Shaheen

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# Dedication

To Mueen al-Islam, who introduced Naseem Hijazi to me.

May Allāh rectify all his affairs.

# The Rebel

Fifty horsemen descended from the foot of the mountain while passing through the dense forest and stopped in front of a broken bridge by the river where the forest was even thicker. Running along the wild trees were grapevines, trees of apples, pomegranates and various types of fruit-bearing trees, a witness to the fact that that this forest was once an orchard. Across the river, on both sides of a broken-down road, were tall trees whose branches intertwined to form a roof. Long, lush green grass that grew out from the sides, embraced the stony road that showed that the feet that once trampled them, now seldom treaded this path.

The river was not that deep and could have easily been crossed by the cavalry. Leaving the road, they could have easily crossed over by maneuvering a few steps up or down. But being cautious the two horsemen leading the group turned around on reaching close to the bridge and gestured to stop. The cavalry was equipped with the best weapons and accessories. One of the leaders of the cavalry sported a white robe and turban that covered his entire face except the eyes. His companion, like the rest of the cavalry, wore an armor and aventail. However, his beautiful brown horse, sword-hilt decorated with jewels, shining armor and aventail created a unique grandeur.

The duo, who apparently were the leaders of the squad, stood by the bridge for a while and stared at each other.

Finally, the white-turbaned rider said, “I repeatedly get the thought…what if he rejects our proposal?”

The brown-horse rider replied: “Then he leaves us no option but to take him as a rebel and treat him like one.”

“No! He has gained his independence from our enemies. If he undertakes the responsibility of guarding only this border, even then, we will respect his independence.”

“And what if he refuses this proposal too?”

“Even then, I will not oppose him. However, I will most certainly be disappointed for not being able to induct such a vital asset into the Granada army.”

Before the brown-horse rider could reply, a deer appeared on the other side of the bridge. The rider took out an arrow from his quiver but as he raised his bow, an arrow swooshed from the trees, piercing itself into a wooden plank, hanging by a tree near the bridge.

The deer jumped and disappeared into the forest. The entire cavalry was horror-struck by that unexpected arrow. The brown-horse rider looked towards the wooden plank and noticed a few murky words on it beside the arrow. He said to his white-turbaned companion, “I think there is something written on it.”

Both riders dismounted their horses and approached the plank by the tree. There was an endorsement written on it:

“On this side of the river the kingdom belongs to the Frontier Falcon.”

“These pastures are dedicated for the horses of the mujāhidīn. The right to the fruits and animals belongs to only those who have committed themselves to wrangle Andalus out of the claws of foreigners. Only those people from Granada can enter this land who wish to join the ranks of the mujāhidīn.”

“Those who are content with being enslaved by the enemies of Islam; those who have accepted to be the subjects of the Christians, should not dare to step in this land. We reply to swords with swords.”

After reading this warning, the white-turbaned rider looked at his armor-clad companion and said, “Like the people of Costa, he also has the right to view the people of Granada with suspicion. However, I would like to meet him at any cost.”

His armor-clad companion replied, “He lives eight miles away from here in an old castle. But we cannot reach there without him being convinced of our good intentions. This dense forest is infested with archers. Let me raise a white flag. Maybe one of his men might appear which would give us a chance to convey our message.”

The white-turbaned rider nodded in affirmation. His companion called out to one of his troops and approached close to the bridge waiving a white flag. He waited and then cried out loudly, “Anyone there?! We have brought a message of friendship for the Frontier Falcon.”

After a while there was some movement in the branches of a thick tree on the other side of the river-bank and a youth jumped down, advanced towards them and said, “Our reply to friendship is friendship but the Frontier Falcon might object as to why you needed several armed individuals to deliver a message of peace?”

The armor-clad rider replied, “I am sure Badr bin Mughira’s fighters won’t be overwhelmed by fifty fighters from Granada. However, we need to inquire if he has any objection to this, we can ask these soldiers to return or else we can handover our weapons to you or our companions can stay on that side of the river and you can take the two of us to your leader.”

The youth replied, “If you know the name of the Frontier Falcon, you must also be familiar with his disposition. Instead of meeting with you, he would prefer to know the strength of the army of which these troops are a vanguard of.”

The armor-clad rider removed his aventail and while handing it over to one of the soldiers said, “If you have no respect for a general of the Granada army, then, you would certainly have regard for its royal household.”

Appearing worried, the youth turned around and looked towards the trees. After a brief silence, the sound of galloping horses was heard from behind the trees and immediately a rider appeared and stopped by the river, sporting a white turban instead of a shining armor over his body and aventail over his head. He was a handsome youth of eighteen or nineteen years with a face that radiated with exceptional courage. He quickly took account of the troops on the other side of the river and said, “To meet Badr bin Mughira you don’t need any royal of Granada to intercede on your behalf. He would be more pleased to meet someone who is a pure soldier.”

The armor-clad rider replied, “The purity of a soldier’s intentions can only be judged in the battlefield and if fate would join your leader and I on the same front then the boiling blood from my wounds would testify to the purity of my intentions. Go and inform your leader that if he doubts Musa’s intentions then let him lay siege on any city of Castile. I, along with fifty of these soldiers would support him under the shade of the swords and raining arrows.”

On the other side, the youth listened attentively to his speaker and without uttering a word, moved forward a few steps, wading his horse in the river. He moved close to the armor-clad rider, dismounted his horse, held out his hand and said, “If you are indeed Musa, then, without asking you another question, I put forward my hand of friendship.”

While shaking the youth’s hand, Musa said, “So, are you Badr bin Mughira? I am amazed that…”

Badr bin Mughira interrupted him and said, “So, you are amazed as to why we didn’t recognize each other at first sight.”

Musa said, “This is exactly what I wanted to say. I expected you to be much older but I think you’re in the right age to be called a falcon. Now, if you could forget the past grievances you have towards the royalty of Andalus, then, I would introduce you to whom I consider to be the last arrow in the quiver of Andalus.”

“If you consider Murad Abu Abdullah Al-Zeghel to be the last arrow in the quiver of Andalus, then, meeting him would certainly be an honor. The mujāhidīn from Granada, who have joined my ranks, have spoken highly of only a handful of people and those army generals whom I heartfully desire to meet are Musa and Al-Zaighri and from the royal family the only person is Al-Zeghel.”

Musa replied, “We could not bring Al-Zaighri along but if you can see past the white veil then consider Al-Zeghel right in front of you.”

When Badr bin Mughira looked towards Musa’s white-turbaned companion, he extended his right hand towards him and unveiled his face using his left hand. Al-Zeghel appeared to be about fifty years of age. Appearing deeply interested, he looked at Badr bin Mughira and said, “It is youth like yourself who are the last arrow in the quiver of Andalus.”

Badr bin Mughira said, “I appreciate your encouragement but unfortunately in Andalus, the hands that should be mastering the arrows are playing *rabābs*.”

Al-Zeghel replied, “I will snatch away the *rabābs* from their hands and if not then I shall chop those hands off. Those useless hands of Andalus are playing *rabābs* because they do not have arrows. I am collecting arrows for them. I have come here to invite you to join the army of Granada.”

Badr bin Mughira replied, “This invitation has been put forward earlier too but my companions and I would rather prefer to live in this forest instead of being exhibits of the royal court of Granada. Here we do not have marbled palaces or satin tunics but we are certainly satisfied that unlike the people of Granada, we are not subjects to a Christian king. These mujāhidīn who have given up all their life’s interests to reside in this forest would not yield to the servitude of someone else in Granada. I fear that in the atmosphere of Granada, the mujāhidīn’s sharp swords that have repeatedly embittered the fangs of Christians, would lose their ferric properties. In Granada’s furnace, they would melt and transform to become strings of *rabābs*. A falcon is only a falcon if it lives on the peaks of mountains and flies the open skies. I am sorry but we are not familiar with the etiquettes of the royal court. We are only soldiers and our struggle has just one objective. The day the Sultan of Granada announces to re-erect the flag of Islam over Cordova and Seville, then, I assure you that that would be the moment when you would not have to invite us. We would come to you voluntarily and in those ashes of Andalus, where the citizens of Granada would be willing to shed their sweat, shall our blood flow. I swear by God if anyone is of the view that I am doing this to be a leader of a group of people then he is mistaken. I am but a soldier awaiting that general from Granada who possesses Tariq’s vision and Abdul Rahman’s heart. This valley would give him a base and I shall keep guarding this place until he comes. If one of you is that general, then, this entrenchment is at your service, or else begone and let me await his arrival. Before me, my father and before him, his father guarded this entrenchment, anxiously awaiting the arrival of that general. I too would continue to do my duty.”

Badr bin Mughira became silent after saying this and Al-Zeghel stared at him with subdued emotions of love, affection, and devotion. Finally, he said, “This is what I had expected from Mughira’s son. Young man! Blessed are those pastures where your horses graze. Blessed are those trees under whose shades you sleep. No doubt the palaces of Granada can never be a home for a falcon. But I have not come here to invite you to stay in those palaces. I have come here to give you good news. We have decided to fight with Castile till our last breath. Today itself, Abul Hassan is ready to announce *jihād* but I have asked him for a period of four months and in that we need to do a lot. And I don’t need to tell you what you have to do.”

Badr’s beautiful eyes were filled with joy. Holding Al-Zeghel’s hand with both his hands, kissed it and said, “If nature has chosen this hand to raise the flag of rebellion, then I kiss it.”

Al-Zeghel hugged Badr with open arms. Moving away from Al-Zeghel, Badr looked towards Musa and said, “I welcome you and your companions.”

Musa moved forward, put his arms around him, to which Al-Zeghel smiled and said, “Musa! This falcon has fallen in your hands after great difficulty. So, don’t let it go.”

While kissing Badr’s forehead Musa said, “Don’t you worry. Instead of keeping you in my custody, I will try to fly with you.”

“I know you quite well,” Badr answered with a smile. “Who is not aware of the apple of Granada’s eye.”

Musa said, “Here, I must say something.”

“Please go ahead,” said Badr.

“I thought that given the circumstances you had become quite cautious but what you demonstrated today was not according to your normal traditions. You decided to come to us all alone without giving a thought that our intentions could be evil.”

Badr laughed and replied, “Even if fifty men did have evil intentions, I do not consider it to be a grave danger.”

“And what makes you say that there is no army behind us,” said Musa.

Badr bin Mughira replied, “I was informed of your arrival when you were about twenty furlongs away and I was also aware that there was no army behind you and when you were descending the mountain, I was on a tree listening to your conversation and despite that I was cautious. The fact is that your fifty men were within striking range of my men.”

With amazement, Musa quickly glanced around at the surrounding trees. While smiling, Badr said, “We don’t call it an arrow if the target can see it. Let me put your curiosity to rest.” Saying this he removed an arrow from his quiver, loaded it in the bow, aimed at the plank by a tree across the river and cried out, “Our honored guests would like to know how many falcons are present here at this moment. Attention! The plank is your target.” As soon as Badr bin Mughira’s arrow flew out of his bow and pierced itself into the plank, arrows rained from all directions, filling-up the plank. Leaves, sliced by the arrows, fell-off the trees.

In amazement Musa said, “So, your men are even behind us on the trees?”

“Yes and even in front of you. You will find arrows on the other side of the plank too.”

Al-Zeghel said, “Musa! We have to learn a lot from this youth. I will send a few generals here. I want to put forward a lot of suggestions to him and I have decided to return today itself.”

Badr bin Mughira said, “Please forgive me for making you stand here for so long. Please come, we will sit and talk.”

Al-Zeghel replied, “But your residence is quite far from here. And if we were to go there, then, I’m afraid we won’t be able to return today.”

“I won’t be taking you far. Come! You are free to eat the fruits and prey in this forest and your horses are free to graze around.”

“We accept your invitation!” Saying this Al-Zeghel mounted his hourse. With Badr leading, the entire cavalry crossed the river. On crossing the river, Badr cried out to his companions to appear and in no time about two hundred archers jumped down the trees from both sides of the river and gathered around him.

Galloping, a rider appeared from other side of a hidden road. He reached close to Badr’s archers and Al-Zeghel’s soldiers and stopped. Appearing confused, he started staring at them. The rider was about twenty years of age. Instead of having features and complexion of a pure Arab or Muslim Berber, he looked of a mixed Spanish race. His face too radiated with intelligence rather than a warrior’s might. Like Badr, he too wore a white turban over his head but he had a red robe over his chainmail. Two bags were tied next to his horse’s saddle.

While looking towards him, Badr said, “Bashir, I’m glad you have arrived. This is the king of Andalus’ brother, Al-Zeghel and this is Musa. They have brought us good news. Soon they are going to announce war against Castille.”

Bashir jumped off his horse and shook hands with them to which Badr said, “This is Bashir bin Hassan. Surely, you must have heard of him. There isn’t a better surgeon in Andalus than him. He left his luxurious palace of Cordova and preferred to live in this forest with me.”

Badr signaled to his companions and one after the other they disappeared in the forest.

Badr and Bashir led their guests into the forest and after a while reached at the banks of a stream where a large cloth-spread was laid out for them on the lush green grass, under the shades of trees. About fifty to sixty of Badr’s men were present here too. They tied-up the guests’ horses and put grass in front of them to feed on.

While Al-Zeghel and his soldiers sat down to eat, almost each one of them was wondering what their host had prepared for their unexpected guests. On Badr’s clap, a few men carrying platters appeared from behind a cluster of trees and after a while roasted meat of forest animals and abundant fruits of different kinds were placed in front of the guests.

The guests looked at each other in amazement. Finally, Al-Zeghel said, “You have taken a lot of trouble. I am amazed…how have you arranged so much in such a short time?”

Badr answered, “Like I explained earlier that when you were at a distance of about twenty furlongs, I had been informed about your arrival. I had also known that you had not stopped on your way for breakfast. And when my informant also told me that you do not have any supply logistics either, then I could not think of any other options but to have some food preparations done.”

After having lunch, everyone offered their afternoon prayers in the leadership of Al-Zeghel. Later, Badr, Al-Zeghel, Musa and Bashir separated themselves from the rest and sat under a tree. Musa spread out the map of Andalus and discussed the various options of the oncoming war. Al-Zeghel agreed with various options put forward by Badr and said, “A few days before the attack, you will be called to Granada. I would like to give some more bordering areas under you command with immediate effect. With this forest as your base, you would be able to secure those areas. With this border secure, we would be able to deploy the majority of our forces to another front. I had sought the permission of Abul Hassan to make you the governor of this border but I was apprehensive that such a move would immediately alert Ferdinand and he would attack us without giving us time to prepare. Therefore, I believe for namesake let the governor be anyone else while you be the de facto governor. For the next four months, teasing the Christians would not be in our interest. In this duration, we want to be aware of their conditions. You can call the mujāhidīn of Cordova, Castile and other cities to join you. If the Muslims of Granada and Andalus unite, we can get rid of the Christians forever.”

Badr replied in a sad tone, “I wish someone had realized this fifty, hundred years, or two hundred years ago. Two hundred years ago, there were three hundred thousand immigrants from Cordova, Toledo, and Seville who came to Granada with the intention to take part in the *jihād* but their swords melted away in the fire of envy and jealousy. Fifty years ago, in this valley alone, there were about sixty thousand mujāhidīn. Today, I only have five thousand. But if Granada has decided to fight, then, the quantity can multiply three times. Even now there are horses available that graze in this forest. If I need arms, I will inform you.”

Before giving the bordering areas under Badr bin Mughira’s supervision, Al-Zeghel finalized several details, after which Al-Zeghel ordered his troops to prepare to return.

# The Frontier Falcon

Muslims had ruled Andalus for the past eight centuries. The history of these eight centuries are the rise and fall of a great nation, whose opening chapters were inked with the blood of Arab conquerors and the great leaders of the Umayyad dynasty. Now this great nation, whose grandeur would silence the defiant waves of the Mediterranean, was writing its closing chapter with tears of hopelessness. That tree of culture and civilization, grown by the chivalrous Tariq bin Ziyad, Musa bin Naseer and the successors of Abdul Rahman, was now facing the strong and defiant winds of autumn.

The Muslims entered this country like a storm. When all the walls of opposition broke down and the people of Spain laid their arms down in front of the Arab horsemen, this storm changed to clouds of mercy and the barren lands of Andalus transformed to a heavenly garden. In a country where humanity was dying, trapped in barbarism, it became a torchbearer for Europe.

When the dark clouds of fear and barbarism dominated Europe, every house in Andalus was lit with lanterns of science and knowledge. When majority of the people of Europe covered their bodies with hides of animals, lived in forests and caves, the people of Andalus spread drapery making and architecture to the south of the Mediterranean. In Europe, where books and its readers could be counted on fingers, in Andalus, it was quite impossible to find a person whose house did not have a small library.

The Umayyad era was the golden age in the history of Andalus. Even today, when a tourist visualizes the magnificence and splendor that is buried in the ruins of Cordova, Seville, and Toledo, he inquires with amazement “Was this that land where prosperity and progress left the ambassadors of Charlemagne awestruck? Is the modern-day Spain and the Andalus of the Arabs the same land which was a goldmine? The land where misery and poverty did not exist? The land whose trade and commerce was spread all the way to Russia, Iran, and China? The land whose universities were renowned the world over and students of Aristotle and Plato sat at the feet of its scholars?”

The spirits of Andalus’ historians, who maybe, each evening, wander around these deserted places, reply to us saying, “Yes! This Spain is the same Andalus that belonged to the Arabs, whose power and majesty has become a legend of the past. This Rock of Gibraltar is the same one where Tariq bin Ziyad’s ships had anchored. Cordova is that very city where the pompous courts of Abdul Rahman III would leave the ambassador of great emperors absolutely awestruck. This Andalus is the same. However, the nation whose sweat and blood bestowed life and beauty to its ashes has been obliterated. Buried beneath these ruins lie the bodies of the glorious builders who made this country a tower of light for the rest of Europe.”

World history depicts the rise and fall of nations but the rise and fall of the Arab conquerors is the most interesting from which a lot could be learned. That sun, that moon, and those stars who, since the creation of Adam till today must have witnessed with their unblinking eyes thousands of caravans on the paths of progress and degenerations. If these celestial bodies had a heart, then, the legend of the rise and fall of the Arab rulers, would certainly be engraved on them.

In Andalus, after the victories of the Muslims, the initial period saw the establishment of many small Christian kingdoms towards the northern border. During the reign of powerful rulers, these kingdoms would become vassals to the Islamic Sultanate of Andalus and during the time of weak rulers or during the time of infighting among Muslims, these kingdoms would declare their independence and carry out looting raids on the border areas. The era of the Umayyad rule was a period of magnificence for the Muslims. Despite the treacherous, clandestine activities of the small Christian kingdoms of the north, the Umayyad emperors would still treat them with generosity.

After the decline of the Umayyad dynasty in the 5th century Hijri, the Muslims of Andalus had reached the last stage of divergence and decentralization. The great Andalus empire was divided into about twenty states. Alponso VI took advantage of this dissent and united the northern Christian states of Asturia, Leon, and Castile to form an empire.

