get the image of the woman, Um Muhammad, out of his mind. She pretended to be polite and respectful of others, while, in reality, she was nosy and vulgar. Even when she discovered that her lies had been revealed, she couldn't stop interfering in other people's lives. Frank didn't forget how she had claimed that, she knew him from his name that he is the husband of "Birgit". He didn't think his wife, Brigitte, knew her personally, and probably had never even met her. He knew that his wife didn't often mix with people, outside their family circle. She only knew people they had met, since their arrival in their new country. They had both been really busy, especially Brigitte. She had started learning

English, so that she could look for various kinds of work, so that she could depend on herself, rather than relying on the assistance, provided by

the State's social welfare system for refugees, the elderly, disabled and the unemployed. He therefore, didn't think that Brigitte would waste her time on, going to places just to meet women like Um Muhammad. However, he decided to ask Brigitte when he got home with Carol. He hadn't forgotten how this woman had referred to him as the husband of "Birgit, the nurse". He didn't like that, nor would most Iraqis.

When he arrived at the house for the trip to the airport, he found a man who appeared to be waiting for him, at the front door with two large suitcases. Frank stopped his car in front of the driveway and got out, exchanging greetings with him. Frank asked the man how many people would be going to the airport and he replied that they were only two women. He asked him to take them to the departure gate of terminal 3, as they were traveling to London, and weren't able to handle their two heavy bags. They needed someone to help lift their cases, up on to the scales at the check-in desk. As he was going into these details, Frank was putting the bags in the trunk of his car. In the meantime two women came out of the house. One seemed to be in her sixties, while the second seemed to be in her late eighties. The older lady needed to rely on the support of the younger one. When they reached the car, the man approached the older lady and kissed her goodbye, wishing her a good time staying with his brother in England. Then he turned to embrace the younger woman, who seemed to be his wife, and wished her a safe flight. Finally he wanted to reassure Frank that,

he knew it was too early for the flight departure, but they wanted to go early to the airport, so that they could buy some souvenirs as gifts for their relatives in Britain.

Frank drove towards the airport. The two women remained silent for a while, until the old lady started to ask her companion about something. He didn't know what it was, because he couldn't hear her. Her voice was too low. The younger woman only nodded and answered in a low voice. He couldn't hear her reply but something made him realize that it was related to him, not because he had heard or understood a word of what the women had said, but because he noticed the old lady, had pointed her head towards him, when she addressed her question to her companion. Then silence returned again, but Frank was driven by curiosity to find out what had been said. He remained looking into the mirror at both of them for a while, waiting to learn more. Then the younger woman seemed to sense that, Frank might have heard the question, or maybe he hadn't heard their brief conversation, a few minutes earlier, but noticed the brief talk between them. Then she nodded towards the front seat, where Frank was sitting and said to him:

- Do you know what my husband's mother asked me?

Frank immediately replied with a smile:

- She asked you about me, I am sure. Which country I might be from.

- So, you heard what she said. I thought you didn't hear it.
- I didn't actually hear the question, but I felt that it was about me.

Then Frank addressed the old lady, saying:

- Madam, I am originally from Iraq. I think you must have heard of that country, haven't you?

She paused for a long time without answering. She looked as if she didn't know the country, or perhaps didn't understand what Frank had meant in his answer. Her daughter-in-law didn't know what to say, but she nevertheless, she carried on, saying:

- No! How can she not know about Iraq?
There's news broadcast about it daily. Everyone hears about it.

You know about Iraq, Mom, don't you?

The old lady then said:

- Why do you think I don't know Iraq?
Are you out of your minds?

I knew Iraq before you were born. I knew it since I was a little girl at school. Of course, we didn't know it by the name "Iraq," but by the name "*Mesopotamia*." We knew of Baghdad, Sinbad, magic carpets, Scheherazade, One Thousand and One Nights, and the fantasy adventures that we were so keen on. We watched them all in the cinema, even before we got a television. Many famous actors portrayed Sinbad in films, where the stories

stick in the imagination. We liked them when we were young, and didn't forget them when we got older. The world was beautiful then. Nothing was ugly like it is now. Even though we didn't have the freedom, to across the world like we do now. It could have taken a week or more to get to England by sea, whereas now we can reach London by air in less than seven hours. People even died during those long, tiring journeys.

But I certainly know about Baghdad, and how much I wanted to visit it when I was little girl. I thought I could see Sinbad and his flying carpet, or the oriental market where the carpets, and perfumes from the East are sold. But, please can you tell me why and how you've allowed yourselves to be invaded by America and Britain?

I feel embarrassed and ashamed whenever I remember that, Britain participated in the invasion of your country. I would never have expected that the British parliament would've agreed to such a shameful act!

It'll take the British a long time to forgive themselves for this act. I myself am ashamed. You must be angry with us and you are right to be. But I'm asking you not to stop in the middle of the road, and throw us out of your car before we reached the airport. Remember, you promised my son to take us to the airport.

Frank laughed at the old lady's joke. She joined in with her daughter-in-law laughing too, but soon she carried on with what she had been saying:

- I really mean what I'm saying. You'd be in the right if you were angry with us, because what happened to your country is something, we should all be ashamed of. I don't think anyone can fix things. Every day politicians are doing one stupid thing after another, causing the deaths of thousands of people. Later on they might announce to the world that they are sorry. But what I can't understand is how politicians, who are supposed to have volunteered to serve the people, will commit a crime against them and never do anything else but apologize. What about the innocent people who have lost their lives, or who became physically or mentally disabled, because of the stupid wars that have been forced on them by their leaders.

Frank replied to her:

- We know that people are not responsible, for what their rulers and politicians do. We also know that people from here, and other countries which welcome refugees, from Iraq and other devastated countries, don't like to attack others or invade their countries. After all, they deserve a safe haven, after enduring unbearable suffering in their home countries. We know most people don't like to attack others, or invade their countries. These

decisions are taken by the countries' leaders, for their own political self- interest.

The woman interrupted him, saying:

- I'm really talking about Iraq. I'm fascinated by Baghdad and Iraq, more than any other country, because of the beautiful stories we learned about Baghdad since childhood. I don't know much about other countries or what happened to them. Maybe they've gone through the same experiences, as what happened in Iraq and Baghdad. But Baghdad will always be special and different from other places.

The old lady's words hit Frank bitterly. She didn't excuse or give an inch, to those who had participated in the criminal destruction of an entire country, dispersing its people. She didn't mention that, Iraq may also have been partially responsible for what had happened. It was ruled by a psychopath who had no moral compass. His violence knew no bounds when dealing with his own people, or anyone who might find themselves at his mercy. She didn't go into any details, or find an excuse for what had happened. An entire people paid an enormous price for the narcissism and madness, of a ruler whose insane behavior and ignorance, lead to the destruction of an ancient country, with its entire infrastructure and millions of lives. What was also surprising was that many great, powerful countries didn't care about this point, but, instead, insisted on punishing an entire nation for the crimes of its insane ruler. She

seemed to be imbued with an authenticity, derived from a fictional image of a magical Baghdad she had created as a child. With the devastation of Baghdad, she was distraught, for Baghdad now **was** nothing more than a mere faint memory of what once was.

Frank tried to compare what this lady knew about Baghdad, or, rather, what she had heard and imagined about it, and what he himself had heard about Baghdad. He had also heard a lot about it. But he hadn't seen Baghdad for more than a few hours, when he passed through its outer suburbs, as he was leaving Iraq for the first and last time. He had spent all his early years in the south of Iraq, far away from Baghdad. He didn't have any special feelings for the great city, which people talk about. In fact, he didn't have any opinion about its reputation. Like many others who have never seen it, he didn't have much of an idea about what life was like, for the people of Baghdad. He failed to form an image in his mind about them, whether good or bad. He just used to consider Baghdad as a large, strange city, which he had nothing to do with. He felt no more attachment to it than any other city in Iraq.

He also had a lot more important things to worry about, than to care about Baghdad. He had a large family back home, and he knew nothing about them since he had left Iraq, and no longer heard about them. After he had decided to leave, he wasn't able to see his family again.

He always thought about them, especially his poor mother, who loved him with that special love, of

a mother for her youngest son. She always pitied him, and didn't believe that he could live in peace, in this aggressive world. He knew that she must be weeping day and night, missing him. Yet he doesn't even know if his mother is still alive... or... not. He doesn't know how his family is getting on, day to day, who has moved away, or even who is still alive or not. Everything he heard about his old country had an aura of murder, blood and death. He didn't hear anything about his family, and there was no way to contact them. He had been trying to get information, from members of his community, who visited southern Iraq. He still hoped to hear something one day. He was also concerned for his own family, his wife and daughter, for whom he was seeking a comfortable and secure life.

Frank deeply felt that this old lady loved Baghdad and Iraq, possibly far more than millions of Iraqis, who don't refrain from causing disastrous catastrophes to their country, because of their weakness and greed, or just because they want to get revenge on those, who one day hurt them. Many people blame the country, for whatever happened to them in the past. So they think this gives them the right to steal anything they can get their hands on from their country.

A big difference between himself and Husain was his ignorance, of the terrible things that happened to Baghdad along her history. Husain had been born and brought up in Baghdad, until he left Iraq to go into exile. Husain always used to say to him:

Those who did not really live in Baghdad...

Will be the reason behind destroying her...

When they have the chance to dominate her...

Husain's saying, which he believed deeply, looks like a verse or a line of poetry of unknown poet. But it cannot always be considered to be true in all the cases. Frank himself from his simple knowledge of history, replied that the builder of Baghdad was not a Baghdadi. Husain responded by saying that the ruler who built Baghdad, wanted it to be his own castle and not for the good of Baghdad. Husain could always win an argument because he was so knowledgeable. He knew everything, particularly about these painful and tragic events.

Before arriving at the airport, Frank wanted to ask the old lady, why she was so upset about Britain's participation in two major wars against Iraq, especially the latest one, when they entered Iraq with the Americans as occupying forces. She replied that because she is British, and was born and raised in Britain, and that she feels responsible for the behavior of Britain as a State, towards other countries. She believed that Britain contributed to the destruction of Iraq, after once being the sponsor of Iraq, after the end of First World War. She recalled that the British had established the first monarchy in Iraq, which was a better alternative to the Ottoman Sultanate.

At this point Frank stopped replying to her, as he didn't know what to say. He didn't know much about this period of Iraq's history. But that didn't

prevent him from believing that, what she said wasn't completely true - something was wrong, somehow. So he decided to return to Husain, to pick his brain about this. He could find out the truth from him later.

FRANK AND BRIGITTE: A CASUAL CHAT

After the airport trip, it was still too early to pick Carol up from school. He had almost two hours to kill, so he decided to go home for a break, unless he got another call from the taxi company.

Brigitte woke up just before noon, and began preparing the main evening meal. The three of them always ate together, if Brigitte didn't have an afternoon shift.

When he got home, Frank was eager to tell Brigitte about meeting Um Muhammad. So the first question he asked her, as he opened the front door, was:

- Do you know a woman who calls herself Um Muhammad—she's really unbearable?

Brigitte was surprised and asked:

- Why are you so keen to know?
- No. I'm not that excited or keen to know. In fact I hope your answer is that you don't know her...

- What do you mean? There are dozens of Um
- Muhammad in this city. What's so special about this one?
- Well she is really special. She sticks her nose into everything. She's a repulsive hypocrite. She reminded me of the worst kind of people, who try to appear to be friendly, just to collect information about other people.
- I don't know who you're talking about, who is she? Doesn't she have her own name, not just calling her by her son's name?
- Why are you so interested in her?
- I'm not interested in her, but she seemed to know you, as soon as she heard my name.
- It's possible. You've got a recognizable name.
- You're the only Frank round here. Many people know me through your name, rather than the other way round. They know me because of their hospital appointments. They ask me ridiculous questions because I work in a hospital—as if I was a specialist in heart surgery!
- Does it bother you a lot?
- Does it affect your work?
- No, not too much. I'm only too happy when I can help somebody. But some of them ask me for things outside my power. They don't realize that I can't go to other hospital departments, and get them priority like in, say, the radiology department. I can't help them jump the queue,

or talk to doctors on their behalf. It's a big problem trying to change old habits, from when they were living in their native countries. When they used to go to public hospitals, the service was terrible, so they used to try to get someone, to speak up for them to get preferential treatment. But here the service is in no way comparable, to what they were used to. At least everyone who goes to the hospital here doesn't need to sacrifice his dignity and self respect, to get an appointment. Many immigrants carry with them their old feelings of envy, that they were consumed with in their home countries. They were jealous of those who were more successful than them financially. But in their new country, they can't communicate with those who are better off. So when they see this rich country, they think they have the right to envy it, and maybe even steal from it. As far as they're concerned, Iraq is finished and has nothing they could be jealous of. What does it have, the previous stupid leadership? Or the thieves and criminals, who are running the country now, and who plundered all its potential?

- Yes, you're right. Let's forget Um Muhammad and those like her. We don't have to have anything to do with them.
- So how was your morning? Where did you meet this woman, Um Muhammad?
- I went to Husain's grocery store, because I haven't seen him for more than a week. I met

her there. Then I got an airport booking and had an interesting conversation with the two women passengers. We mostly talked about Iraq, and what had happened to it.

Brigitte interrupted:

- It must have been a long talk. But you'd better get ready to pick up Carol, while I finish preparing dinner.
- There's still an hour before I have to go to the school. Aren't you interested in the two women I took to the airport, or what I think about Um Muhammad?
- Yes, but I'm only half awake and I'm quite busy.
- Talking about Iraq or people like Um Muhammad, requires me to focus my mind. Why don't you go to watch TV?
- No, I think I'll have a rest. I feel sleepy. I promised Husain I'd go over to see him this evening, to talk about some other things I've been thinking about.
- You're lucky to find a friend like Husain, someone you can talk to about almost anything. It's not easy to find a woman who could be a friend like Husain. I think women are causing all the problems in the world. They should admit this!
- That's your opinion. I haven't pushed you into saying this. It didn't even cross my mind. Well,

maybe it did in the past, but not now. As for Husain and my friendship with him, it's true like you say. I'm happy and lucky to have a friend like him. But the problem is Husain himself doesn't seem to be happy or lucky, and this hurts me a lot.

In the evening, after Frank and Carol had returned from school, and eaten their evening meal together, Brigitte sat down with Carol, asking her about what was going on at school. Carol recounted her day as if she was a tape recording. Whenever she forgot something, she went back over it, even if it didn't seem relevant. Carol described everything that happened at school, as if she felt she owed it to her mother. Frank was sitting, relaxing on another sofa watching Brigitte and Carol. He was not convinced that it was necessary for Carol, to remember every detail of her school day, and then come home and describe it to her mother. He could see that this was a difficult task, and that Carol would not be able to put up with it indefinitely. He didn't even know, why Brigitte insisted on Carol doing this every day. It had often led to problems between him and Brigitte, to such an extent that their marriage could have reached a dead end, if he himself had not decided to back down. However he was also unsure as to whether he could put up with this much longer.

He didn't know what to do while he sat waiting for it, to be time to call on Husain again, so he decided to phone him to catch up with him. Unfortunately, Husain had apparently switched off his phone. Frank tried again after a short while, but the phone

was still off. So he thought he'd better tell Brigitte that, he had to go to Husain's grocery store, to find out why he had turned his phone off, and that he'd be back before she had to leave for her night shift at the hospital.

Frank arrived at the grocery and found Ali instead of his father. He asked him where his father was. Ali replied, rather cryptically, using a word Frank hadn't heard for many years.

Ali replied to him saying:

- My father suddenly decided today to go for "I'tikaf"* A retreat!

Frank responded, while trying not to laugh out loud, feeling like a guffaw was almost bursting from inside his throat. He said:

- Ali, what are you saying? What do you mean 'he decided to go for I'tikaf today?' How do you even know what this word means? You were very young when you first came to this country. You wouldn't have known such a word.

Then Ali interrupted him and he also was laughing, and said:

- Do you think my father would have left us, without knowing these old words of our mother tongue?

He believes we need to know the old words of our language, in order to understand them and how to deal with anyone using them. You know my father hasn't forgotten to teach us, all the vocabulary of our heritage, so that we won't forget our culture. He believes that the most important thing is not to forget where we've come from, whatever personal difficulties we may have.

Frank replied:

- Oh Ali, will you please stop joking and tell me the real story. Why did your father suddenly decide to go into retreat?

I know he doesn't believe in any I'tikaf – with whom is he doing this I'tikaf?

- Ah, well that just confirms that you still know little about my father. He considers the I'tikaf as a necessity for the mind, soul and ethical compass. However, he doesn't take every I'tikaf as a form of worship or mysticism.
- Ali, please tell me what's the matter?

What's happened?

If what you are saying is true, why should he go into I'tikaf today?

What could have happened today to make him behave like this? I was with him this morning and we agreed that, I should come back in the evening, so that we could carry on our conversation.

- Yes, Frank, what you say is true. But what I say is also true. He was upset by something, or talked to someone he didn't like. That was why my father decided to go on his retreat.
- Um Muhammad, there's no one else but her, and Abu Muhammad. Yes, they are the only ones who could be the reason.
- Frank shouted this in answer to Ali's words, as the cause of his father's upset. Ali was surprised by Frank's shout, so he also shouted, in reply:
- Um Muhammad! Is she the woman who is spreading gossip among our community, and throughout the city that I'm getting married? She's a really strange woman. How did she meet my father? Did she come here? What do you know?

Frank explained to Ali some of what had happened in the morning, when he was in the grocery store, and Um Muhammad and her husband had come in. He recalled their conversation, and how Husain was annoyed and disturbed, because she was talking about Ali getting married. However, Frank questioned Ali, saying:

- Why would your father get so upset by such a woman, when he's been used to seeing people like her for as long, as he's been working here in this grocery?

- I don't know, you're right, but it seems that some attacks cause more pain, when they come from certain places.
- I can't catch up with your discussion, and with your father's, it's like a mine field to me. I'm a simple man and I've got no idea how to analyze things deeply. Just let me know when your father's retreat ends. I hope it'll end soon.
- Yes, yes, I think it will end in a day or two. It won't last long. What is important here is that it is simple. I don't think we should be afraid, because I'm sure he...

“Would not claim something unusual has happened”

But, tell me, is this the first time you ever knew about my father doing I'tikaf?

Frank agreed:

- Yes, I never knew anything about it before. I suppose this means that I have a lot to learn about your father, his qualities and characteristics. Without doubt, your father is a master in this time of slavery, where those who are metamorphosed into strange creatures, are widespread in the world these days. These are the creatures of the twenty-first century.
- You are clearly very wise. You have that in common with my father.
- If we didn't have some similarity, I wouldn't consider him as my mentor.

- Yes, I know my father was born and connected to a world, far away from the one we actually live in. But this has not prevented him from always trying to live the reality, which brings his suffering, and we, I mean my mother and I, feel the pain when we see him suffering, and we tell him that, but his reply always comes that, he enjoys life only when he lives it this way, otherwise life is meaningless to him!

I support his beliefs, because at least he lives better than many of his peers and friends, who didn't want to leave their old world, apart from those who fell by the wayside, during their long journey of suffering in this life.

Frank remained silent and did not know what to say, or how he could comment about Husain's beliefs. So he asked Ali to convey a message to his father, telling him:

**Living in this world is very boring,
for those who live without principles.
But it is more boring when they don't know,
how to handle this boredom.**

Then Frank's phone rang. It was a job from the taxi office. He asked Ali once again to give his father the message, and ask him to call him when his I'tikaf had ended. On his way out of the grocery, Frank

picked up two of the local newspapers, which are distributed free of charge in local shops. He planned to read them later in the evening, which he expected to be long and boring. When he is at home, after Brigitte goes to the hospital night shift, he is left alone with his worries and fears about what is coming.

THE BIG CITY

People from a variety of ethnic backgrounds live in the city, which is barely a hundred years old. They have come from most parts of the world. There are people from many different cultures and civilizations, from the ancient world, like Asia, Africa and Europe, as well as many who were originally from South America. Perhaps the only people who are not found there are the Aborigines of Australia and the Maoris of New Zealand.

It is not very different from other cities, which have taken in refugees and immigrants, for the past forty or fifty years. There are of course various reasons for these migrations. At the same time there are several reasons why the host countries want to offer them a home. There are millions of people who deserve to find shelter, so they can live in peace, and make a contribution to the advancement of life, and the economy in the country, which has accepted them as immigrants and given them a second chance. They have given them the chance of a reasonable kind of life, which they didn't have before. They

hadn't been fortunate enough to have been born in countries, which would provide them with safety and dignity, and the chance to enjoy life without the need for immigration, and all the difficulties that go along with it. They might have to completely change, their cultural and social status, in a way they are replacing one kind of suffering with another, if they try to forget or deny their old lives, in order to live their new ones—that is if they have been accepted!

It has never been easy—never. Anyone who claims it is, is a liar!

It is true suffering, which did not appear to them before. Perhaps many of them are not suffering yet, however the many years they have been in their new countries.

The politicians and social researchers from each host country, try to apply their social theories when dealing with these immigrants. No one knows how and why one method is chosen, or why others have been rejected? What is important at the end is that, these immigrants are subjected to laws, which are based on Human Rights legislation. However, it can be said that, many immigrant programs, which have been adopted, are rather naïve or even stupid. They have nothing to do with the mentality of the immigrant people, and they don't take into account anything related to how they think—the foundations and social concepts, that they rely on and like to maintain. Most of these countries, as it seems, do not want these immigrants, to be completely integrated into their new society, even though they claim to

be aiming for it. There are many immigrants who volunteer to organize social activities, based on their belief that, it is what these countries really want, but it seems the truth is otherwise!

In the long run, however, especially when there was an increase in immigration in the last quarter of the twentieth century, each of these countries started to develop its own strategy. This was based on how to achieve the best possible outcome, from these new immigrants, in a way that was mutually beneficial to both parties—the immigrants and the host country. In this way the country can maintain its legal and social principles, while, at the same time, preserving the dignity and harmony of the immigrants. However, it should be remembered that those immigrants, freely chose their asylum destination, and they were not forced to go there. Therefore, they should have no right whatsoever to impose their life style, on the country which has offered them a new home.

