

Bint-Al-Fluda Stories

PART TWO



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Chapter 1

The Gift

She spent an uncomfortable day anxiously waiting for, she knew not what. Her beloved husband had left her shortly after their marriage. She was waiting for the gift he had promised her, before he went into death's eternal sleep; into the bright world of heaven. His gift, (whatever it was) would be dear to her. It would be a token, a symbol of the love, emotion and harmony that filled their life together. Yet it was a unique gift; one prepared by the husband to be given to his wife in the wake of his death. It would be one of the most precious presents he had ever given her, and she was anxious to know what it was. She wondered who could tell her something about it. He had mentioned it first during his arms training, whilst preparing to fight for the rights and the dignity of his people, to either achieve victory or enjoy martyrdom. He did not give it her then but left her, waiting for his sake return. But he never returned. How could he come back? Those who rush to fight against the satanic enemy do not come back. They always expect victory or martyrdom. They desire either death, to vex the enemy, or life that pleases the friends. There are many who come and go... , but can a life of compromise and weakness, be considered a real life? It is really only death. Her husband achieved martyrdom in the battle of Al-Karamah (a village in the occupied Palestine). He fell whilst defending his homeland that had been seized by the Zionists. They did not even celebrate one wedding anniversary as he left during the early days of their married life. Her beloved husband knew that someone's precious life, was worth sacrificing for a noble cause. He left her and joined the combatants in the battlefield, promising her his gift. He was away often and for long periods of time, but she got news of his struggle. She prayed to Allah to give him strength, patience and fortitude with which to face the brutal enemy... then, she was awaiting his return. But now she no longer waited. He had enjoyed martyrdom in the battle of dignity and justice and she would never forget his promised gift. His bright figure was etched deep into her

heart and his martyrdom had increased that brightness. He was her love whether dead or alive, and she lived with him and for him. She was proud of, and happy with, him. She had a right to anxiously await his gift. At last, after waiting for what seemed ages, but was really only a few days, the gift was brought to her. She looked at it as if she were looking at his angelic luminous shadow. She remembered him when he was her hope in life, the man of her dreams. He went for the sake of her and every oppressed wife, every unhappy child, every lost young man... He went in order to liberate his country, for her and for all the people. He sacrificed himself for the sake of the country that was invaded by imperialists and strangers. He was worthy of her love and high respect. She got the gift. She was both happy and sad. She looked at it. It was balm for her wounded heart. What could it be? It was a green board on which was fixed in big letters, the following Qur'anic verse: **... who when a misfortune befalls them say: surely we are Allah's and to Him we shall return...** ? (al-Baqarah, 156)

She hung it on the wall where she could see it every morning, when she opened her eyes and every evening when she went to sleep. She looked at it and promised Allah the Almighty, and her martyred husband that she would tread the road of struggle till the banner of justice could be raised in Palestine. Whenever she longed for her husband she read the Qur'anic verse and a feeling of calm crept through her.

Chapter 2

The Dangerous Game

Asia sat waiting for her friend Baidah who was coming to visit her. She was surprised at her friend's demand for a private meeting. Asia thought Baidah must have a serious problem, so she was anxious to see her friend, when she arrived a few minutes late. Asia waited for her to start talking while Baidah tried to appear composed. Then she said, "Can I ask you a question!" "Yes, with pleasure!" said Asia. Baidah said, "I want you to answer frankly."

"Now you know I am always frank!" Asia assured her.

"Why did you refuse Foad's proposal of marriage!" burst out Baidah. Asia was taken aback by the question. She was silent for a while, and said, "Can I also ask you a question!" "Of course, you can," said Baidah. "Why do you ask me a question that might upset me? You know he is my relative and I have refused him for certain reasons." Hesitantly Baidah said, "Well, he has proposed to me. That's why I want to know your reasons for refusing him."

"Oh, I see!" said Asia, and went silent. Then Baidah began to plead with her saying, "I must know. I am your friend, am not I! Don't you care for me?"