The autocratic rulers of Andalus, called upon Alphonso for assistance whenever they lost to their neighbors. He would demand a price for his assistance to pitch one ruler against the other. He did this to such an extent that almost all the rulers of Spain became his subjects, and loot, murder and plunder flourished after military check posts were established throughout the length and breadth of the country.

During these troubled times, Yusuf bin Tashfeen, the ruler of Algeria and Morocco, came to the rescue of the Muslims. He rescued the Muslims from the mighty claws of the Christians. However, he could not unite the imprudent Muslims strategically. When all his strategies and efforts failed, he captured Andalus and made it a province of his African empire.

The African dynasty of Al-Moravid that was founded by Yusuf bin Tashfeen would not remain for long. As soon as the nobles of Andalus sensed the weakness of the rule, they quickly seceded and every major city became a separate kingdom. At this critical stage, Abdul Momin tried to support this falling building of the Muslims rule by defeating the conceited rulers of Andalus’ small kingdoms and laid the foundation of the Al-Mohad dynasty.

The Mohads repeatedly defeated the Christian attackers of the north. But unfortunately, they governed from Africa. Therefore, their hold on Andalus gradually weakened and the conspiracies of the emirs of Andalus increased.

In 1212, the Christians defeated the remaining Mohad armies at the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa and after this several Muslims cities were captured by them, one after the other.

From 1238 to 1265 the Muslims fought each other and during this time Ferdinand III, the Christian king of Castile, and rulers of Aragon united themselves and Cordova, Helenbesia, Seville, and Mercia were conquered. For the Muslims, the capture of Cordova and Seville by the Christians was no less than the capture of Baghdad by the hands of the Tartars.

Now in Andalus their last protectorate was the Kingdom of Granada. This kingdom spread from Montserrat to the coastal region of Almeria and from here it stretched all the way to Gibraltar. The Muslims ruled Granada for another two hundred and fifty years. Many people from the occupied territories came to Granada believing it to be the last entrenchment of their self-defense and they offered their services to the rulers of Granada although that sword of the Muslims emirs which subdued the mightiest powers was now placed back in its scabbard.

For about one and a half century the Kingdom of Granada was a target of much internal squabbles among its selfish emirs and its border areas were subject to much looting, plunder and killings at the hands of Christians. At times, the rulers of Granada defeated the Christians on a number of occasions but Granada was deprived of an ambitious personality whose leadership would have entirely stopped the threat posed by the Christians.

If an emir would be victorious against the Christians, the general public would rally around him for a period of time but after a while this kingdom would become an arena of jealousy and envy.

Despite the circumstances, Granada was the most advanced city in the fields of arts and sciences not only in Europe but also in the entire world. Its builders too were renowned around the world. Students from far and wide sought education in its universities and Granada’s surgeons and physicians were second to none.

When any nation chooses for itself the path of freedom, prestige and prosperity, then, knowledge and education work for it like a whip but when it strays away from this path, then, these very arts and sciences become an addictive drug and the deficiency of its actions is not even pricked by its conscience.

In the 9th century Hijri and towards the end of the 15th century A.D., signs of Granada’s degeneration were becoming apparent quite rapidly. With the matrimonial union of Ferdinand V and Isabella, two Christian kingdoms of Aragon and Castile were united and the intense discord among the Muslims proved to be the last blow to the glimmering flame of the Muslims.

Badr bin Mughira was called the *Frontier Falcon* by the emirs and people of Castile. Because of his unprecedented victories against the attacking Christian troops, he became famously known by this title in Granada too. This sixty miles long and forty miles wide mountain and forest was home to these independent individuals who were neutral towards Granada but continuously at war with the neighboring Christian kingdoms. Before Badr, his father Mughira was the emir of the region, who had captured and annexed a number of Christian regions into his kingdom. When the rulers of Granada tried to make him their subject, he told the royal emissary that if the ruler of Granada stopped paying tribute to Castile then this region would be theirs and that he would join the army as an ordinary soldier who would take pride in waging war against the Christians. However, unlike Granada he would not become slaves to Castile. During those days Granada had become a center-stage of civil war and the ruler of Granada was not courageous enough to unite the opposing emirs against the Christians of Castile. Therefore, he sent a message across to Mughira saying that he will not be a hurdle as long as Mughira’s activities were focused towards the Christians.

The subjugated Christians nobles of Castile could not form a united front against Mughira because of their mutual rivalries and this gave him ample time for making preparation. Some Muslims living under these Christian kingdoms joined hands with him but while his ranks had swelled to about six thousand soldiers a dramatic revolution was in the offing in Christian Andalus.

Owing to the marriage between Ferdinand V and Isabella, northern Christian kingdoms created the union of Castile and Aragon, which became a major threat to Muslim Andalus. Smaller Christian rulers appeared insignificant in front of Ferdinand’s rule. Compared to Granada’s subjugated kingdoms, he considered the smaller independent region of Mughira a greater threat. He also felt that to conquer this region he would have to sacrifice a substantial amount of his army.

Assessing the upcoming threat, Mughira started preparing *mujāhidīn* groups from the length and breadth of Andalus. He delegated the protection of the independent areas to his subordinate and guised as an ordinary merchant, toured major cities of Andalus. Muslims of Cordova, Seville, and other cities, whose souls were suffocating in the chains of slavery committed themselves to taking part in *jihād* under him and in due time would raise the flag of revolt in their respective cities. Hence, Mughira realized that after living under slavery in Christian Andalus for a long time, there were very few Muslims left here who would be willing to live and die for Islam. The techniques adopted by their Christian rulers to make Muslims strangers to their own religion proved to be successful to a certain extent and now under Ferdinand different ways were aggressively enforced to apostatize them. Muslim schools were banned from teaching Arabic. They were not allowed to wear Arab attire. They were forced to send their children to Christian schools. There were some concessions to those who had converted to Christianity. However, Muslims who opted to stay were ordered to wear a special symbol. They were mocked in the markets. This resulted in the formation of a community that appeared to be Christians but performed the Islamic prayers in the privacy of their homes. For the remainder of the Muslims the biggest threat was a nationalist movement. A group of hypocrites raised the issue of Andalusian and non-Andalusians. These people were uniting the Spanish Muslims against the Arab Muslims and the Christian government, realizing that this would be to their advantage, started patronizing them. These people used to spit-out venom against Arab and Berber Muslims in the mosques and public places. In such circumstances many Arabs and Berbers immigrated to Morocco while some settled in Granada.

Mughira was not very optimistic after he returned from his visit to the different cities. From thirty cities about four thousand Muslims took pledge at his hands for *jihād*. Therefore, he was not disappointed and vowed to spread the message of *jihād* to every city of Andalus. He also felt that unless and until the flag of revolt is not raised by a brave ruler of Granada, the Muslim dream of a renaissance would remain unfulfilled. His biggest wish was that the ruler of Granada declare *jihād* against the Christians and after which he would join this army of diehard fighters. But Granada’s throne was in the midst of severe dynastic squabbles. Despite the circumstances, Mughira did not lose hope. Every year he would disguise himself and tour different cities, preparing people for *jihād*. On returning to his residence too, he would spend most of his time writing letters to secret organizations in different cities of Andalus.

One day Mughira was sitting in a room of an old fort in the forest. A soldier came in and reported that a few soldiers have arrested and brought a stranger from the border areas, who says that he has brought an important message from Toledo. To further his activities, Mughira had not gotten a chance to visit Toledo yet. At his signal the stranger was presented before him. Badr was then fourteen years old and sitting close to his father. The stranger entered the room, looked around and said, “I would like to talk to you in private.”

Mughira gestured the soldier to leave and said, “Okay, speak up!”

The stranger gave an inquisitive glance towards Badr to which Mughira said, “You don’t have to worry about him. He is my son.”

The stranger pulled out a letter from his pocket and presented it to Mughira and said, “Kindly read this.”

After reading the long communiqué, Mughira became contemplative. These last words of the communiqué echoed in his ears: “Ten thousand diehard warriors are waiting for you in Toledo. I am amazed that you have continued to ignore this city. Compared to the Muslims of other cities, Muslims of Toledo are more oppressed and within them are those who, instead of unjustly giving their lives, would rather give precedence to courageously die fighting under you flag”.

Mughira stared at the messenger and said, “Go and tell them that I will surely come. I shall arrive very soon.”

Later, Mughira called in some soldiers and ordered them to escort the envoy safely across the border.

Late into the night, Mughira moved out from his bed and began disguising himself as a monk. A soldier came into the room and informed him that his horse was ready.

“I am coming,” said Mughira.

The soldier left the room. For a while, Mughira stood by his son’s bed and in the candle light kept looking at his innocent face. Finally, he bowed down and kissed his forehead. Suddenly, Badr took a shiver, a little sneeze and after a while opened his eyes. “Where am I?” he asked in a petrified voice and then screamed, “Father!”

He embraced Mughira and said, “Father! Father! I will not let you go alone. I will come along with you.”

“What is the matter, son?”, Mughira asked while embracing him.

“Father, I had a really bad nightmare. I saw that a pack of wolves was following us. You were left behind. They captured you. I wanted to return to save you but you were saying, ‘Badr, you should run away. You should run away.’ Father! If you would like to go then I will also come along.”

“No, son!” Mughira said in a grieving tone.

Badr said, “Father! Last year you had promised that you will take me along if you went to Granada.”

“But, son, I am not going to Granada. I am going to Toledo and you could face a lot of dangers there with me.”

“Father! I am not a coward.”

“Son, if I were to go into the battlefield, I would have surely taken you along with me. But it’s better that I go alone to Toledo.”

“But I am sure that you won’t go there alone.”

“How is that?”

“My dream. Father, you yourself say that my dreams are not untrue.”

Mughira thoughtfully said, “Why don’t you interpret your dream in this way that if you were to come along, then, we would have to face the wolves.”

Badr thought for a moment and then said, “Father, when will you return?”

Mughira replied, “I shall come back before the moon of the next month. But, if I am delayed for any reason, then don’t come running after me. In my absence, you will be the caretaker of this forest. I shall leave with the trust that you will not be careless towards your duties. If you come after me, I will think that you have not obeyed my orders.”

A month had passed but Mughira did not return because at times such trips of his that were scheduled for weeks would extend to months. Therefore, his companions were not worried. But Badr’s concerns were increasing by the day. He proposed to the consultation committee to send a clever spy to Toledo but they suggested that before a spy could be sent, it was important to establish the identity of the person who had sent the invitation. Badr pulled out that letter from a pile of documents inside a cabinet which invited his father to Toledo but the writer gave a number of reasons to conceal his identity and wrote, “If you think hard, you will know who I am. I had met you in a rest house in Seville. It was unfortunate that you did not reveal your name to me before climbing on to your horse and I did not get a chance to speak. Otherwise, I might have proved that our goals were not different. Before I would say anything at all, you galloped away. I did not follow you believing that you might become suspicious of me. If you were to come to Toledo again, the way to find me is that there is a rest house right outside the eastern gate of the city. The owner of the rest house is a short man whose couple of teeth of the lower jaw are broken. You can go to him and say that you want to meet a lost friend. He will bring you to me. Before you meet me do not disclose your name or objective at any time.”

This letter was reassuring yet worrying. So, Badr’s companions sent a clever spy to Toledo. But before his return, an emissary of a secret organization of Cordova came and gave the devastating news that Mughira was hanged publicly at a square in Toledo. The secret organization was told about this incident by a few traders coming from Toledo.

After a few days, Badr’s spy returned and confirmed the news. Badr and his companions questioned him further but he told them that he could not trace the person who had invited Mughira to Toledo. The spy told them that he went to the inn during the night, placed the dagger on the chest of the inn’s owner and when he was compelled to tell me the truth, he told me that he was assigned this task by the city’s mayor. After listening to the spy, Badr and his comrade arrived to the conclusion that the traitor who had invited Mughira to Toledo was an agent of the city’s mayor or governor and the inn’s owner was used as bait to catch the lion of the jungle.

Gradually, the news of Mughira’s assassination spread to Andalus. With this news, a blanket of pessimism spread over the covert organizations. The people of Granada too, felt that one of their strong arm had been broken. Nonetheless, to the mujāhidīn, Mughira’s rather young but promising son proved to be a befitting replacement.

One day the Christian governor of the border territory suddenly attacked. Badr retreated and led them to the difficult terrain of the mountainous region where one archer was enough for a hundred soldiers. After losing more than half of their army, the Christians started retreating from the forest. Badr’s archers proved more lethal than the mountains and soon the Christians felt that after escaping from the fire they now reached the foot of a volcanic mountain. They were no match for arrows coming from the soldiers hiding in dense trees. And the army of 6,000 returned with only 1,500 troops. As the Christian general was escaping with his remaining group amid a volley of arrows, one of Badr’s soldiers jumped over his horse and both stumbled to the ground.

Seeing their general fall, the Christians didn’t dare to look back and give another look. They panicked and became scattered, running here and there. But on reaching their border they were about to face another devastation.

Badr’s horsemen had blocked all their exits. Behind them was a rain of arrows and in front of them was a wall of shining lances. On the left was a slope that apparently had no hindrance. Those who survived the arrows and lances turned their horses in this direction. But after half a mile down, there was a deep ditch. Hopeless from all sides, about 200 men jumped off their horses and fell into this ditch while some threw away their swords.

Badr bin Mughira ordered some of his soldiers to chase the men in the ditch while he appointed another group to guard the prisoners.

This battle ensued with the early rays of the sun and by noon Badr’s 2,000 soldiers changed into the uniforms of the Christian army’s wounded and prisoners. Riding their very horses, they were now ready for a bigger mission. A little before sunset, citizens of an important city prepared to receive their victorious general. When the darkness of the evening was falling upon the reddish sky, a soldier at the bridge of the gate exclaimed, “They have arrived! Long live Count Santiago!”

Cries of “Long live Count Santiago!” were raised everywhere. Church bells were rung. Thousands of men and women gathered outside the city gate. The city’s bishop stood among them with a garland of flowers. As the sound of the galloping horses came close, the excitement of the cheering people grew.

A horseman whose white robe fluttered in the air suddenly appeared from the clouds of dust. He reached near the gate of the city, halted his horse and started looking back. After a while, about 2,000 horsemen gathered in front of the gate. The wave of shock fell over the city dwellers. Being apparently very worried they started dispersing around. The white-masked rider roared the shout of *Takbeer* and the atmosphere resonated with the sound of “Allahu Akbar!”

The bishop could not believe his ears and carefully examined the flag of the white-masked rider. Instead of the cross, the flag sported a crescent. The garland of flowers fell off his shivering hands.

The people were listening to the roars of “Allahu Akbar.” They also saw that the leader of the attackers had a crescent on his fluttering flag but before they could believe their eyes and ears and turn into action, Badr bin Mughira’s 2,000 diehard warriors had entered the city through the wide open gate. After a while, a few of Count Santiago’s soldiers, who had escaped through the forest and headed towards the city, learned from fleeing city dwellers that the city had been captured by the Muslims.

Before midnight, Badr bin Mughira had taken away all the gold, silver, ration, and several livestock as booty and left the city.

After handing over the booty to 500 of his horsemen, he headed towards the nearby cities and villages.

The next morning, when his fatigued troops were on their way back to their residence, they had several flocks of livestock, mules, and donkeys loaded with booty in front of them.

A night before the attack, Count Santiago could never had imagined that they would have to spend the night in captivity of those very people about whom their 6,000 fighters had sworn in front of the Holy Mary’s statue that they will not return until they put the last man of the enemy to death.

He had expected a stiff resistance from his enemy but after Mughira’s death he had not expected that they would repulse this surprise attack so skillfully. During battle, once he had seen a white-robed rider with lighting speed who galloped from one end of the forest to the other, commanding his cavalry and infantry soldiers. It impressed upon him that the new leader was no less lethal that Mughira.

He spent the entire night restlessly, tossing and turning in bed. The food that his men had presented lay untouched. Because of his position and stature, the guards dealt with him with respect and dignity. When someone tried to say a few words of consolation, he would abruptly ask, “Who was the Falcon? Where is he now? I would like to see him. I swear by the Holy Mary, he is not a human.” At times, in a fit of rage he would yell, “How will I ever face them on my return? Why don’t you just kill me?”

After his capture, he had taken an oath of honor not to try to escape, therefore, he was not shackled by Badr’s soldiers like an ordinary prisoner and neither was he harmed. However, when he tried to take out his dagger to pierce it in his own chest, a soldier caught hold of his hands. On raising an alarm, a few other soldiers unarmed him by force while Badr’s lieutenant assigned a couple of guards for his security. He said, “It is our duty to ensure his safety until our leader returns.”

On Badr’s return a little before noon the next day, the shouts of “Allahu Akbar!” resonated in the silence of the forest.

After spending a restless night, Count Santiago came out of his tent and lay in the lush green grass in a deep sleep, under the cool shade of a tree. Rubbing his eyes, he awoke by the shouts of the people. Badr bin Mughira, who was wearing a white robe over his armor and with only his eyes visible from his veil, came and stood right in front of him. Blood was splattered all over his white robe. Count Santiago took a few looks at his masked opponent from top to toe and said, “Alas! Only if my hands would reach your mask and I could see who has given me the worst defeat ever?”

Badr replied, “A soldier should not be bothered by victory and defeat.”

Saying this, he moved his attention towards his companions, “I had expected a better treatment of him by you. I would like to know why his oath was not respected and why were his weapons taken away from him?”

One of Badr’s lieutenant came forward and replied, “We wanted to stop him from the misuse of the weapons. Suicide does not suit a brave person.”

Badr said, “Return his horse and weapons to him. Unchain the rest of the prisoners, blindfold them and escort them to the other side of the border.”

Santiago enquired apprehensively, “So you expect your soldiers to escort us to the border and we would not be rained with arrows from behind our backs?”

Badr replied in a rather bitter tone, “No. Because this is part of our traditions.”

Badr’s lieutenant came forward and whispered, “But I don’t understand the reason for letting them go without taking ransom.”

“In your opinion, how much would that be?”

“At least 50,000.”

“We have gained a hundred times more than that. Go and escort them across the border. After a few years when their treasury will be replenished then we will invite them here again. Now my companions and I need to take some rest.”

Saying this Badr proceeded towards the fort.

After this victory, the title *The Frontier Falcon* given by Santiago gradually became common to all. Several fables of bravery became associated with this name. Superstitious Christians used to say that the Frontier Falcon was a supernatural human who has been spotted fighting simultaneously in the forest of the rebels, in the Christian dwelling that are several kilometers away and in the cities. His legend travelled from the Kingdom of Ferdinand and reached Granada. The Islamic scholars termed him a *Ghāzī*. Poets penned fictitious tales of love and romance with princesses of high pedigree. Intellectuals threw light on various aspects of his personality.

Shepherds and farmers from afar, returning after a laborious day, would become the center of attraction of the people. They would spread stories of having seen the Frontier Falcon at a certain place at a certain point in time.

Santiago was one of Ferdinand’s favorite warriors but after his crushing defeat, Ferdinand had no desire to make an immediate move against his new and intriguing enemy. Before sending any new troops to the other side of the border, Ferdinand thought first of fortifying his border entrenchments. After two years of preparations, Ferdinand gave priority to his show of strength instead of a victory so that he could remove the Frontier Falcon’s image of invincibility from the minds of the people. So, he dispatched a few missions but the result of these attacks were no different than Santiago’s misadventure.