But, basically, this reciprocal relationship between the two parties can never be smooth, because of the fact that a large proportion of these asylum seekers, do not realize how critical and dangerous it is going to be, for them and their families in the near future. They do not know if their actual capacity, to live in a new and totally strange society is sufficient. They might not even know where the country, where they are seeking asylum, is located.

Isn't it important for the authorities, to have reliable personal information about these asylum seekers,

so that they know whether or not they will be happy, productive members of their new country, before offering them the right to remain?

Isn't it important to know why this asylum seeker is, specifically coming to this country, and what he intends to do afterwards?

Shouldn't the States and their governments have a fuller role, and a more comprehensive idea, in terms of knowing what these immigrants, want from the country where they seek asylum?

Isn't it possible that most asylum seekers do not know, what is waiting for them and their families, in these new countries?

Eventually they fall between the foundations, on which the modern free life of the country of immigration is based, on the one hand, and on the other hand, their continued yearning to maintain the old traditions of their native countries. They still believe in them, although they may not practice them in their new countries. On the contrary, if they did, they might be subjected to legal sanctions. Some of the acts - if were practiced - could very well be considered offensive and deserve severe punishment. Yet, they don't think they've done anything wrong and are shocked if their adopted country dares to impose sanctions on them.

Furthermore, even if they knew they would face legal proceedings, they wouldn't be deterred from carrying on, regardless even if they faced life imprisonment.

As a result, some asylum seekers believe that, their host country should do everything for them, as if they were living in their original countries. They expect to have the same life style and that the State should provide them with everything, sooner rather than later. So logic suggests that the host country is at fault for deceiving asylum seekers as far as human rights is concerned!

How can such a dilemma be resolved?

Could it be by those people who experiment in this laboratory of life—this vast and violent laboratory? Although such people might have different areas of expertise in science, psychology or the social sciences, they know little or nothing about the attitudes, and life styles prevailing in the countries, the asylum seekers originated from, and how different they are from the norms, or behavior in Western countries. Most of them came to the west seeking asylum, expecting a better life. They had not necessarily experienced oppression, nor did they seem keen to change their way of life. Indeed all they wanted was a better life financially. They thought that they could live in these countries, without doing anything in return, and that the governments would carry on giving them hand-outs, and providing them with everything they need. They even know which countries will provide them with a more luxurious way of life.

How can you solve such a problem, which has already escalated?

These economic migrants actually interfere, with the chances of genuine asylum seekers. It was because of them that Western countries first offered sanctuary to people, who had been persecuted in their homelands. Why should they give the same rights to others who don't deserve them?

This is particularly true when they seize every advantage, but never stop complaining about changes they might have to make, in their lives to conform with the laws and customs of their new country.

They might even go so far as to commit crimes, which were not considered to be offences in their original countries but are serious crimes in their new countries and deserve harsh punishment.

How can such a situation be resolved to please both sides?

HUSAIN IN HIS I'TIKAF

In his home, Husain sat in the living room as usual, quiet and silent, not talking about anything. His wife Zainab, Um Ali, sat opposite him watching television, looking at her husband from time to time. In her hands lies a shirt which looked like Husain's. She was fixing its buttons. She was doing it so quietly and slowly, that it looked like she had nothing important to do, apart from watching one of the Arab TV channels, which was showing a drama series. Although Husain was sitting in silence his mind was fully occupied, as if the weight of the whole world, was resting on his shoulders. Zainab started talking to him, saying:

- Abu Ali, how many years have we been here in this country?
- About twenty-six years. Why do you ask?
- No reason, just that it's a really long time. I mean if we had a child who was born here, they would now have become a grown up man or woman.

- Is that all you wanted to discover by asking this incisive question?

He said this mockingly in his usual sarcastic way, and laughed a light laugh when answering her. Then he continued to say to her:

- Zainab, please don't make me laugh. Don't you know I'm doing my I'tikaf, and I'm not supposed to laugh?

My I'tikaf could become useless, and a waste of time and effort.

She quickly replied to him:

- Do you think your I'tikaf will help you get to heaven, to enjoy your time with the angels?

But Husain continued laughing a high-pitched laugh and said:

- It really is true that:

“Worse harms is what makes you laugh”

Yes. Why not? I want to go to my paradise, my own heaven. My heaven is not based on the presence of angels, as rewards for efforts on earth. I don't know how they can be of benefit, or if their reward is worth having. It isn't necessary to creep with people into their paradise. It's true that people in ancient times had a lot of wisdom, and I think what my grandmother used to say is true:

“They left nothing unless they mentioned it, in a wise saying, a proverb or verses of poetry”

But that doesn't mean they were right in most of what they thought. My grandmother called them "*people of reason*". And when we were young, my brothers and I always asked her:

"Who are these people of reason?"

But she didn't give a straight answer to our childish question. So we thought that the people of reason she meant, were maybe our neighbors, or those who lived in our neighborhood. Probably, she herself has heard it from her ancestors that, the "*people of reason*" are those who created these proverbs. Perhaps she also didn't ask who these people were. That is what I think actually happened. Or maybe she asked but didn't get an answer.

Zainab, do you notice how many things we inherit, but we don't know how did we keep them?

They stay with us throughout our lives, because we don't question their origin. At the same time, we wonder about and research thousands of trivial things, in an attempt to discover everything about them. What I mean is, for instance, this woman Um Muhammad, she came into the grocery today, dragging her husband behind her like a bull, with his bloated belly and vacant head, just for trying to hunt news. She expected me to join in with her tasteless, trivial conversation. These are the people living in this community. If they had

stayed in their original countries, they would have been working night and day, just to get the basics of life. But that wouldn't matter, because they never expected anything more. They were just happy to survive poverty, oppression, and tyranny at the hands of those who had grabbed power in our country.

Zainab interrupted him:

- Husain, please don't turn it into a funeral.
- We've lost the best years of our lives crying, and slapping our heads, remembering those, who died centuries ago. We didn't even know them, nor did our parents or grandparents. They weren't even our relatives. We only heard about them, and then afterwards began to cry for them, and for our loved ones. To this day we also cry for those who are still alive, but suffering injustice. Yet we can't do anything to help them either. How long do you think we should keep on crying?

Don't you want me to make you some tea?

We can talk about anything you want, as we drink it.

- Yes, as you say, make some tea. It's really time for tea. Although the best time would be with a drink other than tea. Tea, as a drink, has become something that is, almost impossible to discern between its existence and its absence. It's a drink for those who have no clear attitude. It's

a drink for those who don't like to take sides. A drink for those, who it's hard to understand, if they are right or wrong.

But, Zainab, you're not the kind of person to offer other drinks!

It's better to stick with the tea proposal.

- My dear Husain, you didn't teach or show me how to participate in such gatherings, in those old days of oppression, which we passed through. My father didn't join those kinds of groups. He was barely able to provide sustenance for us. He was not so selfish as to deprive us of money, just to spend it on his own enjoyment with such groups.

I always remember how many things he lost or was deprived of. If you were not lucky to finish your education, and worked in a time which people now call "*the blessed time*," you couldn't have joined those groups. Then you wouldn't have some time for yourself to enjoy, which you still remember today.

- I don't only remember those days. I actually lived them. I remember the people who attended those gatherings. We never imagined what life and the years would do to us. But I don't want those days to return, because they crushed and terminated many without any guilt. All their dreams have ended. They were only trying to move on from being mere living beings to being human beings, who live their own lives and have feelings—even if such feelings were a fantasy. They needed to feel that they are

actually living; that life is something worth living.

It was exactly like what Warda al-Jaza'iriya* said": *What have the years done to us?"*

- Life and the years have impacted on other people we knew, much more than they did to us. They have been kinder to us. Maybe that was because you carefully planned when you decided to take us, out of the hell of that world. But it's true, we have been luckier than others.
- Yes, we have been luckier than many other people we know, and even people we don't know. This is a big problem. I've no logical explanation for it—why we have succeeded and others have not, why we have been saved, and our life continued while others have been crushed by the “justice” of this life when they did nothing wrong.

If

The land is unjust

The geography is unfair

The States are unwise

The rulers are oppressive

The United Nations is unjust

The Security Council is unjust

Justice is on the side of the powerful

Why can't we have someone else apart from those, who might be merciful to us, and show us some compassion?

With whom can we face this injustice?

Where could this be?

How much injustice should take place, before justice can be restored?

A justice that restores some of the rights that have been stolen; rights which have been stolen throughout all the ages of human history; stolen from millions of people who passed through life, like a shallow water quietly flowing, through a long narrow stream, without being noticed by anyone, then descending towards a groove, which leads it to the earth's core. There it settles, maybe for centuries, until it reemerges into the world in a different form—a form that is unrelated to its previous form. Then it will become increasingly more complex, mixing truth with falsehood and both will be lost, without anyone realizing what has happened. There is no wisdom in that.

Why should it all be so complicated?

Are we actually different in any way, from the animal world which is living around us?

Is it possible that mankind's life could evolve from its animal state to a more of human life form?

FRANK AT HOME

Frank arrived home after he had finished his taxi job, which was his normal daily routine. Brigitte had been getting ready to go out for her night shift at the hospital. He remained sitting in the living room that night. Normally he used to go to bed soon after Carol went to sleep, even before Brigitte left the house. But today he was preoccupied with this new thing he had heard about Husain and his I'tikaf.

He had heard a great deal, but he didn't know much about it. He only knew that it was related to rituals, and religious practices that have nothing to do with Husain. So why was Husain getting involved in this when, he was not practicing any religious rituals? He knew that, when Husain was a young man, he was religious and carried out certain practices and religious rites. Husain himself had previously mentioned to Frank that, he was more interested in religious culture, than the rituals themselves. He liked the revolutionary sentiments, the faith and the fight against tyrants. These were the reasons he really liked religion, not the rites! For this reason he

was brought up on revolutionary concepts against injustice and tyranny.

Some of the time he was more interested in religious concepts and faith, while at other times he was keener on doctrinal concepts. But how could any of these old ideas, have any relation to what Husain was doing today with his I'tikaf?

Could it be that Husain had resumed his previous religious beliefs and thoughts?

Is it possible?

No, it's very unlikely. His current state of mind was inconsistent, with most prevailing religious concepts. However, Ali claimed that his father always, used to retreat from time to time, for a day or two, but he wasn't paying much attention to Husain's I'tikaf, and he considered it a normal issue that, had happened many times, and probably would keep on happening. So he told Frank that he didn't care about it and that

“Husain would not claim anything after the end of his I'tikaf.”

Frank didn't know what he meant by this, and he didn't ask about it, because there were a lot of other things, he wanted to know about but there was no time. He was surprised when he heard about Husain's I'tikaf, and this meant that he didn't have time to ask about other things.

What a strange family this is!

The father, Husain, is a distinctive character, and his son, Ali, also seems to be unusual in many respects. He has a great sense of humor, making jokes whenever he gets the chance. Being raised by Husain has given him a strong personality. He is not like other young men of his age and generation. Ali, together with his parents and his two sisters, has gone through periods of suffering since childhood. This has forged his character, and made him an important member of his community.

Frank was unsure what Ali did for a living, or was he still studying? He didn't think it was the right time to ask him, when he met him in the grocery store earlier, mainly because he was surprised by the news of Husain's I'tikaf.

What is this I'tikaf?

Is it a state of limited monasticism for a certain time? Or, is it the case of the need to worship more than usual?

Does the retreat differ from other forms of worship? Is this one of the similarities between religions?

Why does a person need to spend a special time in a certain place worshipping God?

Can't he prove his sincerity and worship his God, while going about his everyday life?

Doesn't God know what is in the hearts of his creatures?

Why should a person choose to worship God at a certain time, and exclude other times?

Isn't this analogous to what happens between people themselves?

Isn't this an example of what is going on between the weak and the powerful, when the weak are trying hard to please the powerful, or just avoid them, even when they haven't made a mistake?

You never know what pleases the powerful, or what may irritate or anger them.

Many images were going through Frank's mind that, he was reminded of every time he had gone to church with Brigitte and Carol. This was especially true last time, when he was greeted by the church preacher. He remembered the preacher's friendly smile, as he entered the church on Sunday with his wife and daughter. Some people went to church regularly every Sunday, to pray to God to ask for mercy and other things they needed. Some of them saw Frank as an outsider in the church. They thought that he didn't belong. They didn't like seeing him there, or seeing how the preacher had received him. Perhaps they thought he shouldn't have welcomed him to the church, or paid him any attention. They believed that his conversion to Christianity, and the abandonment of his original religion was fake! They

thought there was something strange behind it, and that the truth would be revealed in the near future. Frank was confused and wondered who was being genuine.

Was it the preacher, God's representative, who had a duty to welcome people who come to the church?

What about the other church members? Were they the ones who were being honest?

The truth of the matter was that, Frank needed to confront the people who were rejecting him!

They were more interested in raising doubts, suggesting that he had hidden intentions.

They were the kind of people who always saw the negative in everything.

Such an attitude would eventually push him to dislike, his new religion, even though he had his own reasons for giving up his old religion. Hence, Frank often tried to avoid going to church, in spite of the psychological comfort and sense of security he got from it.

Frank had been through, and was still going through, difficult times, psychologically. There was tightness in his chest, pressing down, almost causing him to suffocate, when faced with one of those people who didn't believe that his conversion to Christianity was genuine.

How could they know what faith is, or whether they themselves truly and genuinely, have a certainty in their faith?

Or maybe they consider themselves defenders of the kingdom of God.

Frank's crisis of faith often caused problems with his wife, who insisted that he should pay no attention to such people. There would always be people like that, and the best way to deal with them would be, to ignore them and their opinions. Frank knew that what Brigitte said was theoretically true, but difficult to apply.

But how can you ignore those who accuse you, or hate you from within?

You know they teach how to hate, be cruel, and be abhorrent.

Can there be evil and hatred in the kingdom of heaven?

He had already asked Husain about this issue and remembered how seriously he took his question. He remained silent for some time as if he was thinking back to something from the past!

Frank didn't know why Husain's mind was so shattered, when he questioned him. However, what was important was that Husain's answer was, more surprising than the impact of hearing the question. His answer was:

“Go and look for a movie called ‘Beckett’ or ‘Honor of God’ and you will find the answer.”

Frank remembered that, he couldn’t get hold of the video of the film at the time. Then he forgot about it.

THE TEA SESSION

Zainab brought a tray of tea with a teapot and everything else that was needed. She placed it on the coffee table in front of Husain, who stared at the tray questioningly, furrowing his eyebrows. Or maybe he just stared at the tea as he always did.

Zainab, who was watching him, said:

- What are you looking at? It's as if you've just seen a tray of tea for the first time. The tray and teapot are the same; the cups are the same; nothing is new.
- No, I'm not looking at it any differently from usual.
- Don't I know your normal look?

I can distinguish it from a look of surprise. After all these years together, I think I ought to be able to convince you that you gave the tray a strange look.

Husain responded:

- Now you're making me feel guilty!

I really mean what I'm saying. Have I made you carry such a heavy burden, all these years we've spent together, that you know what I want, just from the way I look at something? You know what I want you to do, and you adjust your behavior accordingly. It's as if I've imposed a life of military discipline on you, even though you know I'm quite liberal, and have always hated wars and armies.

- We have all lived a military life with conflicts.

It was the same for our grandparents and will be the same for our children. Don't you remember our leader, Nebuchadnezzar, how he couldn't see anything in life but war, and looked on us as fuel for his wars. You certainly can't have forgotten how, he used to talk to school children about power and conflict. But this isn't important now. You must tell me now, what did you mean by your strange look at the tea tray?

- Why do you care so much about how I look at things?

Hasn't it been enough that you have suffered all these years, because you always took my interests into consideration?

But I want you to feel that you have your own life. You can have your own opinion about anything. You don't have to remain connected to me and my view of life.

- That's true, to a certain extent. I mean only part of it is true, not all of it. I suppose we've

benefited from your guidance in our lives, even though your suggestions were sometimes rather harsh, and could have militarized our life. But it was useful for us because, we were unarmed and unprotected in the middle of a jungle, lost between all kinds of monsters and raptors, from the smallest scorpions to the largest carnivores. But I still want to know why you stared at the tea tray so strangely. Did you expect me to bring you a new tea tray, rather than this old one?

- Zainab, don't worry about why I was staring. I only looked at it this way today. I didn't look at it like that before, and I'm sure I won't look at it like that in the future.
- So you were looking at the tray differently today. What did this poor tray do?
- Don't you realize that, when you kept going on about me staring at the tray, you ignored what the tray holds?

There's the teapot, which contains the tea, the tea cups and the sugar bowl. So the tray is carrying whatever is needed for the tea drinking session, whether good or bad. It's not held responsible for what it's carrying. It's just there to carry the tea. What we will actually be using, for the tea drinking ceremony is the teapot, and the tea in it, as well as the cups.

By the way, why did you get these mugs?

We only started using them when we came here, instead of our traditional small tea

glasses, “Istikans,*” which we used to have back home.

- Husain, you seem to be afflicted with a condition. I can't remember its name now.
- I think you mean homesickness.
- Yes it is.
- That's possible. I've resisted it for a quarter of a century. I feel like I'm on the verge of collapse now. I don't know if I can carry on fighting it or not.

I was actually looking at the teapot, not the tea tray. You know I always focus on what is most important, and I'm not like the usual people – who are called the riffraff, as Nebuchadnezzar's media, in the early days of collapse of his foolish empire, called them mobs.

- This means that you think I'm either from the riffraff or the mobs! You should give me the courtesy, of considering me as a member of the riffraff, rather than being from a mob.
- No, you're neither riffraff nor one of the mobs.
- That is as long as you remember what kind of teapot, was popularly used by people and in the cafes?
- Why you are asking this strange question? As you know, my dear, I wasn't someone who regularly frequented cafes, so I have no clear idea what kind of teapots they used to use. Was it usually a white ceramic pot, decorated with colorful flowers and figures?

I didn't like them. They seemed silly to me. But, remember, I'm younger than you. You're remembering things I've never seen.

Why are you trying to test my memory?

I wish you were sitting with my grandmother, so that you could remember the past.

- God's mercy for Joseph Wahbi*, when he was saying "Oh hell!"

Yes, here I'm the one saying, "Oh hell!" Because for the first time, I know you thought that, those colorful pictures on the old ceramic teapots, were silly and stupid, and they depicted ridiculous scenes. You might be right. Most of them depicted princesses wearing grand dresses or bouquets of flowers. I can't imagine why they choose those pictures for the teapots. I don't know why I just remembered the shape and look of those teapots. When they were broken, people actually repaired them in a strange and complex way, before they went back into service again. We saw many teapots showing their injuries, as if they had emerged from violent and unfair battles, during their service to mankind.

How unjust is the owner of the teapot, both when he decides to repair its cracks, so that it can carry on being of service, and finally when he eventually decides to throw it away, when it is beyond repair. Now I can see how the craftsman was distorting reality by deliberately painting joyful, happy images on things which

were clearly bleeding to death. Their destinies tied them to being obliged, to participate in a bloody show; they lost their most precious and dearest—their dignity and their souls. Although to be fair, this sad fate was probably only applicable to those teapots that had to sit on the stove and keep boiling inside. I remember the people who fixed broken teapots. They were strangely clothed men, who went through the ancient alleys, calling loudly that they could repair everything made of china, whether teapots, cups or plates. They charged a pittance and sat on the ground, in front of the house where they had been called to do repairs. They had some simple, very ancient tools in a cloth bag. They carried out the repair by making several small holes, through the china and using an old manual drill, which probably goes back to the nineteenth century. Then they used some strange, stainless pins and some traditional glue. Of course that was long before the invention of the kind of instant glues we now have. Then they put that on the wounds of the broken parts, and finished the process of rehabilitating the teapot, so that it could return to service again. This repair service was usually a complete success. The people rejoiced at the return of their teapots, and joined them in their enjoyment by having a cup of tea. It didn't matter that they were still carrying their fresh wounds, and had to ready themselves for the possibility of further wounds, which they might receive in the future. They did not know

when they would come, or how serious they might be.

It's always reminded me of scenes from a TV documentary, about World War I or II, showing wounded soldiers who were supported by their comrades, as they struggled along on their retreat. It might have been when they were facing loss in a battle, or even the prospect of complete defeat in a war, when all the soldiers were taken captive and faced even more suffering and agony. This was when those who had suffered defeat have to face the triumph of the victor.

May God have mercy on "*Abu al Ala' Al-Ma'arri**" when he says:

“All life is tiresome. What surprises me, Is who asks for more?”

At that point Zainab managed to interrupt:

- And what about you, Husain?

Were you expecting me to bring you tea in a broken china pot, repaired in the traditional way?

Where can I find one here in this modern world? You don't even get those people, who used to fix broken china, back home any more. I don't know where they went. I don't remember them myself. Even your daughters, Laila and Su'ad, and their husbands, would be surprised to hear

your story. However, they would mostly enjoy it and would probably be smiling.

I've actually just remembered I saw a china teapot, at our old home that displayed the effects of drilled holes and nails, as you described. If I could have predicted how you would have felt about it, I would have brought it with us, on our long journey here so that you could enjoy its company in our strange new land.

Can't you tell me what's wrong with your I'tikaf and all these depressing memories? I really love to reminisce with you, and to remember how we were. I'm fascinated by the saying:

“Those, who have no first, will have no last.”

It's a really wise saying, but I don't know why it means so much to me. We don't actually apply it to our lives. Maybe it's only applicable to people who are quite different from us. We can identify them easily, from their misconduct and bad characters, because they are keen to carry on in exactly, the same way as they did, when they were in their old countries. They only consider what is of benefit to them, not what causes harm to their interest or what annoys them!

You know this better than me.

Husain interrupted his wife:

- I'm not used to you speaking with such insight. It's so pleasing, but what you say makes me want to go further and ask you for more clarification. What do you really mean?

Zainab laughed:

- Maybe, but let's go to a commercial break first!