"Yes, you are my friend and I do care for you, so I will tell you the reason. But first of all, what do you know about him?" Asia asked Baidah.

"I know that he is a handsome, gentleman, educated, and well mannered with a good social position."

"That's right," said Asia. "He is also wealthy. But is that enough?" Baidah, pale faced, murmured, "He is not a committed Muslim!" "You know this

and yet you still ask me my reason for refusing him?" "I know that religion is very important, but he might change", said Baidah.

"How?" asked Asia.

"Have you ever thought that he might be guided to the right path?" proffered Baidah.

"Is this what you think?" said Asia.

"I think," began Baidah, "that refusing him is a kind of cowardice. I think we can bring Foad and the likes of him back to religion, and that we should strive for that."

"O.K., but how are you going to do it?" Asia said.

"I have means" said Baidah. "Anyway why should I refuse him when he has all these good qualifications?"

If I leave him, he may marry someone who will increase his disregard for religion. If I accept him, I may bring him back to faith." "That's your opinion" said Asia. "I won't impose mine on you. However, it is a very dangerous game, or marriage at risk." "Oh, please do not exaggerate so Asia. Marriage is an adventure. I feel I can tolerate the experience."

"You are quite wrong! Experience does not make a fool wise. There is a great difference between marriage to a committed believer, who is careful of his religious duties which protect him from deviation, and a non-committed Muslim, who cares for nothing but earthly pleasures that change with the times."

"It is a risk" said Baidah, "But if I succeed it would be in the best interests of religion."

"You say: 'If I succeed', this 'if' indicates your doubts. Marriage should start on a firm foundation." Asia told her. Baidah looked down as if in inner conflict. Then she said, "What is your opinion?" "I don't know what to say" said Asia. "I am afraid you will suffer as a result of such an experience. It is a dangerous game. A husband does not usually accept his wife's opinion and he may even make her accept his. Then the wife may

find herself standing at a crossroad leading either to the failure of her marriage or the loss of her religion. You know both are terribly hard to tolerate."

Asia stopped for a while and waited for Baidah to speak. When she did it was in a choked voice, "What then?" "I think you can spare yourself such trouble!" said Asia kindly. "Suppose I am forced into doing it. What should I do then ? " "That's for you to decide Baidah. No one can impose their will on you, whoever they are!"

Baidah was silent, then said challengingly, "I shall take the risk. I hope that I will be successful." Asia looked at her and said coldly, "You are free to do what you like. I hope you won't be sorry afterwards." Baidah got up saying, "I apologize for having taking up your time." Asia, "Nothing to apologize for, I feel sorry for you! " They shook hands and Baidah left the house. Asia felt she had just lost a friend.

A few weeks later, Baidah sat, waiting anxiously for her husband. It was nearly 11 p.m. and she was very worried. She looked at the clock every other minute, and at half past eleven she heard the door open and close softly. She got up and saw her husband enter. Her face became bright with happiness. She said, "Oh Foad, you are late!" She was scared when she saw he looked disappointed. He said, "Why haven't you gone to bed yet?"

"How can I sleep when you are still out? " asked Baidah. While he was taking off his suit and putting on his pajama, he murmured, "That will cause you a lot of worry." "How? " asked Baidah. "Because I shall often be late. There is no need for you to stay awake and alone."

She was disturbed at his answer and could not believe her ears. So instead she said, "Your supper is ready." Smiling he said, "I ate out. Some friends invited me to a club. They held a party in my honour."

"I hope you enjoyed it. But why didn't you tell me about it before?" asked Baidah. "There was no need to tell you, as you won't go with me to such places," said Foad.

"Well, at least I wouldn't have got so worried." Foad said, "You should have known that I was at a social engagement. I live amongst educated

liberals, and cannot be isolated at home with a woman... " he uttered the last words in a sharp tone and then said, "Now, go and have your supper."

With tears in her eyes, she sadly said, "I am not hungry." Foad said, "Then let's go to bed."