Ferdinand had come to realize that the Frontier Falcon was a formidable enemy in his own territory of influence but lacked a large enough group to come out of the forest and take over any part of his kingdom. Therefore, he started concentrating on finishing that last Islamic sultanate, whose people were not only against living under him like subjects but were also striving to achieve their lost glory.

Meanwhile, Badr bin Mughira took advantage of the situation and constantly kept consolidating his strength. Gradually, when the people of clandestine groups of various cities found out that the Frontier Falcon is none other than Mughira’s young son, some of them, who were keen on taking part in *jihād*, left their homes and joined-up with him.

One such individual who migrated from Cordova was Bashir bin Hassan. Living up to the reputation of his famous ancestry, he became a skillful physician and surgeon at a very young age. He proved to be a valuable asset and support to Badr.

The rulers of Cordova and Seville had remained under his treatment. When the Crown Prince of Castile injured himself severely after falling off his horse, Ferdinand sent for him. On the Crown Prince’s recovery, Ferdinand and Isabella offered him the post of Royal Physician but he refused and returned to Cordova. After two years, when he received a letter from Badr bin Mughira, he left his luxurious palace and gave priority to living with a *mujāhid* in the forest.

Two months after the meeting with Al-Zeghel, the ruler of Cordova, Abul Hassan, issued a secret decree and gave the custody of some of Cordova’s bordering areas that were connected to the Frontier Falcon’s mountains and forest, to Badr bin Mughira. Badr bin Mughira did not get himself involved in the affairs of tax collection, judiciary and other local issues. He left these responsibilities with the border administrator while he took over the administration of check posts and construction of new defensive outposts.

Apart from a few trustworthy army officers, no one knew that their commanding general was the very same youth who was remembered by the title of *The Frontier Falcon* or *Shaheen*. He was referred by these title not only by the people of Andalus but also by the Muslims of Granada. One day, the border administrator announced to the soldiers that, on his request, the Frontier Falcon had promised to give a few days’ training to them in his forest.

“I will send you in batches of two hundred, one after the other. I am sure his training will prove beneficial for you.”

The troops were more excited to have a look at the Shaheen of the forest than to learn new war tactics. Badr bin Mughira’s lieutenant, Mansour bin Ahmed, would receive the troops disguised as the Frontier Falcon and would send them back after training them for a few days on the war tactics of fighting in the forest and mountains.

Ferdinand did raise his concerns over the entrenchment along the Granadian border but Abul Hassan sent a reply saying that these preparations have been done to protect against any attack by the Frontier Falcon. Besides Abul Hassan’s reply, Ferdinand was also satisfied because apart from the normal formalities, there were no new restrictions on the access of the kingdom’s cities from the border. As usual, traders from Cordova, Castile, and other cities could pass the border to the cities of Granada on showing a transit document issued by Ferdinand’s rulers.

# The Nation-Sellers

During the night, in a room of the royal palace of Castile, Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand sat on gilded chairs, facing each other. The expressions on their faces showed that both were in deep thought.

Trying to bring a smile to her face, the Queen said, “Why are you so worried. I don’t think that the tribute amount is such a big issue to cause you concern.”

The King replied, “Oh Queen! I’m not concerned about the tribute. I spend more on maintaining the border check post than the tribute I receive from Abul Hassan but his refusal to pay the tribute shows that he has confidence in his strength. Unfortunately, there is no other claimant to the throne of Granada. So far, more than our swords, the primary guarantee for our successes was the disunity among the Muslims.”

The Queen said, “Even if the Muslims of Granada unite, I don’t think they would rise against us. I am sure that they have not forgotten what happened to the rebels of Cordova, Toledo, and Seville.”

The King said, “Queen, you are talking about those times when there was much infighting between the Hispanians, Berbers, and Arab-Muslims. Our ancestors had worked extremely hard to take advantage of their disunity which helped them in capturing three regions of Spain. Otherwise, I am not ready to believe that had they been united as one like us, we could not have gained victory over them.”

The Queen replied, “This was the Holy Mary’s grace upon us that they split up.”

“Perhaps with Holy Mary’s grace, like Cordova and Toledo, the Muslims of Granada continue to remain divided. Otherwise, I know that their unity can compel the enemy, no matter how mighty, to its knees. If they remain scattered, they would be like piles of dust in the face of a mildly blowing wind but if they are united they will prove to be like an invincible rock even to a huge storm. I have come to know that a few scholars are trying to motivate them in the name of Islam. If this is true, then, I would not consider these words of Abul Hassan as empty threats that ‘instead of gold and silver coins for tribute our mint manufactures swords of steel.’”

“O Queen, the truth is that instead of the army, I was relying more on the fact that I would take advantage of the civil war in Granada.”

“But even if the chances of civil war are not present in Granada, we should not hesitate to use our armed forces. I don’t believe in giving the enemy time for preparations.”

“This is what I was thinking too. But because of Santiago’s stupidity, we have still not been able to wash away the stains of negative publicity that our soldiers’ good reputation had received.”

The Queen said, “Can’t we recognize The Frontier Falcon as an independent ruler and have some agreement with him against Granada?”

“No, rather I’m afraid if Abul Hassan announces to revolt against us, he would give him unconditional support.”

An army officer entered the room, bowed in respect and said, “Abu Dawood seeks permission to enter.”

Ferdinand furiously said, “We had ordered that he should be presented in front of us immediately.”

Overwhelmed, more by the voice than the words, the army officer quickly exited after paying his respects.

The Queen said, “Do you trust Abu Dawood to be loyal to you even after he goes to Granada?” The King replied, “After having Mughira captured, he has gained our trust for life. But him accessing the Royal Court of Granada would not be that easy.”

Abu Dawood entered the room. He appeared to be around 45–50 years of age. From his features and complexion, he seemed to be a mix of Spanish and Arab descent. Although most of his beard was white, his face had the freshness of youth. He sported a black robe and white turban.

Abu Dawood moved forward, first kissed the King’s and then the Queen’s hand, took three steps backwards, and stood respectfully.

The King gestured towards an empty chair and said, “Have a seat.”

Abu Dawood reluctantly said, “The slave wouldn’t dare disobey, however, I would like to submit that even standing in front of my King and Queen is a great honor for me.”

Ferdinand said while smiling, “The King and Queen order you to sit.”

“The slave wouldn’t dare disobey.” Saying this Abu Dawood sat on the chair.

Ferdinand said, “We believe that nature’s signs dawn upon you before they do on our holy monks. Once again we would like to test your intelligence. Tell us, what is the challenge that we are faced with today?”

Abu Dawood replied, “Even a display of this slave’s ordinary intelligence and wisdom would be disrespectful. However, I would comply with your command. The Great Emperor wishes for this slave to proceed to Granada.”

Ferdinand said, “If you had replied wearing the attire of a monk, we would have believed this to be a miracle of your spirituality. But we know that you rely on your intelligence more than anything else. Tell us, how did you arrive to the conclusion that we would like for you go to go to Granada?”

“The slave had come to know that Abul Hassan has refused to pay tribute. Then, the slave came to know that the Great Emperor had called in a council. Moments after the conclusion of the council of the ministers, the Emperor’s emissary had come to me. In such circumstances, it was not difficult for me to understand what was to be expected of me. I fully understand that if you would send me to a front against Abul Hassan, then, that front could only be Granada.”

“Then, I’m sure you must have also thought about what you would have to do on this front?”

“Yes, I believe, in order to sow disunity in Granada, it is important that we come up with another claimant to the throne and this slave of yours would be able to decide who that other claimant could be only after he’s in Granada.”

“What is your opinion about Al-Zeghel?”

“In my opinion, Al-Zeghel would give unconditional support to his brother. But…”

“But what?”

“I cannot say this with surety. There are some reports that this job can be done by using one of Abul Hassan’s sons. I have heard that Abu Abdullah fears that his father would make one of his step-brothers the crown prince. I have also heard that Abul Hassan likes his Christian wife more.”

Ferdinand jumped with excitement and said, “Then what are you waiting for? If Abu Abdullah has that doubt, then you can change it to fact. You should leave no later than tomorrow.”

Abu Dawood said, “I am ready to go but in the type of work I’m undertaking, it requires that I take my family along. I might have to stay there until such time I get all the gates of the city open for your forces. The slightest doubt about me could nullify all our efforts. Therefore, I want to cross the border posing like a refugee. On reaching Granada, my wife and daughters and I would elaborate the tales of your barbaric rule so that no one suspects us. Another reason for taking my wife is that through her it would be easier for me to have access to the harem of Abul Hassan.”

Ferdinand said, “Surely Abu Dawood, your services won’t be in vain. We promise that you would be our first governor in Granada. And until the time the throne of Andalus remains with our family, the governorship will remain with your family. If you so desire, I can give this to you in writing.”

“This servant considers your words no less than your writing.”

“Very well then. Meet me first thing in the morning. The royal treasury will supply you with your needs for the mission of Granada.”

It was raining heavily. A coach of four horses, drenched in puddle, stopped at the gate of a border fort of Ferdinand’s kingdom. The guards of the fort, who were waiting at its gates, ran out and gathered around the coach.

A youth, who appeared to be their officer, moved forward, opened the door of the coach, peeped inside and after greeting them respectfully said, “I had received instructions of your arrival from the governor. Fresh horses are ready but the journey in a horse carriage might prove to be painful for you in this rainstorm. So, if you think it appropriate, do stay here until at least the rain stops and the water from the mountains settles down. Your food is ready.”

Abu Dawood replied while peeping outside, “This weather is perfect for my journey. We will leave this place as soon as we have had our food. I would also like to give you some instructions regarding our journey. We will follow every order of yours with our heart and soul. Please come.”

Abu Dawood came out of the coach along with his wife and two young daughters. One of the girls, whose name was Angela appeared to be two or three years younger than the other girl. Her round face, blue-eyes and blonde hair were exactly like her mother’s. Her looks too resembled a glimpse of her mother’s youth.

The other girl’s name was Rabia. She was Angela’s stepsister. Rabia’s black, shiny eyes were quite different to her stepmother and sister. She was even taller than both of them. Seeing the slight redness in the fairness of her face, it seems as if nature’s painter had mixed milk and honey and complemented it with a bit of pink. With the combination of seriousness and mischievousness in her looks, nature had made her an amazing posture of female beauty and elegance.

There was a slight resemblance in Rabia and Angela. A resemblance that could be felt but couldn’t be described. Both girls were beautiful. If Angela’s beauty was the laughter of a desert flower, Rabia’s earnestness had a seemingly smile of a budding flower.

Led by the army officer, these people entered into a room of the castle and sat on the chairs around the dining table.

The servants brought sumptuous food in dishes of silver and placed it on the table. On Abu Dawood’s signal, the army officer too sat down on one of the chairs. While having food, Abu Dawood asked the officer, “How far is Granada’s first check post?”

The officer replied, “About eight miles. However, three miles down the road you will enter their territory. I think if I write to the officer of their check post, he can make some arrangements for your protection across the border. But the governor has instructed me that I should not let him know anything at all.”

Abu Dawood replied, “The governor has followed my instructions. I am not entering their territory as an ambassador to the King but would like to go in as a Muslim refugee.”

“In my opinion, if you want to deceive them, then, leave this coach and this road and travel either by foot or on horses by using a different route, otherwise, don’t you think they would become suspicious as to how come your coach slipped by our watchful eyes?”

“I believe the merchants of Granada and Castile travel these roads unimpeded. However, the plan that I have thought-out should be successful to a certain extent. Order twenty of your horsemen to get ready and instruct them to stay behind us and when we increase our coach’s speed on nearing Granada’s border, then, they should act as if they are trying to intercept us. When the soldiers at Granada’s check post see that the Christians are trying to intercept us, then, they would surely interfere. We will get their refuge and your soldiers will return after a minor skirmish.”

“Although the plan is good, the road ahead is rough. I fear that during the dash, your coach could get into an accident.”

Abu Dawood replied, “Minor incidents do happen in such circumstances. If the coachman is injured or a horse is hit by an arrow or two, then, even this is considered to be a minor thing.”

“Very well, then, I will personally take part in this task along with my soldiers.”

On the army officer’s order, a servant called in a soldier of the fort. The officer said to the soldier, “Order twenty horsemen to get ready. We are going on a mission.”

Then he turned towards Abu Dawood and said, “Have you heard anything about the Frontier Falcon?”

Hearing these words, Abu Dawood’s wife and daughters were startled and looked at the officer. Abu Dawood replied calmly, “Yes. I have heard a lot about him, but, I believe his territory is quite far from here.”

“His territory is quite far from here but his comrades have snatched away our horses three times.”

“When?” Angela inquired.

“Last year. This year he has not focused on us but last year he had captured this fort too for a week.” Angela asked, “So, you surely must have seen him. What is he like?”

“Well, he did not remove his mask in front of us but from the sound of his voice he didn’t seem much of age.”

Maria, Angela’s mother, asked, “So, then, how did you remove him from the fort?”

“Well, he left on his own will. He only needed our surplus grain and horses.”

Angela said, “I have heard that he’s very cruel.”

The officer replied, “His biggest virtue is that he is not cruel. He does not raise his hand on the unarmed and helpless. He does not attack a befallen enemy. No doubt he’s the biggest enemy of our kingdom, but he’s a decent enemy.”

Abu Dawood said, “I must appreciate your honesty. Like you, Santiago too, admires his nobility.”

Angela said, “Father! If we were to meet him along the way, I’m sure he would supply us with his best horses to complete the journey.”

Rabia asked, “Why do people call him *The Frontier Falcon*?”

The office replied, “This title was given to him by Count Santiago because when it comes to being fierce, fast and clever, he’s no less than a falcon.”

Abu Dawood asked, “Is it true that he’s Mughira’s son?”

“There are different opinions about that. Some say that he’s his son, some say he’s some Moroccan.”

Abu Dawood said, “We’ll soon come to know who he is.”

The officer inquired, “Does His Highness the King plan to launch an attack?”

Abu Dawood replied, “His force is not that large to have the King to personally launch an attack. A clever man is enough for him who is familiar with his war tactics.”

The rain continued to pour heavily. After riding with normal speed for about a mile and a half, Abu Dawood ordered his coachman to increase the speed of the coach. The horsemen who were pursuing stopped their horses on the signal of their officer. When the coach had about a mile’s lead, the horsemen gave it chase.

In the lower part of the valley, some parts of the road had disappeared under the rain water. Therefore, despite Abu Dawood’s insistence, the coachman was taking precaution to a certain extent. When the distance between the coach and its chasers would become very little, then, the chasers would reduce their speed to let the coach have a lead.

Due to the flooding, the road had been damaged from several sides. Because of the jumps of the coach caused by the rocks and holes on the road, Abu Dawood’s wife and younger daughter, Angela, were protesting severely. Even Abu Dawood’s head had bumped with his wife and daughter several times but he appeared to be absolutely heedless to Angela’s screams and his wife’s cries. Once, the coach bounced after hitting a stone that was submerged in water on the road. A screaming Maria jumped and her head went and hit the ceiling. She cried, “Order the coach to stop or else I will open the door and jump. You are a barbarian. You want to get rid of us before reaching Granada? For God’s sake, stop the coach.”

With another powerful jolt Maria’s and Angela’s heads collided against each other. When Angela started wailing, Abu Dawood said, “If I knew that you would prove to be as courageous as your mother, I would never had brought you along. Look at Rabia. She hasn’t even uttered a word of complaint from her mouth.”

As soon as Abu Dawood said this, Maria and Angela lashed out at Rabia.

Maria said, “Rabia is glad to go to people of her race and religion.”

Angela shouted, “Rabia is even sure that in case of an accident, you will first attend to her.”

Ignoring their taunts and sarcasm, she said, “Father! Why do you bother Angela and Mother? Please order the coach to stop.”

Abu Dawood said, “Maria! Be a little patient. We have passed Granada’s border. As soon as their men see us in this condition, they will try to intervene. When I had given this suggestion at home, you jumped with joy. Now you’re upset because of a little discomfort. A person has to go through a lot of dangerous phases to get power and prestige.”

Maria shouted and said, “You’re so stupid. Who on earth would be waiting for you in this storm? They must be sitting comfortably in their rest houses.”

Abu Dawood said, “Nonetheless, it is important that we continue like this until their check post. Otherwise, we won’t be able convince them that we are on the run and the King’s soldiers are chasing us.”

The coach was now moving along a more stable road uphill, therefore, Maria and Angela’s tongues were wagging lesser. Their excitement, too, was subsiding.

The coachman yelled, “I have seen a horseman.”

“Our job is almost done. He will soon alert his comrades.”

Saying this he looked out from the window of the coach towards the rear and signaled with his hand to the pursuing horsemen. At the same time, he instructed the coachman to gallop faster.

After a while when the coach was descending down the mountain, the coachman yelled loudly, “The water seems to be a lot more, down the valley. There is no sign of the road. Dashing blindly forward could be very dangerous.”

Abu Dawood said, “Take precaution but don’t stop the coach. You will have double the rewards.”

Again Maria and Angela raised a hue and cry. Abu Dawood consoled them saying, “The coachman is not stupid. He’ll reduce the speed himself as soon as he reaches down.”

The lower part of the valley appeared to be a large stream but for the sake of the reward, the coachman, drawing a cross on his chest, forced the horse into the water. However, the coach got off the road and the two horses in front fell down after stumbling over some stones. With the sudden halt of the coach, the coachman, who was sitting on the edge, bounced and fell on the horse’s back, rolling into the water. Seconds later, the four horses galloped in full speed. The water was hardly deep. Without any further incident the horses passed the low land onto the road.

Passing another cliff, the coach entered a wide plain. Sitting inside, Abu Dawood was unaware that the coach was deprived of its driver. Thus, the horses left the road and started running in the field. When the jolts became unbearable, Abu Dawood started calling out to the coachman. Receiving no response, he opened the door of the coach and glanced outside. The coachman had disappeared. There were dense trees at some distance and the coach was heading towards a collision course with some boulders in its path, which could prove fatal for all of them.

The horsemen that were in-pursuit could hardly have reached in time to stop the horses. Suddenly, a contingent of thirty to forty horsemen appeared from the forest in front and quickly reached close to the coach. Leading on a dark horse was a masked man, whose white robe was fluttering in the air. On the masked man’s cue the rest of the horsemen raised their swords and while raising the slogans of “Allahu Akbar,” diverted their attention towards the intercepting horsemen, who had changed their course after firing a few arrows at the coach.

Seeing the coach without its driver, the masked man dashed his horse towards it. He came close to one of the horses in front and after positioning his horse near it, jumped on it. He was still trying to balance himself when one of the coach’s wheel broke after crashing into a rock and the coach overturned to the other side. The underfeet reins of the horses snapped, but the ones in their mouth remained intact. The masked man extended his hand and first grabbed one and then the other horse by the reins and tried to stop them with all his strength. Dragging, stumbling, and crashing into the rocks, the coach finally came to a halt.

After a while, when the masked man’s comrades returned after chasing away the intercepting horseman and arresting the distraught coachman, the masked man pointed towards the groaning passengers near the broken coach and said, “Unfortunately, I could not save them from getting injured. But I’m sure that their lives have been saved. There is a suitcase inside the coach that belongs to them. Do take it along.”