This jokey dialogue was quite common between Husain and Zainab, because they both enjoyed teasing each other in a loving way. Even though Husain himself spent most of his time, engrossed in his own thoughts, and came across as rather depressed, he could still be quite witty. He didn't try to hide his feelings, although he tried to resist them a bit when he talked like this, making fun of things, even himself. Then Husain continued with the same topic of conversation:

- Do you know, my dear Zainab, I've been thinking lately that I'm the china teapot! That teapot, which lived for years sitting on the heat of the fire, holding the tea to delight others with its taste. But barely anyone paid attention to his bruises and wounds, inflicted by all the bad times that he'd lived through.

Before Zainab replied, they heard the front door open, and Ali returned from the grocery, as it was after midnight. He went into the living room to find his parents and say hello.

Husain asked him:

- How was your day?

Ali responded with a smile, clearly showing that he had something to talk about, even though it was quite late at night.

- It wasn't bad. In fact I heard something rather interesting.
- Can you tell us, or is it too late?

Zainab intervened to say:

- Let Ali go to sleep. He's got to go back to the grocery in a few hours. He doesn't even have enough time to get the sleep he needs. Anyway you're supposed to be on a retreat, and you shouldn't be distracted, or your I'tikaf will be pointless. You know you shouldn't start letting your mind wander on random topics.

Husain didn't answer her, but waited to hear Ali's decision, about whether he needed to go to sleep straight away, or whether he would stay up and talk a little.

Ali answered:

- You don't have to worry about me, Mom, I can stay up another half hour, so I can tell you the latest news, I heard about the most recent refugees. Sameer, my friend told me, he dropped by the grocery a couple of hours

ago, and talked about the news he'd heard, about what the refugees are thinking about the government, and what it is doing for them here. It really is unbelievable! He described to me how he used to translate for one of the young people, who had arrived here and was granted refugee status, when he had to talk to the committee who supervised them. He said that this young man, who was about thirty years old, after his interview with the committee, told Sameer what he thought was a secret. He said that he didn't want to stay here, and that he was only going to stay until, he got citizenship and a new passport. Then he planned to go back to his home country! He added that, he couldn't imagine how people could live in a country, where they didn't hear the call to prayer, vibrating through the loudspeakers five times a day; to remind people that it was time to pray. Furthermore, he said that this young man also told him, that he didn't think it was right and lawful religiously, to live in a country where people do not know the value of faith, and don't believe that they must adhere to all the teachings of religion!

That's my news for tonight. See you tomorrow morning.

As Ali turned to leave the living room, he remembered about Frank's visit to the grocery store and told his father:

- I forgot to tell you that Frank came to the grocery store tonight. He seemed very worried about you.
- And what did you tell him?
- I told him not to worry, because you are strong, and we don't need to worry about you, Abu Ali.

Husain smiled and said:

- Thank you for this statement of confidence.
- Oops, sorry, he also asked me to convey a message to you, which was that "*people suffer from boredom here, and their big problem is that they don't know how to deal with this boredom.*" I really didn't understand what he wanted to say, but wondered whether Frank might have intended, to send you a secret message on a particular subject, which is important to you, because you need the people to talk to you in code, for the clear and direct talk loses much of its meaning in the words.
- Well done Falah, thank you. And you Ali, can now go to sleep.

Zainab wanted to comment on what Ali had just said, about his friend Sameer, and about that young refugee, who didn't like life in his new country. But she was keen to go back to the metaphor, of how Husain saw himself as a china teapot. So she said:

- Before I forget to comment on Ali's news, can you tell me the secret of how you resemble a teapot? Do you really think you have suffered that badly?

Do you compare your suffering, even if you suffer today, to that of people who have been forgotten, and have been buried in the four corners of the earth? You know many people who still live in Iraq, and suffer from injustice, poverty and fear.

Husain responded:

- It seems that we are living, with you in a valley and me in another valley. There's no point in going over it all again. Why don't you go to sleep and leave me with my thoughts about what is going on around us?
- Yes, I will go to sleep, but not before you tell me what you think about what Ali has said, about the way that refugee is thinking. Could such a young man change his mind in the future, about this country, particularly after witnessing and enjoying its benefits?
- My mind is shattered now, flitting here and there. This is yet another thing to worry about. I don't want you to waste your time on the same things. It's not going to benefit you in any way. You should devote your time to raising your grandchildren, both the current and the future.

- Do you think our children and grandchildren will be safe, here in this country?
- Who can dare to predict now, what might happen ten years down the road. Personally speaking, I don't expect good things. There are catastrophes happening all over the world and they are growing in their intensity. There always seems to be something that is, being kept from us, something that the weak cannot know. This world belongs to the powerful. It is the world of the mighty. The weak will be making a major mistake, if they imagine that, they will someday have a share in it. The best thing for all of us is to sleep!

There is nothing better than eternal sleep!

FRANK, A NEW MORNING

Frank woke up the next morning after having fewer hours' sleep than usual. He had not gone to sleep, until after two in the morning the previous night. The TV news was repeated on most of the television channels about the waves of refugees, displaced from their native land, Iraq, as well as Syria, whose problems had increased and worsened.

It seemed that hundreds of displaced fugitives, from other countries had already joined these refugees, and taken advantage of the situation to get a chance to claim asylum in a Western country. Many of them had been trying assume the identities of citizens from Iraq or Syria. Those, whose appearance couldn't pass for Iraqi or Syrian, because they came from Africa or the

Far East, were not so lucky in fooling the authorities. However, there were always exceptional cases which slipped through, depending on the mood of immigration officers, who controlled the process of granting the asylum.

So it is from this background and homeland, that countless people, over the years, have done so much to avoid their negative effects, and tried to change or overcome them. But only few have succeeded, because the ties of their homeland, firmly attached them to their fellows. It felt as if they were being pursued, to their dying day by nightmares. Not a day passed, without reference being made to their country of origin. Many of them hated their home country, so much that they wished they had never born there.

But the past can't be changed. Their fate has been sealed.

Their role in life is that of someone who has been defeated.

It doesn't matter what they do or strive for, they will never relax and enjoy life. Not as long as there are people who point at them, asking:

“From which one of Noah's sons,
have you descended?”

Thousands of immigrants, men, women, and children, both young and old, all scrambled to get out of the flimsy boats as they reached the shore. No-one knows how many days they had spent at sea, buffeted by the waves in this cold winter. They're happy because the waves didn't swallow them. It's difficult for people, who live on land, to imagine how they managed to tolerate that time on the boats.

It must have been at least a day, or maybe more, in those small boats.

What were they eating and drinking?

What about their children and babies?

How could they carry out their normal bodily functions, if they were there for more than a day?

It's horrible, depressing and unthinkable.

Frank remembered at this point his uncle, who always used to be surprised by people who travelled by air, was surprised at how they could trust a plane. He used to claim, in front of everyone that, they were foolish, saying that those who travel by aircraft were crazy:

“How could they get on the plane and rise so high? What will they say to themselves when they look down? There's nothing they can say better than:

Enjoy it, you who have stayed on earth!”

His simple-minded uncle's words, revealed the culture and thinking of people in the old days. People were keen on avoiding risking their lives, on anything they imagined to be dangerous. There were no car accidents as frightening as those we see these days, and plane crashes were infrequent. Of course the number of flights has increased, by

perhaps hundreds of times compared with the early days. But people do not care about this relationship. What is important to them is the final result, which is that a lot of people have been killed in plane crashes.

But what is difficult to explain is, why has the death rate increased as civilization has become more developed?

More importantly, why has the killing of one man by another increased, without any definite reason?

Killing has become more like totalitarian death. A new term has recently been coined “weapons of mass destruction,” which refers to those weapons, which can cause the indiscriminate deaths of civilian non-combatants, as well as armed forces. Only the super powers, and a few other countries, are allowed to possess WMDs. Those other countries have either managed to avoid UN regulations, or have been facilitated by one of the super powers with impunity to obtain such weapons. However, more recently, many individuals, religious and racist groups have been murdering people, using improvised weapons of mass destruction. Chemical weapons and highly destructive explosives are no longer, only limited to the super powers. There are now many groups and even individuals, who have used them and caused the deaths of hundreds of people. Yet the United Nations is trying to work for world peace. The Security Council, one of the main parts of the UN, also talks about its role in something hazy called global peace. But more than that, the UN

collects contributions from member states to pay the salaries of their staff that are supposed to work in the interests of mankind. Or at least that is what they claim.

When Frank saw the suffering of these people, in their desperate attempt to find a safe homeland, it reminded him of his own journey fifteen years ago. But in his case, it was easier and problems were quickly resolved. His limited education and lack of culture left him unqualified, at finding a convincing answer for the current situation. He believed that the waves of emigration, and people seeking asylum, would stop a few years after the beginning of the war, which was supposed to try to bring about regime-change in Iraq. But immigration continued to increase, and spread to many other countries. The numbers who have emigrated has increased, while the number of countries which have been destroyed has also been increasing. These countries were originally destroyed by their rulers and their people, but then other countries from different parts of the world, for different reasons, decided to participate in the destruction party.

Frank couldn't find any answers to his questions. He certainly needed Husain to explain everything to him.

Is this the right time for you to go for I'tikaaf, Husain? What are you doing at home alone?

I know you are alone.

Yes, I know Um Ali is with you.

But, will you talk to her about what is going on in this world?

The world around us boils and ignites at the same time!

This will not work, I have to talk to him today, and yes I will call him at ten.

Please, Husain, answer my call!

Time passed slowly for Frank, as he was waiting for ten o'clock so he could call Husain. He had done everything he needed to do. He had taken Carol to school as usual, and then he'd had a call from the taxi office, for an airport pickup. He had finished these jobs without thinking about them. Nothing interested him apart from talking to Husain, about what he'd seen on TV. He carried on thinking that he would have to talk with Husain, at ten, or soon after ten. The important thing was that, he was trying to understand what was going on around him. Life couldn't and shouldn't mean that, one is just protecting himself and not bothering about other people. He had never felt the seriousness of a situation like this before. The scenes of people packed into small boats haunted him. It was like doomsday. Their situation was terrible. Then he started thinking of what would have happened, to him and Brigitte and felt terrified. If they had had to face such a journey on those little boats, how would they have survived?

At ten in the morning, he dialed Husain's number to talk to him. He stopped at a shopping mall parking area, and was very happy when Husain answered him, with one of his usual friendly greetings:

- Hello, welcome the friend who came asking about me.
- Where have you been? I've been worried all night long, since I went to the grocery yesterday and you weren't there.
- As long as you've started to worry, it means you've started to live. Your existence has become *de facto* by the wisdom and virtue of my philosophy. This is Husain's philosophy of realism!
- You mean life can only be real when it is tinged with worries? God damn such a cursed life!
- No, it's possible to live without worry. But this only applies to animals, on the lower rungs of the evolutionary ladder. And, probably, to sociopaths, like killers and thieves or those who lie to others. Such people don't worry, because, if they worried, they would never have committed their crimes in the first place.
- I'll tell you again. You know I can't keep up with your wisdom. Are you the wise Luqman*? Even if you were the wise Luqman, I still think you should include in your pearls of wisdom, some words that we can understand, and not just restrict them to puzzles that we can't explain.

Husain replied:

- I like your comments. They're beautiful, very nice. You've impressed me, but, let's leave Luqman and his wisdom for later.
- Where are you now?
- I'm in the street, and I've got a lot of questions for you. I need answers to my questions about the misery of humanity. What do you think?
- Why don't you take your questions to the United Nations, the Arab League, or the Organization of Islamic States? Just go to any organization that has a lot of money and a lot of mercenaries working there. They are the only ones who can answer humanitarian questions! However, I understand and appreciate your situation. So if you have time, why don't you come over for a drink together? We can have a cup of tea, nothing stronger, and bring your questions with you!
- I'll be with you in a quarter of an hour. Did you think I would leave you today?

FRANK IN HUSAIN'S HOUSE

Husain greeted Frank as he arrived at the door, and they entered the house together. The first question Frank asked was if Um Ali was at home? Husain replied that she wasn't, because she had gone to the grocery store, for a couple of hours. Ali had an appointment, so she was going to look after the store until he came back.

After they sat down, they remained quiet for a minute or two, and then Husain said:

- Ali told me yesterday that you'd come to the grocery, as we agreed, and you were surprised I wasn't there. I was impressed with the message you left. But, let's forget what happened yesterday. We should talk about what's worrying you today. There's nothing in the news, unless you have got news from your own sources. But, that's what those liars in the media always say; when they want to lie or pretend they have the exclusive news!
- Didn't you see the news on the TV yesterday? It was on most of the channels.

- Yes, I saw some, but there was nothing new.
Do you mean the refugees fleeing their countries, or those who have been smuggled from their own countries, to mix in with the genuine refugees?
I'm talking about the ones who are sent by various fanatical organizations, to create problems in Western countries. We still don't know why and who is actually behind it.
- I don't get what you're saying, but yes, I really wanted to talk to you about the conditions of the refugees. There's huge numbers of them, and they are living in deplorable conditions. How can this situation continue with thousands of people being displaced?

Husain interrupted:

- Not all of them are poor. They have different motives. Their travel costs are paid from the very beginning. They are meant to gain access to different countries, so that they can become residents. This is the best opportunity they will ever have, to reach these countries.

Frank asked:

- Do you mean some of those, who are suffering, do not actually deserve our pity?

- I'm not in a position to judge who deserves pity and who doesn't. I think we need to pity ourselves before we pity others.
- What do you mean, Husain, you're making me even more confused. I came here to find out what's going on in the world, but you've not helped at all.
- Didn't I tell you... why don't you take these questions to the United Nations?
- No, although I know you don't know as much as the UN, about these people, but I'm looking for honesty and truth. We need to know about what is going on around us. Where can we find truthful sources? Certainly not at the United Nations.
- I'll tell you what I know, and what I've read between the lines about all this. But I'm not a political analyst, and I don't want to try to be one, like all those people we know who claim to be experts, those who are encouraged by the irresponsible media, because they put the strap line "political analyst" under their names when they write. But they don't have any qualification to make this claim. This is how the media deceives and misleads people. By the way, you must know that, there is no educational degree or study that helps a person, become a political analyst. Therefore, don't ask how some people could become political analysts.
- Yes, yes, I've noticed that, and let me tell you a story I heard a couple of weeks ago from a

friend here, about a funny incident in Iraq. I know it's not the right time for it now, but it might ease the gloom, and take the weight off my chest.

Husain interrupted:

- Okay, I'll listen, even if I've heard it before. I'm feeling quite fed up as well. Maybe your story will give me some light relief.
- As I said, I was told this by a friend, and it started about the days of the war with Iran. There was a man called Hammoodi, who lived in a well-known but impoverished area. He used to repair small, domestic oil heaters in his tiny primitive shop in the market. He was well known by the people in the market as Hammoodi Fitila*, because of his work with the old fashioned oil heaters. He liked to hang patriotic slogans outside the shop, saying things like:

“We are all sacrifices for our homeland.”

Then, one day, a group of military police came to the area, to arrest people who were trying to evade military service, and arrested Hammoodi. He ended up in the military prison! After a few years there was a general amnesty and he was released. Years later, after the change of the political regime in Iraq, he suddenly appeared on a TV program, taking part in a debate! Under his name was written

the words “Political Analyst”! He was speaking about the problem of the unemployed youth in their tormented, looted country. First of all I laughed, but then I began to feel disgusted.

I feel I can no longer laugh when I remember it, how can a person’s opinion change in this way?

- You started to feel disgusted, because you remembered the miserable state we’re going through. People no longer know what to laugh at. We hear a lot of jokes that, in reality, are quite painful and we shouldn’t laugh at them at all. I’ve also got one for you. Tell me how you feel about it. But let’s have some tea first

NEW IMMIGRANTS AND POLITICS

In the city, where immigrants were a common sight, and their numbers were increasing day by day, some people had begun to talk about what they were doing in the city. They had complicated reactions to the news that, the government intended to accept a large number of asylum seekers. Most of the media tried to twist the news so that it supported the views of various political parties who were their paymasters. In spite of this, people still had a great deal of freedom to make up their own minds, and choose what to believe without fear or hesitation. They could distance themselves from the impact of the media. They didn't trust the government, or the media to be honest about the refugee situation. They didn't trust the government's motives, when they agreed to accept large numbers of immigrants. Did the authorities even make adequate plans for where the refugees would live, or how they could

support them financially, until they were able to support themselves?

However, it is often difficult to understand government policies, particularly when they are abused, and don't seem to be in the interest of the majority of the people. How long will the government have to keep on supporting these new refugees?

Did they know, when they offered them asylum that, they might have to support them indefinitely?

Is that possible?

Does the government know how well, these refugees will integrate within their society?

Can you compare what the refugees were used to, in their original countries, with the basics of the legal system, values and social concerns of the new countries?

Does the government know whether these new refugees, are seriously willing or plan to integrate in this society?

Haven't they taken a serious risk, without knowing what might happen in the future?

Do they really know what they are doing?

Is the government ready to accept the results of its actions, or is it just responding to a situation, just to gain popularity to gain an election victory, when the refugees who obtained asylum, finally become citizens and get the vote?

People form their opinions based on evidence from a proportion of the refugees, but it's difficult to be precise. This isn't actually true for all the newly-arrived refugees. For example, people talk about those refugees who like to frequent, private gyms and sports centers, where they have to pay membership fees. At the same time others prefer to stay at home, and never have any interest in mixing with other people. They just want to get everything they can for themselves, like special schools to teach their children, and mosques to gather in during the prayer times, and other religious occasions. It isn't easy to distinguish between the two categories of people, from their appearance or behavior. You have to get to know them, before discovering their real intentions and plans. It's not easy unless you understand the culture of the refugees. Many refugees don't want to integrate in their new countries' social life. They don't approve of it, and don't believe that they are obliged to be part of it. These people seem to be driven ideologically, by their own priorities and obligations. They don't see it as being important for them, to be accepted socially by their new countries, any more than they themselves accept their new society. After all, they only went to these new countries as a last resort. Maybe they think, they will gradually change the values of their new society. In any case, they don't think that, being accepted by their new society will help them, in their ideological endeavor of changing the basics of it. They see themselves as being on an important assignment. They don't differ much from their predecessors doctrinally. In fact they

are probably more committed and eager, to carry out what they believe the practices of their faith, than their predecessors. They are probably more knowledgeable about their religion than anyone else. When such an ideological conflict happens, we will be faced by a huge dilemma and everybody will reap the consequences!

The government cannot tell who the ideologues are. They can't distinguish them from ordinary, peaceful people, who were once oppressed and beaten down by the tribulations, which forced them to leave their countries. The ideologues have forced themselves on the weak when, really, they need the help and support of their adopted countries. They don't have any official papers that government representatives could examine, to get to know them properly. Certainly the governments that, tried to accept these people, will not bother with the problems that, they might face in the city in the future.

Who will volunteer or be responsible when problems arise?

What kind of solution will there be?

What laws will be passed?

Are we approaching a disaster, because politicians care more about being elected, and pandering to the voters, rather than seeking solutions which could be unpopular?

Isn't this a form of corruption?

Politicians might believe that, they are listening to the needs of the people, but they are pushing humanity towards an abyss. This is one of the most crushing and destructive afflictions of society.

BRIGITTE AND CAROL

After Frank left home in the morning to take Carol to school, Brigitte went back to bed to try to catch up on her fitful sleep, because of her night shift at the hospital. She woke up just past 11, which still gave her some time to relax in front of the television and watch some of her favorite programs.

Brigitte particularly enjoyed programs where people discussed their problems. There is usually a small studio audience and people, talk frankly and openly about their problems. When she first found out about these programs, Brigitte couldn't believe that the participants, who were talking about themselves, were just ordinary people and not actors, and that they were actually talking about their personal problems, and their relationships, with their families and friends. It was hard for her to believe that, there are people who are willing to speak on live TV, about how badly they have behaved with their friends and relatives. Many of them talk about the problems of, the addictions they suffer from, while

others talk about various perversities, such as sexual or physical abuse by family members or even their parents or spouses. Today, for the first time, she had an issue that, she had not previously realized was important. She didn't know much about her daughter's school friends, and she didn't know what kind of home life they had. Did their families live a quiet, stable family life, which wouldn't affect her daughter's friends? Clearly Brigitte wasn't so much worried about Carol's friends for instance. She was more concerned about, how it might affect her daughter's behavior or, mentality if she mixed with a family that had problems. Brigitte couldn't change how she felt. Most people in her home country were, keen to find out news about their children's friends. It never crossed their minds that, it might be their own children, who had a negative impact on their friends' behavior. Brigitte was still like most of the people she had been raised with, who believe that they shouldn't trust other people, unless they had been given plenty of evidence that, they really deserved to be trusted. Brigitte thought that she had been careless, in the way she had been looking after her daughter. She decided that she should be more serious and careful in future, and find out what was going on between Carol and her friends, especially when she went round to her friends' homes. At least, when Carol's friends visited them, Brigitte could make sure that, she paid attention to what was going on. The only problem that Brigitte always had was that, she was so busy, and her life had to fit in with her shift work pattern. She felt that's this was the tax that, she had to pay in her new country!

Can a person live in a country where no taxes are paid? She didn't mean monetary taxes. She was thinking of a different kind of payment, and the compromises she might have to make in the future. Then her mind started to drift, and she began to think about things she had not yet had to face. She knew she would have to face them one day, when Carol grew up and reached the age where, she would need real answers to important questions, such as religion.

Brigitte was born in Baghdad and had lived there, until she was over twenty years old. People didn't talk openly about religion in those days. This was not because people weren't interested in religion, or didn't want to talk about it. Religion was not allowed to play a role in society then. The government did not tolerate anyone who displayed any interest in it. They held very strong views, based on their self-interest. No one dared defy the government, and there were unimaginably harsh punishments, for anyone who dared to contravene any of their rules, both those officially enshrined in law, or unspoken.