Baidah said, "I expect you've already done your prayer?" Coldly, Foad said, "It is after mid-night. Prayer time is over."

"No", said Baidah, "It is not yet mid-night. Anyway it must be done even if it is late."

"You don't know how tired and sleepy I am!" said Foad. "Fatigue doesn't exempt one from one's religious duty." Mockingly he said, "Allah will accept my excuse."

"No matter-if you love me you must do your prayer." Angrily, Foad got up saying, "Please do not mix up my love with praying and fasting. Let me love you in my way not yours. Anyway, I will not allow you to call me to account about my prayer every night!"

He threw himself on the bed and fell asleep leaving Baidah shocked at his words. She recalled Asia's words which had apparently come true. She hurried to the Holy Qur'an to seek comfort and refuge. She opened it at random and read the first verse of the page which said: ?... **We did them no injustice, but they were unjust to themselves.**? (al-Nahal, 118)

Days and weeks passed. Baidah could find no way of getting Foad to come to her way of thinking. Whenever she talked about religion, he either mocked her or turned a deaf ear. She tried her best to give him comfort and happiness at home, but she found him more and more interested in spending his time outside. One night she waited long time for him to come home, and when he did he seemed happy, so she thought it would be a good time for her to talk to him. She said gently, "Don't you see that I am unhappy?" Foad surprised said, "You are unhappy? Why? Haven't I provided you with all the means for your comfort?" "Yes, I must admit you have! Anyway, happiness is what matters; without it, there is no comfort."

"Why aren't you happy then ? " asked Foad. Baidah said, "How can I be happy when you are so physically, spiritually and emotionally far away from me?"

"That's partly true," conceded Foad, "but I love you so I do not completely agree with what you say."

"If you loved me you would please me. You know I am not happy about your behaviour."

"Have I hurt you in any way?" asked Foad, much surprised. "You have not hurt me physically, but you have hurt me mentally by your disregard for the belief that you promised to respect. You are not careful enough about religion, to bring us closer to each other." "Well, I am afraid I cannot change my life style. I cannot give up my friends or my social life. I cannot be cut off from others just to spend my life behind these walls. I cannot perform my prayer in a mosque just to please you. Faith stems from personal satisfaction. It would be nothing but hypocrisy if I worshipped Allah just for you. You know that I am an honest, straightforward person, both in my personal and business dealings. What more do you want? "

Baidah listened, while her heart sank. She said in broken voice, "What about me? Have I no place at all in your life?" "You are my beloved wife. I love no one but you. Come closer to my heart and you will know real happiness." "What do you mean?" said Baidah.

"I mean give up ideas that keep you from enjoying life's pleasures. Turn to me whole-heartedly, and I will make you taste a life that you are still unaware of. You are at cross-roads, either you put your hand in mine and I'll take you into a world of happiness, or you stay a prisoner in your house, content with it." "Isn't there a third choice?" she asked. Foad was silent for a while and then said, "Yes, there is. We can separate; and though it would be hard for me, it would be less harmful than if you decided to refuse my suggestion."

Baidah was silent. She wanted to scream and run away, but she was helpless. She spent a long sleepless night, feeling as if she was between two fires both of which could burn her. She was about to choose a divorce, but then thought of the tiny creature moving in her womb. This

innocent creature tied her both to the house and her husband. She was soon to be a mother. She felt dizzy with thinking and, throwing her head on to her hand, she went into a dreamless sleep. When she woke up her husband said, "Baidah, why didn't you sleep in your bed?" She opened her eyes to see him standing near her with a cheerful face as if he was ignorant of the reason why she hadn't gone to bed. She looked at him silently. Anxiously, he said, "Why are you pale? Are you sick?" He put his hand round her and sat nearby. She said, "Do you really not know why I am sad?" He laughed gently saying, "Even if I know, what can I do about it? I have offered you my heart, so is it my fault if you reject it? By the way, today I have some visitors, so be ready for the occasion." "Who are they?" said Baidah. "Just some friends with their wives." He was silent waiting for his wife's reaction. She said, "Will it be a mixed meeting for men and women?" "Of course, you do not really expect me to stick to the old tradition of having a separate room for women, do you?" "What about me then?" asked Baidah. "You are free to do what you like," said Foad. She was silent for a while; then, wishing to compromise and thus show some understanding, she said, "O.K, I shall be present." Her husband was happy-he kissed her warmly saying, "Do you mean it? How happy I am. I shall be the happiest husband. I shall be so proud of your beauty. You are the sun that will outshine their dim lights."