Semi-conscious, Abu Dawood opened his eyes and sat up. After feeling his bloody forehead, he looked at the masked man and his comrades and said in a feeble tone, “Thank You.” Then, he turned his attention towards his wife and daughters.

“Maria! Rabia! Angela!” he said after shaking them, one after the other.

Maria opened her eyes while groaning and closed them feeling fearful. After a moment, she reopened her eyes and after crying, “Angela! My Angela,” shook her aggressively. Angela was bleeding from her lower lips and temple. After moaning a few times, she started staring at her mother.

# Their Host

Rabia opened her eyes on gaining consciousness. In the candlelight, she saw that she lay in a spacious room. Abu Dawood sat on one of the chairs near her bed while a youthful stranger sat on another chair. Seeing his daughter had gained consciousness, he bowed and placed his hands on her forehead and said, “Rabia, my daughter.”

Rabia asked in a frightened tone, “Where am I?”

Abu Dawood replied, “Daughter! We have reached a very secure location and we’re guests of a person under whose refuge we are safe from every danger. And this is your physician.”

Maria lay on a bed on the other side of the room. Angela sat with the support of a pillow on another bed. Gesturing towards them, Rabia asked her father, “How are they?”

Abu Dawood replied, “They are fine.”

Another youth entered the room. Rabia’s glances focused on him for a while.

Abu Dawood stood up.

“Please remain seated!” The youth stepped forward and while placing his hand casually on Abu Dawood’s shoulders said, “I just came to see how your daughter was doing.”

Abu Dawood replied, “She has just opened her eyes. I am sorry that we have put you through so much trouble.”

The youth replied, “I wish we had a suitable place where guests like you could stay.”

Angela got up from her bed and quietly came and sat down besides Rabia. “Rabia, how do you feel?” she said while placing her hand affectionately over her forehead.

“I am fine. There is pain in my leg and head. How is mother?”

“She is fine.”

The first youth, who was discharging his duty as their physician, said, “I think it’s not good for her to talk right now. I will give her some medicine to sleep. Complete rest is very important for her.”

The other youth asked in Arabic, “I hope she did not get much hurt?”

The physician replied, “I will be able to give you a proper answer in the morning. However, there is nothing to worry about.”

Abu Dawood asked, “In your opinion, when will she become healthy?”

“She will be good in no time and I think you should take some rest too.”

The next day when Rabia awoke after a long, deep sleep, she saw Angela standing by the room’s window, peeping outside. Maria sat on her bed with the support of a pillow.

“Angela! Angela!” Rabia whispered to her.

Startled, Angela looked at her, came, and sat down beside her.

Rabia said, “Did you see the two strangers that were here last night?”

Angela replied, “I was looking at them right now while standing by the window.”

“I thought it was only a dream.”

Angela said, “If you come to know where we are at right now, you would say that we are dreaming with our eyes wide open.”

Rabia said, "Maybe I…fell off the coach and became unconscious. But this accident happened a little after noon. Then when I regained consciousness, it was night. There was a candle lit in the room. I think we are at some check post in Granada.

“No, we have strayed far from it. You were transported here in an unconscious state. Rabia you always say that I have no place for you in my heart. But, by the Holy Mary! The whole way I cried for you. We might have reached here by midnight. Father says that the person treating you is the best surgeon in Hispania.”

“But where are we right now?”

“Rabia! You won’t believe that right now we’re in the valley of The Falcon.”

“In the valley of The Falcon? No, you are joking.” Rabia tried to sit-up but could not. She clasped her aching head with both her hands and lied down. “Angela! Angela! Tell me honestly. Stop bothering me.”

“What I’m telling you is the truth.”

“But I can’t understand this.”

“Rabia! You won’t even believe that you have seen The Frontier Falcon. Not only have you seen him but even…I’m afraid that you might start fighting. But, by the Holy Mary, I’m not lying. You even had the honor of spending a few moments close to him.”

“What do you mean?” Rabia inquired anxiously.

“What I mean to say is that you have spent some precious moments of your life with him.”

“Mother! Mother! Ask Angela to stop.”

Maria said while laughing, “Angela says the truth but no need to worry. You were unconscious.”

Frustrated, Rabia started looking towards Angela. While controlling her laugh, she said, “Rabia! There is no cause for concern. He transported you along with him to this place on his horse. If I had been unconscious, it would have happened with me too. I heard that The Falcon would be an extremely, barbaric man, but maybe he’s some angel. Father had become hopeless that you would ever gain consciousness but he felt your pulse and put you up on his horse and while consoling Father, he said, ‘I am taking her to the best surgeon of Andalus and I’m sure her life will be saved! You can come along with my comrades. Take me as your friend.’ And Father said, ‘I don’t know who you are but if you save my daughter’s life, then, a case filled with gold and jewels is yours.’”

He said, “Don’t take me for people who do good for a reward. My comrades will even protect your gold and jewels.” Saying this he sped his horse. When we reached here by midnight, we were told that you had arrived here way before us."

“Okay, so how did you know that he was The Frontier Falcon?”

“Father had just told us that before you woke up.”

“So the masked man who endangered his life to stop the horses of our coach was The Frontier Falcon?”

“Yes and yesterday, late at night when you gained consciousness, he had come to see how you were faring. Before that, he had come and inquired about you two or three times. He came in the morning too. He was probably going on a mission since he was dressed in a soldier’s attire. He had also told Father that he might not be able to come until the evening and I believe your physician sat on the chair the whole night. When I awoke, he was checking your pulse.”

Rabia asked, “Where is Father?”

Angela replied, “He and the physician have gone to the other room to see the coachman. The poor soul has been injured very badly.”

After three days, Rabia’s headache had eased considerably but because of the pain in her knee, she could not walk without support. The cavalryman who had saved her life and the physician treating her were Badr bin Mughira and Bashir bin Hassan. Abu Dawood was surprised how The Frontier Falcon suddenly reached there for their help. In the past three days, he had, more or less, gained the trust of Badr bin Mughira after telling Ferdinand and his rulers’ tales of oppression. After Friday prayers, he delivered a passionate speech in front of Badr bin Mughira’s comrades depicting a sorry state of the Christian’s Muslim subjects in Andalus, leaving the crowd emotional. Then, he narrated spirit-elevating stories of Andalus. He praised Badr bin Mughira’s and his comrades war of independence immensely and concluded, “We should not have any misunderstanding about our future. If we do not decide to unite and organize for a decisive war against Ferdinand, then, we would gradually be annihilated. My message to you is that a courageous death is better than a coward’s life. And this is the message I’m taking to the people of Granada. I’m sure after listening to the atrocities, Abul Hassan will not delay in pronouncing *jihād* against the enemies of Islam.”

After the speech, when he was returning with Badr and Bashir to his room, Badr bin Mughira said, “Once you are in Granada, you’ll be able to pump a new spirit into the Muslims.”

Abu Dawood replied in grief, “I’m just doing my duty. But people don’t usually pay much heed to a stranger.”

Badr said, “No. Now they have awoken.”

Bashir hesitantly asked, “If you don’t mind, may I dare to ask a question?”

Abu Dawood replied, “If you too would hesitate to ask me something, then, that would be very wrong.”

Bashir said, “God has bestowed you with immense religious knowledge and you practically get up for *Tahajjud* prayer every night too and your tongue is magical but I’m surprised that…you…”

Abu Dawood interrupted to complete his sentence, saying, “You’re amazed that despite all these things, how come my own wife and daughter are still adhering to the Christian faith? Is this what you wanted to say?”

Bashir was surprised and said, “Yes, this is what I wanted to ask. I’m sure you must have a logical reason for this.”

“Well, there is a reason but I wouldn’t call it a logical one. I think in this regard, a religious *fatwā* from *mujāhids* like you would be more appropriate. This is my second wife. The first one was a Muslim and her daughter too is a Muslim. But this wife of mine is from a Christian family of Merci and before getting married to her, I was aware of the fact that living in a Christian kingdom, I would not be able to convince her to leave her faith. Despite this, I went ahead and married her so that I would be considered a liberal Muslim in a Christian land. I couldn’t stand the injustices and humiliation of my people. I wanted to incline them towards revolution. I used my Christian wife as a shield. To this day, I have not revealed my objectives to her. She thinks that I’m no different from thousands of those Andalusian Muslims who have drifted far from their religion. In fact, she even goes to fellow Christians and says that I am closer to Christianity than to Islam.”

“The advantage I have taken from this is that I have prepared many revolutionary groups of Muslims in different cities. You’ll be amazed but I have been in Castile for the past ten years. I have access to the houses of the Christian nobles but till today they have not found out that I’m working against their kingdom. You have full right to criticize my *modus operandi* but God is aware of my intentions. Before getting married to this woman, I felt that the government’s spies were after me. But after getting married to her my problems have eased considerably.”

“And the result of whatever I have done over the past twenty years would be apparent when Abul Hassan or any other successor to Granada’s throne after him, would proclaim *jihād* against the Christians. Now, you might want to know the reason of my fleeing from there. I have not run away because the government has uncovered my conspiracies. The only reason is that a youth from the royal family of Castile wanted to marry my younger daughter. They had persuaded my wife on the matter and because of my past conduct. My wife was convinced that I would never object to the marriage of my daughter to a Christian youth. But when I found out, you can imagine my condition. Previously, I had thought to go to Granada once my work was done and convert my Christian daughter and wife to Islam. Now I have realized that it was too late for that. When I opposed this proposal, I received an order from Ferdinand. Now the only option I had was to migrate. But I was afraid that if they found out that I wanted to migrate to Granada, then, my wife might not support me willingly and would snatch away my daughter, who does not approve of the proposal.”

Bashir asked, “The girl didn’t agree to get married to the youth of the royal family?”

“No. The youth had lost an eye after an arrow had hit it.”

Badr bin Mughira posed a question, “So, how did you get here?”

“I did this judiciously and stopped opposing the proposal. I asked a friend of mine to write a letter and took the help of his servant to deliver the letter to my house. Acting on my instructions, he delivered the letter to my house during the night. In that letter I had asked him to write that Angela’s maternal grandfather was on the death bed and he wishes to see his daughter and granddaughter before leaving this mortal world. After receiving such news, women seldom go into details. Because the letter also mentioned something about inheritance, my wife prepared herself for the long journey to Merci. Angela had despised the marriage. The end result was that we decided to go first thing in the morning. I had already briefed Rabia about it. She said she would definitely like to meet her stepmother’s father. When we were having dinner, that monocular youth came. When he got to know that we were going to Merci, he too wanted to come along. When I objected, Maria sided with him saying that the journey would become easier if he came along and I was compelled to surrender.”

Early next morning when we were getting up on our coach, he came galloping and informed us that he had sent orders to the check posts along the way to get horses ready for our trip. Because of him, we did not face any problems along the way, but as Merci came closer and closer, my anxiety kept increasing. His horse would either remain in front or at the back of our coach.

The coachman was an old servant of mine and he knew about my intentions. He advised that we would not be able to reach Granada without getting rid of this person. So, I was compelled to take a tough decision. One afternoon, when Maria dozed off in the coach on Angela’s lap, I said to Angela, “Angela! Do you know where I’m taking you?”

She replied, “You are taking me to Merci, where else?”

I said, “I want to save you from this person so instead of Merci, I’m going to Granada.”

Filling her eyes with tears she said, “I would rather die than get married to this person. I’m ready to go anywhere to save myself from him.”

I said, “A little further down, this road separates from Granada’s road, but he’s following us like a shadow. If we change direction, he’ll stop us at the next check post. There’s only one way we can get rid of him.”

Angela thought for a while and said, “Father! The moment he’s behind us… You have a bow and you know how to fire an arrow.”

I said, “But I fear your mother.”

She said, “Mother is asleep. Now hurry up!”

When I looked out the rear window, he was about 50 yards away and was singing a vulgar song. I asked the coachman to reduce the speed of the coach. When the distance between us became less, I fired an arrow and then asked the coachman to speed up the coach. He fell off the horse when the arrow struck him. Therefore, I continued my journey with full speed. When Maria awoke we told her that he has gone ahead of us and after that we didn’t tell her that we have changed our path. But as soon as we crossed the border’s last check post, we saw a few riders behind us. Judging from their speed I got suspicious and asked the coachman. The road was really bad because of the rain. Anyhow, I thank God that the coach broke at that moment when you had already arrived to help us. We got to the border probably because they must have looked for us on Merci’s road and not finding us there, they changed direction towards the road to Granada. This is the answer to why I haven’t converted Maria and Angela to Islam. Now, I would like to ask a question."

Badr said, “Now you have the right to ask anything.”

Abu Dawood said, “Your territory is quite far from our path. Granted that a falcon’s territory of flight is not defined but you came to our rescue as if you were standing there all prepared beforehand.”

Badr bin Mughira replied, “Actually, our relations with the Sultanate of Granada have recently become quite cordial. They have handed over the security of some of the areas of this region to me and sometimes I have to go out inspecting the check posts. Today, too, I came out to check whether the guards were at their vigil or cowed in their shells. I encountered you on the way. My actual residence is quite far from here. This fort that has been graced by your presence is at one end of our territory.”

Abu Dawood said, “I must laud the sense of choice to whoever has given you the authority to oversee the border. And if Granada was to give you the duty of guarding all of its borders, it would be its good fortune.”

“No, I don’t have the capacity for such a huge responsibility.”

Abu Dawood said, “I do not know anyone in Granada. If you would be kind enough to give me a few good names, then, that would make it easy for me.”

Badr bin Mughira said, “I will write to one such person through whom you will know the whole of Granada. But I think you might have to stay here for several days. Bashir, how long will it take their daughter to be able to walk?”

Bashir replied, “God willing, she’ll be completely healthy in a week’s time.”

Because of its location, this fort in which Abu Dawood was staying as a guest of Badr bin Mughira, was not safe from foreign attacks. Even its boundary walls were not strong enough to withstand a major attack. After the meeting with Al-Zeghel, Badr bin Mughira used to stay here occasionally whenever he came to inspect the border check posts. This fort was within Granada’s border and since Castile and Granada had not declared war on each other, Badr felt no danger of an immediate attack and so he had stationed very few soldiers for its security. However, his spies and guards were always in and around Castile’s border, keeping a watchful eye. After Abu Dawood’s arrival, he had increased the number of guards. Usually, he would stay at this fort for two to four days to look at the new arrangements and to give instructions to the officers of the check post. Then, he would return to his residence in the forest to give training to new soldiers and officers arriving from Granada but because of Abu Dawood, he had to stay here against his wishes. However, he would go every second or third day to give necessary instructions to his warriors and return. Although Abu Dawood had gained his trust a little after telling him a concocted story, he was not inclined to allow any stranger on his side of the border without a written recommendation from Al-Zeghel or Musa. This is the reason he had called Bashir bin Hassan here from the forest instead of taking Rabia to his residence for treatment.

Apart from her father, who had married a Christian girl a year after the demise of her mother, Rabia had no one in this world. When she grew up, she was told that she was less than a year when her mother died. She had spent most of her initial thirteen years in Toledo with her maternal uncle. Due to the increasing high handedness of the Christians, like other people, many people of her maternal uncle’s family were compelled to migrate to Granada. Rabia’s uncle wanted to take her along, but Abu Dawood opposed it and so Rabia had to stay with her father in Castile. In Castile, the environment of her father’s house was totally new to Rabia. Her stepmother and stepsister were strong adherents of the Christian faith. Greed for fame and fortune had thrown her father away from her ancestors’ religion. The Christians of Castile knew him as a liberal Muslim. He would recite the Quran in Christian gatherings and would make intellectual speeches. Priests of the upper class knew that although disguised as a Muslim, he was a bitter enemy to the adherents of that faith. Therefore, unlike other Muslims, they did not insist on him becoming Christian.

Some farsighted Muslims did suspect him, but he had convinced the majority of the people that whatever he is doing for the Muslims, like attending the King’s court and visiting churches, could not be accomplished sitting in a mosque. He would go to different cities and prepare covert groups of freedom fighters. He would also get well-acquainted with the “fanatic” Muslims of that city and would disappear after reporting them to Christian authorities. The Christian authorities would capture them one-by-one and execute them without a trial. For these services, Abu Dawood had already received a gold medal from Ferdinand and a silver cross from the Lord Bishop of Castile.

Rabia was the direct opposite of her father’s traits and habit. This could probably be because she had spent her first thirteen years at her uncle’s home. The education she received at her uncle’s home taught her to love Islam and the Muslims’ current sense of helplessness and persecution gave birth to sentiments of hatred in her heart for the Christian government of Castile. The feelings during childhood are not permanent but the bitter environment of her father’s house kept reminding her of her uncle’s home and the interesting moments of those thoughts became part of her sad and bitter life. When a priest of the city would come to teach the Bible to her stepsister, Angela, she would remember the elderly-faced scholar who would come to her uncle’s home to teach her the Quran. And when Angela’s mother would ask her to study the Bible along with her stepsister, she would run into the other room, sit and open up the Quran.

Every Sunday, Angela would go to the church along with her mother while Rabia stayed with her neighbor’s wife, who also happened to be her mother’s friend.

After living in Castile for two years, she came to know that her uncle along with a few more members of her family had left Granada for Morocco. Prior to this, she used to console herself saying that one day, destiny would give her the opportunity to go to Granada and meet her dear ones from Toledo. She often supplicated to God for this to happen. However, she was left heart-broken on learning that they had left for Morocco. For several days on end she shed tears in hiding.

Despite Abu Dawood’s shortcomings, he loved Rabia immensely. Maria often complained that he loved Rabia more than Angela but he always silenced her by saying that Angela does not need his love since her mother is alive while Rabia has no one besides him.

Maria was a harsh-tempered woman and because of her behavior, Rabia had come to despise her. Angela inherited arrogance and contemptuousness from her mother but within her was heart that, unlike her mother, couldn’t return Rabia’s love with scorn. At times she even sided with her in cases she felt that her mother was being unfair. But like her mother, she too was extremely biased when it came to religion. Rabia would not get involved in religious discussions but when some of the things that Maria and Angela would say would become unbearable, then, she would be compelled to quarrel. These quarrels had more to do with emotions than logic and reason. Maria and Angela would try to impress her with Ferdinand’s pomp and the magnificence of the rulers of Rome. She would reply by telling the legends of Tariq, Musa, Abdul Rahman the Great, and Yusuf bin Tashfeen.

Maria and Angela would say that one of their priests had dreamt that God had chosen Ferdinand to drive the Muslims out of Andalus and she would reply saying that she has dreamt seeing Abul Hassan waving the flag of Islam in Castile.

Like the rest of the Christians of Castile, Maria and Angela too rejoiced at the news of Mughira’s assassination but Rabia was so grief-stricken that she did not speak to anyone for three days. Then, on hearing the news of Santiago’s defeat at the hands of The Frontier Falcon, the degree of her happiness was as intense as the grief of her stepmother and stepsister.