As a child, Brigitte only used to go to church with her parents, for special religious festivals. She didn't experience any religious intolerance, even though she lived in a predominantly Muslim country. She wasn't bothered about maintaining her religious traditions, before she emigrated. However, in her new country, she was keen to go to church every Sunday, and take Carol with her. Frank also accompanied them most of the time, if he was not working. This weekly visit

to church was very important for Brigitte, because it gave her a convenient way to socialize with friends. She was keen to meet and maintain links with them. She and Frank didn't know many people because they were both so busy—Brigitte with her time divided between work, home, and caring for her daughter, and Frank working for hours in his taxi. Brigitte was realistic and had no time to lose, on activities which didn't benefit her family. She had gone through years of suffering and patience, before she was able to establish herself in her new community. She also supported Frank before they were married, when he lacked self-confidence and determination and couldn't make decisions—no matter how simple or serious the problem was. Yet he had managed to make a fateful decision, before he arrived in his new country, a decision that only a bold person, and a strong believer, would dare to make, which was even before he had met his wife Brigitte.

That was when he decided to change his religion! And then, after these momentous decisions, he was unable to make any further decisions, and left it all up to Brigitte, who was really much more efficient than him.

Bridget couldn't decide what to do about, her desire to find out the family background of Carol's friends. She didn't want to let Carol know, what she was thinking, because she wasn't old enough to understand her motives. She didn't know what she would do, if Carol talked to her friends about

her desire to know, the details of their family life. She realized that it could spoil, her daughter's relationship with her friends, if they found this out.

You never know what repercussions there might be!

In the end Brigitte decided not to pursue this too much at the moment, and not meet the matter head-on. However, she put it on her list of priorities, and decided to adopt a gradual follow-up procedure with Carol, and not miss a chance where, she might be able to find out some information. She knew that Carol loved answering her questions as far as she could. She hoped that, her answers would eventually reveal everything she wanted to know.

FRANK AND HUSAIN HAVING TEA

Husain brought the tea tray, which contained the same stuff as the previous night when his wife, Zainab, had served him tea that, in turn, had led to their long conversation about the ceramic teapot.

When he put it on the coffee table, Frank asked him:

- Abu Ali, do you feel lonely here? Husain soon replied:

- The man who doesn't feel lonely has no sense!

I mean, it's true if someone lives his life like me. But many people here have created special conditions for themselves, surrounded by their extended families, as well as friends and acquaintances, so you would assume that they wouldn't feel lonely. Others try to get involved in meetings, which have no meaning or value, just to engage in trivial conversation, and, perhaps, play games just to waste or kill time. They are obviously experts at wasting time!

Oh well, I suppose they have the right to choose how they live their lives. Lifestyle is not always the result of chance or desire. People often suffer greatly to achieve a standard of living that, gives them the ability to face the misery of this cruel world.

Do you feel lonely, Falah?

- Of course. As usual, I haven't understood a lot of what you've just said. I won't ask you now to explain to me, what you said a little while ago. Yes, I certainly feel lonely. I'm really alone. You know Brigitte is not at home most of the time when I am. Either she's out at work, or I'm driving my taxi around town. Of course I feel alone. Then I think that, my decision to change my religion, has built a high wall between me and our community. I've been rejected by most people. I certainly feel that many people here, who know me, hate me. The problem is, I know they're not committed to their own religion, and I know it doesn't mean anything to them! However, I feel that many of them, would be willing to execute me—if they could get away with it—because I've converted to Christianity. I'm sure you agree with me about that!

Husain remained silent, with his head bent, facing the ground. He was silent, and didn't comment on any of Frank's words. Then Frank turned to ask him in a surprised tone, saying:

- What's wrong?

You haven't commented about what I just said.

- Yes, it's true. I didn't comment because I don't know what to say. I told you when you called me before you came, that you have started to live, and that you will continue to exist as long as you have started to worry!

The truth is that, after I heard your words, I felt that I had to correct what I said previously. You've started to think seriously, and pay attention to what is around you, which is a very dangerous start. It could threaten the life of the man, who starts to think about his situation or at the very least, it could take away his peace of mind.

Falah, you've taken me to a place where I didn't want to be. If I were to tell you to abandon such thoughts, and devote yourself and your time to your wife and daughter, I would be deceiving myself. The day might come, after I die, when you say about me that I tricked you with my advice. If I told you to continue in this way of thinking, I would be pushing you to give up, all the good things that might be coming to you down the road to you and your family, especially that you might hope to forget the past. By this I mean forgetting "Falah" and living with "Frank".

Frank asked:

- Can you explain it to me more? I'm too dumb and slow to understand exactly what you mean.

If I wasn't, I wouldn't have allowed Brigitte to take charge of everything. She certainly has a sharper mind than me, and is more competent in making everyday decisions for our family. I am useless, completely useless. I don't care about Brigitte taking charge, I mean of me and our daughter. But I'm not really sure if she is making wise decisions. I often feel that she is the product of a dictatorial regime; we lived under its tyranny in Iraq. But, at the same time, I sometimes feel like I've been unfair to her by describing her as a bossy woman. You know I am a supporter of women and

- What a wonderful thing to say! You've managed to make a decision that millions of people are afraid to make. I'm certainly one of them. I know I've been a bit of a coward. But it's probably the most difficult, horrible decision to try to make, and you seem to have taken it so easily. How did you come to make such a dangerous decision?

Frank remained silent for a few moments, without answering Husain's question, and then finally answered:

- I hope the phone won't ring and interrupt us again, or Um Muhammad doesn't knock at the door, under the pretext of coming round to inquire about you and your I'tikaf!

- This is beautiful. I love it when you overcome a crisis, or miserable times with humor or ridicule. It's something the weak can do, those who don't have the power, to change anything in their life. It allows you to feel empowered for free. But don't worry, just go ahead and say what you like. Don't let anything put you off. I want to know what happened to you, and how and why you took this bold decision. It's extremely bold!
- Yes, I was really daring. Then, afterwards, I lost my courage and confidence and began to feel scared of everything around me. The pain is tormenting me whenever I remember my mother's face. My poor mother—I don't know what's happened to her.

Yes, you know how far religious heritage, affects us throughout southern Iraq. It's not because people are very religious, but because they have inherited their religion, in the same way that they inherited, their customs and traditions. Now we know that most of these customs are bad or incorrect and, possibly, unjust. But everybody needs to employ hypocrisy to express their faith and commitment to this legacy, even though they may not have been convinced by it. Moreover, there are many people who will go against their customs and traditions, from time to time, when it does not cost them their lives. But to go beyond religious matters, is different from

going beyond any other matter, and the results are well known.

In the south of Iraq, no matter how difficult our living conditions were, we accepted life like the birds that came to visit our marshlands and swamps, and never hurt anyone, but only sought the bare necessities for life. Ever since the modern Iraqi state was founded, it neglected the south and never cared about the people's needs. There were no schools that could be described, as fit for purpose for the late twentieth century, and no one could use the public hospitals. I know that most of the south is rich in natural resources, but we haven't been able to use agriculture properly, for our livelihoods, because of the lack of state support. The State bureaucracy doesn't facilitate anything; it just complicates everything for the people. This is something I am very sure of.

I don't know why there was something inside me that made me rebel against something important and big. It was obviously something I inherited, but I don't know how to control it. I knew it was dangerous to think like that, but I was determined, and was waiting for the opportunity to scream. My only scream was the one I cried out at the end! That was the end of my patience, at all of the injustice around me. I could not shout at the teachers, who punished me when I was a child, and humiliated me in front of the other kids, just as other kids were

insulted too. We were used to being punished by someone, and at the same time, they were always telling us that, there was still some more to come. Someone would punish us later, a severe and eternal punishment. And I was asking myself in silence:

“What kind of life is this?”

A life, which begins with suffering and ends with an eternal punishment?

I was waiting for the moment when, I could openly say I am a rebel.

I don't want any one of you to impose anything on me, even my father, my mother and my brothers, whom I miss them all. In the end, it's better for me and for them that, I'm considered ungrateful or even dead, than to discover that I've changed my religion. They could never accept or even imagine this. They used to consider me powerless, unable to even dare to do anything major, and so, how could I dare to do that?

I truly wasn't bold enough to upset or harm anyone.

I couldn't understand why almost everyone around me, insisted on punishing and hurting me?

Even if I could understand and accept the punishment of those around me for misbehavior, and a result of their violent nature, I couldn't understand why I should be punished, by those who created me, for something I did not do or have a role in?

This was one of the important reasons, but not the only one, which pushed me to be so rebellious against everything that was there around me.

You cannot live with the religious practices, of those who profess religion; the constant, unanswered prayers that no one hears; and the constant fear of something invisible and supernatural; something that insists on threatening them with punishment, without knowing why. You couldn't live with something like this without retaliating.

Here Husain interrupted him in a surprised tone, as if he was shocked by something, saying:

- Falah, Falah! Stop it, Falah!

Are you really the Falah I know? You are not him!

You are a philosopher. I must hear from you, from now on.

Where have you been?

Where was your intellectual capability hidden?

- Abu Ali, please don't kid me. I need your advice about what I am going through. I am not convinced about my decision to leave a religion, which I never felt protected my humanity, to then convert to another religion, whose followers don't accept me, and treat me as if I was coming, to take some big treasure from them. I don't know what they think, those who don't like seeing me in the church. It's as if I had invaded and occupied a place, which was reserved for someone else. I felt like I was passing along a narrow passage, and maybe soon I would have to go into another one. I had to bear the pain of separation from my family, as a result of my first religious conversion, but I couldn't bear to leave my daughter and Brigitte, should the day ever come, if I had to abandon my new religion. It could be soon. I don't know when that might be. In a way I feel that I owe it to the people, who have done more than their humanitarian duty to help me, which wasn't because I converted to Christianity because I don't think they are fully convinced that I'm genuine about my new religion, and I understand why they think this way, which is mostly because I haven't been particularly committed to my religious duties.

But I'll never forget they were more helpful to me, than any of my relatives.

- Falah, I think I should seek inspiration from you, rather than the other way round. You want me to explain things, but I am nothing more than

a person who just repeats himself, and can't actually reach any decision about anything. Maybe my mind has lost its ability to analyze and see things clearly. I think I have to admit that this was my destiny from the beginning. My destiny, you know, like "destined."* I will never be able to escape this fate. I feel like I'm now the same person I was almost fifty years ago. I am "destined." Yes, I am "destined".

Frank asked:

- What do you mean by "destined"?
- I don't understand what you're saying.
- Don't you know "Destined"?
- It was a song by Abdul Halim.
- Yes, I know it. But what's that got to do with what we are talking about.
- It's not only significant to me, but to my entire generation too. It represents everyone from that generation, whether they know or not. I personally considered it to be a song which has fallen from heaven. There are very few songs or pieces of music where, their composition is so intense and perfect that, you think they must have been inspired supernaturally. Yes, the one who writes the words, and who composes the music or performs them, all of these are people of this world, but all of them experience moments of transfiguration when, they feel that their work has reached a higher level, of

supernatural creativity, when they reach a higher plane, and produce an exceptional work of art. Yet, even if they tried to reproduce another song, or something similar to it, they wouldn't be able to do it! This is what I call:

“Music and songs which fell from the sky.”

It's probably like many things, which man considers to have been sent from heaven!

Falah, you need to listen to it, over and over again, before you realize how incredible the words are, compared with what you normally hear. You must listen to it alone—on your own! You must listen without any outside interference. You can only hear it properly when your mind is clear - make it a sanctuary where you can retreat alone. Perhaps it won't have the same effect on you, as it did to me. We lived at a time different from this. There wasn't so much around us to distract our attention. Loss of attention is the problem of this time.

*“See where we've gone and where she's gone
see where she took us and where she's gone
on the old passage of the old time in the same
place we are lost—the same place”*

Frank remained silent, and didn't comment on what, Husain had said about the song. He didn't know what to say about, a song that was nearly half a century old, and he didn't know how, it related to what he had come to talk with Husain about. He was also

astonished that, Husain had complimented him on what he had said earlier, and that his thoughts were worthy of interest. He couldn't believe that, Husain was really serious about, what he had said about the song. It was a very nice song, but he was surprised that Husain found it so important. Perhaps, there was something wrong with Husain, and that was also the reason he had praised, what Frank had said earlier, as if he was spouting some brilliant philosophical wisdom!

Could Husain be annoyed by something, like a family issue for instance?

No, not that, because if he was, he wouldn't have asked him to come over to visit him today. Nor is there anything unusual about Husain, apart from what he was just saying.

There was still a lot that Frank didn't understand about Husain's character.

There was something in Husain's soul – and maybe in his mind!

Husain then, filled two cups of tea and offered one to Frank and asked:

- What's the news of our cousins here?

I don't mean anyone specifically. You know I'm not keen on hearing their news. Very little of their news would bring happiness, and are good to hear, and most of the others just make me feel sick. But I'm asking about them,

because I hope they won't cause problems here, or we'll be paying the price for them.

Frank replied:

- I don't know much about what's happening here.

There's certainly a lot going on but I don't get to hear about it. You know I only talk to a few people, but I was having a chat with Hamid a couple of weeks ago. You know he is the owner of the kebab restaurant, and he's not particularly religious, or care for the ethnic background of people, and he mixes with people from various ethnic backgrounds. Also, I know he's straight- forward, honest and never hypocritical. He's confident because he's practical, and has been able to create a job for himself, serving the needs of his community. His business and kebabs are excellent, and the quality of his kebabs is always reliable. When I saw him a couple of weeks ago, he welcomed me warmly, not like some of the deceitful people we know. We chatted about different things while he was preparing my order, and he told me about one of his Arab friends, who volunteers as a translator, for the refugees and the social services. He said that the social workers were trying, to educate the refugees about the country's core values. One of the social workers wanted to explain to them, that the country was established on human

rights, including women's rights, emphasizing that the law protected women, and respected their needs, and as a result, women should be treated equally in every way. Respect for these concepts constituted the foundations of their society. After he had finished translating this to the refugees, one of the men wanted to speak to express his opinion, or to inquire about something, and asked him to translate it to the social workers, so that they could understand his point of view too. He said that he knew the country had its standards, which ought to be respected by the refugees. But the refugees also had their own standards that, they should also be observed and respected, and that one of their core values was their attitude towards women. They didn't believe that women should leave the house, and mix with other people! Women should stay at home and take care of their husbands and children. Women don't need an education, because they might be tempted to commit sins, and stop behaving in a respectable way. The translator said he was surprised, and didn't know whether it was wise to translate, what this man wanted to say to the social workers, or not! So he tried to find out the refugee's motives, and asked him whether someone from the government, had invited him to come and live in this country? The man replied, "No," that no one had invited him. Then the translator answered him: "Okay, then they were good, when they took you in, and tried to help you and your family." But, in reply

the man said: “These people, who receive us here as refugees, are basically the reason for the war that we have suffered, and the destruction of our countries, which is why we left in the first place, and now they want to sabotage the morals of our women and children!”

So what do you think of this response?

I believe it explains how, many of these people feel about the countries that, have given them asylum. It seems to be a widespread view among many of them. They really believe that, these countries are responsible for the tragedies they have suffered. I don't know how a friendly relationship can ever be formed, between such people and their host countries, even after many years have passed. Indeed, maybe there's some truth in this guy's point of view. Where were these powerful states, when disastrous events were happening in our home countries?

Even people, who are totally ignorant about politics, could predict that a civil war would break out in this situation. I'm not saying this because I support any particular point of view, but I'm totally confused as to which side is in the right.

Husain was focused on Frank's account, of Hamid and the translator when he replied:

- I don't know, but I don't think any good will come out of it. Things just seem to be getting

worse every day. The only way to prevent this situation reaching breaking point would be, for the state and the political parties that govern these countries, to acknowledge what they are facing. Ignoring the problem will only lead to established countries being sabotaged. They cannot continue to provide people, who arrive in their countries, with support indiscriminately, just because they want to hang on to power, and they believe that this will make them more popular. People have been emigrating to these countries for centuries, in search of work and to find a better life, safe from the problems they were exposed to in their home countries. But in those days they didn't try to impose their beliefs on their hosts. No one contemplated doing this before. They were keen to work hard, to provide themselves with a better standard of living, as well as participating in the development of their new countries. It's only been in recent years that, political parties have used refugees to their own advantage, in order to guarantee their future in power. I'm surprised at this, because when we were young, and we were first beginning to understand that our homeland was ruled by dictators, these modern democratic countries seemed like, models of liberal thinking, and had no corruption to spoil them! Indeed, there were many examples of selfless rulers, who had made great sacrifices for the sake of their countries, in troubled times. They struggled during the years when their countries were

at war. If the time came, when they felt that they no longer had the confidence of their people, they resigned and stayed at home. They might never be seen again in public until they passed away. But today things have drastically changed, and corruption can be found in all aspects of government and politics. We seem to have crawled from the Old East, and brought with us a legacy that goes back centuries into the distant history of our countries. This history is associated with the beliefs we used to have, and judging everything through them, such as slavery to the sultans, who ruled in the name of God, and represented for many the shadow of God on earth. They consider it a real shadow, not an illusion. Unfortunately, these countries are now facing internal conflict, and we'll most likely end up paying for it. When we came to these countries, we were already fugitives from the people, who were ready to exterminate us, and nothing could prevent them from crushing us—not even the laws of the United Nations or human rights organizations.

Falah, The flood is coming; it will be more destructive than the flood of Gilgamesh time!

- Abu Ali! You're terrifying me with what you are saying. Is it really possible, after all we've been through, that we should face further suffering?

I just can't imagine this.

- Why can't you imagine it?

Just take a few minutes and think about it!

How many times did you imagine that, you might die at the hands of the criminal killers, who ran our country? And nothing could deter them from that.

How many times did you wish to die to end your suffering?

You and I are living on borrowed time!

Both of us were candidates for death. We saw many people die in front of us. We lived while they died or were killed without guilt.

Why did we live?

Do you know why?

No, you don't know and will never know! It's the state of injustice which governs this world, and nothing else.

Falah, you shouldn't say anything to your wife about all this. If she asks you anything, just pretend you don't understand or care about current events. Leave her alone and let her carry on as she has been, looking after you and your daughter. She is a lioness, and has enough courage and power, to protect you and your daughter, and take you on a safe way. If you don't follow my advice, you'll stop her from using her common sense, and innate courage and ability to manage your lives. She's much

better than both of us put together, as well as all our cousins! She's naturally strong and can face anything. If she couldn't, she wouldn't have been so successful in this new world. She wouldn't have been able to save you and your daughter, and help you achieve a position, which most of the other immigrants have been unable to, achieve for themselves. We could all potentially slide towards the abyss.

The coming days are going to be unbearable. We are not going to be able to face the people, who welcomed us so warmly to their countries. Many of us did not deserve, the great opportunities we were given in these countries. But we will be paying for all of those criminals who claimed asylum under false pretenses. Yes, you, I and every peaceful person who came here, to live and coexist with their new countrymen, we will have to pay a price. We have been created by God, to live in peace and, we shouldn't even try to do anything else.

Frank abruptly interrupted him, saying:

- Abu Ali, what are you saying?
- Do you really mean it?
- I heard you say "*we are created by God...*"
- Yes. What's so strange about that, why are you surprised?

- I'm surprised because I know, or maybe thought I knew, that you don't believe in the existence of any God or maybe I'm wrong!
- Yes, you're wrong. You're definitely wrong. Do you think that because I don't believe in religion, and repulsive religious practices?

What does that have to do with God? I never gave up on my faith in God!

But, from time to time, I go through phases, where I live in isolation from Him, and cannot talk to Him. You might say that I cocoon myself, and feel particularly upset, when He doesn't intervene in human suffering. That seems strange to me and I wonder why. But, of course, as usual, I've never received an answer from Him. That was the same with all those who preceded us, and claimed they were talking to Him, or He was talking to them. But this is quite controversial because, I just cannot imagine that He would talk to certain people, and ignore everybody else—that He prefers one situation to another. He is quite capable of explaining things to people, so there is no need to abandon people, to live their lives in a state of confusion. If that is the case, then the God that they believe in, must be weak and have an inferiority complex, just like a normal person might have. Otherwise, what is it that makes this God ask the people, whom he created, to follow the path that he wishes them to follow?

Why didn't He create them to be more responsive to His desires, from the beginning? And for those who believe that, mankind has been created perfect, they need to think again and, examine the similarities between man and many other animals. There is no logic and no rationale, to this deity they are talking about. But, never mind; let's put this aside, for a moment. It seems sometimes you judge things superficially, just like most of the people, which is why you thought I was a nonbeliever!

Now, have you heard the latest joke?

I heard it just a few days ago from an old friend of mine, who still lives in Baghdad. It's got a very strong connection to what we've been talking about.

Frank interrupted him:

- Do you think I could just hear the joke?

You've just blown my mind. I didn't follow everything you've said. It doesn't matter. I'll try to remember it as much as I can. I'll get back to you if I feel I've missed something. Now let's hear the joke.

- Yes, it is said that, in one of the villages in the south of Iraq, You know, better than me, how deeply religious the local people are, and how they have all kinds of religious symbols, and rituals, which have been passed down from

their fathers and grandfathers. An Imam was leading prayers, in front of a large group of worshippers, and all the time he was praying, he was also weeping! After prayers had ended, and the people had begun to disperse, a well-known respected local man approached the Imam, and took the Imam aside, as if he wanted to privately talk to him, or find out something from him. He was obviously trying to find out, why the Imam was crying, so he asked him:

“What’s the problem, Imam?”

*You were crying all through the prayers today.
Has something bad happened to God?*

Is it something you don’t want to tell us?”

So imagine the simplicity and naivety of this man’s understanding, of such serious matters! These people, my dear Falah, are very simple. They have been crushed by life throughout their lives. They lived their lives in a state of fear, controlled by tyrants. Then, on top of that, other people tried to instill, a perpetual fear in these simple minded people—a fear of something they will face after this life—something which will be even more terrifying. No one can escape the torment of doomsday. You’ve lived among these simple minded people. They can easily be led, like a flock of sheep to the slaughter house, where they will have their necks cut, and be skinned, cutting them up into pieces. This is what the tyrants

have prepared for the poor people! But the Creator does not need to be tyrannical. He does not need to prove His existence by torturing helpless people. This is how tyrants behave. No one else needs to frighten and terrorize people in this way. I don't need it, and you don't need it either. The Creator definitely doesn't need any of the superstitions that, people have created and passed down to their descendants. They just show how shallow they are.