"What has my beauty to do with anything? To please you, I have decided to be present but I will wear hijab." Foad drew back in disgust, "In decent hijab? No! I do not want you to be mocked. Just prepare dinner and leave the house. That will be better. I can find some excuse to explain your absence." Baidah could not tolerate such an insult. She got up saying, "It is better if I leave the house at once." "What about the guests?" asked Foad. "You can take them to a club".

"When will you come back?" asked Foad.

"I may never come back!" retorted Baidah.

"What about my child?" asked Foad, calmly and deliberately. Those words were strong enough to remind her of the bitter reality, the great dilemma she was in. She despairingly murmured, "Oh, what a fool I was! How right Asia was!"

When he heard Asia's name, he said laughingly, "Oh, that snob! I

proposed to her just to crush her pride and religious vanity. Now you remember her; what has she or her advice ever done for you? You are on the verge of destroying your marriage and your family life is about to fail because of this backward Asia!"

Baidah angrily said, "No, I won't allow you to speak ill of her. Had I listened to her advice I would have spared myself such an experience. Anyway, it is my own fault. I must bear the consequences."

Two years later, Asia sat thinking of her friend Baidah. She had heard a lot about her that she found difficult to believe. She could not believe that after a bitter struggle Baidah had given in to her husband. She had heard she no longer cared for Islamic hijab but accompanied her husband to parties and nightclubs. She had given birth to a boy, Farid and they said she was always sad and hardly ever smiled. Asia heard such rumours and wished she could see Baidah and learn the truth from her. That morning the doorbell rang and Asia hurried to open it. She was surprised to see Baidah herself standing in front of her. She was pale and unhappy. Asia welcomed her and led her into the living room. Baidah sat silently, not knowing what to say.

Asia said "Oh, Baidah, how I hoped I'd see you; I've heard so much about you, but I was anxious to hear from you yourself." Baidah cried bitterly saying, "I have no news except of disgrace and shame! I have been the victim of foolishness and self-deceit. Anyway I am not worthy of your friendship. I have fallen to the bottom of the abyss and am hopeless, may Allah forgive me!" Asia felt great pity for her and kindly said, "You are still my sister and I must help you, to overcome this awful experience. Now, please tell me everything frankly as you did in the past."

Baidah said, "Well, you know that I never listened to your advice. I believed in a dream and ran to get it; I tried hard to get Foad to come round to my way of thinking but ailed. He never accepted my religious commitment, and treated me cruelly, humiliating me often. Sometimes, he was gentle and kind and sometimes he was frightening. I thought about divorce, but my son caused me to give up that idea, so I gave in, and obeyed him meekly. He exploited my weakness and increased his domination over me, drawing me ever deeper into disgrace. I accepted everything just as a prisoner accepts his sentence. Now, you see me here!"

Asia could not blame her seeing her as she did and asked, "What's the problem now then?"

"He divorced me a week ago, because he blamed me for the death of our son", said Baidah. "Why?" asked Asia incredulously. "Because I fasted in the month of Ramadhan." Asia asked, "Did your son die of hunger?" Baidah replied, "Of course not. He was both breast-fed as well bottle-fed. He died after an illness." Asia was greatly moved and felt sorry for the bereaved mother who had suffered humiliation and disgrace. So you see, I have lost everything," continued Baidah.