Later whenever a fight ensued in their house because of religion, the name of The Frontier Falcon would somehow be mentioned. As much as Maria and Angela would get irritated at the mention of his name, Rabia would exaggerate and elaborate his many endeavors. At night when Maria and Angela would kneel in front of the statue of the Holy Mary and pray for the victory of the Christians, Rabia would go to another room, pray and supplicate for the victory of The Frontier Falcon. One day, Maria complained to Abu Dawood that Rabia thinks well of the enemies of their king. Abu Dawood reacted by scolding her and later tried to make her understand, saying, “If you don’t want the government to declare us being rebels and hang us, then, for God’s sake please take care in expressing your feelings about The Frontier Falcon. I am not stopping you from following your mother’s religion, but, this does not mean that whatever respect I have gained at Ferdinand’s court should go down the drain because of you. The Frontier Falcon is a rebel and in good time he will be crushed by Ferdinand’s forces.”

For the first time, she realized that despite her father’s knowledge and maturity, he was no different than those Andalusian Muslims who, after becoming hopeless of an Islamic renaissance, had pinned their entire expectations on their Christian masters.

After this, she started keeping a closer watch over her father’s activities. Gradually, she started feeling that the real reason behind her father’s often disappearance from home was not a passion for travel and tourism but it was to render vital services undercover to Ferdinand. She now began to feel her loneliness and foreignness. This feeling grew with the progression of her age. The enthusiasm that bloomed in her heart while contemplating the bright future of the Muslims withered away. She became mentally numb. Life became a never ending cycle of day and night.

But when she learned that she would be going to Granada with Abu Dawood, her long lost wild emotions suddenly sprouted back to life. She was not aware of Abu Dawood’s real objectives. However, she felt her heart thump faster with every stop toward the new travel destination. Vivid scenes of Granada would wander in front of her eyes. The name of The Frontier Falcon was mentioned several times during this trip. Maria was terrified of him and despite Abu Dawood’s protests, she would ask at every check post, “Is there a danger of The Frontier Falcon’s attack in our path?” The officers of the check post would try to console her but she would ask the same question at the next one.

One day when she was posing similar queries to an inn’s owner, Abu Dawood addressed him and said, “Why don’t you just tell her that The Frontier Falcon doesn’t raise his hand on women.” Rabia would listen to the replies of her stepmother’s queries with interest and her imagination would take her from the beautiful city of Granada to the mountains and forests, where a mysterious *mujāhid* had given an exemplary defeat to Count Santiago a few years ago. But she would be saddened at the claim that her father had made that their path was far away from the territory in which The Frontier Falcon flew.

From the rumors that were rampant in Castile, about The Frontier Falcon, she imagined him to be a dreadful, elderly-aged man. But he turned out to be quite different. More that valor, his looks oozed with love and compassion. His masculine charisma had an attraction that would have impressed Rabia even if she had not heard of the stories of his bravery.

Having a glimpse of the most heroic *mujāhid* of her people was the greatest gift of Rabia’s life. But when she learned that the masked man, who endangered his life to stop her coach, was none other than The Frontier Falcon, and when Angela told her that when she was unconscious, he rushed with her on his horse and brought her here to the fort, then, for the first time, she realized her importance in the vast system of the universe.

While her condition was critical, he kept visiting her day and night. But when she started becoming healthy, he seldom came into her room.

Bashir bin Hassan would come to change her bandage twice a day. Angela would anxiously wait to hear the footsteps of this young and pleasant physician and would rush to open the door for him. And when he would attend to Rabia, she would come and sit close to her and would try to gain his attention.

She would ask, “When will my sister be healthy enough to travel?”

He would heedlessly reply, “Very soon.”

“My father says that you heal any patient you touch but my teeth still hurt from the fall off the coach that day.”

“It’s your delusion. Your teeth are just fine.”

“No, No, it’s not my delusion. I wasn’t able to sleep last night because of the pain.”

Maria said from the other end of the room “Please do have a good look at them again. She actually was groaning with pain last night.”

“Very well, I will have a look.”

After Bashir bin Hassan finished dressing Rabia’s wounds and examined Angela’s teeth, he pondered for a while and asked her mother, “Has she complained of toothache before?”

Maria replied, “No.”

He pondered again while Angela looked the other way, suppressing her laughter. Bashir bin Hassan said, “There could be some problem at the root of the teeth but apparently there are no visible signs of that. Anyway, I will give a new medicine. Rub it nicely over your gums.”

He would then go away after giving her the medicine. To escape her mother’s wrath she would go and stand near the window that opened outwards. Then, without applying the medicine, would start spitting after massaging her gums with her fingers.

At times, she would press her gums and spit out some of her blood along with her saliva and her mother would say, “Daughter! No matter how good a physician he might be, he won’t be free from religious bias.”

Angela would immediately reply, “No mother dear! I have been relieved a lot by his medicine.”

When Maria was not around, she would have a whole hearted laugh. Rabia would rebuke her and she would become serious and say, “Rabia, my sister! Don’t feel bad. I won’t do it again but I wonder why I get mischievous when I see him. I know I’m making a fool of myself but some stupidity can be interesting. While examining my teeth, he seems a bit upset and starts pondering. I feel like laughing out loud…and would like him to do the same.”

Rabia would get concerned and say, “Don’t be stupid, Angela. Your world and his are poles apart. You must give respect to his stature.”

Angela would say laughingly, “You’re worrying unnecessarily. Trust me, it was only a joke.”

One evening when Abu Dawood was present, Bashir bin Hassan was dressing Rabia’s wounds. Maria said, “Angela could not sleep last night too. Please have a good look at her teeth.”

Abu Dawood seconded his wife’s statement. Bashir said, “Today I have brought a very effective medicine. God willing, your daughter should be well after three days.” Saying this, Bashir poured out a does from the bottle onto a saucer and while giving it to Angela said, “Drink this.”

“A syrup?” she asked in amazement.

Suppressing back his smile Bashir said, “Your pain in the teeth would be relieved after drinking this.”

Angela hesitantly drew the saucer close to her mouth but immediately spit it out after tasting it and screamed, “This is very bitter. I will not drink it.”

Bashir got up, scolded her and said, “You have to drink it.”

Intimidated by Bashir’s unexpected scolding she said, “But I will throw-up.”

Bashir answered, “Then, I will give you more of this medicine. I have a lot of it in stock.”

Angela said apologetically, “So, I should drink it?”

Abu Dawood said, “Yes my daughter. Drink it up. It’s for your own good.”

As usual, Angela, while looking at Bashir said, “I won’t be harmed by this, would I?”

Abu Dawood said in anger, “Harm with Bashir bin Hassan’s medicine?! Angela you’re so ignorant.”

After a moment’s indecision, Angela gulped the unbearably bitter medicine down her throat.

Smiling, Bashir said, “I shall leave this bottle here. If you feel the pain in your teeth again, have another dose of the medicine. Apart from the teeth, it’s also beneficial for the stomach. Today you should feel quite hungry.”

After Bashir and Abu Dawood had left, Angela, biting her lips looked towards Rabia, who burst into laughter.

After sulking for a bit, Angela, too, was laughing as a bewildered Maria said, “Both of you are crazy.”

The next day, praising Bashir bin Hassan in front of her husband, Maria was saying, “This physician is indeed very competent.”

The fort was situated at an elevation. Its boundary was as high as the height of two men. There were houses built along its gated wall. Its lower levels had the barracks for the soldiers while the upper levels had the officers’ residences. The stables were along the walls opposite this wall. On the third side was a mosque while the fourth had ruins of old houses.

At one corner of the upper level were two wonderful rooms that were given to Abu Dawood and his children. The room where the beds of Abu Dawood’s wife and daughters lay was quite spacious. Its windows and ventilators opened outwards. Since the level of the residences was about twice the height of the boundary, the view of the lush green valley and a series of high mountains could be seen from the window. The center of the valley displayed sparkling water from a small stream.

The access to this room was through two doors that opened into Abu Dawood’s room. It also comprised a huge balcony facing the patio. On the right side of Abu Dawood’s room was a small cabin where his coachman was recuperating and on its left side were the room of Badr bin Mughira and Bashir bin Hassan. Further down were lodges of the army officers.

During the day, Badr bin Mughira would hardly find the time to sit with Abu Dawood. Early morning, he would set out on his horse to supervise the border check posts. Sometimes, he would stay out during the night too, but, in his absence, Bashir bin Hassan would carry out the duties of Abu Dawood’s hospitality. Not only was Bashir an excellent physician, he was also a scholar par excellence. However, he too was quite impressed by Abu Dawood’s command over history, philosophy, and other sciences. During the day, he too, had to go out tending to patients. But on returning in the evening, he used to sit with Abu Dawood and discuss various topics. He would also have food with Abu Dawood in his room.

Even Badr would spend his free time whenever he returned from his trips. Bashir used to talk with Abu Dawood late into the night while Badr was not in the habit of chatting a lot after dinner. Usually, he sat for a while and would get up and go to his room. Rabia, Angela, and Maria would have dinner separately in their room.

Rabia’s ears would be alerted towards the conversation in the other room with Abu Dawood but only when she would hear Badr’s voice. On seeing that she had recovered, Badr had stopped coming to her room to check on her health. So, whenever he entered Abu Dawood’s room, his first question would be, “How is your daughter?”

Rabia felt that his initial attention was merely caused by emotions and were merely a result of compassion. Angela was more of an unreserved person. When only Bashir would be with Abu Dawood in the other room, she would barge into the room asking her father something or the other. After tasting the bitter medicine, she was completely relieved of the pain in her teeth. However, her interest in the young physician grew.

Abu Dawood’s coachman had recovered completely. One night when Badr and Bashir were having dinner with Abu Dawood, he said, "My coachman wants to go back to his country. His wife and children are in Castile and I had promised to send him back as soon as we reached Granada. He also wanted to emigrate with his family from Castile but because of my haste he could not bring them along. It’s going to take us a while to reach Granada and he seems quite concerned for his family. So, I’m thinking to see him off from here. Can you help prepare for his journey?

Badr replied, “My men will take him to the other side of the border but it is important that he does not speak of my doings once he is there.”

Abu Dawood replied, “I would not guarantee anything on part of someone else but for him I can say this much that he has been with me for the past twenty years and I have tested him a number of times. He is aware of hundreds of secrets of mine and if he were to reveal only one of them to my enemies, you would not have seen me standing here. Even now I have left half of my wealth at his place and I’m sure that even after twenty years I shall be able to take it back. The fact is that I rely more on him than on my Christian wife and daughter and this is not because of some extra ordinary quality in me. But this is because he thinks that I am a bitter enemy of the Christian government and therefore he would give his life for me. When he was fourteen years old, the governor of Castile hanged his father in a conspiracy case and he witnessed the terrible sight with his own eyes. You don’t know how much he respects you. Today he was saying that, God-willing, he would leave his children with me in Granada and join the ranks of your *mujāhidīn*.”

Badr bin Mughira said, “How unfortunate that I did not show much interest in him. Anyways, whenever he wants, my men will help him to get to the other side of the border.”

“He is very worried about his children. I think I should send him tomorrow morning itself.”

Angela and Maria were listening to their conversation at the door and both were looking at each other in amazement.

Badr bin Mughira got up and went to his room while Bashir and Abu Dawood talked till late into the night. Maria strolled restlessly in her room. She knew neither the coachman’s wife nor his children were in Castile. Her concern was whether Abu Dawood would actually prove to be an enemy of the Christian government.

Rabia fell asleep by midnight but Angela and Maria whispered to each other till late. Time and again, she would repeat her husband’s words, “I rely more on him than on my Christian wife and daughter.”

While consoling her mother, Angela said, “Father is not that naïve to speak so openly, knowing that we can hear him from this room. I am sure there was some wisdom behind what he said.”

Maria said, “I simply cannot trust a Muslim. I feel that I have committed a grave mistake by leaving my country with him. What will we do if he forces us to become Muslim once were are in Granada?”

“Mother, I assure you that father is not interested in religion. And I am sure if you ask him as to what is going on, I’m sure he will give you a satisfactory answer.”

“And until I am satisfied, I won’t be able to sleep. But this physician is showing no sign of leaving. Open the door a bit and call your father.”

“No mother, wait! He will leave in a while.”

When Bashir left, Maria opened the door and barged into the room like a defiant wind and yelled, “So my daughter and I are not even as worthy as your coachman?!”

“Lower your voice,” Abu Dawood said while promptly closing the outside door.

“I knew that you would get upset after listening to the conversation. But for God’s sake, be patient for a while. I will reassure you in a bit. Come on. Let’s go to your room. It is not safe to talk here. It will be dangerous for all of us if anyone hears us.”

“For God’s sake, send us to Castile. I don’t know what your attitude will be towards us once we are in Granada. I won’t be surprised if you sold us to a merchant.”

Abu Dawood quickly stepped forward, shut her mouth with his hands, dragged her into her room and after quickly closing the door said, “Angela! Close these windows. We will get into a lot of trouble if someone was to listen to our conversation.” Then, addressing Maria, he said, “For God’s sake, be quiet for a while. I will reassure you in a bit.”

This commotion had awoken Rabia and while lying and keeping her eyes closed, she began listening to their conversation.

Once Angela had closed the windows, Abu Dawood forced Maria onto the bed and said, “Stupid woman! I am dreaming of making you the Queen of Granada and you are planning to destroy us. Wait! Let me call the coachman here. Since you don’t trust me, maybe he can address your concerns.”

Maria regretfully said, “But why did you insult us in front of them?”

Abu Dawood said, “Maria, listen carefully. I am sending the coachman on a very important mission and if that mission is successful, I might change my mind to go to Granada. In Ferdinand’s sight, this success will not be any less than capturing Granada and when I will go there and tell him that you helped me in making this mission a success, then, I’m sure that your value, in the eyes of Queen Isabella, will be above all the women of Castile.”

Maria mellowed down a little more and asked, “And what kind of success are you expecting from here?”

Abu Dawood replied, “You know that Ferdinand considers The Frontier Falcon to be more threatening than Abul Hassan.”

“So, you…”

“Yes, if the people in Castile were to know that The Frontier Falcon is staying in this insecure fort instead of his mountains and forests, then, they would immediately attack and that’s why I’m sending the coachman. Let me call him for reassurance.”

“No, I don’t need his reassurance. But they have obliged us with a lot of favors.”

Abu Dawood said, “I’m sure in good time, we will also be able to return the obligation. When, like us, they will be at our mercy, then, I will be able to ask for the forgiveness of their lives.”

Rabia’s heart was throbbing but she neither had the courage to open her eyes or talk.

Angela said, “Father! They have saved our lives. They deal with us honorably. Even if they were our bitter enemies, they would still deserve a good treatment and that physician who comes to see Rabia day and night, despite being The Frontier Falcon’s comrade, is an angel. Will you simply forget all his favors?”

Abu Dawood replied, “There’s something you should know about him. Ferdinand would give away half his wealth for his friendship. I am sure he would go to Ferdinand as a prisoner. He would have handcuffs of gold and Ferdinand would ask his Prime Minister or the Lord Bishop to empty their chairs for this honorable prisoner. He had once saved the life of the Crown Prince of Castile. The governors of Cordova and Seville consider him their benefactor. He is wasting his precious time with these miscreants. His real place is not in the forest but in Castile’s royal court. And as for his favors, I will take him there despite his opposition. I’m also sure that with his intercession, he will also be able to seek forgiveness for all of Badr bin Mughira’s past mistakes from the Queen and King.”

Angela’s fear turned into joy. So far, she thought that her temporary interest in Bashir would end once she left this place. And this accident that became a cause for their meeting would someday become a beautiful thought of the past. On Bashir’s first sight, she had felt strange and unfamiliar heartbeats and even after being able to talk to him freely, she felt that there was an insurmountable wall between them. In these conditions, Bashir was merely a temporary focus of Angela’s dabbling glances. Angela’s situation was no different from that traveler who would rest for a while under a tree and be amused by the twittering bird that sat on its branches. But despite being impressed by its enchanting songs, he would not even think of making it his traveling companion.

But this latest conversation with Abu Dawood had opened up a new avenue for her to ponder upon. It kindled several lamps in the obscurity of the future in front of her. Today, for the first time, she was thinking that her meeting with Bashir was not an incident that would not have an outcome. For a few moments she went far away from this room. She was seeing Bashir bin Hassan in the royal court of Castile. She was preaching Christianity to him in her home. Then, the Lord Bishop of Castile was baptizing him and they were exchanging vows in front of the Holy Mary in a church and the priest was sprinkling holy water on them.

This imaginary happiness was not merely a pleasant breeze for Angela but a storm that, within moments, swept her from one place to another.

But Rabia’s condition was a lot different. The palace of her emotions were being demolished. She was seeing a shackled Badr bin Mughira in Ferdinand’s court. Lilies of her hopes were withering away. The bright sky of hopes was falling piece-by-piece. She was being buried under the burden of hopelessness. She was suffocating. She wanted to scream…but only if she could scream. If only she could say something but she didn’t have the courage to open her eyes.

Abu Dawood said, “Let me call in the coachman.”

Maria replied, “I trust you. I am sorry that I caused you so much trouble.”

“I want to make him understand a few things and this room is secure for such things.”

After a while, Abu Dawood brought the coachman along and after closing the door said softly, “Rabia! Rabia!”

Receiving no reply from Rabia, he said, “It’s good that Rabia is asleep. Angela! Don’t reveal anything to her.” Then, after being silent for a while he addressed the coachman saying, “Remember, if you want to become one of Ferdinand’s knights, you have to do this properly. A small error can ruin the entire plan. Go straight to the Governor of the Border and tell him that I have not given you anything in writing as a precautionary measure. I will try to keep The Frontier Falcon here till Friday night. If he’s here, then, the flames would be lit in both the windows of this room. Our men will be able to see this from far away. If the flame is lit in only one of the windows, then, it means that he’s not here and an attack would be in vain. Even if it’s a stormy night we’ll try and make sure that they are able to analyze the situation based on the flames in one or both the rooms. If the windows of both are shut, it means that there is danger in advancing. Also tell them that if they are not able to attack the fort before midnight, then our lives would be in danger. And don’t reveal your secret to anyone before crossing the border. Maybe you have never seen a coachman becoming a king’s knight but after the success of this mission, you will certainly find a huge, empty seat in Ferdinand’s court for yourself.”

The coachman said, “I’m merely a petty slave of yours. If my master becomes the King of Granada, I would rather be a guard at his gate than become one of Ferdinand’s knights.”

Abu Dawood replied, “This is what I have expected from you. If the star of my destiny would shine then the first house of my loyalists that would illuminate would be yours. You will not be a guard at the gate of my palace but an adornment of my court. You will the jewel of my crown. Now go and rest. The preparations for your journey would be done early in the morning. Make sure you tell them that the number of troops guarding the fort never exceeds fifty.”

When the coachman left, Abu Dawood closed all the doors once more and sat talking till late to Angela and Maria. Considering themselves to be King, Queen, and Princess of Granada, these three discussed their future life of pomp and luxury and other relevant issues. However, Rabia was hardly interested in this. Abu Dawood’s conversation with the coachman was enough to drive her anguish to the last limit. She now knew that a cage was being prepared for The Frontier Falcon. She wanted to breach this cage and want to put an end to this danger. This was the first time she knew about her father’s viciousness and wickedness and intensely felt that she was all alone in this world. She thought that although she knew and understood very little about his young rebel of the border, he was the sort of person who would be closest to her.