There was silence after Husain had finished talking. Frank was looking at him expecting him to continue, but he couldn't concentrate on what Husain was saying. His words were intense, and he had really needed to interrupt at quite a few points, to get him to thoroughly explain his meaning. Normally, when they chatted, Frank might only feel the need to interrupt occasionally, when he couldn't fully understand him. Sometimes Husain's words were very simple and easy to understand. But in this case, after the simple explanatory joke, about the man who sees himself as one of the elite, and who is also seen by people around him, as important and knowledgeable, but he wouldn't know what kind of being, the Creator is supposed to be. He couldn't move away, in his perception of the Creator, from the stereotypical image, which had been inherited by people for generations, and which is more like an arrogant tyrannical ruler, who has unlimited power, and could impose good or evil on people,

as it pleases Him. Yet at the same time, He might encounter a problem or something could cause Him a malady, as happens to every tyrannical ruler.

Husain himself remained, bending his head, looking at the tea tray, his mind far away - far from the room, where he and Frank were sitting. Frank had never seen Husain so distracted. He always entrusted him as a man who lived a state of a constant focus, paying attention to everything. Frank's dream was to have Husain's ability, to concentrate and pay attention; the ability to analyze and come to the correct conclusions. He didn't know how to break the silence, until he remembered that he had intended to ask his opinion, about the conversation he had had in his taxi, with the two women, when they had talked about, the benefits of British troops entering Iraq, for the first time during the First World War. The old lady thought that the occupation was, like a transition to a new era, and that Britain intended to help Iraq get rid, of the hardships of Ottoman rule. This time it was Frank who got Husain's attention, when he said that he had forgotten to tell him about, his conversation with the two women. It was an opportunity for Husain, to provide Frank with reliable background information, about that part of Iraq's history. It didn't take long for Husain to reply:

- There are various schools of thought on this.

Specialists in history and politics, both at the time and now, have viewed this era from different angles. If you look at it from the point of view of civilization and modernization,

the woman was right because after Iraq was released from Ottoman rule, it had the opportunity to become a modern country, in which the democratic principles of the rule of law were established by Britain. They created firm foundations. Sadly that opportunity did not occur again, because it was the first and last time that democracy existed in Iraq. But at least it was enough for people, to start acquainting themselves with its principles. That was a golden opportunity which never happened again. It was probably the first democracy in the region. But if we were to look at it from a religious point of view, I don't feel qualified to judge, whether the call of the religious authorities, at that time to fight the British occupier, was correct or not. The British kicked out the brutal Ottoman occupiers, which was wonderful. But at the same time, the religious authorities spread lies and fabricated claims. There was hypocrisy on the part of the religious parties, because the Ottoman authorities did not represent Islam. Furthermore, those who called on the people to fight the British were themselves, oppressed by the Ottoman rulers. This was an example of the stupidity we suffer today, when the religious authorities try to grab power for themselves. After they had witnessed the defeat of the collapsing Ottoman Empire, they certainly didn't want to set up a modernized civil authority. They relied on the help of simple, naive people, who were following their orders.

Now, turning to the question of Britain and the nature of its policy in Iraq: was Iraq treated fairly by Britain? I've read a lot about this. I personally think Britain did not treat Iraq fairly. This might be because the Iraqis stood up against, the British army, based on a simple, stupid reason in 1920. Another reason was that Britain's position on Iraq was built on, the visions of empire builders—British Empire builders. When they reported back to London, they were expressing their own personal views. They underestimated the country's potential—either intentionally or unintentionally—because they were ill-informed. I cannot comment on that, but just look at the geography of the country. It is quite a large country, but it just has a very small coastline on the Gulf.

Whom do we have to blame for this?

What was intended when the border was drawn in this way?

They brought a man with his family, to become the king of Iraq. He was a very weak king. Yet Iraq at that time was a country full of potential, with highly educated, intellectual people from different backgrounds. That was totally unfair. A humiliating sentence was imposed on Iraq, and most of the Iraqis. It was done on the pretext that, they had committed themselves to providing a throne for that king,

and his followers, who had cooperated with the British troops against the Ottoma2n0s3! This is why the

British wanted to provide seats, for their supporters in Iraq's first government. That policy has obviously been adopted in other European countries and has been successful until today. But it couldn't last long in Iraq.

So imposing a puppet government was, one of the issues that affected Iraq's future. The other was the problems caused by Iraq's geographic borders. The latter problem has resulted in Iraq paying, too much to overcome the problems caused by, its limited access to the Gulf. I don't believe these problems will be solved. So, if you come across that woman again, tell her that:

“The British Empire might have had good intentions for Iraq, but what they actually did, prevented Iraq from reaching its full potential, and has actually been responsible for the problems it is still facing today.”

FRANK ON HIS WAY TO SCHOOL

Frank did not feel as comfortable as he'd hoped, after visiting Husain at his home. In fact he felt more frightened than before. He was very confused, but he realized something important: that Husain himself was worried about what was happening. He was probably even more concerned than Frank himself. He was used to Husain always being able to provide answers, to most of the issues that occupied his mind. He could not imagine anything that would confuse or puzzle him. Husain was a refuge and resource. Whenever he needed to find answers or explanations for anything he encountered, Husain could always help. Most important of all was how confident he was in Husain's honesty and objectivity. He trusted him and Husain was worthy of this trust. Husain was a man from the depths of history, the pure decent history, not just any history.

How would Frank manage his affairs, if Husain became a recluse, confined to his house, unable to

interact with the world? Frank had only just dipped his toe into getting interested in current events. In fact Husain had recently commented about this, saying:

*“As long as you are worried,
it means you have started living,
and you are now existing, de facto, wisely.”*

Would he really be able to depend on Brigitte, to take the right decisions for the family as they face important life events? Yes, he felt he had confidence in her and her abilities. Husain had described her as a lioness, and advised him to let her act independently, and not to worry about what she did, so as not to put her off and confuse her with problems, many countries find difficult to solve!

Late at night, when it felt as if a large dark gloomy bird was perching on his chest, he wished that they had never had their daughter, Carol. Although he was eager to become a father, as almost everybody is, and although he was very happy when she was born, and although, today, he sees her as the most precious thing he has in the world, he certainly wasn't someone who ever dreamed about having children. If he was still living in his former country, he would have considered himself insane and irresponsible if he had thought so. But when he arrived in his new country, where people live under the protection of the law, and their rights are not abused, he got past

the fear uncertainty and responded to his wife's desire to have a child. That child was Carol, their only child. She was born some years after they had got married, when they felt themselves to be financially secure and able to provide for a family.

He remembered when he had a conversation with Husain; one day after Carol had been born. He was happy when he told Husain about her birth. But Husain commented on this, after congratulating him, telling him what it meant:

Congratulations on her birth. Today you became a father.

Congratulations on this heavy responsibility.

You will carry this burden until your dying day!

Frank wasn't too upset at the time about Husain's comment on Carol's birth. The joy was overwhelming, and he didn't care about anything else. But now, after more than nine years, he recalled Husain's words and understood what they meant. Yes, Husain was right in what he said, because he felt a great responsibility now. He thought to himself:

How could I not feel it? I don't know. How can I protect her?

How long can I protect her? I know, someday, I won't even be able to help myself. Who will be able to guarantee she will find someone who will treat her well?

Will the government be able to provide for her?

Will she be entitled to any help when there are thousands of others, living without support, standing in the ranks waiting for the state to provide them with the necessary care they need.

Then he also remembered what Husain had said about that innate instinct for self-preservation that all creatures have. He said that:

There is something which drives living things to reproduce—even plants and micro-organisms—everything is racing against the others to reproduce itself. This is also true even if what is produced, is hated by everyone, and doesn't seem to be of any use to nature, human or animal. Those who harm the most important beings of this earth are the most efficient, at reproducing themselves. Don't you know that no living thing can reproduce itself as well as deadly bacteria and deadly viruses do?

It is clear that, when living things cannot take care of their offspring, they reproduce in very large numbers, so that at least a percentage can survive, even if the threat to their survival is great. Insects and worms produce thousands of eggs and leave them to their fate to hatch out and survive. It is the same thing with plants. Those who take care of their young, only give birth to a limited number, so that they can provide care and protection, to what they have reproduced. This is what most creatures do,

with exception of mankind. Only man doesn't think or care about this! When man reproduces himself, he is selfish and doesn't care for anything, apart from his own ego and enjoyment. This is a really interesting feature of mankind.

Why would people in our time think of reproducing themselves, when they cannot guarantee their own safety?

Isn't this a mockery of the many absurdities of our human world?

What does man think when he insists on reproducing himself?

Does he believe he is doing mankind a service by having children?

After all, he doesn't know if the world will benefit from those who will be born.

Does it ever enter people's minds how much harm might be inflicted on the world by their descendants? There could be devastating damage imposed on the world where people just want to live in peace.

Man's selfishness is the main cause and stems from his state of mind. There are endless examples, one after the other, where his mood veers from a state of altruism, and unlimited selflessness on the one hand, to uncontrollable egoism, which sweeps away everything in his path, on the other. If humanity wanted to calculate how many people had been born throughout history, who have caused humanity pain,

destruction, and catastrophe, it would be impossible. No one could make such a calculation!

We are still paying for much of the damage that was caused decades or even centuries ago. Those decades and centuries were full of suffering, because people have inflicted these disasters on us, because of their twisted beliefs and ideas. Shouldn't we put the people on trial who were responsible for the birth of these tyrants? Obviously such a trial would be far too late and useless. But maybe it might be considered as a deterrent, so that people can take care and think about whether, they are helping humanity when they bring a newborn baby into the world, who might be responsible one day for inflicting new disasters on humanity.

The world has hardly been distancing itself from disasters!

TALK AT THE DINING TABLE

Frank arrived home after he'd taken Carol from school, and noticed that the taxi office hadn't contacted him for a job, which was unusual. Then he remembered that he'd turned his phone off, before reaching Husain's house, so that no one could call and interrupt him, while they were talking. He took his phone out of his pocket and switched it back on. He immediately began to receive messages as the office had called him more than once while he had been with Husain. Frank was silent for a few moments, trying to decide what had happened. He saw that he'd already lost at least two taxi jobs, which would have paid him enough for a full day's living expenses. However, at the same time, he thought it could actually be the solution to the problems of an entire lifetime!

Brigitte was waiting for Frank and Carol, so that she could prepare their dinner. She also wanted to take advantage of the opportunity, to question Carol about what she was most concerned about – how she

was getting on with her friends. The three of them were sitting at the dining table. Brigitte was alert and following Carol with her eyes. She smiled at her every time she looked at her, as if she was trying to get her attention and acceptance. She didn't want Carol to start getting fed up, with all her questions and interference. Carol was pleased that her mother seemed so cheerful, but she also began to prepare herself, for whatever she might ask her about later.

Frank was not concentrating on them at all. He was still lost in his thoughts. Brigitte hadn't noticed because she was busy with something more important than him and, perhaps, even more important than herself.

As they were eating, Brigitte began asking questions one after the other. She asked Carol about her friends one by one how they were doing at school, how did they travel in the school bus, did they bring sandwiches with them for lunch, what kind of food their friends ate at home, who was at home to receive them when they got home, and finally, did any of them travel to school by car, as she did? Sometimes Carol answered her without hesitation, particularly if the questions were simple and didn't require any thought, such as if the parents of any of her friends came to pick them up from school, because the school didn't provide transport for those who lived very close to the school, just as it didn't for students who lived outside the school's catchment area. However, sometimes she would hesitate when the question was about things, like who is waiting

for her friends when they get back home on the school bus. After a while, tired from her mother's interrogation, Carol tried to change the subject by asking her mother random things, unconnected with her mother's obsessive questioning. Brigitte answered her briefly and then turned to Frank to ask him about his day. He told her that he had spent some time with Husain, and that he had visited him because, he was not feeling well. He told her that they had been discussing the refugee situation and that he'd only had one taxi job, which was an airport run. He avoided telling her that his phone had been turned off most of the morning. Then Brigitte asked:

- And how is Husain's health now? I haven't seen him for a long time. I think he's the best person we've met here. I always like to hear his views and comments.
- He's not happy with what's happening here.
- He's not happy with the world situation. He's very pessimistic. I already knew about some his worries, but others were not so clear to me.
- Like what? I think we still need to see him, and get him to explain all of this. He has a lifetime of experience that is priceless.
- Husain believes that things will only get worse, because politicians continue to manipulate people, depending on their whims and only do things that will benefit them themselves. He's very pessimistic and definitely believes that we could face problems here.

- Is this because of the huge increase in the number of refugees, in the world and, of course, I mean the ones coming here?
- You know he was originally a refugee, and we both started here as refugees. There are thousands of refugees around us. But when we came here we were realistic, and we didn't expect them to provide us, with a lot of what the refugees seem to require today. Some even want their own laws. I know that these countries will not allow it now. There is still a fear that, somehow, politicians will create loopholes to allow such changes, in the future just to win votes from the refugees. I don't know if a lot of what he said is true, but I myself became pessimistic, because there is no reason for optimism. The whole world moves in a direction difficult to understand. All the contradictions have now become the headline events all over the world.

Brigitte remained silent and didn't comment on what Frank had said. It seemed like she had stopped concentrating on what he was saying, and was letting her thoughts wander. On the other hand, Frank, seeing that she wasn't listening, remembered Husain had said that he shouldn't discuss such a subject with her. She should just concentrate on their livelihood and future, and not occupy her with things that do not benefit any of them. So he changed the subject a bit, trying to distance themselves from all the negativity of the past few minutes, saying:

- I don't think Husain can see the broad picture.

I'm sure these countries know their interests, and understand what to do, whether dealing with their citizens or strangers, and there is no need to justify their actions, or worry about the future.

- But you were so pessimistic a little while ago!
- Maybe a little, and is mostly because of the tragedies we went through in the past. We can never escape from the memories they left with us.
- Maybe...

Frank then tried to close the subject by finishing his dinner, and trying to help remove the remains of their meal from the table, while talking to Carol. Brigitte remained calm and didn't say anything. She also helped to clear the table and wiped it clean. Frank then realized that he had made a mistake, by talking to her and hoped that because she was so busy in her everyday life, Brigitte would forget what they had been talking about. Now he understood what Husain meant, when he advised him not to talk to Brigitte about the refugee problem. Brigitte seemed to be preoccupied with something that they had talked about, and Frank didn't and couldn't know what she was thinking, and how she would deal with this new worry. He couldn't say what Brigitte was thinking about, when she was preoccupied with something. She might get difficult and hard to talk to, and even be anxious around Carol! Brigitte had a particular way of dealing with family problems, as she believed that things could easily have got out of

her hand in the past, and if they had, then she and Frank wouldn't have been able, to live in the relative tranquility that they enjoy now.

Frank withdrew from the kitchen and went into the living room. He sat on the couch and stretched his legs out on it. On a small table he noticed the free local Arabic newspaper, which he'd picked up the previous day when he'd gone looking for Husain at his grocery, and found his son there instead. He hadn't forgotten their conversation. He started flicking through the pages, while Brigitte was loading the dishwasher.

There were advertisements for activities taking place both in their local community, as well as the nearby city. Immigrants were engaged in various businesses, such as brokerage, buying and selling houses, real estate and cars, insurance, restaurants and catering, money exchange and transfer of funds to Arab countries to name but a few. Such activities have many benefits. The Arab community improves its reputation, as it's carrying out the legal, commercial and service activities, which they are encouraged to do. In this way they help to create jobs, which improve the financial situation of the immigrants, making them self-sufficient. At the same time, they contribute to the country's economy, through the taxes paid by the immigrants.

Frank didn't notice anything new in the newspaper, apart from a short article about some of the new refugees, who had recently arrived the country. They were trying to convince the state to set up

their own schools for them, where they could teach their children what they thought was appropriate. In their opinion, as they now lived in a country which respected human rights, they believed that it was their right to reject what they didn't like. And one of the things that they didn't like was, being forced to live in a way that they didn't approve of. Frank couldn't tell who might have written the article, but it must have been someone who helped the new refugees, and maybe tried to push them to try to open their own schools. It would have to be someone who knew how to manipulate, all the loopholes in the law, with regard to rights and freedoms in order to achieve their aims.

Frank put the newspaper aside, and started going over in his mind what he had been reading, not just the article but also the advertisements. They seemed to represent the two polar opposite positions representing the immigrants and refugees who had arrived in the country. No one knows who will win between these two opposing points of view, if they come to a confrontation. If things were to get out of control, and were not adequately supervised by the State, the refugees could actually import the systems and way of life, of their homelands into their new countries. Then dictatorships could be established because they will find fertile ground created by the millions of refugees, who have lived for many years under the rule of dictators. As a result you could get a situation where, they will not be able to fight for any rights of their own, or be in a position to oppose these new dictators. In this case the dictators will not

be known by name, but will come under the cloak of Shari'a, or what is close to it, which can dominate people and easily control them. Who knows?

It can happen in these countries, because the politicians are naïve and lack the understanding of how people think. They are ignorant, but once they have won an election, democratic principles allow them to make these changes. Or perhaps, even though the immigrants and refugees, who are already settled in their new countries, live in harmony with their fellow citizens, they can still easily change their affiliation, and start to support the newcomer's orientation.

Just as Husain said, recreation of dictatorship is never very far!

Yes, everything Husain said could be true, very true. Husain never makes mistakes. Frank was convinced about this. Something will happen, which we don't expect, or maybe we have no idea of what disastrous impact, it will have on us, all of us, no exception.

But when will that be?

Will it happen after I become too old?

Will it be when I'm not strong enough to protect myself, Carol and Brigitte?

Could it be like that?

Is it possible that I will return to how I used to feel, dealing with the constant anxiety and fear?

Fear of the unknown! What kind of curse do we have to face?

What kind of life we are living?

Brigitte finished tidying the kitchen, and went to sit with Frank in the living room. Carol went to her bedroom. Frank noticed that Brigitte did not ask Carol, to come and sit with them in the living room, which was unusual because, she was always keen to have Carol sit with them, and to talk to her about what had happened at school that day.

Bridget sat on the couch, opposite the one Frank was on with his feet up. She didn't say anything at first, but sat down as it was clear that she wanted to talk about something to Frank. Frank himself expected her to start speaking at any moment, but she paused a while, which meant that she was very keen to say something, but didn't really know how to start. Finally, she asked him:

- Do you think Husain's fears about what might happen here are real, or he is exaggerating?
- I think his fears are real, but I don't think it will be as bad as he says. I just cannot imagine that a country, that is so competent, could fall prey to people who are trying to change its foundations. And I cannot believe the people who are in charge in the country, do not know the intentions of the people—all the people—not only the new comers.
- These people have carried out riots and terrorist attacks in other countries, and there is nothing

to prevent them from doing the same things here, or worse.

- I don't know. I can't predict what's going to happen. I don't think our situation will be as bad as Husain imagines. At least, here, we're in a much better position than we were back home. I know our main priority is to raise Carol, and protect her from any danger that threatens her, or threatens us. But at least we've got the right to defend ourselves. Back home we didn't even have the right to self-defense. Our souls have always been the property of those who govern us.

It was clear from Brigitte's face and her silence, that she wasn't convinced of what Frank was saying. Her silence revealed that she wanted to make up her mind, for herself and not let Frank get involved in her decisions—particularly the topic that now consumed her attention—the subject of Carol's friends. But the refugee subject is no less important than that. It was obviously a dangerous subject and needed to be considered carefully, very carefully.

ALI

Ali might come across to some people as a fairly normal young man. He seems like a cheerful, energetic, highly motivated, good-natured young man, who always tries to do what his parents say. He has a good sense of humor, preferring positive jokes and not meaningless trivia. He doesn't remember the time when he first witnessed the suffering in the eyes of his father and mother, before the family left their home and joined the Diaspora. Despite his young age, he was aware that his family was going through difficult and unusual times. They were leaving their country for the unknown. Unlike the other children on that journey, he was well-behaved and didn't play up, so he didn't add to his parents' suffering.

The situation back then, when they migrated from their country, was unsustainable and unpredictable. People were afraid even to just talk about wanting to emigrate. They were afraid of the repressive authority who controlled the country. They needed a lot of luck before they could be accepted as

refugees somewhere. There were very few people, who could provide the large sums of money, to the people smugglers. Indeed, there were not many smugglers around in those days. Although, when there was an increase in the number of people, who were desperate to leave their country, the smuggling of refugees became known as a profession. Many countries have tried to fight and clamp down, on the smugglers in many ways. But they could only achieve this when they changed the immigration laws, so that the arrival of a refugee in a country was, no guarantee of the offer of asylum.

Although Ali remembered everything that his family had experienced since then, he kept these memories locked away inside his chest, his mind and emotions repressed. He didn't talk about them. But he never allowed them to influence his behavior. He never talked about his childhood memories or forgot them, even though they were still hurting him. Childhood trauma can remain with a child for many years—perhaps not every child—but Ali was one of those who couldn't forget what he had gone through. He was very like Husain, only differed from him in that he wasn't trapped between the old homeland, and a new homeland. He didn't live in a state of oscillation between the two. He knew that he couldn't, and wouldn't want to, live in his father's native land, because he didn't know how to survive under such a repressive regime. He couldn't live near oppression, which comes from such outdated ideologies.

Yes, Ali was very much like his father, but he was more resilient than him, when times got difficult and didn't give into his emotions. His experiences during those difficult times with his family, made him stronger—stronger even than Husain. Husain's childhood was nothing like Ali's. He didn't experience the same kind of suffering that Ali had lived through. Husain was nearly forty years older than his son, and had lived a better, more humane and comfortable life than his son, which kind of goes against the natural order. The social world in which Ali grew up, forced him to live a semi-independent life, relying on himself and his innate talents. Even when he was a child at the beginning of school, he never came home complaining about what had happened to him, when he was bullied by other children. He just thought about the difficult situation, which his family was experiencing, and that he must be patient until things become clearer and easier, and the cloud of oppression and repression vanishes from his family's life and his.