Asia hugged her warmly and said, "You have not lost everything. You still have your religion calling you back through repentance, and I am still your loving friend. You still have the broad road of the future ahead of you. Perhaps this experience will help you to make a new righteous start; a future that is built on firm foundations. Don't despair?... **surely none despair of Allah's mercy except the unbelieving people.**?(Yousef, 87)

Struggling with Conflict

As Fatima walked along the tree-lined street, thoughts filled her head and mocked her sensitive emotions and delicate feelings. She hurried to reach the source of pleasure, security and light in her life. She wished she could overcome this nagging doubt, but she was weak, and in need of support. She told herself, "I will tell her everything. I will explain all of my difficulties to her. I will confess to her my fears." When Fatima reached her friend's home, she knocked anxiously at the door. She feared disappointment; not finding her friend Aminah at home. Aminah came forward to welcome her, they shook hands warmly and then entered a room where they settled to talk. Aminah chided her friend gently, saying, "Oh, I have missed you. Welcome again, dear friend." Upon hearing her friend's warm voice Fatima felt at ease and nearly forgot the aim of her visit. She remained silent, so Aminah gave her a smile of encouragement and said, "You do not look like your usual self, Fatima. Tell me what is bothering you." Her question helped Fatima to speak. With a trembling voice she said, "Oh sister, something is very wrong with me.

My courage has failed me. I thought I was well protected against Satan and whatever troubles in my way to reach my goal. But... "Fatima silently thought of the right words to express her suffering, but Aminah was quick to understand her pain. Aminah asked, "But what, Fatima?"

Fatima replied, "I have lost courage; I can no longer endure these difficulties I am facing as a religious instructor."

"What difficulties are these, Fatima? Tell me about them. I am your sister in faith."

Fatima told her, "Being a Muslim, I believe in our responsibilities towards our beloved religion, Islam. I have tried my best to guide misled

Muslim girls; to save them from our deviated society. But society, Oh, Aminah...."

"What about society?" asked her friend.

"It is a corrupted one, with no morals. Everything is measured with materialistic values. Living in this society has made me feel a bitterness I never dreamed I could feel."

Aminah admonished Fatima, "Did you think that the road of religious guidance was strewn with flowers and empty of obstacles? We should not deny these difficulties. But we are told not to worry about troubles and hardships as long as we are on the right path for the sake of Allah. Haven't you heard the words of one Muslim woman believer:

'Whatever difficulty we encounter in the way of Islam is not a difficulty, and whatever bitterness we may feel is not a bitterness.' Now tell me Fatima, what specifically has happened to upset you?"

Fatima sighed, "It is not anyone particular incident."

Then Aminah told her, "So you feel cowardice in front of deviated currents, and you fear harmful ideologies."

When Fatima heard these words she cried, "No, I am never afraid of such things. It is only troubles and obstacles that have shaken my faith in myself, as well as my lack of experience and understanding."

"What else bothers you, Fatima? Tell me everything so that I can be of help to you."

Fatima said, "From the beginning, I had a strong desire to serve my religion by all means and at all levels. I believed also that Islam knows no limits...." Fatima stopped, as if not knowing what to say. Aminah explained, "That is why it hurts you so much to find that society is still under the yoke of false measures. That a person is judged through a materialistic view point and within a frame of pseudo-measures. But had society been a Utopia believing in Islamic values, considering an individual through realistic measures, then our cause (Islamic guidance), our responsibility would not have purified our souls and increased our determination to surmount any difficulties. Had we been struggling in a

virtuous society, guiding our fellow Muslims in an ideal environment, flowing with the tide instead of having to oppose it as we do today, then we would not have been among those referred to in the Holy Qur'an as patient men and women:

?Surely men and women who submit, and the believing men and the believing women, the truthful men and the truthful women, and the patient men and patient women... Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a mighty reward.? (al-Ahzab, 35).