Despite not knowing him much nor understanding much about him, she felt that this young rebel of the border was one person whom she felt closest to.

Few hours earlier she thought that this rebel of the border was far away from every danger of the world and she would get fearful at this thought. A fear that a hiker feels while climbing the peak of an interesting but dangerous mountain. For her, Badr bin Mughira was a heart-yearning oasis, a volcanic mountain, and a grisly iceberg all at the same time. Imagining his intimacy was as charming for her as much as being dangerous. But now, after knowing about her father’s evil intentions, Badr bin Mughira was that tree in whose branches she had already built her nest. This tree was now facing a flood of events. She wanted to save it from falling. She wanted to dig the hard earth with her delicate hands and put soil into its roots.

Abu Dawood proceeded to his room and Rabia fell asleep after tossing and turning a few times.

# Rabia’s Anxiety

When Rabia woke up in the morning, her body was aching. She also had a headache. Light piercing through the windows was indicating that the time to perform the afternoon prayer was diminishing. She got up from her bed, quickly performed ablution and after praying, went, once again, to her bed.

A day before, Bashir bin Hassan had taken-off her bandages and had advised that the remaining pain in her leg would go away once she starts to walk around. And that it would do her good if she strolled outside, near the fort. Walking in fresh air would rejuvenate her feeble body.

After seeing off the coachman, Abu Dawood came straight to the room and said, “Rabia! You are still asleep? Go out for a stroll with Angela. Maria, you too, go along with them.”

When Rabia didn’t reply, Angela said, “Maybe Rabia is not feeling well Mother! Let us go.”

Maria said, “We’ll see in the evening. I have a headache right now.”

Abu Dawood asked Rabia, “What’s the matter, Rabia. You’re alright, aren’t you?”

Without looking at Abu Dawood, Rabia replied in a dismal tone, “I’m fine.”

“No, No! Your eyes are red.”

“My body is aching.”

Abu Dawood felt her pulse and said, “Maybe you have a fever. Let me bring the physician.”

Rabia said, “No, no, I’m perfectly fine. No need to call the physician. Father! I would like that we all leave for Granada immediately.”

“But until you’re not able to walk about properly, we have to stay here.” Saying this Abu Dawood left the room and after a while returned with Bashir bin Hassan.

Bashir looked at Rabia, felt her pulse and said, “I think you were not able to sleep last night.”

A shocked Abu Dawood, Maria, and Angela looked at Rabia and understanding the reason for their concern, she said, “I think I overslept last night. When I woke up in the morning, my head was spinning.”

“It’s quite possible that you fell ill because of oversleeping. Nonetheless, I will send some medication. Do go out for a stroll in the evening. Lying in bed also has adverse effects on the body.”

Abu Dawood took a sigh of relief and said, “My wife’s head is also hurting.”

After checking Maria’s pulse, Bashir said, “Either you have not had much sleep or you might have overslept like Rabia. If you go out for walks in the morning and evening, then, you would not have this complain.”

“No, I really did not get much to sleep.”

Bashir said, “I will send the medication. Whenever you have difficulty sleeping, just have a tablet.”

By evening, Rabia felt better. On Abu Dawood’s insistence, she along with Angela and Maria went out for a stroll. She would still limp while walking. Outside the fort, Bashir was returning after attending a patient. On seeing them, he stopped his horse and said, “If you balance your weight on both your legs, you should be able to walk properly day after tomorrow. Don’t go out very far today.”

Angela said, “Is it dangerous for us to go down the valley?”

Bashir said, “There’s no danger for guests here.”

Rabia was extremely restless for the next two days. She wanted to caution Badr bin Mughira of the approaching danger but she also knew that she won’t be able to do this without putting her father in danger. After pondering and reflecting hard, she came up with the idea of meeting Badr bin Mughira. After inquiring from Bashir bin Hassan, she found out that he had gone to his residence in the forest and might not return for the next two days. There were four days left for Friday and after every prayer she kept supplicating for him not to return from his residence for a few more days.

For two days, she continued to go with Angela for strolls in the mornings and evenings. The first morning, Bashir bin Hassan, who took strolls early in the morning met them on his way back. Angela saw him and said, “Look! Now there is no flaw in Rabia’s walk.”

Bashir replied, “Walking is good for her.”

Angela said, “Father was saying that we will be leaving on Saturday.”

“Yes! We have requested a new coach to be brought in from Granada.”

“Doesn’t the solitude here bother you?” Angela said after mustering up some courage.

“In the cities, I do not like crowds of people.”

“You take strolls very early in the morning.”

“Yes, I’m used to waking up early.”

Bashir bin Hassan said this and walked away while Angela turned around and looked at him for a few moments. Rabia said, “Let’s go, Angela.”

Startled, Angela looked at her and said remorsefully, “Don’t you think he’s an interesting man.”

Rabia replied, “I’ll be disappointed if he thinks the same about you. Angela, your direction in life and his are totally different. They are two parallel lines that never meet each other.”

Trying to conceal her fear in her giggle, Angela said, “Rabia, are you thinking that I have fallen in love with this physician who is your brother-in-faith?”

“No, Angela! Love is not your cup of tea. I find relief in the fact that you’re deprived of this holy emotion but it’s no use getting tangled in thorns. Some thorns are very strange. The one entangled in them can go threadbare without realizing it.”

“Rabia! Rabia! You are wrong. I am not deprived of the emotion of love. I will sacrifice everything for the one I choose to reign over my heart. But he won’t be someone who will not be from my faith, someone who hates the cities. I’m not that stupid to look for a flame in an iceberg. If I have taken any interest in Bashir, it’s only because he’s your physician. But if you mind this, then, I won’t even raise my eyes to see him. And next time I won’t even come out for walks with you.”

“No, no, Angela. I was only joking.”

Rabia’s anxiety grew by the day. Just two days were left for Friday. After Rabia got up and offered her Fajr prayers, she saw that Angela stood all ready for the morning stroll after freshening up herself. Every night before sleeping, Maria would promise that she too would come along for strolls but in the morning when she would be awoken, she would make an excuse of either a headache or some other pain and would remain lying in bed. However, before they left, she would always instruct Angela not to wander off very far since these people were very dangerous.

Today too, Rabia and Angela dutifully tried to wake her up but instead of waking up she tossed to the other side and slept. Angela felt a sigh of happiness and said, “Let’s go, Rabia. Today we will cross the valley and climb the mountain.”

This was the same mountain Bashir frequented during his walks. After passing through the dense tress of the valley and crossing the stream, Rabia could not keep up with Angela’s fast pace while climbing the mountain. After climbing about a third of the mountain she said, “Angela, I’m exhausted. If you like, you can go all the way up. I’ll wait for you over here.”

“Very well! I’ll be right back.” Saying this Angela raced to the top. She had not seen Bashir on the way and she hoped that he would be at the top of the mountain. The pace of her heartbeat became faster with each step.

Rabia kept looking at Angela while sitting on a rock. When she was out of sight, she started to look down at the breathtaking scenery of the valley. Suddenly, on her right, at a distance, she saw a rider. The horse was pacing slowly on its own while the rider was singing a song loudly in the Arabic language. On seeing the rider’s white robe, Rabia’s heart started throbbing and after pondering for a while, she started moving towards the valley. She thought that if the rider reached the banks of the stream, she won’t be able to stop in his way. She covered some distance with normal pace but raced when she reached near the trees and eventually reached close to the stream. Here she stood under a tree, near the sides of the tracks. As the rider’s voice became louder and louder, the thumping of her heartbeats increased.

When the rider came very close, Rabia wanted to come out from behind the tree and stand in the middle of the tracks but she could not gather enough courage and so she started looking towards the tracks from behind the tree. What she had thought was indeed correct. The rider was none other than Badr bin Mughira. He wore a white turban on his head instead of a helmet.

Despite the fact that The Frontier Falcon was heedless of her presence, Rabia could not take more than a look at him. For a moment, mixed feelings of modesty, anxiety, and veneration prevented her in coming to any decision. However, after he passed by, she was stunned by the guilt of being negligent towards her duty. She said to herself, “Maybe I will never get another chance. Friday is only two days away.”

“Wait!” she said quickly while moving forward onto the tracks.

But her soft voice, dipped in modesty, did not reach Badr bin Mughira’s ears. He had moved a few meters away. Moments ago, the ground that had held Rabia’s feet were now pushing her towards the stream. She advanced towards the stream. With every step she was gaining speed until she eventually started running.

“Please stop! Please stop! Please stop!” Her voice became louder as she gained speed. The rider turned around, looked and pulled the reins of his horse. Rabia’s face blushed with modesty and once again her feet froze to the ground.

Appearing a bit surprised, Badr said, “You…alone…?”

Rabia couldn’t give a reply immediately. Badr pierced his lance in the ground, got off his horse and after a brief silence said, “You look worried. You called out to me.”

Rabia reluctantly raised her head and looked at him. Finding concern, sympathy, and compassion in Badr’s smile, she gradually stepped forwards and said in a meek voice, “I want to say something to you.”

“Please do…!”

For the first time Badr had a close look at her. She was an embodiment of health, youth, beauty, and chastity. And the red and white waves of shyness apparent of her face could not but impress Badr.

“You wanted to say something to me?” Badr questioned.

Rabia’s eyes that harnessed within it seas of love and submission, gradually started rising up.

She said, “I came out for a stroll with Angela. She has climbed up this mountain.”

Badr said, “Don’t worry. She won’t be in any danger here.”

“I’m not worried about her. What I wanted to say is that this fort of yours in very close to the border. If the Christians find out that you stay here, then…”

“Don’t worry. We know how to protect our guests.”

“No. No. I didn’t mean that. I…I’m worried about you. You’re the last hope for Muslims of Andalus. If the Christians find out that you stay here, then, I’m afraid that…”

“Don’t worry about me. I have taught the Christians a lesson many times.”

“But staying with limited troops in this insecure place could prove to be dangerous. Your life is very precious. I fear that our servant might disclose that you stay here instead of the forest.”

“But your father was saying that he’s a very reliable man?”

Rabia anxiously said, “My father is a very optimistic person. It’s possible that our servant is caught on the way and due to fear or greed tells everything to them. It is better to be cautious in such affairs.”

Rabia’s tone sounded more like a plea than advice. A Muslim girl’s concern and compassion was not incredible for Badr. Badr consoled Rabia and said, “This fort is within the border of Granada and unless they don’t formally announce war against Granada, they won’t attack it. And if they find out that I stay here sometimes, even then they won’t take immediate action. And if you are worried about yourself then I assure you that the blood of the Muslims of Hispania is not that cold that they wouldn’t be able to protect their guests. My soldiers will guard you all until you reach Granada.”

Rabia, appearing anxious, said, “You misunderstood me. I am not worried about myself at all. I was only thinking about you and not only me but every Muslim girl in Andalus and Castile prays for the safety of The Frontier Falcon. You’re the last hope of this unfortunate people.” Rabia’s voice halted and tears flowed down her beautiful eyes.

Badr bin Mughira was quite touched and said, “The daughters of the nation should not express such fears that drive its men to becoming peace lovers. So, I thank you for your concern.” Saying this Badr bin Mughira placed his foot in the stirrup of his horse but Rabia quickly said, “Wait!”

Removing his foot from the stirrup, Badr said, “Maybe I was not able to entirely console you. Look, any attack by the Christians cannot be unexpected for me. They won’t ever find me sleeping at any front. This fort is not as unsafe as you might think.”

Rabia hesitantly said, “Do you believe in dreams?”

“Yes. I won’t deny the truth of some dreams. I had a dream about my father once when I was child and it turned out to be true but after that I have written the interpretation of all my dreams with my sword. If you have seen a dream concerning me, then, for that too I will depend entirely on my sword.”

Rabia said hopefully, “I have full confidence in your sword. Every Muslim of Andalus has confidence in your sword and the interpretation of the dream that I have seen can only be written by your sword. I dreamt that the enemies suddenly attacked your fort. The number of their troops compared to yours was far more. In the darkness of the night, I was hearing frightful slogans inside and outside the fort. I felt as if they had broken the wall of the fort and entered inside. Because I was scared, I woke up. Maybe this dream is a result of my imagination but I could not rest without mentioning it to you.”

Badr bin Mughira said, “I’m thankful to you. If your dream is true then, God-willing, instead of hearing their slogans inside the fort, you will hear their cries outside the fort.”

Rabia said, “Ameen” in a suppressed voice and her sad face shone with happiness.

Badr bin Mughira said, “For the realization of this dream, I think you might need to stay here a few more days. I will speak to your father. Maybe he would agree to postpone the trip for a few more days.”

Rabia, feeling the heartbeats of joy, said to herself, “This obligation of yours might be the realization of some other dream of mine.”

While placing his foot in the stirrup, Badr said, “I believe you will wait for your sister. I’ll leave now.”

Badr mounted his horse and pulled out his lance. Rabia hesitantly said, “I fear that you might take things I said as a joke. My stepsister, Angela and my father too, laugh at things I talk about. For God’s sake, don’t mention anything about my dream to them.”

“Maybe words are not enough to console you.” Saying this Badr looked around and whistled a few times. In response to this, a few guards hidden in the dense tree nearby, gathered around him.

Badr said to one of them, “Sulaiman! Head towards the forest immediately. Before evening I want to gather half of my army behind this mountain. None of the soldiers in the fort should know about their arrival.”

On receiving Badr’s hand signal the guards disappeared amongst the trees just as they had appeared. He smiled and looked at Rabia and said, “Are you satisfied now? Until the time you’re in this fort, half of my troops shall be guarding it.”

Rabia impulsively moved forward and held the reins of Badr’s horse and said, “For God’s sake, don’t think that I fear for myself. My anxiety is only for you. You are the nation’s asset. You are the wealth of the Muslims. I wish I could do something else besides impressing you with my dream. I wish I was one of these die-hard fighters who guard you. But I’m merely a superstitious girl who can only offer you dreams and supplications. Rabia’s voice dipped. Tears overflowed from her eyes. For quite some time, it was difficult for Badr bin Mughira to decide on what he should say. Despite the simplicity, humbleness, and humility, Rabia’s face had such an expression of sobriety, seriousness, and dignity that left Badr bin Mughira quite impressed. He told her apologetically,”I’m sorry that my words caused you distress. That wasn’t the intention. I’m thankful to you. Okay, goodbye!"

Rabia left the reins and stood aside. Badr heeled the horse and moved it into the stream. Looking at him, she repeatedly said, “Goodbye…goodbye!”

After leaving Rabia along the way, when Angela reached the top of the mountain, she saw Bashir bin Hassan a few feet away, in front of her, coming down. She sat down on a rock to catch her breath. When Bashir came close, she got up while cleaning the sweat on her face with a handkerchief. Suddenly when Bashir saw her, he froze in his tracks at a short distance. Then, after pondering a bit he gradually moved towards her.

Bashir said, “You have come alone today?”

Angela replied, “Rabia was with me, but she stayed down. I wanted to reach the peak of this mountain. I didn’t expect to find you here. It was a very difficult climb.”

“You have been very courageous”, Bashir said unenthusiastically. Angela could not help noticing it. So she hesitantly said, “I don’t have the courage to go any further. It’s also fortunate that I found you. If you don’t mind, will you accompany me to the peak?”

“Let’s go.”

“Thank you! I was afraid that I might lose the way on my way back.”

“This way is not that complicated”, Bashir said carelessly.

Bashir was pacing quite swiftly in front of her and a breathless Angela, despite her desire, could not speak a word to him.

By the time Angela reached the peak, she was badly gasping for breath. Her face was drenched with sweat. Bashir bin Hassan, being a physician of high morals, turned and had one look at this image of beauty and turned his face again and looked downwards at the lush green valley.

Wiping the sweat on her face with a handkerchief and trying to catch her breath, Angela said, “It seems that you didn’t even feel the climb. But my situation is far worse.”

Continuing to look downwards, Bashir said, “I’m used to climbing mountains. Maybe this is the first time you have tried it.”

Angela said, “The valley looks so captivating from here. It’s unfortunate that Rabia could not come with me.”

“She should not be exerting herself so much at the moment.”

Angela said while sitting on a rock, “With your permission, can I rest a bit. I’m really very tired.”

Bashir replied, “Be quick. Your sister must be waiting.”

Angela tried to change the topic of the conversation and said, “What a beautiful sight. Do you come here everyday?”

“Yes, but it’s only a coincidence that today I’m returning back from here. Otherwise, I usually go till the peak of that mountain.”

“Maybe this coincidence happened because nature wanted me to reach here under your guidance.”

“You could have reached here without me.”

“No, really, I’m saying the truth. I just didn’t have the strength. We’re leaving day after tomorrow. Had I not met you, the desire to climb the peak of this mountain would have remained in my heart.”

“It’s not that big a desire to cause you grief.”

“I will never forget this beautiful scene. I have heard that The Frontier Falcon’s forest has very captivating views too.”

“Yes, that area is very beautiful.”

“And maybe that is why you don’t like to go to the cities.”

“A person usually likes a place where he’s doing beneficial work.”

"I think you will be able to do more beneficial work in cities like Castile, Seville, and Cordova instead of mountains and forests. There the nobles, governors, and even the King would be your appreciators. I hope you won’t mind my saying but you’re wasting your talent here. Father says that if you go to Castile, the King would offer you a great position in the court.

“I’m sure your father would never advise me to go to Castile. I’m much happier treating an ordinary soldier of Badr bin Mughira than to sit in your King’s court. Sometimes these people get inflicted with different physical ailments that can be treated. But your King and nobles are always inflicted with spiritual and moral diseases.”

Angela smiled, looked towards Bashir and said, “Why don’t you just say that you hate Christians.”

Being a physician, it is my duty to serve every human being but being a Muslim my first duty is to support those people in Andalus who are fighting for the honor and liberty of the Muslims. You find humanity in those senates of Castile where the chains of slavery are being prepared for Muslims and I find humanity in these huts whose residents prefer death over slavery to aliens."

Feeling a bit sad, Angela said, “Are you sure you will be able to fight our Emperor for long?”

“You don’t compete only with the desire to win. In some situations, war becomes a duty for the weak. We are confident that till we are alive, no one can enslave us. Anyway, let’s go now. It’s getting late.”

Angela said, “I think if you are designated as Castile’s Royal Physician, then, you can please the King and prevent him from attacking the freedom of the Muslims.”

“Freedom has never been won with flattery and blandishment. It has always been bought with blood.” Angela said, “As his physician, you won’t be his blandisher but rather his benefactor.”

Sounding a bit bitter, Bashir said, “Now there is only one way we can become a benefactor to your arrogant King and that is by grabbing the draconian sword from his hand and when he’s at our mercy, we’ll forgive his faults, keeping up the traditions of our ancestors. For the everlasting life of our people, I’d rather give preference to fighting like an ordinary soldier than begging for a life that is merely temporary. You are a guest here. You started an argument unnecessarily. Hispania and Castile’s tussle won’t be settled by words but rather by swords.”

Bashir gradually started descending from the mountain. Angela got up and followed him. She repeatedly said to herself, “I wish I hadn’t started this argument.”