He was always asking himself about things he encountered, and tried to create an answer or answers to every question he had. He always chose the hardest answer, the one that required him to learn more, suffer more, endure more and depend on himself more. The events, days and years created a unique personality for Ali. He bore little resemblance to the majority of his peers. But he remained someone who tended to repress things that, even keep secrets from his own family. His mother was the same, she always tried to find out

everything she could about his life, but he let her know very little. He just gave her little hints which don't really let her know anything. Yet she thought that she could know something about his private life, when she resorted to asking her husband about him, but Husain was not very helpful. He simply didn't care when Zainab asked him for information about her son, and tended to answer her by saying: *"It is part of his personality to be secretive about his private life. But if you want to know accurate details about his life, you should face him and ask him. Do you expect your son to lie to you when he answers you?"*

In fact, Husain was not far from explaining Ali's situation. Even though Zainab was always thinking about him, she found it difficult to understand him. Husain shared Ali's feelings because he understood his suffering. Yet, at the same time, he was afraid that these sincere feelings would not receive the justice they deserve in this country. Ali felt that he had imposed himself and his family on it, when they decided to emigrate and leave their home behind, heading to the unknown. They didn't have a free choice as to which country they can emigrate to.

His memories of their journey were hazy and obscure. They felt humiliated. They were seen as beggars, asking for what they could be given by those people, who are employed by the international agencies for refugees, who had the authority to choose whoever they thought, should have the chance to start his life again. The rest would have to go back to wherever

they came from, so that, for the rest of their lives, they will be struggling endlessly with the tyrants, and their oppressing regimes, while the whole world looks on.

Ali was unaware of everything his family was passing through when he was young, but he knew about it when he grew up. He didn't get bullied or harassed that much at school even though he was a foreigner, and his family had come from a distant land, to live and be protected by this new country. But he knew more than he should know for a child of his age. Perhaps one could comment that:

“Children's unawareness is sometimes better than their awareness.”

Ali was in thrall to a powerful love, which had a great influence on him. In fact he was living in such a state of adoration that, he couldn't show or tell anyone, even his mother, for his fear she would not understand the complexity of his feelings! Ali loved the country where he lived and learned, and saw life in its most beautiful images, and he didn't fear anyone. But all this didn't reassure him that he would actually be accepted in this country without going through painful periods of feelings of isolation. He knew the future would not and could not be controlled by his hand, however much he tried. It is actually linked to many factors, which are controlled by those enjoy power. Ali and anyone who is more powerful than him, couldn't change or even

have access, to what is in the hands of the powerful elephants who are controlling almost everything. In fact they are the ones who are ruling the world. He was well aware the future will not work out as he would like. He knew full well that, he was still at a stage where his future could be affected by chance or random events, as is the case with many people. He was aware that he could easily be taken out of, that safe circle where he had control of his life, and be thrown into the abyss of uncertainty. He doesn't know what the future might hold. He knew that connections do not result by choice or because of what people wish for. They have to be inherited and then they are bequeathed to the new generation. This is why life is unjust. People are never free in their choices. Their actions are influenced by the past, even if those past events were irrelevant to them.

It's not easy, even for someone close to Ali, to know how he really feels about his family, their mentality and the way of life they live in their new country. He doesn't remember much about how they lived in their homeland, and doesn't know if there was anyone in their homeland, who had a particular influence or control, on his personal or family life. No private life was allowed there. People shared nothing apart from a constant, everyday fear and terror, leading to an unknown future. That fear and horror spread overwhelmingly, among people without exception. Even among those who lived in the shadows of the oppressive power, and were considerably protected by it, were haunted by that fear. Ali had always heard stories from his family, about all the suffering

they had gone through, which he had not witnessed. He also had fragments of memories from his early years since their arrival in their new country. All of this had fueled his imagination and continued to fill him with a horror that he had not actually lived through. Yet it was as real as if he had because of his family's experiences.

In some ways, Ali thought his parents were irrational. He believed that they needed to reappraise their values from their previous life and learn to live with the current reality, so that they could keep up with what is expected for their new lives, both mentally, emotionally and through their behavior. He was particularly concerned that his father, and to a lesser extent his mother, were unfit for their new world and that they were affected by a certain kind of madness, that affects only those who once lived in the ancient world. Of course it could also affect those living in the new world, and who lack confidence in themselves and in their ability, to live in the conditions that surround them. But although he sees his father as perpetuating his passion for his native land and the past, he knows he doesn't glorify the past. He realizes that he feels extremely weak, maybe caused by disgrace and humiliation. But he doesn't reveal this in front of others, only when he is alone with his soul. It draws its determination and creativity because it's free of any constraints, whether they are from the past, represented by old beliefs and values, or the constraints posed by the present, such as those represented by modern values, because they are full of cheating, deceit and

falsification. Ali found it hard to understand how his father was unable to forget a homeland, where he didn't enjoying freedom and never felt safe. His homeland had surrounded its citizens with fear and intimidation every day.

A homeland, where the people wake up in the morning, praising the ruler and spend every evening with hatred and fear of him;

A homeland where none of its citizens could know whether he will spend the night with his family or in a remote dark prison;

A homeland, its citizens don't know who is the one, who guides the tyrant's men to take them to an unknown destiny, or to whom they can safely talk about what is inside them;

A homeland where people wake up in the morning to hear news which destroys all that remains of their hopes and what they dreamed of the night before, and then spend their evenings listening to decisions - but they don't know to what extent their lives will be turned upside down;

A homeland, owned by a sole tyrannical ruler, and his henchmen, who were nothing but rabble, whose only occupation was to praise, applaud and sing about him;

This was why Ali told Frank, when he went to the grocery, enquiring about Husain, that his father:

“Would not claim something unusual has happened”

But Frank couldn't have at the time, an explanation of what Ali wanted to say about his father, however, obviously what he meant was that: Husain in his retreat, which is ostensibly similar to that of many others—we heard in human history—that they have retreated or isolated themselves, then they ended their isolation and went out to the world claiming big unusual claims! But Husain will not come out to the world with any claim like those, or even anything

It is because Husain is a peaceful man. He is a man who has never been aggressive in his life and never wanted to achieve a glorified position that qualifies him to control the lives of people and their personal affairs!

He is a man who has the innate ability to observe and discriminate, and he has never sought for his own benefits using his own features.

So what happened is that, all of his own good humane features, have reflected negative aspects on him, and he became a stalker night and day.

He cannot avoid it nor could he get a salvation.

Perhaps he can get rid of it when he leaves this life!

HUSAIN AND GLIMPSES OF THE PAST

The next morning, Husain woke up late after he had stayed awake till very late midnight, after Zainab left him and went to sleep, after they talked about things relevant to their life, their future, and the future of their children in the new country.

Husain sat in his usual place at the small kitchen table, waiting for the breakfast Zainab was preparing. There was a paper pad and a pen on the table, which Zainab seemed to be using, when she needed to register what she wanted to shop for. He remained staring at the pad for seconds, without anything been written on the first page of it, then he took it and began to draw on the page, different lines that show nothing clear, even when Zainab came to him with a cup of tea, which he used to take starting his breakfast, and she deliberately tried to see what he was writing on the page, she saw him drawing lines as if he wants to draw a pigeon picture, or that was what she apparently expected, because she knows

his love for pigeons since his childhood, and so Zainab commented on that by saying:

- I thought you're going to draw my picture!
- I am the pigeon that flew with you along the way of this difficult life and all that troubles we have encountered together in it.
- You are too much for my ability to draw your picture. Do you think I'm "Da Vinci," so I can do that?
- No, but I wish you would count me one of the pigeons, which you still like to remember, whenever you have the opportunity, and you have memories of the past, blowing their winds in your mind.
- You know Zainab, I did not like anything in my life like my love for pigeons, of course except my love for you and the children.
- Mmm, God rewards you for your sympathy with me!
- It doesn't matter if you mock on my words. I cannot say anything other than the truth, whether you believe it or not. I will not fool you at all... though I have tricked and fooled the pigeons, several times in my life, which is a guilt I feel, and I couldn't forgive myself for many years. I have tried for years to do what could be an apology, for what I have done in the past, but every time I retreat for fear that what happened in the past could be repeated, and I have to deceive the pigeons again!

- This seems to me a new story; I haven't heard it before from you, during the years of our life together, I mean our flight together... it seems to me that the subject deserves to stop at it... as you seem to be serious about what you are saying,

Husain, is there anything you feel hurting you?
Are you all right ?

What happened to you?

Oh God, what has happened to all of us?

Zainab wondered these questions with obvious concern, after she stopped making the breakfast, waiting for Husain to clarify his words.

- Nothing, don't worry. It is the past and what has been mixed in between a sense of tranquility, and a sense of fear, between despair and hope, between loyalty, deception, and denial.
- No, I am sure there is something. I know you love pigeons very much, and I don't care if you love them more than me because this is no longer worth anything now but I am serious about knowing what is new?

What makes you in this situation of frustration and despair without having anything new happening to us and to our lives?

- I told you there is nothing. It's just the end signs.

Everything comes to an end. Everything has to end up!

Sweet or bitter, nothing in life is to stay. Perhaps only injustice, fraud, lying, and untrue claims could stay.

But nothing good can stay.

Everything good and peaceful does not have the ability to survive... it is the law of nature.

- This is not new. I heard it many times from you. It became familiar to me like the daily lesson, but the new thing today is the subject of your deception of the pigeons, and I want to know what this is.
- Yes, I know that I have been repeating myself for years, but I repeat things which need to be repeated. Why do you think the prophets were repeated? They were all claiming the same thing. Was their repetition boring and unnecessary in your opinion or what?
- I don't want to go into this subject. It is something scary to me. I don't know where you get this confidence and boldness, to talk about these topics, religions and God. I think your son Ali will follow your steps on his way... and God help us!
- Ali will be stronger than me. He will not fall under the influence of whoever would suppress his freedom and deface his personality. Do not hate that he follows my steps and way!

Did you forget the breakfast, or did you go on hunger strike today, without any reason?

I am distressed and I am only trying to forget my current concerns, which I remember from the past. These concerns have a special taste and influence, a taste like the Iraqi rural sad melodies.

Would you like to listen to me, if I sing to you one now?

These old melodies which lived along, with the stages of history of the country, and I think no one knows for sure when they started?

Or do you want to share my memories of the pigeons of more than fifty years ago?

- I do not think I would love listening to either of them, but your memories of the pigeons, maybe less sad and painful than listening to those depressing melodies, which cause heart aches, and at least I may know how you fooled the pigeons in the past?
- When I tell you that I cheated the pigeons, I mean what I say, and this has already happened. It is not hallucination. I used to treat the pigeons more than what would be considered a good treatment, and I know I had their confidence in me, because they appreciate what they see of my interest in them, and how much I care for them.

But when I went into trouble or argument with my father for any reason, every time he was pouring his anger on the poor pigeons, and ordered me to do within minutes to get the pigeons out of the house. So, to quickly meet

his orders I was putting the pigeons in any carton, or even in paper bags and go to one of my friends, to keep them in his home until my father's anger subsides and ends, then I ask my friend to let the pigeons go to fly back to my home.

But my father's anger was sometimes, lasting longer than my friend could keep the pigeons in his home, especially if my friend did not have pigeons himself, and he knows nothing about keeping pigeons, or his family does not like having pigeons in their house for long in such a case, I had to sell the pigeons, so I put them in the box or the paper bags, when I would have to face their sad and disappointment look in their eyes, which I can certainly read, but I can't portray it to anyone, not to anyone who doesn't understand pigeons!

Neither you nor any other one would imagine, how much their sad eyes looking was affecting me deeply inside, when I decide to sell them!

After I tricked them when I put them in the box because I often used to put them in the box and take them away from home for different distances and then release them to fly and return home for exercise every time I was watching their joy, as they were released and fly off my hands to fly high and go in circles flying in the sky for several rounds and most of them will be applauding their wings with joy and confidence that they will know the way

back home, which is the most precious thing they have, then they soon go on their direction heading home and reach it before

I myself get there, or I leave them and go to another destination, because I trust they will arrive home safe without a problem....,

Until that day, when my father's anger was so furious, that he decided to demolish the loft of the pigeons and ordered me as usual to take them out and forever that was the hardest time and the pigeons saw the destruction of their loft in front of their eyes while I was standing and couldn't do anything. The pigeons of course couldn't know an explanation for what is happening. My father's anger was an overwhelming fury, which swept all that stands in front of him, and once again I had to put the pigeons in the box and took them for the last and final time.

Then after a few days, I was surprised by the return of some of them to the roof of the house. I saw the joy in the eyes and behavior of some of them, and they seemed to be indifferent to what happened. And they would stay at home, no matter how the loft was destroyed, but some others seem to have come to make sure of what happened, and when they saw the ruins of the loft, they were terrorized again and remembered the anger of my father, and decided not to have a new experience with the

anger of human beings, so they rushed to fly away and forever!

It was the first time I see the pigeons running away from their home, after they returned to it by themselves, filled with hopes and longing.

- Husain, your words are scary, and are horrifying me, more than the horror caused to the pigeons, by your father's anger and destruction of the loft. Husain, tell me the truth.

Are you thinking of returning to Baghdad!?

FRANK AND THE DECISIVE POSITION

Frank remained in the vortex of his thinking and feeling that his situation still lacks the sense of reassurance, which he needed to feel comfortable in trying to enjoy his life, which he feels is not as he had imagined before when he was expecting to feel in comfort after settling with his family and work.

The reason for his feeling is only one without any doubt, he knows it well, but he doesn't know how to take a stand against it.

He has completely lost his willful, since he made his difficult decision, when he changed his religion, and then soon after that he no longer has the ability to volunteer to face difficult challenges, especially after his relation with his wife Brigitte, when he left most of the social responsibilities to her.

This has become the subject controlling all over his mind, and it is not easy for him to get rid of thinking in it, especially after his recent meetings with Husain, and the resulting discussions and topics which they

included, and those revelations that began to insist on his mind, of what he did in the last years which he lived away from his first homeland, and his big family he left there, and no longer has the ability and means to communicate with them, for he cannot visit his first country—Iraq—after announcing the change of his religion, although this announcement was known only by those people around him in the region where he lives, and there is no one who knows him when he was in southern Iraq. No one knows his family, and this was one of the things which relaxes him, because it gives him reassurance that his family does not know about the development of things, and what has changed in the life of their son, Falah, who became Frank, and other things which are more fundamental in himself, since he left them and his country behind his back.

After days of his last meeting with Husain at his home, and not having the opportunity to meet him again, Frank felt a strong desire to make a serious attempt to know the news of his family in Iraq, in the village where he was born, raised and lived in the province of Nasiriyah, not far from the oldest city in human civilization “Ur”, but he was unable to know how it could possibly be done?

He is still hesitant even to think in going there by himself, to see his parents and brothers, because he doesn't know the consequences of that, and what could his travelling there yield to, which he might be unable to solve, and could make him regret taking a step such as that.

So he focused on trying to figure out, who could help him know how to contact them, maybe by telephone? They must have an access to a mobile phone, like all the people living in the country, in their village, which was in a state of deep poverty and misery. His thinking could not take him to anyone, who could be better than Hamid, the Kebab restaurant owner, whom he knows and trust, and knows that he would help him for nothing, so he decided to go to him today soon as the time and opportunity permit, and indeed he went to see Hamid in the morning, just before noon, when he expected him not to be too busy at that time.

Frank thought it is better not to give Hamid an impression that his visit to the restaurant was only to ask for help that Hamid could arrange for him, so he went on to make an order of a meal of kebab, which he could take home, to be kept in the freezer to be used whenever they want, which is something they usually do.

He arrived at the restaurant and saw Hamid as he wished and expected. After he greeted him and asked him to make the kebab meal, he went on to ask Hamid about how could he find out, who could help him sending a message to his family in their village in Nasiriyah province. Hamid prompt reply was a good and encouraging, saying that there is no problem in that, and that he will try with many of the people of the community he knows. Frank was so pleased to know that, so he gave Hamid the name of the village, and some of the features and

names of some people he still remember, and those who know or reach any of them could very likely know something about his family. Hamid wrote the information in a paper he took out of his pocket, and he told Frank that it would never be difficult, as long as the telephone communication has become free, and the people there today are talking by mobile phones, much more than they were talking when they were sitting in the old coffee places, without doing any good things for themselves! Also, most of their conversations have no meaning or value.

All of them waste their time, which they do not know how to deal with it?

This is not only limited to what is happening between the people there in Iraq, but many of those who arrived here, forgot that they have to work to gain their livelihood because they have learned the different ways, which qualify them—according to government regulations here—to be happy without doing any work by circumventing the government, when for instance they convince medical or other government agencies that they need aid because they are incapable or incompetent to do any work, and some of them reached the level of prosecution and circumvention that they are crazy or depressed because they cannot adapt to the community here, and in most cases, the government agencies are very sensitive to the situation claimed by these people, and the abuse continues and therefore, continue to bestowal them what they do not deserve of allowances.

Then Hamid ended his talk by saying:

*“I cannot see how God accepts this situation?
And his all mighty does not turn the people
upside down!*

*Even if it is necessary, to turn it on all of us...
It is something puzzling!”*

Frank came out of the Hamid’s restaurant, full of hope that something will happen, and will be able to contact his family, to know how are their conditions, and he will know how is the health of his mother, who was suffering from several diseases, and they could not afford providing medications for her.

How could she be now?

What about his father who was not better than his mother?

And his brothers and sisters, who he doesn’t know where they could have been now, and if they are still there, or moved to somewhere else, in this overwhelming exodus?

When Frank arrived at the house, he did not find Brigitte there. He noticed she had left a sheet of paper on the kitchen table, telling him that she went to the market to shop for some of the household needs. Frank put the kebabs he bought in the fridge, so when Brigitte comes she would know where to keep it, and he sat in the kitchen as usual. On the

kitchen table, there was the daily newspaper which is delivered to the house, so he took it to go through the pages, reading without concentration, for he considers most of what comes in the newspaper, as mostly irrelevant to him, or more accurately, does not mean much to him at this time, since he is passing through his case of concerns, hope and desire to know the news of his family in Iraq.

Will he hear news about them soon?

If the news came in from them, how could they affect his life?

How can the format of the news essentially be?

He is not used to hearing joyous news coming from his first country, since he left. This is not only for himself, but most of other people who are also Iraqis, if not all of them, perhaps with the exception of those associated, and related to the new class of people, who have been by mere chance able to rule over Iraq. The people who were supported by different powers, to enable them to govern the country and then to plunder all its capabilities afterward, which made the situation of the country worse and worse, and people continue to escape from it!

Then he moved on to the point of, what could be Brigitte's view of his attempt, when she knew of him seeking to know his family's news?

Would she consider that as an attempt to re-link himself with the past?

Or, will she look at the matter as a passing issue, and doesn't care much to it?

But she can't ignore the importance of this attempt, and its strangeness at the same time, because she had never heard of him when he talks about this issue, except that he was very relieved to get rid of everything, that was causing an eternal problem in his life, and his ability to deal with people over there, but he knows and he is sure that Brigitte would have her own view, that may not come to his mind, something very unexpected by him now, and her opinion is mostly going to cause a shock to him, as usual in terms that she thinks of things which do not come to his mind, and indeed what happened was, when Brigitte returned home, at the beginning her usual question for him was about how was his day, and he knows that she means how much he earned in his day out of his work?

So his reply was:

- It wasn't good today; I had one fare and was for a short distance!
- Where did you spend most of the time?
- I went to the Hamid's restaurant... and I brought a meal of kebabs, it is in the fridge.
- But you know we still have some of the previous kebab meal, which we did not eat all of it.

Why did you buy a new meal? Is there a siege going to happen on the country, so we need to store more food?

- No, there will be no siege. This meal can stay for months in the fridge, until the need arises for it.
- This means, you used what you have earned this morning in buying this kebab meal, isn't this what has happened, as I understand it?
- Yes, that's true, maybe I paid for the meal more than I got from the taxi, and does this satisfy you now?
- Why you are angry?
- You are trying judge me on something without asking me, what mainly motivated me to go to Hamid's restaurant?

It certainly wasn't because of my intention to buy kebabs, but it was another reason, I am sure it does not come to your mind now!

- I no longer have the ability to enter into your mind, to know what you are thinking in.
- Is it necessary to intervene or go into my mind? I am a person like an open white page, I was born like that, and I lived like this, and I will stay as I am, and all my problems were because of that. I cannot be otherwise!

Why did you choose to join a person who has these qualities?

You know me very well. Did you think you can change the creatures of God as you like, to transform them as you like them to be?

- Why you are so nervous today?

Did something happen during your work, or maybe when you went to the kebab restaurant?

- I'm sorry for being angry this way.. You rest assured that nothing happened to me, not in the taxi or when I went to Hamid, but it is what happens here! It is your unfair accountability to me, as if I have spent what I earned on myself, or played a gambling game and lost.

I did not leave my country, if it wasn't for the injustice that was common there, but I did not expect to spend my life, with an unjust ruler to share my life and home, and I have to submit my papers and reports daily, on what I did and why I did this and didn't do that! You're living an illusion that tells you can lead our lives in this way, taking us on a right and safe journey! Let it be known to you that, you are wrong in your belief and this imagination.

My purchase of kebab from Hamid, was an excuse to go to the restaurant and ask for help from him. I did not want to go to ask only for his help, although I am sure the man will not care for that, whether I bought kebabs or did not buy anything... he is a man as you heard me saying, generous and his work is going very well, and I did not need to buy anything from him, before asking for his help.

- I am also sorry to cause you this disturbance. I will try to pay attention to this in the coming times, when I comment on the things that concern you, although I don't know where my

mistake here was, but can I know what kind of help you asked Hamid to do for you?

What is it that you need him to help you with?