"Fatima then said, "But Aminah, our enemies rejoice, they mock us when we are distressed or are facing hardships." Aminah smiled and asked, "Haven't you read the Qur'anic verse:

?You shall certainly be tried respecting your wealth and souls... surely this is one of the affairs determined upon. and the verse: Don't think of those who rejoice for what they have done... and they shall have a painful chastisement.? (Aale-Imran, 185-187)

"The Holy Qur'an has clearly revealed everything. It has lined the path with thorns and obstacles, but the aftermath with bounties and blessings. We must be sure of ourselves, in order to stand firm and avoid collapsing in the face of difficulties. We must always remember the early days of the Message of Islam and all the hardships that faced the great Messenger of Allah (s) when he called on people to give up the worship of their idols and to worship Allah. The One, the Almighty." Aminah continued, "The Prophet toiled to prune a primitive nation which was overgrown with wild traditions such as unprovoked attacks, the plundering of properties, murder, the drinking of alcohol and the committing of adultery as well as other indecencies. He planted and nurtured Divine values and morals in the people in order to make them the best nation ever found among nations. We should remember Muhammad, son of Abdullah, the offspring of the best family in the Arab Peninsula and he noblest member of the Quraysh tribe. All of the people, young and old, high and low in society, agreed that he was a truthful, honest person. We should try to imagine the responsibility this great man assumed when he was chosen by Allah to carry His Message. All of the tribes rose against him and joined forces opposing him. They threatened him and barred any trading with him. Standing firm, he neither relinquished his divine duty nor stopped calling on the people to worship Allah. He and his

followers were isolated, as if he was a deviated person. He endured every kind of insult and mockery. They called him a wizard while he was the Prophet, and called him a liar while he was the most truthful honest person in their midst. They said he had been taught (by someone) while his knowledge had been revealed to him by Heaven. They accused him of madness while he had the greatest prophetic wisdom."

"We should keep all this in mind, and remember as well the Prophet's Dua (words of prayer) to Allah when he was in the village of Al-Taif calling people to worship God. The people of that village sent their sons to throw stones at him, make fun of and insult him. He took refuge by a wall and stretched out his hands towards the sky, praying to Allah, **'Oh, God to you I complain my weakness, my lack of means and the scorn of my people. Oh God of the oppressed and of mine, to whom do you leave me? To a wrathful relative or to a foe, to whom you gave control over me? If You are not angry at me, I don't care whatever happens to me; Your compassion is great enough for me. '**"

Aminah went on, "Fatima, we must remember the Prophet's words after his painful suffering. As long as we are certain that our ideas are right and our belief is true, we should not be daunted by falsehood and fear. Fatima, remember the honorable Zaynab (a), the daughter of the Leader of the Faithful, Imam Ali (a), when she stood near the body of her slain brother Imam Husayn (a) on the Day of Ashura. He was to her not only a brother, but a supporter and a defender, yet she put up her hands and said: 'Oh, God, accept from us this sacrifice.' Yes, Fatima, we must remember all this in order to remain devoted to Allah."

As soon as Aminah stopped speaking, Fatima cried and said, "Oh my dear friend Aminah, may Allah never deprive me of your friendship.

You are a guiding light for me. Your words have revived my spirit, which I nearly lost. You have helped my faith to remain firm and steadfast.

How stupid I was to have lost all hope!", Aminah told her, "No Fatima, you are neither stupid nor had you lost hope. These are feelings that arise as result of many reasons. The best evidence of your sincerity is your firm stand and faith. You have come directly to me to help you overcome obstacles which are the result of this deviated society and

which you have no hand in producing. Oh Fatima, have you abandoned reading as you have abandoned visiting me?"

"I never abandoned you; I was trying to solve an inner conflict (of feelings) and I was afraid."

Aminah said, "You were afraid to speak frankly to me, but you did not fear the serious results of remaining silent?"

She smiled at Fatima, who said, "You should be quite sure that I will never feel weak again, and I will always admit my fears and my hopes to you. You will be my guiding angel as you have always been."