Both remained silent for a long time but when they came down the mountain completely and were passing through the trees, Angela hurried forward close to him and said, “I didn’t know that you would get so upset. God knows I’m not your enemy. No matter what you do, my prayers will always be with you. Please forgive me.”

Bashir turned and looked towards her. Tears were flowing down her eyes.

He felt touched and said, “Silly girl, you are crying?”

“Please forgive me,” she reiterated.

“But I don’t understand the reason for these tears. If they convey a message of friendship from the Christians to the victorious then I’m afraid they are in vain. And if they are because you think our struggle is useless then too this message of sympathy is too early. And if you think that Bashir bin Hassan is so precious that he won’t support his people in the path of life and death, then too, you’re mistaken.”

Succumbing to her emotions Angela said, “I am not interested in Christians and Muslims and their Kings. I only wish you well. I feel bad that my words have hurt you so much. I am foolish. Just don’t give any importance to what I said.”

“Angela! Angela!” It was Rabia’s voice.

On Angela’s silence, Bashir bin Hassan answered, “Your sister is over here.” Then he addressed Angela and said, “Come on Angela. Your sister is calling.”

Angela started walking in front of Bashir. After a while, Angela, Rabia, and Bashir were walking towards the fort.

After crossing the stream, they met Abu Dawood who addressed Angela and Rabia and said, “You took very long today.”

Rabia said, “Father, today we had decided to climb the mountain. I could not go much far. Angela went to the top of the mountain all by herself.”

# Realization of Rabia’s Dream

Badr bin Mughira and Bashir bin Hassan spent most part of Friday in Abu Dawood’s company. By talking to them, Abu Dawood was satisfied that they would be spending the night in this fort but what surprised him was the fact that most of the soldiers in the fort had suddenly disappeared.

In the afternoon, when he was having lunch with Badr and Bashir, he said, “The number of soldiers in the fort has reduced. I believe when you’re here, there should be proper security for you.”

Bashir replied casually, “We never felt the need of soldiers to protect us.”

“Your bravery is not mere talk but the fort needs protection as well and a good number of troops need to be deployed here. We should take precautionary measures even if we don’t expect an impending attack from Christians.”

Badr bin Mughira replied, “Don’t worry. You will find enough troops to deal with the danger, should the need arise. My stay in this fort is merely temporary. Tomorrow you will leave for Granada and I, God-willing, will be in my forest and mountains.”

“So, I believe that is why you asked your soldiers to move out a couple of days beforehand.”

“Yes, they were useless here.”

After this, various other topics came under discussion.

After Maghrib prayers, when these people were leaving the mosque, a horseman galloped into the fort and stopped at door of the mosque. Seeing Badr bin Mughira, he dismounted his horse and advanced swiftly towards him.

Without waiting for him, Badr bin Mughira asked, “Hope everything is okay? You looked worried.”

The soldier replied, “The King’s brother and a few officers of Granada’s army had come to see you and instead of waiting for you at your residence, they are headed straight this way.”

“How far are they from here?”

“They are about eight to ten miles away from here. They said that they would be having dinner with you.”

Badr bin Mughira turned his attention to Bashir bin Hassan and said, “Make preparations for their boarding and lodging. I will go to receive them.”

After a while, when Badr bin Mughira was galloping his horse out of the fort Abu Dawood quickly paced toward his room. He strolled about his room in deep thought. Then, opening the middle door and peeping into Maria’s room he said, “Maria, please come here.” When Maria got up from her chair and entered the room, he quickly shut the door.

Rabia and Angela started looking at each other. Rabia whispered, “Angela! Father has been upset since morning.”

Angela looked at Rabia with meaningful glances and replied, “His tension could be because of tomorrow’s arduous journey, but to me, you look more worried than him. When we started from Castile to Granada, you were very happy but now it seems that you like this deserted fort more than Granada.”

“I love Granada. I am worried that Father might change his mind about going to Granada tomorrow.”

“You know that Father won’t change his plan about going to Granada. The Frontier Falcon has ordered a new coach for us from Granada. The reason for your concern is something else. Rabia, you cannot hide what’s in your heart from me. Tell me honestly. Aren’t you sad that The Frontier Falcon’s habitat would be very far from Granada?”

Rabia’s face lit up with red and white waves of bashfulness. She could not give any reply to Angela. Angela said again,“Rabia, we both are in the same boat but when I take Bashir bin Hassan’s name you scold me and your condition is such that by the mere imagination of departure from this place your face dries up. Tell me honestly are you not fond of The Frontier Falcon?”

“Angela, now can I say that I hate him? But my world and his are totally different. Badr bin Mughira is the full moon of Andalus’ sky and I am merely one of those thousands of spectators who despite being in awe with its brightness cannot even bring the idea in our hearts of bringing it down from the sky for the adornment of our huts. Bashir bin Hassan is also a shining star of Andalus’ sky and if your interest was limited to seeing him, then I certainly would not have objected. But Angela! You want to tear this star of the sky and put it in your lap while closing your eyes to the massive gulf between you and him. I believe it is my duty to open your eyes to the reality.”

Angela’s beautiful face faded in gloom. Bringing a dejected smile on her lips she said, “Although I have misbehaved with you in the past, I feel that no one is more sincere to me than you. Don’t mind my saying, but you are a poet. I have not seen him in the sky but right here on the ground. I’m not ashamed to say that I am fond of him. Even if I wouldn’t be able to make him an adornment of my lap, even then I would not hesitate to extend my hand towards him. Rabia! When I saw him for the first time my heart bore witness that he is mine. When I heard his voice I felt that my ears are familiar to his voice. Until my eyes keep seeing him and my ears keep hearing him, my heart will continue to say that he is mine. Rabia, tell me honestly! Don’t you feel the same way for Badr bin Mughira…that he is a man and you a lady…?”

Rabia looked at her intently and said, “Don’t you feel that you are a Christian and he a Muslim and there is a war waging in Andalus between Christianity and Islam?”

Angela replied, “I don’t care about that. I will try to pull him towards me and if I won’t be able to bring him towards this side then going to his side would not be a problem for me.”

Rabia said, “Angela, assume that this very day, a formal declaration of war takes place between the kingdoms of Granada and Castile, then don’t you think all the doors would be closed between you and Bashir bin Hassan?”

“Maybe for a brief period all the doors between us might close but the certain outcome of the war would be that the Christians would capture all of Andalus and the remaining walls of hatred between us would also collapse.”

Rabia said, “Angela, do you think that a warrior like Bashir bin Hassan would live to romance with you after the defeat and destruction of his people?”

Grief spread over Angela’s face. After being silent for a while she said, “Rabia, what if circumstances compel him to go to Castile and he has to spend his remaining days there? Then too, do you think these walls of hatred would come between us?”

Rabia replied, “That depends on the circumstances that compel him to go to Castile. Being a captive, he would not like to lead a life of disgrace by being released on a plea made by a girl belonging to the enemy camp. However, in the capacity of being victorious, he might accept wearing the chains of your love. But how did you know that circumstances might compel him to go to Castile?”

Trying to overcome her worries, Angela said, “The right place for a flower is in the garden. Maybe he himself would not want to live for long in this isolated place.”

Rabia wanted to say something but the door of the next room opened and Abu Dawood and Maria entered their room. Abu Dawood had two burning torches in his hands. When he placed both the torches near the windows, Rabia innocently said, “Father! As it is there is enough light from the chandeliers. What’s the use of burning these torches?”

Abu Dawood replied with uneasiness, “Rabia, do you despise having extra brightness?”

“No Father. But they would be puff-off by the wind. If you permit me, I will close the windows?”

“No, it’s good to have the windows open for fresh air.” Then he turned towards Maria and said, “If they get extinguished, then, light them up immediately. I have more torches in my room. When these finish, replace them with new ones.” Saying this Abu Dawood left the room.

At the time of the Isha prayers, Badr bin Mughira, the King of Granada’s brother, Al-Zeghel and two renowned commanders of Granada’s army, Musa and Al-Zeghairi, entered the fort. Fifteen soldiers and junior officers of Granada also accompanied them.

Because the *Mu’addhin* was giving the *adhān* in the fort at the time they entered, these people entered the mosque as soon as they dismounted their horses. Bashir bin Hassan and Abu Dawood welcomed them at the door of the mosque. After enthusiastically greeting Bashir bin Hassan, Al-Zeghel looked towards Abu Dawood. Badr bin Mughira said, “This is Abu Dawood. I had talked about him to you along the way.”

While shaking Abu Dawood’s hand, Al-Zeghel said, “Badr has highlighted a number of positive qualities you possess but the biggest one is that this Frontier Falcon has great regard for you.”

Smiling, Abu Dawood said, “My biggest merit is that I am a guest to an immensely generous young man who has included praising his helpless guest within the realm of his hospitality. The accident because of which I got to be in the company of The Frontier Falcon has been the best incident that ever happened to me. And that great man from Granada, whom I would have considered my great fortune had I even seen him from a far distance, today, is in front of me. If you don’t consider it disrespectful, I would like to kiss this holy hand that has had the honor of holding the swords of Musa bin Naseer and Tariq bin Ziyad after centuries.”

Al-Zeghel was the kind of practical individual who felt very uncomfortable with flattery. But Abu Dawood’s style and tone of articulation touched him. He didn’t have the nerve to pull his hand back. Abu Dawood enthusiastically placed a kiss on his hand along with a couple of flaming tears that would flow out of Abu Dawood’s eyes at the spur of a needy moment.

Abu Dawood expressed similar emotions after being introduced to Musa and Al-Zeghari. These people entered the mosque. Abu Dawood performed the duty of leading the congregational prayers.

After prayers, when these people were having food in a room in the upper story, Abu Dawood, in an attempt to impress them, was making optimal use of his verbal and mental skills. Al-Zeghel, who had exceptional knowledge on a number of subjects was quite impressed by Abu Dawood’s depth of knowledge. And when he made a mention of his underground activities whose objective was to overthrow the high-handed government of Castile, Al-Zeghel said, “Thank God you have selected a place for your activities where you are needed the most. You would be able to do a lot for us in Granada. With whatever Badr bin Mughira has told me about you, I can conclude that you certainly know how to motivate the youth. I will give a certain youth under your wing that you would have to bring on the right path. And that would be no less than bringing back the lost kingdom of Andalus. I am talking about my nephew and the Crown Prince of Andalus, Abdullah. He’s the biggest hallucinator, a coward, flattery lover and is also a very hasty individual. He’s happier with destruction than construction. If you can mend his ways, it would be a great service to the nation.”

Trying to hide his gladness, Abu Dawood replied, “A mere wink from you is enough for the youths of Granada to mend their ways. However, whatever task is given to me, I will fulfill it to the best of my ability.”

Al-Zeghel said, “Abu Abdullah needs a whip not a wink and I believe you possess that whip. When are you going to Granada?”

“God-willing, we shall leave tomorrow.”

“So, I will reach right after you have. My brother won’t object a brilliant person like you being his son’s tutor. But don’t disclose this to Abu Abdullah that you have accepted this responsibility on my recommendation. He suspects everything I do.”

“Don’t worry about that.”

After this, Al-Zeghel, Musa, and Al-Zaghairi asked Abu Dawood a number of questions about the Castilian army’s preparedness and instead of giving them the correct answers, he replied with answers that would please them.

By midnight, when they were planning to get up, sounds of military drums were heard all around the fort and everyone started looking at each other anxiously. With glances demanding answers, Al-Zeghel looked at Badr bin Mughira and the glances of the rest of the people also focused on his face.

Badr bin Mughira’s face was free from any anxiety and worry. “Don’t worry,” he said. While getting up calmly, he said, “Let me find out right away.” Bashir also got up but Badr bin Mughira said, “Why don’t you stay with the guests? I will be right back.”

When Badr bin Mughira reached the door, one of his guards came running in. He said breathlessly, “The Christians have attacked.”

Hearing this, everyone drew their swords out but Badr bin Mughira turned his attention towards them and said, “The Christians have not made such a blunder in the past twenty years. Please sit and take it easy. During the night, no matter how big an army they have, they won’t be able to come near the fort. In my entire life, I have not been so well prepared for a surprise attack as I am for this one.”

Abu Dawood said, “But I have not seen more than twenty to twenty-five soldiers in the fort today.”

“The protection of this fort is done far away from its four walls. Fortunately, more than half of my troops are here. I will be right back.”

Musa said, “I will come with you.”

Badr bin Mughira replied, “I am afraid that you might become a target of an arrow of one of my soldiers. I too might not go out to lead the fight. I merely want to give a few instructions to the guards of the fort.”

A satisfied Al-Zeghel replied, “So, you were expecting this attack?”

Abu Dawood was stunned by this question and looked towards Badr. Badr replied, “Nature had given me a sign and thank God we didn’t take this as an illusion.”

Bashir bin Hassan insisted on coming along, but Badr stopped him. He said, “The only reason my soldiers can stand in the raining arrows is because you can treat the injured. Stay here and prepare first aid for the injured.”

Badr bin Mughira went out. He returned after an hour and said, “If you want, you can relax and go to bed. The Christians are trying to flee after receiving an unprecedented welcome but it would be a miracle if even ten of them escaped. I would not stop anyone of you from being part of this fabulous victory but it would not be appropriate to go out before dawn. In the light of the morning you could assist my comrades in gathering the prisoners and aiming arrows at the ones trying to flee.”

Saying this, he moved his attention to Abu Dawood and said, “Please go to your room and close the windows that open to the outside or else extinguish the lights and instruct your children not to stand near the windows. I have been informed by the guards that a strayed group of attackers has been spotted in the vicinity of the fort. Although the fort is not under any threat from these people, it’s very likely that one of them could take an aim towards a lit area.”

“I was not expecting the girls to make such a mistake.” Saying this, Abu Dawood ran out of the room.

Al-Zeghel laughed and said, “Seldom does a good scholar prove to be a good warrior.”

After covering a distance, Abu Dawood started to ponder and his speed slowed down. Badr bin Mughira’s statements showed that the destruction of his attackers was imperative. Therefore, it would not have made any difference if there was light or not. Another thought that came to his mind was if his servant, whom he had sent as his emissary to the Governor of the Border was with the attackers. Although the possibility of this was low, it was nonetheless bothersome. He thought to himself, “What if the general of the attackers is arrested and confesses the whole thing to Badr bin Mughira?” But at this stage he would console himself by saying that since he was Ferdinand’s special person, the Governor would have certainly complied with the orders of Ferdinand and wouldn’t have revealed the secret to any of the army officers.

With every step, he would have all kinds of fears and would fight-off each one of them till he reached near his room when a new thought created shivers in his body. He thought, “Is it possible that the Governor of the Border himself would have lead the army for the sake of fame and fortune? And on being arrested would say in the presence of Badr bin Mughira and Al-Zeghel that it is not him but Abu Dawood who is their main criminal who invited him to attack this fort.”

As he was thinking with extreme anguish about various avenues to defend himself, he heard a slight scream. He quickly opened the door and entered his room. Another scream was heard from the adjacent room and the sound of someone falling down was heard. Within this time he had entered the rear room. For a moment his blood froze. Angela and Maria lay unconscious on the floor.

An arrow was pierced in Angela’s chest. Rabia stood by her in a state of shock. Abu Dawood, shaken by the events, looked at Rabia who appeared petrified. She signaled towards the windows. Abu Dawood picked up and threw the torches to a side and closed the windows. Then, he moved his attention to Angela and Maria. “Maria! Angela!” he said while shaking each of them one after the other.

Angela opened her eyes groaning but Maria remained unconscious.

“Father! Call the physician. Angela is injured and mother has fainted because of a shock. Angela was passing by the window and someone fired an arrow. Please hurry up. Angela is bleeding.”

Abu Dawood got up and went out running.

After a while Abu Dawood entered the room with Badr bin Mughira and Bashir bin Hassan. Bashir took a cursory glance at Angela and Maria, then, carried each one of them to their beds, one after the other. In the meantime, a servant came carrying his bag of medicines. Bashir took out a bottle after opening the bag and after sprinkling a few drops over his handkerchief, gave it to Abu Dawood and said, “Please make your wife sniff this medicine. She will gain consciousness immediately.”

Then he moved his attention towards Angela. She was staring at him with wide eyes. After carefully examining her wound, he extended his hand towards the arrow. Angela screamed after grabbing his hand with both her hands and said, “No! No!”

Bashir bin Hassan said, “Look! The more we delay removing the arrow, the more painful it will get. Don’t be scared. Don’t hold my hand or else I will have to give you some medicine to make you unconscious.”

Bashir bin Hassan signaled to his servant and Badr bin Mughira. Angela yelled and said, “No. No. Don’t hold my hands and feet. I won’t do anything.”

Bashir said, “I initially thought that you were a brave girl. Just close your eyes for a few moments…Don’t worry.”

But Angela kept looking at him with glances filled with complacency, love, and idolization. This time when Bashir bin Hassan stretched his hand towards the arrow, she did not display any resistance. She constricted her lips and after a slight shiver, her hand subconsciously moved towards the wound but with merely a small jerk of Bashir’s hand, the arrow came out of the wound. Bashir bin Hassan took a sigh of relief and said, “The wound is not that deep. God-willing, you will be good in no time.”

During this time, Maria had gained consciousness. For a moment she opened her eyes and then closed them again. Then, she opened them again and got up from her bed screaming, “My daughter! My Angela!” and ran towards her bed. “Angela, are you alright? Will my daughter live? Tell me! For God’s sake, tell me!” Partly distraught, she was saying this while holding and shaking Bashir’s arm. Bashir said, “Look! Please let me dress the wound. This way you are only aggravating her pain.”

Leaving Bashir bin Hassan, she moved her attention towards Badr bin Mughira, “For God’s sake, save my daughter’s life.”

Abu Dawood stepped forward, grabbed her by the arm and while forcing her onto the bed said, “Maria don’t be crazy. Be patient. Angela will get well in no time. It’s a small wound.”

Maria yelled and said, “You are stone-hearted. Whether Angela lives or dies what do you care. Only Granada…”

Maria stopped after uttering “Granada.” For a moment Abu Dawood felt short of a judgment being passed against him that was delayed. He was now looking at his wife as if he was pleading for mercy. But her looks showed that she would no longer shed light on this dangerous topic. Therefore, Abu Dawood said loudly, “Yes! Yes! I am concerned about Granada. It is a duty of every Muslim to fight such barbarians who won’t even hesitate to fire arrows at girls. And my going to Granada has nothing to do with Angela being wounded. The least you should know is that during an external attack when a room is well-lit, the windows should not be open. You should have at least stopped Angela from standing by the window. And Rabia you are a sensible girl. You should have stopped Angela from doing so.”

Rabia said in a depressed voice, “Father! Angela was talking to me. She got off from my bed and was going toward hers when she got struck by an arrow coming through the window.”

Abu Dawood’s entire Machiavellian skills had amassed in his eyes. Maria would often be subdued by that typical frightening sparkle in Abu Dawood’s eyes. She was silent but this was not an ordinary incident. Her shocked eyes were saying that this matter has not come to an end. I’m only waiting for the ground to clear. With the amount of engrossment Bashir bin Hassan was treating Angela, Abu Dawood was looking at his wife with far more gravity.