- Fa'iza, you seem to be unable to find out where your fault lies?

You have just now said that, you will not comment on the things that concern me, then immediately you asked me about the kind of help I have asked Hamid!

Don't you find contradiction in this? Furthermore, why in such situations, you separate between what is my own and what is yours?

How long we have been living this partible way of life for each of us?

What is this new logic that has no meaning or taste?

- Let us away now from the logic that has no meaning or taste, I will not ask you to tell me what you asked of Hamid, and let's leave it ends at this limit.
- I do not mean to hide from you what I have asked Hamid, because I know that sooner or later you will know when I hear the news from him, and I know in advance, the problem will come at that time! Or that is what I expect to happen.

I asked Hamid to find me, anyone who could help me find a way to contact my mother and father!

Do you like this, or have I crossed my border when I asked for that?

Brigitte remained silent, when she heard that unexpected reply from Frank, but the signs of surprise were visible on her face, which indicated that she did not rejoice at the news, her face changed in color, and she did not know how to answer, and the silence lasted for minutes, but she couldn't keep her patience for a long silence.

So she returned to ask him, what would he tell them if he knew how to contact them?

*Would he tell them that he changed his religion?
And married a woman of another religion and
that he has a daughter followed the religion of
her mother?*

She did not receive answers to these questions... because Frank himself doesn't know what would he say, when he could contact them. Then she went on to ask him another question which did not occur to him... which was:

- Don't you think they will ask you to send them help?

I mean financial.

Do you think we can do that?

Frank did not answer what she asked, for it is true that he didn't think in this before. His parents would very likely be in need of financial assistance now, because they were living in poverty when he left them, so how could their lives be now, after these lean years which have passed through the whole country?

But at the same time, he didn't like what Brigitte said in advance and as priority, before caring for any other humanitarian matter. She soon thought that they would ask their son for help, even before any contact was made with them!

How does this woman think?

How can she think in this selfish, brutal way that explodes from a thought, filled with meanness and deep hatred?

She does not know his parents, and has never seen them, and has not yet been able to consider that her husband is part of them. How could she precede events with this expectation devoid of human feeling?

In the evening, after Frank finished the evening meal with Brigitte and Carol. He decided to go out without even receiving a call for the taxi. He claimed that he would go to stand in the taxi rank at one of the malls, but in fact he intended to sit alone somewhere, because he knew that the subject did not reach its end for Brigitte. And she would want to know more than what he said to her! However, there

was nothing more than what he said, because it is not yet known if he will succeed in the contact with his family or not?

Frank intended to go to a public park to sit alone, despite the cold weather and the humidity that accompanies sitting in the garden in winter. This garden was overlooking the lake, and when he arrived, its waves were calm as if it was dead and motionless. Frank sat on one of the seats, and there were no people sitting there other than him. But there were some who were jogging, or walking as a fitness exercise practiced by people, who have used to walk or jog maybe on daily bases, and others who were putting on wheeled shoes, all for sport and maybe enjoyment, so he thought of a very far-fetched thought which is wondering with himself:

Why people became so interested in sports?

Is it because they want to live a better healthy life, or because they want to live longer?

Is there a difference between the two?

Are athletes the ones who lead a healthier life, or do they live longer?

He doesn't know reliable information about this, but it is certain that both things are not compatible. Sport is not necessarily a guarantee for a healthy and better life, or for a longer life!

But this is how things go in this world, and many of them are based on a deceit or more than one deceit. There are too many!

As for this lake, he also does not know why people like to live on the shore of a lake?

It is such a bleak depressing way to live! What kind of beauty could be found in it?

It looks like a silent tank of water. It often smells like fish!

It is the kingdom of fish, which man always wanted to invade!

What beauty in this miserable kingdom, which buried both the dead and the living, all those who can and who can't live like fish!

What is this measure that people use in what they love and don't love?

Man has very strange characters. He doesn't know what he loves and how he loves and probably knows everything else!

At this moment Frank's mobile phone rang, and it was a call from Hamid, so he quickly answered:

- - Hello. Yes, Hamid. Do you have any news?
- Yes, I have someone who can help you. I know he will be able to, but he wants to meet you to have more information, more than what you gave me, he will be here at 7:00 p.m., so if you could try to come here to meet him, but I must tell you that, it is necessary if you want him to make a real effort to help you, you need to be patient with his questions, and perhaps

his antipathetic feature, you should not be surprised, or lose your patience, when you hear his unexpected questions, it is necessary to have your full patience with him, I know he is repulsive most of the time. But there is no one better than him for this task.

- Don't worry about this; I'll take care of that.

What could he ask me?

Let him ask whatever he wants.

Frank arrived at Hamid's restaurant before the seven o'clock, and he was not expecting the person has already come before him, and after he greeted Hamid, Hamid pointed his hand toward that person, saying to Frank:

- This is Sa'ad, who knows about your need for him to help you, as I talked to him, and he seems to know you from your name, perhaps you have met him before.

Frank and Sa'ad shook hands, and sat at a table near the reception table where Hamid sits at the entrance of the restaurant, and Frank said in response to what Hamid said:

- No, I don't really remember we met before.

However, I don't know many people here, and because of the nature of my work, which does not allow me to meet with the community very often.

Then Sa'ad commented on Frank's words by saying:

- Yes, what you say is true, but I hear about you and did not meet you before, although I attend most of the events, which are celebrated by the community, and I think I have more time than you have. I am still looking for work here.

Frank wanted to talk more with Sa'ad for courtesy, so as not to seem excited to meet him, just because he would help him, or this was what he expects from Sa'ad, so he asked him:

- What kind of work are you trying to get?
I am looking for a job which rewards me with a good rewarding salary... a job does not require me to get up early in the morning, because I love the late night life, which contradicts the early wake up, and I also smoke a lot, and can't bear more than twenty minutes without a cigarette, which also does not work for most jobs, but you tell me how did you find out about the taxi driver job, since your arrival here?
- After I got the driving license here, I thought to take advantage of it; which helped me a lot in being close to my family, and my obligations towards them!
- What about the church?

- What about it? And what does it have to do with my work? Whether a taxi driver or any other work!

No, nothing, but I heard they are paying a salary to help. And that's what many people of the community say here. They believe that the church pays to the needy people and helps them with their children's expenses, or maybe looking for work for them, good and rewarding work.

- I don't receive anything from anyone, neither the church nor the government, I pay the income tax to the government, because I am registered in the list of drivers at the taxi office, and the office counts the income of the driver and report everything, then we are responsible of the tax payment to the government. Not everything you hear is true, and people easily go far with their thoughts and imagination, especially in such matters.

But how could you contact the area where I lived in Nasiriyah, it was a very remote area; I do not know how it is now?

Sa'ad interrupted him by another question, stranger than all the previous question:

- Does this mean if I go to the church and tell them that I want to become a Christian, they would not help me to find a job or help me financially even by a small amount!

- Your questions, my dear Sa'ad really puzzling me, I don't know how to answer you, and I don't know if I can answer these questions at all!

Then Frank looked at Hamid, who was busy with a customer, and he remembered how Hamid told him to be patient, with the unbearable features of this person, Sa'ad, who continued his intolerable questions.

Frank didn't know, what Sa'ad wanted from asking those questions. However, he returned to complete his answers while trying to hold his nerves:

- Dear brother Sa'ad, the question of my choice to become a Christian, is a question has a lot of roots and reasons, I do not think I can explain to you here in this first meeting. Nevertheless, it does not include secrets, and there is nothing hidden in it, except one thing which is, I have risked my life when I decided to change my religion, and I personally don't think you need it, because it will not benefit you in anything, especially the benefit you might expect!

Frank then ended up with Sa'ad, when he has almost lost his patience, but fortunately he managed to control his nerves and also to give Sa'ad more information about his village and the people who knew his family. Frank left the restaurant as if something was going wrong! Something inside was

blaming him because he went on in his attempt. But what he could have done, after waiting this long time, without knowing anything about his parents and his whole family. He did not know anything about them since he left Iraq, his lost homeland!

HUSAIN AND ZAINAB, THE SUDDEN QUESTION

After the question of Zainab which surprised her husband Husain, about if he intends to visit Iraq, silence and serenity prevailed! Husain did not answer anything, and he seemed to have been surprised by two important things for him, first is his realization that what he is thinking inside himself, was clear through what he talked with Zeinab about the pigeons, and his nostalgia for them, which means it is no longer easy to hide his feelings when he speaks, even if he tried to! This may be one of the signs of aging, and it will not be easy for him to accept this new situation. The second is that Zainab has become fearful of what could be decided by Husain; hence her question to him was full of surprise and fearful image. Husain had to be clear in what he wanted to say, about his memories with the pigeons, especially about what hurts him inside of this issue, although, throughout the years he spent in his new country, he did not seriously

think in going back to keep pigeons, which he could have done it at any time. Obviously, this meant that pigeons do not mean to him, like what they meant back home, and their meaning was based on their natural instinct of love to their home, adding to it the nice and good features the pigeons possess.

What could have been Husain's answer to Zainab's question?

Could he tell her that he is actually thinking in visiting

Iraq? Especially after Ali went on his own to visit the country, which he hardly remember anything about it, and spent a few days there in his uncle's house, then Ali came back from there, faster than he had imagined he would be able to stay. He came back with negative feelings about everything he saw there, and he could not see anything in a positive look, but all what he saw was, a strange life and people living in a different way, with respect to everything he could imagine!

For the first time Husain felt that it was time for him to take a position from this ruptured life that he lived, between his perceptions and his imagination about the past, and the reality of the present. He believes that he must live with reality, not with the past fantasies and their beautiful images. He knows that those beautiful images, despite all the scratches which distorted large areas of them, are still having their serious effect on him. Yes, he must do something to correct that!

Husain finished eating his breakfast, and Zainab sat in front of him. She was also taking her breakfast slowly, and looked at him every now and then, a worried look, but he saw her looks at him very well, and he knew she was worried about him. He was drinking his tea in the large mug, looked at Zainab and smiled a smile of courtesy, and then he asked her:

- Would you like to join me going there?

I will be very happy to have your company. Perhaps in our visit we could see things more clearly, and probably we move on to deal only with reality, and forget the past as if it was not there!

- Do you think you could do that?

Please, do not compare yourself to Ali. He has no memories in Iraq, nothing but the fear he saw in our eyes!

- I know that is not easy, but I must try it, and I would be stronger if you are with me. I don't push you to do so as you know, because I know you do not want to travel there anyway, but it will only be a trip on the road of our life stations.

- I will not accept let you go alone to the unknown. Let's leave it now. Maybe you change your mind, or maybe I could convince myself to travel, or maybe I would be going because I have no other choice.

- What a difficult and hard choice!

I thought my teaching did not work with you.
Now I know and can see I was wrong.

How much I wish now that, my teaching did
not work with you.

May God help you all with my teaching.

I will never forgive myself. Never.

FRANK WAITING

It was a long and dull day for Frank, waiting to get news about his family. He was waiting for a call and expecting it whenever his phone rang. A call from Sa'ad or Hamid, anyone of them, but that did not happen. He tried to keep himself busy, but he does not have control over the work, for his work is according to the requests he receives from the taxi office.

He tried to occupy himself with anything, but he did not find anything he could take care of, and get himself busy with it. Then he thought of visiting the grocery store to meet Husain, whenever he had the chance, but recently he had noticed that Husain is not in the grocery store as often as he used to before, and his son Ali is the one who is there most of the days. He learned from Ali that Husain does not stay there more than a few hours a day, and the cause of this change was not known. Or Frank really did not care much to find out why?

It was Husain's state the last time he met him in his home, which was strange and Frank did not used to

see him that way. The exhaustion and discomfort were very clear on Husain, and Frank did not feel that the outcome of meeting with Husain, suits him anymore to learn from Husain, as he used to all the years before, and that what comes out of his meeting with Husain lately, is nothing but a mixture of feelings of anxiety and fear of the future, which is what Frank always tried to avoid and get rid of, since he left his first country, and was separated from his family. He has succeeded perhaps partly, but certainly to a degree which provided him relative comfort for the past few years, since he arrived in this country, and now he is sad and distressed, for the condition of his friend Husain, who does not seem to be in a good psychological state. Frank knows or expects that Husain's family, particularly his son Ali, know about this, and certainly more than Frank knows about him.

What curse is it that is pursuing people of this country? Wherever these people go, they will be pursued by a curse, on many times, the curse could be represented by, some of their country nationals themselves!

Then Frank finally thought of calling Sa'ad, to see what might have happened, since he met him a few days ago at Hamid's restaurant, but he hesitated, fearing that Sa'ad would again open the subject of the church and change the religion, and he very much wished, if he did not open this door to someone like Sa'ad!

He felt that he has changed psychologically, since he began to seek the news of his family.

He doesn't know when could he hear news about them?

And how would his life be when he becomes in contact with them after that?

And how would Brigitte's attitude be of all that?

Oh God, how many things we don't think about them and they surround us and live with us?

How could he not have thought what could be Brigitte's position towards him?

Will he be able to deal with her anymore as he was dealing with her before?

Is there anything that can justify her attitude towards his parents?

She has not seen them before, and she doesn't know if they would actually ask for anything from him?

How far can a person retrogress in his senses, feelings and attitudes?

Finally, Frank decided to go to Hamid to ask him about the news of Sa'ad, and if he had seen him since that day, and indeed he went to the restaurant and met Hamid. He asked him if he had seen Sa'ad, and Hamid's reply was that he did not hear from him, and he thought that Frank was in contact with him, then Frank's answer was that, he did not want to be

much more insistent on Sa'ad, and preferred to leave him until he heard news, so Hamid took his phone and called Sa'ad and talked to him, asking if he had got any news on the issue of Frank's family. Sa'ad's answer was that he had reached the beginning of the thread, and that he knew someone from the region who knows his family, but he hasn't yet get his phone number, and he added, if Frank wanted he can give him the number of his friend, who knows this person, and can follow the subject with him, to get the number of that person who knows them.

Frank felt as if Sa'ad might have lost his interest in the matter, because he did not get what he thought he could reach through Frank, about the possibility of benefiting from the church, or this is what he thought of Sa'ad's answer, and so he welcomed receiving the number of Sa'ad's friend in Iraq, in order to continue to pursue the subject himself.

Frank returned home in a better mood, hoping to reach something of his endeavor, and to know after all these years, what happened to his parents and his family in general. But he knows his problem with Brigitte will remain standing there, for this issue cannot be settled easily, and he began to think in many of its aspects, and what could it bring in the coming days.

How could it be his relationship with his parents, after he succeeds in contact with them?

Would it be at the level of free of charge phone calls, or what?

Is it conceivable that his parents are financially fit, and he will not need to send them aid in the coming days?

And again, how would it be Brigitte's stand, of all of that?

The time was after 8:00 p.m., and for the time difference between Iraq and his new country, Frank did not want to make a call, to the number he has got from Sa'ad and therefore, he left it for tomorrow, and he wanted to have a sleep which he desperately needed, because the last nights were exhausting to him, and he lived periods of insomnia and thinking in several directions, and he knew that he needed to see and have the advice of Husain, but this time he decided to take his affairs, his needs and his life... by himself.

The next morning, after he took Carol to the school, he remained standing in his car, in the parking lot in front of the school, then he took the phone out of his pocket, and looked at it, and he saw great hope in it, that he will hear the news of his family, and he doesn't care now what the consequences could be, the important thing now is to know how is their condition, and he will help them with whatever he can help with, and will not be stopped by Brigitte.

Yes, she cannot stop this time; they are his parents who have raised him, and pity him from everything that hurt him, of what they know.

Yes, they could not change anything of the cruelty of teachers in the school, and the cruelty of nature,

the cold weather, the rain and mud, and hunger... yes hunger which he very frequently suffered, when he was a child with his weak body, when long hours were going by, while he felt his stomach cramped because of hunger, that stomach cramp which he couldn't know, why it insists on hurting him, and tearing his stomach! Was that another punishment? Why, and for what guilt?

Then Frank dialed the number he got from Sa'ad, and remained waiting.

The phone rang at the other end but nobody answered it.

This is the first time he is calling a number outside his new country, since he started using the mobile phone. He has repeatedly heard that Iraq's communication lines are faulty, and suffers from many technical problems, so he decided to wait for a short time and then recall again, and indeed he redialed the number after ten minutes, and after he extinguished his cigarette while sitting in the car.

A person answered from the other side:

- Yes, allo, please.
- Hello, my name is Falah. I've got your number from my friend Sa'ad.

And then Frank continued to narrate what he wants to say to this person, to identify himself, where he is and what help he needs from him to contact his family. The man on the other end of the line was listening to him, without commenting on Frank's

words, until Frank finished his words. The man then responded, and started to talk about things which are irrelevant, to what Frank was saying and expected him to say:

- Yes, my son, we know the difficulties of contacting us here, but we live here from day to day, and we don't know if we will be alive tomorrow, or we are under the dirt, perhaps you hear from others that, people here have reached the utmost desperate degree. Life and death became the same to all of us, many of us wish die rather than, to live a life full of humiliation, and nothing worthwhile behind it. We all say that those who die are actually released of the tension and relaxation of this life.

Frank was surprised by the man's strange response to him, and although he knew a lot about what was going on in his country, of difficulties which are faced by ordinary and poor people, but he did not expect the man who spoke with him for the first time on the phone, to talk about such things and difficulties!

Are people becoming unable to distinguish between what is right, and what is wrong to say at certain times?

Or the man was giving him hints through what he was saying, and Frank couldn't pay attention to his words?

Anyway, the man finally suggested to Frank to call a person named “Abdulkarim,” he believes this man knows Frank and knows his family, and he is from their village region, and gave him his phone number, and wished him to call Abdulkarim, and also told him that the man has a problem with hearing, and that Frank will need to speak loudly so that he could hear him well.

Frank’s call ended with this man, but he did not know what it was that made the man talk about a subject, had nothing to do with Frank’s need for his help. It wasn’t important or relevant, to talk about the many catastrophes going on in the country, while Frank was only asking for how to contact his family!

Then Frank focused his thinking trying to find out, who this man was Abdulkarim? He is supposed to know Frank as the man told him, and therefore, Frank thought it is better for him to try to know, who is this Abdulkarim before calling him, so that he knows how to talk to him? So that he doesn’t go through any kind of misunderstanding, which he doesn’t need to have at this critical time, and he needs the most to know how to speak to him, which will be dependent on how much he knows about him. He continued his thinking for more than half an hour, and did not dare to dial the phone number of Abdulkarim, before knowing who possibly he can be? Lots of faces and names passed before him, of those he remembers of the people of his old village, but he did not remember anyone by this name. Who could be this person? Abdulkarim...

Abdulkarim, obviously knew him from his name, Falah the son of Abdulzahra who was working a fisherman, selling fish in the market of the village.

Then Frank suddenly remembered that person, who is known to the whole village people, by his nickname (Karrumi) or (Karim), who was serving his compulsory service as a soldier in the army, during the war between Iraq and Iran, and according to what Frank had heard about him later, Karrumi was a brave soldier in the artillery division, and he lost most of his hearing as a result of the war, and the sounds of bombs and missiles, which they were firing on Iran, and those that were fired by Iran, until he was severely injured by an Iranian artillery shell, and lost his leg to become disabled. Then he was discharged from the army after he lost his leg. It was in the early eighties of the last century, when Frank was still a little boy, but he heard the story later when he grew up.

Such stories were making most of what people talk about. They were representing their daily worries, which none of them knows when it could come to an end.

Yes, he must be Karrumi or Karim.

He certainly knows Frank and knows his father as well. He knows his whole family, and very closely. Yes, there is no need to wait for more before calling him.

But he will wait a little more. It is better to review what came up to his mind about the man, Karrumi. How he should call him when talking to him now

(my uncle Karim or Abdulkarim), to confirm respect and appreciation for him?

He is at least twenty-five years older than Frank, which means about the age of Husain, but of course there is no way to compare his relation with this man, as to that with Husain. Anyway, there is no need to delay calling him, so Frank has the phone ready, and dialed the number then waited a little, and then the answer came-Allo... allo... who is... who is this? Who is calling please?

Are you calling from outside of Iraq?

- Hello, Uncle Karim. Are you Uncle Abdulkarim?

- Allo, I can't hear well. Raise your voice. I don't hear you well.

- Hello, Uncle Karim. I am Falah, son of Abdulzahra. Do you remember me?

- Who are you? Falah? Falah, whose son are you?

- I am Falah. My father is Abdulzahra the fisherman. You know him.

- Yes, yes. Where are you now?

Have you returned to Iraq?

- No, Uncle Karim. I did not return, but I got your phone number from a friend. I am calling you to ask about my mother and father.

How are they doing?

- Where did you get my number?

- I do not hear you well.
- Uncle Karim, I am asking you about my mother and my father. How are they?
 -
 - Uncle Karim, do you hear me. How is my mother and father?
 - Your mother and our father, ask for God's mercy. They went to heaven. They martyred, don't you know that?
 - What are you saying, Uncle Karim? What martyrdom? Did you know me well, who I am? I am Falah, son of Abdulzahra who did not know how to hold a gun in his life! What war are you talking about? And what martyrdom and my mother? What happened to her?
- Did you know who my mother is? My mother could not walk on her own for few steps, what do you mean she was martyred?

Frank went on talking unilaterally to explain more to Karim who he is, so the man does not get mixed up about who is Falah, but it seems Karim has already recognized and knew who he is, and he knows what to say about his parents. Karim then, returned to confirm to Frank what he said:

- Yes, my son, I know you, I know your father and your mother, and I was surprised when you asked me about them, because I expected you to know about them. They have martyred four years ago, when they were walking from the

village to Karbala, to visit the Imam and to ask for blessings, when a terrorist roadside bomb exploded and killed dozens of people.

All of them are in Paradise, by God willing!
They martyred as sacrifices to the Imam!

- And who was the idiot who inspired them, to go walking to visit the Imam?

What would the Imam do with the visit of the poor people?

Poor people walking on their feet hundreds of kilometers.!

My mother could not walk for few meters.
How could she go for that?

