

The Triumphant Smile

Humayun lay in a coma. His father Babar stood beside his bed, sad and worried. The Chief Vizier and the nobles crowded behind him. The queen with tears in her eyes begged of the emperor, "Save Humayun's life, my Lord". In between sobs she said again, "Save my son from the clutches of death."

Babar stood aghast and moaned in grief. "O God, how helpless am I! I can't even save my son. I can't save my own flesh, my own blood...."

The palace herald announced, "Here comes *Shahi Hakim*."*

The *Hakim* entered the room and offered his respects to the emperor. Babar knelt before him pleading, "O life-giver! Save my child." The *Hakim* was taken aback and bent down to raise the Emperor to his feet. "O my Lord," he said, "I'm just an ordinary servant of yours. I promise I won't leave any stone unturned. But to grant life is in God's hands. Have faith in Him. He is Rahim. He is Karim, the kind and the merciful. Beg His

"Royal physician.

mercy, Sir. I can only examine the patient and diagnose the illness."

The *Hakim* felt Humayun's pulse. Then he examined the closed eyelids. He tried to open his mouth too, but it was shut tight. The *Hakim* unbuttoned Humayun's shirt and applied a strong-smelling balm to his chest. The prince slowly opened his eyes and mouth too, but did not show recognition.

"*Asalam walekum* Prince," the *Hakim* greeted him. But there was no reply. "*Asalam ivalekum*," he repeated. "Look at me Prince. Look at your father. Don't you recognise your mother sitting by your side?"

There was still no response. Humayun's vacant looks were fixed on the ceiling. The queen took Humayun in her arms and moaned.

"O Humayun, my son, won't you call me *Anuria** * anymore? Here, here look at your *Abba** * * Say something my son, say a few words!"

But Humayun didn't utter a sound. Babar stood dazed beside the *Hakim*, while the queen's heart-rending cries continued to fill the room.

The *Hakim* opened another bottle and poured a few drops of nectar into Humayun's parted lips. But the drops flowed out. The *Hakim* mumbled,

"God bless you (Muslim greeting).

⁰⁰ Mother

"" Father

"He has not accepted the medicine. I'm sure his throat is swollen and clogged." He took a piece of paper and wrote down the names of some medicines. "Here my Lord! I can only prescribe these potions for the patient. Kindly try them. *Howal shaft'*•!* May God cure him," said the *Hakim*. He handed the slip to the Emperor and left the palace in dismay.

Babar passed the prescription on to the Chief Vizier. Meanwhile, one of the court priests had entered the chamber. He bowed low and said, "My Lord! Kindly offer to God whatever you love most. I am sure God will be kind enough to give Humayun a new lease of life."

"Should I renounce my wealth and my kingdom?" asked Babar.

"That's up to you, my Lord. You should offer what you love most," the priest replied.

"What do I love most?" the Emperor muttered.

"Only you can answer that my Lord."

"Dearest to my heart is Humayun," Babar replied.

"Surely, to save the Prince, Your Majesty would not hesitate to offer something equally dear to *Allah*?" urged the priest.

"Ah! It is my own life that I love most," said Babar with a triumphant smile.

°God bless you with good health.

"*Allah-O-Akbar* In the presence of all nobles and courtiers of my empire, I, Zaheerud-Din Babar, do hereby offer my own life to God Almighty to save Humayun my dearest son. Let his malady strike me. Let Humayun recover. May I die and may Humayun live for ever and ever." As soon as he had finished speaking Babar sat down on the mat to offer prayers to the Lord.

The anguished queen flung herself at Babar's feet and cried, "No, no, my Lord. You cannot die. Let the Almighty take my life. Humayun must live under your patronage."

"No, *Begum*.⁰ My pledge to the Almighty must hold good. I must defeat death. I have lived a hero's life. Let me die a hero's death for Humayun," muttered Babar as he lay down on the mat feeling faint and dizzy from the pain in his chest.

"*Allah-O-Akbar*," whispered Babar again with the same triumphant smile on his lips, as his eyes closed.

At the same time Humayun regained consciousness and opened his eyes.

"Allah is the Greatest.

"Woman of noble rank.