Aminah embraced her, saying, "Oh Fatima, I am not an angel. I am only a loving, advising sister to you and to all Muslim girls."

Chapter 4

Spiritual Surgery

Ikhlaas considered her sister-in-faith, Wafa, to be a real help to her in understanding life as being a righteous attempt towards achieving perfection. She could never be out of her company for even a short time, and Wafa was always nearby to support her in times of crisis. She would remind Ikhlaas of her duties, if ever she forgot, and was, to her, like a mirror, gently reflecting any defect or weakness in her character. In fact Ikhlaas felt uneasy and suffered spiritually, whenever Wafa did not call or turn up at meetings. Waiting would cost her a lot; therefore she rushed anxiously to enquire about her friend's absence but could get no news of her. There was nothing for it but to go herself. Wafa, looked rather pale, but welcomed her friend with a smile. Ikhlaas kissed her saying, "Oh dear sister I why haven't you come recently? I hope there is nothing wrong?" Gently Wafa said, "Nothing, but a little surgery." Shocked, Ikhlaas said, "Oh dear, surgery? Where? When? Why? ... " Calmly Wafa said, "Oh sister, you have raised many questions that cannot be answered all at once. Let us answer the first question, 'Where?', the answer is here at home!" Ikhlaas wondered, "Here? At home? 'Who was the doctor, who performed the operation? Where is the pain? You look, quite well, thank God!"

Wafa said, "You have again raised many questions, I shall therefore, follow your style in my answer. As for the doctor, it has been myself, as for the wound, it is unseen."

Ikhlaas thought Wafa was joking; she said, "When did you become a surgeon? We know you as our spiritual guide." Wafa spoke in a serious calm tone. She said, "Every person should be his own surgeon. A sick man is ready to resort to the doctors to rid him of a tumour or a rotten limb. Why does he do that? Why does he risk his life at the hands of someone else? Of course to be saved from a disease which is eating up

his body. As for spiritual diseases, the case is different. When a person feels such diseases keeping him from happiness he should do something to cure himself. Surgery with a difference is necessary, in this case. He himself must be the doctor. By means of faith he can perform the operation, and hence the house replaces the hospital. So I was not joking when I referred to the reason for my absence." Ikhlaas was excited at this. She was about to cry out of fear for her friend. She anxiously said, "How do you feel now dear sister? Shall I congratulate you on your recovery?" Wafa did not answer, but was silent for a while. Ikhlaas was greatly concerned. It was not easy for her to see her best friend suffer such a dangerous disease and she was relieved when Wafa said, "I think I am quite well again." Ikhlaas wanted to learn something from her friend, so she asked, "How do you know that you are safe, sister?"

Wafa said, "Life's incidents have helped me to recognize the disease and it's cure. Don't you see that these incidents are the experimental tools which operate upon the human personality?"

Ikhlaas said, "So I see, but still one should not forget the other surgeon's knife." Wafa nodded saying, "That's a fact. Physical treatment is as important as spiritual."

Chapter 5

Social Measures

The lady of the house, dressed in the latest fashion, was waiting impatiently for her daughter Zeinab to get dressed for the wedding party.

The lady was impatient, and walked up and down the room. Now and then she stopped in front of a mirror to have a look at her image. Her daughter was a bit late, so she rang a bell and a pretty maid came in the room. She was wearing a short dress and had her hair done.

The woman admired the attractive maid and said, "I see, Samia, you have finished before your little lady. Go and tell her to hurry up. We have no time to spare.. It takes an hour to reach the bride's house."

The maid replied, "Yes, my lady." Samia left the room and soon returned, saying that Zeinab would be getting ready now. Zeinab's mother became angry and exclaimed, "What has she been doing all this time?"

The maid answered, "She has been praying."

"Praying?! Oh, what an abnormal girl she is! Go again and tell her to hurry up."

The maid went out and came back to announce that Zeinab was coming.