What the Imam needs from my mother sacrificing herself for him?

The Imam himself was killed 1,400 years ago!
Who is the stupid who suggested that the Imam needs my father and mother to visit him?

- Yes, my son, your mother was unable to walk. I know that, but they were pushing her while she sits in a wheelbarrow. Here, there are many young people volunteering to push the disabled people in the carts.

Frank did not know what to answer Karim, after hearing this news. There was a lot of emotions scramble and collide inside his chest. Who is responsible for the killing of his helpless parents?

Are they the ones who want to terrorize people, of those who follow the ideas of fascist and religious terrorism?

Those who do not tolerate anyone who doesn't believe in what they believe in.

Or are they those who are using the old, naïve, and helpless poor people to shed light on them and to portray themselves, as they enjoy this high percentage among this poor and middle class people. This is the class which has always been exploited, by all advocates of ideological beliefs.

Each one takes away a piece from this class, so there is nothing left of this class of people that can represent something to be referred to as a class of certain features.

Or, is it the corrupt government, which plundered the resources of the country, and remained determined to place corruption in all its forms in the country. This country, which lives in a state of lawlessness and lack of morality!

This poor class lacks the least sign that can be described, even the feature of poverty is no longer applicable to it, and it became necessary to search for signs or other features which could describe it!

Maybe it fits better with **“Eternal Dogmatism Slavery”!**

Frank ended his call with Karim, and his heart was aching him of pain and bitterness, and he considered

that the moment the phone call ended, was as the end of the first chapter of his life. It was a delayed end of that long chapter, which was formed of several scenes. Perhaps the last scene is the most influential on what is coming in his life.

Frank felt a strange feeling, after hearing about the killing of his parents, together in one bombing incident. The news passed on him as if it he was expecting it anyway. Certainly not the way they were killed, for he thought they could die due to any disease and, it could be because of the lack of the necessary health care for both of them. But to end up killed by a terrorist bombing, was something far from his mind!

After he heard the news of his parents, Frank did not know where he could go so that he could enjoy an hour of calm alone by himself. There was nowhere better than the public park, where he used to resort to, whenever things got uncomfortable for him. So he went there and sat like usual on one of the wooden benches, facing the lake, and the images of his parents went on circling in his mind, which shook him vigorously, and made him feel a strong desire to cry. His crying was more than he could imagine, that one day he would cry like this!

For many years, he thought he had given up the need and age of crying.

When everything around him was crying... All people are crying.

All events require and impose crying.

All the people who were around him were as if they have been created for crying.

HUSAIN PREPARES FOR TRAVEL

There were a lot of emotions and tensions in the days that followed the discussion and the debate, which took place between Husain and Zainab, and was about the need and importance of Husain's visit to Iraq, and his insistence to make this visit.

He spent his days in a constant preoccupation, with arranging what he will need for that first visit to his country, Iraq, which he did not leave except once in his lifetime, which was when he left for the final migration. That was the long range and term departure, which exceeded a quarter of a century.

Although he knew from inside, the country is no longer as it was, a quarter of a century ago, he insisted that it would not be much different than it was when he left it!

How could the streets change?

*How could they lose their redolence and fragrance?
Is it possible the coffee shops that age perhaps over*

a century... to become different from what they were? Will there be in those cafes, other than those wooden couches, on which they lay out the carpets of cheap coarse wool?

Would they use the newly manufactured metal teapots? Such as those used by Zainab at home!

Let it be and let everything change. The streets and cafes have changed. It is possible.

But is it possible to change Al- Mutanabbi Street... the street of bookshops...and Al- Sarai Market* of the stationary shops and different other things?*

Is all that possible?

If all that was possible... is it possible that the Cotton Market “Souq Al-Ghazil” change? With its minaret which is older than twelve centuries, where the pigeons and aviary birds keepers come every Friday to meet with their friends for selling and buying pigeons. Through all these questions, Husain was trying to suppress and prevent them from affecting his decision to visit Baghdad.*

He was trying to convince himself to answer them in order to strengthen his desire to travel to Baghdad, his eternal city.

Baghdad, which was slain by those who are not related to it.

Those who did not live one day in it before they were given its keys to rule over it!

Those who don't know that Baghdad is the "The Desert Flower," for they haven't heard Abdulghani Al-Sayid* when he was singing:

“Oh... Desert Flower, bring back Joy to the World... do it more and more”

But inside himself, Husain knew that his dream was nothing but a dream, and that it does no longer exist, and possibly can no longer be true and achieved!

He knows the truth of the matter.

He even realizes that man himself has changed, and became another man, a man who has no roots, a man who is uncompromising with others, with all others, even with himself.

Husain is well aware of all this.

But now, he is living a state of psychological rupture between what he knows as a truth and what he wishes to have in his first country.

The result was that he paid for that out of himself and his health, a great price for that state of suffering.

It was a price even Husain himself cannot know, how far he can fulfill delivering it!

He had kept in his pocket that paper, on which he had drawn a picture of a pigeon, he wanted to keep it with him when he goes to Baghdad, to see how far his lines in his new country, would match what

he was going to draw in his first country, when he is embraced by the arms of Baghdad.

Would Baghdad be happy when she sees him? And before that, would he be happy when he sees her?

He is trying to pass the days quickly to start his journey to Baghdad.

He doesn't know so far how much will he need to stay there, is it enough to stay for a month or two months, or perhaps more than that?

It is better to leave this thing now, until its time and what he will see in Baghdad, which he did not forget.

He did not forget its scent and fragrance, despite what has happened through the years of fear and horror, fear of the reality which he lives and the horror and nightmares in his imagination.

Husain decided today to go to sleep earlier to delete another day and get closer to meet with his beloved Baghdad.

He entered his bedroom but did not really feel the need to sleep, so he remained sitting on his bed with anxiety, as usual, so he thought of writing something to review during his travel, and to know if his view will change, as to what is now in his mind, and concerns after arriving in Baghdad?

But he did not know what to begin with, and which topic he writes and can have a value during his travel, or there upon his arrival, and to whom he should direct his words?

He remained hesitant for minutes, until his hand pulled the pen from the pocket of his shirt, and began writing on a paper of the booklet, which he used to put on the table of drawers and started:

To my dear Zainab, companion of my long way of life,

To my dear daughters Laila and Suad,

To my son Ali, wishing him to know the real value of his present country, to which, the suffering and unmerciful life brought him, not the justice,

To my friend Falah, who passed over the walls of fear, I have always loved to have his courage,

The life all of you are living has no justice in it, there wasn't in it before, it will not be in the future, and everyone who believes otherwise, is illusion, however, what you can say is what most people say, the weak as well as the mighty:

“Nothing could have been better than what was.”

But I will not say that like you do, for I can never say it like you say it. Therefore, forgive me that I shall need to keep what I have for myself, for I

have learned that I have imposed on you what you couldn't carry, so excuse me for doing that.

The world will continue imagining perceptions that, are not based on truth.

It will continue going on a wrong way, which is tough, and will never know the right way.

Man will continue eating his human brother!

His slogan will remain why can't he eat his brother? Isn't he the strongest animal, which is ruling over this animal kingdom?

Isn't he who allowed himself everything? And made himself a king on what he doesn't own.

Didn't he become the new dinosaur of this modern age!

The dinosaur which is not reached by extinction! Isn't he who doesn't want the universe around him to change, maybe only according to what he likes? Isn't he who doesn't want nature to be angry?

Isn't he the one who doesn't want the insects to be eradicated, flies, mosquitoes and all the harmful and disgusting creatures?

Isn't that what he seeks, to help these insects avoid extinction, and never cares for the people who are about to be exterminated and extinct, and those people who have been deprived of their rights?

But...

“Lilies will continue blooming on swamps.”

And man could never stop them.

Yes, he is the hypocritical man, who bows to the wind.

Assimilating himself to the tree which bends with the wind, thinking the tree is dealing wisely with the wind, and he realizes that the wind could break the tree, and even what is bigger than a tree when really angry, the wind anger which was probably never seen by many. It is the wrath of tyrants.

The wrath of tyrants which was wanted for some people to live with, and then for others to act as tyrants, then for others to witness and document it when they liked the idea of authentication.

Husain was writing consciously one time and unconsciously again. He did not feel many of the meanings of what he was writing.

The ideas and what he wanted to document on this small paper were, all conflicting in his head. He felt very tired and sleepy, and the walls of the room looked like circling around him in vertigo, then the pen slipped out of his fingers. He stretched himself on his bed, exhausted, and went into a deep sleep.

FRANK AND SUNDAY

On Sunday morning, as usual, Brigitte has prepared herself to go to the church, and her daughter Carol was also dressed, like every time on Sundays. She is very careful not to work Sunday morning in a hospital shift, and she always tries to choose any other time, by arranging that with her colleagues.

Today, Brigitte noticed Frank had also prepared himself, as he seemed to be, to go with them to the church. Brigitte asked him whether he would accompany them today, or he had another project, and his answer was that he would take them to the church, and stay with them there in the church.

When they arrived at the church, Frank chose to go to the front rows this time, unlike his habit, when he preferred to sit in one of the last rows. Brigitte was

busy with greeting some of her acquaintances, who came to greet and talk to her.

When she finished talking with them, she and Carol went to sit in one of the back rows, but she did not find Frank until Carol told her that:

My father was sitting in the front rows!

She was so surprised by that, and did not know why? Why Frank is excited today to sit in the front rows?

She did not feel comfortable with that, because she knows, he usually does not want to be in the sight of the many people, who sit in the hind rows in the church.

Why only today he changed his mind and his choice? There must be something!

The seats next to Frank's seat were empty, so Brigitte and Carol came forward to sit beside him. Brigitte couldn't know, what was it that made Frank this time decided to sit in the front seats?

When the mass began, Frank did not seem to be interacting with what was going on around him. He was not chanting with the worshipers, and it was obvious on him that he is thinking of something else, very far from what is going on around him in the church.

After the mass ended and before the people began to leave the prayer hall, Frank rose from his seat, and he spoke loudly and audibly by all who were present, asking them to wait a little before they leave, then

he asked the pastor to allow him, to address some word to the attendees, and then turned to the back rows, where the audience stood after they were on their way out. They were looking at him and waiting for what he has to say to them. It seemed that most of them were thinking that, Frank needed their help with something! But he returned to ask the pastor, to allow him to get out of the row of seats, so that he can face all the people he is talking to them, and the pastor agreed and told him to speak with his full freedom! The pastor in his behavior gave the impression, as if he knows what Frank wants to say, and his position was extremely wise and forward-looking, as if he knew what Frank has inside his chest, and what he wants to say, but most of the audience saw it as a confirmation that Frank, would ask for help, then Frank said:

- Thank you for allowing me to talk to you, perhaps for the first time with many of you. I also thank Father “Solomon” for allowing me to talk to you on this day.

All of you know I was a Christian, when I first came to this country, and I am committed myself to Christianity, after I was following another religion in my original country, Iraq.

My faith in the teachings of Christ, and his forgiveness features were what made me follow his religion, and it wasn't for another thing, and I am proud that I had the courage to choose my own religion, and I did not inherit it from my parents, because if my parents had

known that I had changed my religion, they would have vainly shed my blood, and you know what that means.

I am in front of the Lord, has made a sacrifice in order to follow the right religion and the teachings of Christ, and I am not here to ask for a privilege, and a better place for choosing my religion, which I was convinced in and changed my life accordingly, and boycotted my family for that. I have left my country, where most of you come from, and I did not go back to visit my family for more than fifteen years.

I have left my family, my mother and father, and I have not heard news of them since I left Iraq. I lived here among you, and I tried to be accepted by you—all of you who come to the church to pray to the Lord, because you are who remained for me in my world. You are the people I hoped that you surrounded me, with what makes me feel that I will not live stranger in this world, but things did not go as I wished, and many of you may even refused to consider me a follower and a believer in Jesus Christ...! As if they are the guardians of the teachings of the Lord, and they are the ones who determine who is the believer in the Lord, and who is the obtrusive on the kingdom of the Lord! But I don't forget that the Lord blessed me with Father Solomon, who took care of me because he knew from the beginning, the extent of my faith and my knowledge and commitment, to the teachings of Jesus...

Just two days ago, I learned that my mother and father have been killed, in an incident of bombings in Iraq!

Here, Brigitte whooped when heard him say that, because he had never told her anything about this, she bent to hug her daughter Carol, who did not realize at first what her father was saying! She did not know what he was talking about, and she always dreamed that she one day would meet her grandparents, as is the case of most of her friends, who live close to their grandparents. Brigitte cried when heard what Frank said. How she felt ashamed only now because she argued with him a vain and unjustified argument, when he told her that he is trying to contact Iraq, to know news of his parents, and how many things and complexities, she has introduced in the subject, which was not worth all the noise that she made.

After Frank stopped speaking for a minute and wept, his crying was the reason for many of the attendees to cry, especially those who treated him with kindness and good-heartedness and Father Solomon alone prayed by signing the cross on his chest, when he heard what Frank said about the killing of his parents and remained bending his head, while Frank continued his words:

- Today I knew that the Lord does not need to be worshiped, or obeyed in any particular place, before being worshiped from the heart, and deep inside the heart.

After the experience I lived and went through, which I think not many people went through what is equal to it, I believe I have known the Lord the right way of knowing him, and I no longer need anyone to show me, how to know and worship him.

The Lord is everywhere.

He exists for all people, and he is not the concern of certain people, whether ethnic or race or a color.

Then he went towards father Solomon, to thank him and kissed his hand. He thanked him for giving him the opportunity, to talk about what was in himself, and also thanked the attendees for listening to him, and then headed towards the door to exit the church hall, and then he was surrounded by many of the attendees, who wanted to comfort him and offered him condolences, for hearing the news of the killing of his parents.

Brigitte remained sitting in her place, bending her head, and Carol was sitting next to her, and father Solomon walked towards her, and he said:

- You do not have to worry. Your husband has a big heart. He is a believer, and it will not be difficult for him to look to the future, and forget the past. His goodness is big enough to accommodate many of us. I pray and wish for him all the goodness.

Brigitte replied:

- O father, kindly pray for us father, we desperately need the mercy of the Lord.

When Frank, Brigitte and Carol arrived home, Frank asked them to get off the car, because he has to go to visit a friend. Brigitte realized that he meant his friend Husain, so she did not comment on anything. Actually, she did not speak anything along the way, from the church to the house, perhaps because she did not want to talk in front of Carol, although Carol was a child, she couldn't hold herself from crying quietly and silently, wiping her tears with her hands, after she heard what her father said about the killing of his parents, and she tried as much as she could, to suppress her grief and tears. She lost all hope to see her grandparents, she has for long dreamed that she could one day, visit them after she heard they live in a village, close to nature and animals. The dreams of an innocent childhood have ended in its worst image. She doesn't know or understand who killed them, or why they were killed?

Perhaps she will never understand this, even if she has lived for many years!

Killing of innocent people is doable only by certain people. They are those who believe they alone are who know the secret of creation and life!

Then Frank went to Husain's grocery store, and when he arrived and parked his car in the car park, he noticed the grocery store was not lit.

Isn't that strange?

He got out of the car, and went to the grocery to see if it really was closed, and he stopped at the door to ask whoever passes by, in front of the grocery store, in hope may know something, then he went to next door shop which is a dry clean shop, and asked the man who was in the shop, who told him that the grocery store has been closed for three days, and he does not know why it is not open, so Frank went on to call Husain and dialed his number, but the telephone was off and he doesn't remember Ali's phone number to call him, so he went back to his car and headed towards Husain's house, when he arrived at the house, no one opened the door, after he rang the doorbell more than one time, and it happened that a woman came out of the next door house, so Frank went on to ask her about the house of Husain and if she knows anything about them, then she asked him:

- Are you a friend or relative to them?
Don't you know what happened?

Husain died!

He died three days ago. Poor Husain.

The impact of the woman's words was more than a lightning bolt on Frank's whole body. He couldn't

support himself to stay standing on his legs, and he bent toward the ground with his trunk first, and then received the ground with his hands and turned on his right side to lean on his elbow and sit on the ground and then turned to the woman to say to her, with the tears pouring out of his eyes as he weeps and cries loudly, with deep pain:

- Why did all of you declare war on me? I didn't do anything that hurts anyone. What did I do to have my parents killed and to have Husain dies...

I know who killed my father.

But I do not know who killed Husain?

What did I do to deserve your anger, oh God.

Frank did not feel what happened to him, after he heard the woman telling him about Husain's death, when he collapsed on the ground until the woman herself came to support him to stand on his legs, when she thought the reason for his collapse was because she told him that strait and without introductions. Of course, she did not know or imagine what Husain meant to him, and she did not expect him to be one of Husain's relatives, so she remained puzzled and did not know to say anything, but to show her repeated sorrow, until Frank recovered from the shock while his mind was still shattered by the shock, but he remained sitting on the ground, weeping so bitterly, as if the repayment of the debt of crying, over everything that happened in the

past, has come now, all of that, Falah had to cry for it soon when he heard of the death of Husain.

He remembered all the pain he has been through, but the pain of Husain's death remains the most important. How would his life be without Husain?

To whom he used to resort to in all the problems and things he was facing...

All those things which he needed the right mind, to support him overcomes them...

Oh, Husain, why you decided to die now?

You know I cannot accompany you. I wish I could. But who will sponsor Carol?

I can no longer trust anyone. I have nobody! You're the one I complained to about my worries!

I know you were suffering, but wasn't it possible to postpone that?

I thought you would live long!

I saw you gigantesque, that death would be scared of.

Oh, death, how hideous you are!

INDEX:

***M**y Country...Habeeby... My Largest Homeland..!: This is a patriotic song of martial rhythm and melody. It was composed in the early 1960s when most of the Arabs were highly optimistic, that the Arab countries will regain back their golden age, and unite again, which was the dream of almost every Arab. However, after they lost the war against Israel in June 1967, things started to go back to a state of deep pessimism, and therefore, different ways of mocking and sarcastic reactions, started to accompany the playing of this song which was once a symbol of Arab glory!

*Nebuchadnezzar: Nebuchadnezzar is the Assyrian king of Babylon (620 BC). He was first mentioned in (607 BC). King Zedekiah of Judah attempted to organize opposition among the small states in the region, but his capital, Jerusalem, was taken in 587 BC. Saddam Husain, for many years during his dictatorial reign of Iraq, insisted to show himself as the inheritor of Nebuchadnezzar, and the rebuilder of his Kingdom, mostly because Saddam wanted to

express his opposition to Israel! The people of Iraq noticed that and those who were closely related, were secretly hinting to this, and calling Saddam as Nebuchadnezzar of the twentieth century.

*Commander of Time: The term Commander of Time, is used by the She'a Muslim sector, referring to Al- Mahdi who is the last of the twelve imam recognized by the She'a, who believe that he will reappear at the end of time, just before the doomsday, and would restore Islam to its perfect form and restore justice. Commander of Time reflects the belief, that he is the one who decides when the doomsday is coming.

*Hammurabi: Hammurabi is the king of the city of Babylon, who inherited the power from his father in 1792 BC. The Law Code of Hammurabi is the emblem of the Mesopotamian civilization. This high basalt stele erected by the king of Babylon in the eighteenth century BC is a work of art, history, and literature, and the most complete legal compendium of Antiquity, dating back to earlier than the biblical laws.

*Fatwa: The Fatwa is a nonbinding, authoritative legal opinion the Islamic clerk can give on Islamic issues. Many Muslims believe that the Muslim who knows Islamic law could to a certain extent, give an opinion on the Islamic teachings.

*I'tikaf: Is the time devoted to the practice of Islamic worship, which could be for several days, spent

mostly as a retreat in a mosque. It is in accordance with the desire of the worshiper.

*Warda al-Jaza'iriya: She was born in 1939 in France, whose mother is a Lebanese, and her father is Algerian. She started singing at the age of eleven in 1951. She was an Algerian singer who was well known for her Egyptian Arabic songs. Her name literally meant Warda the Algerian.

*Istikan: It is the small vial, made of transparent glass, used for drinking tea in Iraq. It is believed to be originally coming from Russia, and its name is a Russian!

*Youseph Wahbi: He is an Egyptian pioneer actor. He started acting from 1932 till he died at the age of eighty-four, in 1982.

*Abu al Ala' Al-Ma'arri: Abu al Ala' was born in Ma'arrat al-Nu'man in Syria, near the city of Aleppo, 973. He lost his eyesight at the age of four due to smallpox. His later pessimism may be explained by his virtual blindness. Later in his life, he regarded himself as "double prisoner" which referred to both this blindness and the general isolation that he felt during his life. He started his career as a poet at an early age, at about eleven or twelve years old. Al-Ma'arri never married and died in May 1057 in his home town.

*Luqman: Luqman who is known as (The Wise Luqman), is probably a legendary person. He tried

to understand the world, based on what he saw. It is not known when and where he was born and lived. As part of the legend, it is said that, he was captured by slavers and sold as a slave. Many legends of moral values were attributed to him and to his wisdom.

*Destined: This is a song by the well known Egyptian singer Abdul Halim Hafidh. It was composed early 1970s. It was probably a remarkable piece of harmony in its words, music and performance, that gave rise to many more songs, which probably wanted to follow its footsteps, but none, was up to its comprehensive excellence.

*Al- Mutanabbi Street: This is an old street in old Baghdad centre area, which is the main street where the bookshops and the old printing presses were established. It was named after the Iraqi famous great poet Al- Mutanabbi, who lived in the ninth century era.

*Al- Sarai Market: This is a narrow street connected to Al- Mutanabbi Street, where the stationary shops and other bookshops are based.

*Souq Al-Ghazil: This historical very old market where the shops specialized in selling row cotton in bales, are located. It is close and next to the mosque, which is named by the local people after the market name. The mosque and its famous minaret date back to the tenth century. Also, there used to be few shops of pigeon and bird sellers. The pigeon fanciers

go every Friday to this market to sell or buy their pigeons.

*Abdulghani Al-Sayid: This is an Egyptian singer of the fifties of the last century, who has his famous song on Baghdad and its golden history.