The mother said, "What did you say? How could she get ready in such a short time? Surely she will bring disgrace to me at this party. How I pity her. She is spoiling her beauty by negligence and indifference." Admiring herself again in the mirror, she saw her daughter enter with a smile on her angelic face.

The daughter said, "Here I am mother, quite ready."

Her mother gave her a sharp look, and said ironically, "Of course you are ready! What is this? Are you going in this long dress? Where is your make-up? Is there a girl of your age who does not know how to color her lips or put on eyeliner except you? I have been waiting all this time while you did nothing but pray. Now you say you are ready!"

Zeinab waited for her mother to finish, then she said politely, "Yes, I have performed my prayers since it is my religious duty, and I cannot pray at the party which will end after prayer time. My dress is not that long, but it certainly is not a mini. My hair is tidy, with no need to waste my time at a hairdresser to be polluted with chemicals. As for the makeup, of course, I know how to color my eyes and my lips, but I feel this is not necessary. I like to show myself as I am, with no mask on my face. "

Her mother turned her head away, disapproving of her daughter's logic. She said, "Let us leave before you get on the pulpit and give us a long sermon, as is your habit. But I feel bitterness when I see the maid exceeds you in her good appearance."

Zeinab replied, "If such measures are the true criterion, I agree that she does exceed me." The mother stated, "In fact, I don't know how you are going to face the famous people there. You will appear so poor and humble among the men and women."

"The party is not for both sexes," Zeinab replied.

"Had it been like that, I would not have agreed to go. In any case, there will not be any singers or music of any kind."

The mother laughed in a mocking tone and said, "Then the party is for giving a religious speech on the decency of hijab."

Zeinab answered quietly, "No! There is no religious speech. It is only a formal farewell party to a bride starting her honeymoon."

The mother feared delay, so she said to her daughter, "Come on; tell me the details on our way to the party." Zeinab put on a long black coat and a scarf on her head as she always did. They got into their car, with the

maid carrying a box of her mistress's cosmetics.

While they were driving, Zeinab's mother asked her daughter, "How do you know that the party is not for both sexes?" Zeinab answered, "It was supposed to take place at one of the clubs, according to the bride's mother. But my friend, the bride, is a good believer, as you know. Thus she refused to have her wedding party according to western values, or in defiance of religious morals. Quarrels started between the mother and daughter. But the groom took the side of the bride, and my friend insisted on canceling the celebration. Finally her mother gave in and agreed to have a simple farewell party."

Zeinab's mother was astonished and asked, "Does the groom have the same reactionary beliefs as the bride?" Zeinab tried to smile at her mother's cruel words.

She said, "Of course he has the same beliefs, and he is of equal moderation. Otherwise, she would not have agreed to marry him. A good believer does not marry a playboy who is totally different in beliefs and ideals. Disputes in such matters are a serious threat to a marriage. How can you brand such ideals 'reactionary' while they are the essence of our religion? They are clearly elaborated in the Holy Qur'an. Our belief is the right path, while the non-Islamic way is the reactionary one, since it goes back to the primitive stage of humanity when there were no Divine creeds or human values."

Her mother was affected by the argument and she said, "You are right, but civilization requires something different."

Zeinab replied, "Oh, mother! What civilization is this? Tragedies and disasters are under the surface. Bright masks hide devilish motives and inhuman desires. Oh, mother! We should not be fooled by this civilization."

The mother spoke in a sorrowful tone, "This is the general attitude of the day and the social measures that count."

"We shall try to defeat such perceptions," Zeinab said. "We will prove that in a society, a young girl can show herself through her real personality -not by her make-up or her fashionable clothing. When she

has an independent personality, she will taste the sweetness of victory. It is contrary to woman's true nature to expose herself in a framework of fashion or make-up, which is only a means for public exposure."

They arrived at the house of the bride. The mother tapped her daughter on the shoulder and said, "May Allah bless you. I wish I could have your strong faith and self-confidence."

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*"Wisdom is the lost property of the Believer,
let him claim it wherever he finds it"*

Imam Ali (as)