In the midst of all of this, Badr bin Mughira looked at Rabia a few times. She still stood by Angela’s bed in a state of shock. What impressed here more than Angela being injured was that despite a surprise attack by the enemy, neither Badr’s nor Bashir’s face displayed any sign of worry or anxiety. She said in a low tone, “Looks like this fort has come within striking range of the enemy.”

Badr, too, was quite desperate to say something to her. Rabia’s voice attracted his attention and he said in a consoling tone, “Looks like an enemy soldier strayed here taking advantage of the darkness of the night and knowing his death was certain, fired an arrow this way. If he has not been killed yet, he would certainly be arrested. A few moments ago I was informed that a group of the enemy’s riders had been spotted near the fort. It’s possible that he is one of them. I’m extremely sorry about your sister getting wounded. Were it not for a bit of carelessness from my side, I would have had your windows closed. Then, maybe, this would not have happened. Please sit down. Don’t worry. Your sister will soon recover.”

Rabia moved back a few step backwards and sat on her bed. Badr turned his attention to Bashir and said, “Let me go and comfort the guests.”

Bashir said, “I’m almost done too. Now all that needs to be done is to give her the medicine.”

While leaving the room, Badr bin Mughira stopped near Rabia’s bed and whispered, “Today’s victory is the realization of a chaste lady’s dream. If you grant permission, I will reveal her name in front of the King’s brother.”

First, Rabia nervously looked from one end of the room to the other where her parents stood. Then, with pleading glances looked at Badr bin Mughira and said in a suffocated tone, “No, No. For God’s sake, No.” Then she started looking at her father who was oblivious to the world around him, staring at Maria like a snake gazing at its prey.

Badr said, “Then I would have to lie in front of Al-Zeghel. I would have to give him some other reason for such elaborate preparations for this unprecedented attack.”

Mustering courage within herself, she raised her eyes and uttered these words involuntarily, “My dream was only for you.”

With this little phrase, Rabia was able to describe that colorful fable which the daughters of Eve had been making the sons of Adam hear since the beginning of time. She had not anticipated the gravity of her words as she uttered them but her heart’s pleasant and beautiful beats had immediately informed her that she had taken a massive leap. Her eyes lowered and her face blushed with shyness.

Badr had left but she felt that he was still there staring at her and not only he but everything in the room was staring at her. She got up with a shrill and shiver in her body, came, and stood by Angela’s bed.

When Bashir bin Hassan poured out the medicine in a cup, she said, “Here…I will give it to her.”

As Bashir bin Hassan and his servant were leaving the room, Abu Dawood said, “Wait! I am also coming along with you.”

Bashir said, “Please take rest.”

“Not at all. It’s going to be morning soon and he said that he will attack early in the morning. Although my training is not that of a soldier, a person like me seldom gets a chance to fight under the leadership of The Frontier Falcon. If I can’t make proper use of a sword or lance, at least I would be able to assist you in counting the prisoners.”

Bashir said, “I think there is still time for them to leave. In the meantime, you can spend time with your children. I will call you when the time comes.”

“In the time being, I will sit in the company of Al-Zeghel. It’s not everyday you get a chance to sit in such company.”

Actually, Abu Dawood was keener in being away from his wife’s fiery glances than to sit in Al-Zeghel’s company. He was sure that she was waiting for the room to be free, after which a perpetual rain of arrows in Castile’s commonly understood language would have been initiated. Maria spread out a web with her glare but when he eventually got up to leave, she said, “You don’t even have the least concern for Angela. She is groaning with pain and you want to go out for a good time.”

Angela too was quite familiar with her mother’s nature. She had already seen the initial waves of a storm in her eyes. She said, “Father, you carry on. I’m perfectly alright.”

Abu Dawood took a sigh of relief and said, “Rabia dear, please lock both the rooms from the inside.”

Bashir bin Hassan said, “There is no need to lock the door. There are enough soldiers on guard in the veranda. I will instruct them just in case you need anything. But do close the windows and rest assured that the attackers will not reach near the fort. They have already been stopped far from here.”

When Abu Dawood left, Maria glared at Rabia like a hungry wolf. Angela quickly analyzed the moment’s delicate situation and groaned, “Rabia, please massage my head. It’s aching.”

When Rabia got up and sat by her, Maria also got up and came near Angela’s bed. She started to say, “My daughter! Where does it ache you?” Then, she got a hold of Rabia’s arm, jolted it and said, “You go from here.”

Angela said, “No, no, Mother! Rabia reads a supplication that relieves my headaches.”

Motherhood immediately laid its arms down. Maria pleaded, “Rabia, dear. Your supplication is effective. Please pray that her wound heals up. I will never forget your favor.”

Rabia would melt with such words. She said, “Mother, do you think praying for Angela is a favor? Isn’t Angela my sister?”

“Rabia, you are an angel. Okay, sit down next to your sister,” she said while moving aside.

Angela said, “Mother, take some rest.”

“I won’t be able to rest till you recover.”

“No, Mother. You go. I’m perfectly fine.”

Maria said, “I know you want to start some never ending tale with your sister.”

Rabia said, “Mother, you go and sleep. They were saying that this fort is completely secure.”

Maria got up and while sitting on her bed said, “I hope they’re compelled to go back or else we would have to travel with Angela in this condition.”

Rabia said, “They were saying maybe none of them would be able to go back alive.”

Maria depressingly said, “Who said that?”

“The Frontier Falcon said that while leaving the room so that you feel at ease.”

After a while when she dozed off, Angela whispered, “Rabia, are you certain that this fort won’t be captured?”

Rabia said, “I am sure.”

“Rabia, maybe we will be staying here for a few more days.”

“Until you’re not fit to travel, we’ll have to stay here.”

To check whether her mother was awake or asleep, Angela softly called out to her and receiving no reply, took Rabia’s hand and placed it in hers and said, “I just made up the excuse of a headache.”

Rabia said, “I know.”

“What do you know?”

“You wanted to save me from Mother’s wrath.”

“Thank God Father went out of the room or else Mother would have raised hell.”

Rabia said, “You must be in pain because of the wound.”

“No, there can be no pain where his hands have touched a wound. Tell me honestly, aren’t you glad that our trip would be postponed?”

She replied, “I’m really sorry about your injury.”

“Wasn’t it your life’s biggest wish that tomorrow’s trip be postponed?”

“That’s absurd. How could I wish for you to be injured?”

Angela thought for a while and said, “Rabia, when he used to come for your treatment I used to think that you’re grabbing away my right. Honestly speaking, I have no regret of being injured. Today he was very upset and I would not have wished for more than that he be upset for my sake. But the sad part is that his worry would fade as my wound starts to heal.”

“I believe his distress might change into interest.”

“But you used to say that his way and mine are totally different.”

“Next time I won’t say that.”

“Rabia, I was watching you when your falcon was whispering something to you and your glances were buried in the ground. Your face was blushing with shyness.”

“So, even in this condition, you were looking at me?”

“Yes! So, what was he saying?”

“Nothing. He was saying that the fort is secure.”

“No, he was saying something else. My ears are very sharp. Tell me, what he was saying.”

“Tell me.”

He was saying that, “Thank God that you will have to stay here a few more days.”

“You liar!” Angela said and burst into a laughter.

Al-Zeghel, Musa, and Al-Zeghairi were amazed at Badr bin Mughira’s preparedness after seeing the map of the battlefield in the light of the morning. Very few of the attackers were able to escape with their lives. Badr bin Mughira’s archers had encircled the attackers in the valleys and ditches. When the Christian attackers would muster courage and try to escape a volley of arrows from one valley and enter another, they would take a sigh of relief for a while only to find a greater number of arrows raining on them. At dawn, as Badr bin Mughira and his guests mounted their horses and galloped out of the fort, the sound of the fort’s drum was raised. Then, within moments several drums could be heard. Then, sounds of galloping horses could be heard from the forests in the vicinity and in no time some 3,000 horsemen gathered at the gate of the fort.

Al-Zeghel said, “Had I believed in magic, I would have said that you’re the greatest magician. Where did this army come from?”

“These riders were hiding in secure places during the night. They did not take part in last night’s battle. Their work begins today. My archers have besieged the flocks of attackers at various locations and these lancers will gather them in one location.”

By afternoon Badr bin Mughira’s men had already huddled the enemy’s remaining fighters into a valley.

Even Abu Dawood had demonstrated his fighting skills wearing an armor and aventail. What pleased him most was that the general of the attackers had been killed and the Governor of the Border had not taken part in the assault. But there was one thing that still bothered him and to overcome that distress he was running here and there and during this exercise, he had already condemned three men of the enemy to death.

When long queues of the prisoners were formed, he had a good look at each man carefully and then mounted his horse and became part of a group of lancers.

Passing through a valley’s dense forest, he suddenly saw some infantry soldiers bringing a group of prisoners. He separated himself from his group and galloped his horse towards them. After having a quick look at about fifteen to twenty prisoners, his glance focused on one of them and he slid back in the aventail of his helmet. This prisoner was his coachman. The soldiers stopped as he gestured with his hand to do so. He said to one of the youths who appeared to be their officer, “Did you arrest him while he was with the enemy’s army?”

“Yes!” he answered. “He was trying to hide himself by climbing on top of a tree.”

“He is so treacherous.” Saying this he got off his horse. He moved towards the coachman after leaving the reins of his horse with a soldier. He came close to the coachman and said loudly, “I never would have thought that my own servant would be so disloyal and treacherous. Tell me, didn’t you direct the enemy forces to this fort? You were wounded and they gave you shelter in their fort, they gave you treatment and this is how you repay their favors? Now how will you face them? You have also embarrassed me.”

The coachman, who was not able to see his face because of the aventail, was astounded when he recognized his voice. This was his master’s voice but the words were of someone else. At once, it occurred to him that there might be some wisdom behind this. He said fearfully, “Master, you know that I am innocent. I…”

He wanted to say something more, but suddenly Abu Dawood swung his sword with full force and excised his head from the body.

The young officer got hold of his arm and while jolting him said, “Who are you? It’s against our rules to execute prisoners. You have to answer for this in front of The Frontier Falcon.”

Abu Dawood replied comfortably, “Don’t worry. I will be able to answer for this.” Saying this, he removed his aventail and said, “Maybe you might recognize me.”

The young officer said, “I do recognize you. You are our leader’s guest. I also believe that you have not executed this prisoner without a logical reason but at the moment he was a prisoner of war.”

Abu Dawood said, “This person was my servant for the past twenty years. I had escaped from Castile in very difficult circumstances. They were pursuing us when The Frontier Falcon rescued us. He too was a guest along with us for a few days. After I gave him permission to leave for his home, he guided the Christian forces till here. The maximum he might have received after having me captured would have been a few dirhams. But, God forbid, had you not been prepared, then, even the life of the last hope of Muslims in Andalus would have been in danger. If he were a Christian, I certainly would not have killed him but he was a Muslim. There is not a law in the world that would show mercy for such an individual. Tell me, if anyone of you were in my place, what would you have done?”

The young officer was left speechless and said, “Forgive me. I didn’t know that he was a Muslim. No doubt this was the right punishment for such a person.”

Abu Dawood reached Badr bin Mughira before the soldiers and narrated the tale of his servant’s execution in a manner that only but impressed him. However, when Bashir bin Hassan got to know about the incident he appeared perplexed for a while. However, Abu Dawood opened the topic with him and cleared all his doubts.

Badr bin Mughira gathered all the prisoners in a narrow valley leaving a guard of his archers around them. Leaving a group of horsemen who were busy in gathering the horses of the prisoners and the injured, he instructed the rest of the horsemen to prepare for a counter strike.

After *Dhuhr* prayers, he said to Al-Zeghel, “I have some unfinished business to take care of. Please go ahead and take some rest in the fort. I will be at your service as soon as I’m done. Your personality is too great to lead such a small mission. So, I don’t want to bother you. Secondly, Granada has not formally declared war against Castile as yet. I want you to have the maximum time for preparation and for the enemy to believe that their war is directly with us.”

Al-Zeghel said, “Where do you want to attack?”

Badr replied, “I don’t have any particular place in mind. The enemy thought that we were asleep. But we have convinced them that we are awake. In this mission, there would be more traveling than fighting.”

Al-Zeghel took off his turban and robe and handing them to a soldier, he said, “I need the uniform of a soldier. We will all go with you. Today you are our general. The day when you will hold Granada’s flag is near but today I’ll hold the flag of The Frontier Falcon. Don’t worry Badr, I’m not only good at giving orders, I’m also good at taking orders.”

Musa and Al-Zaghairi, along with their comrades, followed Al-Zeghel’s example and changed into Badr’s soldiers’ uniform, ready to join the mission.

After a while, Badr bin Mughira rode out of the fort with 3,000 horsemen wearing his distinct white robe and turban.

By evening, citizens of Ferdinand’s border cities and villages were facing The Frontier Falcon’s wild assault instead of showering petals on their victorious soldiers.

The next morning, a while after sunrise, this army returned back to the valley of the falcons after ravaging a huge region of the border. Some horsemen had flocks of livestock in front of them while some had loaded war booty on their horses and the army now appeared to be like a huge caravan of merchants.

On reaching his residence, Badr bin Mughira announced that one-fifth of the war booty would be contributed to the treasury of Granada. Later, he organized a fresh group of 500 horsemen under the command of a youth to march towards the border fort. He ordered them to drive the prisoners across the border and sent a special envoy to Bashir bin Hassan with a message saying, “Those injured enemies incapable of walking should be given horses and escorted to the other side of the border. And those who are severely injured should be given treatment. I shall remain here for a few days.”

After this, when Badr bin Mughira was discussing future strategies with Al-Zeghel, Musa, and Al-Zaghairi, Al-Zeghel said, “Ferdinand won’t delay in declaring war. Had he captured the fort, war would have started. We shouldn’t give him more time to prepare. After hearing the news of your victory, the people of Granada’s morale would be boosted tremendously. I plan to give the news of this great victory of yours to the people of Granada myself. After that I want you to come to Granada. For years, the people of Granada have never given a reception to a victorious warrior who was one of them, and Granada’s poets, disappointed by the living, glorify those soldiers that sleep in graves. After seeing you, they will surely believe that nature had sent them a warrior capable of changing the direction of the flood of events. And after witnessing the enthusiasm of the people, my brother will immediately declare war. As it is, he’s all ready to engage with all he has. But he fears that the people won’t support him.”

Badr bin Mughira said, “After our previous meeting, I consider myself an ordinary soldier of Granada’s army. The sole purpose of a continuous war at this front was to engage Ferdinand’s attention towards us till the people of Granada wake up from their deep sleep. But now I don’t see that day is far when he will attack Granada with all his might. On the day of their wedding, the Queen of Aragon and the King of Castile swore not to rest until they had conquered Granada and to this day they are making preparations. The only way to save Granada is to crush their morale permanently.”

Al-Zeghel said, “The fact is that we have decided to capture Al-Sakhra and that is why I had come here to take you along with us for that mission.”

Badr said, “The soldiers of my army are at your service. I’m ready to come along with you right away.”

Al-Zeghel said, “No, your soldiers need to be at this front. Meanwhile, handover the command of your troops to a trustworthy person and come to Granada. Maybe Abul Hassan might be ready to jump into the war arena a day or two after your arrival itself.”

Musa said, “I think if he comes to Granada with a few of his contingents it would have a grand impact on the people and I also want to give the command of Granada’s storm brigades to him during the initial stages of the war. The morale of the people will take a tremendous boost because of his presence. In return, we’ll send some of our troops to defend this side of the border.”

Badr said, “Our mission is to be victorious against the enemy and I will go to every front where I’m needed. At the moment, I am confident that even if I take 2,000 troops from here, even then, this entrenchment won’t be weakened. However, I do agree with your proposal of not reducing the number of our troops here. If we were to remove a thousand experienced troops from here, then a similar number should be inducted and sent from Granada. This way this area will serve as a defense post and by continuing our skirmishes with them on the border we will be able to divide Ferdinand’s attention to more than one front.”

Al-Zaghairi enquired, “Are you convinced that after this fresh defeat he would not want to capture this area before Granada?”

Badr bin Mughira replied, “I am sure that past experiences have made him very far sighted. He’s now convinced that, God forbid, if he were to capture the rest of Andalus even then he would have to be at loggerheads with these cliffs for years to come. However, if he were to take such a decision, it would be a good omen for the people of Andalus. We will be able to engage his entire force for at least ten years and if the people of Granada are hell bent on committing suicide then by that time they would at least wake up.”

Al-Zaghairi asked, “If you don’t mind my asking, what is the strength of your troops?”

Badr bin Mughira replied, “It is double the amount of what you have witnessed so far.”

Musa said, “Let’s assume that circumstances change drastically and you’re compelled to stay more in Granada than here, then, do you have anyone from among your commanders who could take up your position and deal with the enemy like you did during that unprecedented attack? I mean, do you have anyone who can be your replacement without your troops feeling your absence?”

“There is no doubt that my soldiers revere me but with the Grace of God I have ten such people who can take my position.”

Al-Zeghel said, “In your opinion who is the best among them?”

“My deputy, Mansoor bin Ahmed.”

“Isn’t Mansoor bin Ahmed that young man who was with you riding a dark horse?”

“No, he’s not here at the moment. He’s gone to Cordova.”

“Cordova? Is he a citizen of Cordova?”

“No, he’s a citizen of Seville but he has gone there on a tour.”

“On a tour?”

“To induct new recruits.”

“And how did he reach here from Seville?”

“Just like the way the rest of the soldiers got here. Bashir bin Hassan had brought him here.”

The next day, Al-Zeghel and his comrades left after taking a commitment from Badr bin Mughira that he would come to Granada within a week’s time along with a thousand of his troops.

# The Nation and its Warrior

The Frontier Falcon entered Granada with a thousand troops. News of his recent victory had spread to every city of the Sultanate. Aspiring for a long time, the people of Granada finally got a chance to see him. After a long time, they took out a procession for a victor. Musa and a few senior officers of the Granada army, who received him a station before Granada on behalf of the King, also accompanied him. The King of Granada, Abul Hassan, his Crown Prince, Abu Abdullah Mohammed and the King’s brother Abdullah Al-Zeghel stood on the tower of the palace’s gate witnessing his grand procession. The enthusiasm of the people was a reminder of the past when the *mujāhidīn* of Andalus would return after glorious victories in the north.

People were showering flowers from rooftops. Badr bin Mughira was dressed in his usual white robe. But today he didn’t have his face covered. He was flanked by Musa on his right and Al-Zaghairi on his left. Another great warrior, Naeem Ridwan, held the reins of his horse and they all were led by a *mujāhid* holding The Frontier Falcon’s flag bearing a crescent.

Crushing the flowers beneath their feet, this procession stopped at the gate of the fort. Abul Hassan looked at Al-Zeghel, and trying to fight back tears of joy said, “I always believed that he was one of us.” Then he addressed Abu Abdullah, “Son, you should have gone out for his reception.”

“Me?” Abu Abdullah said in amazement.

“Yes, you! It was your duty to be the first one to kiss his hand.”

“But what about the honor of the royal household?”

Abul Hassan said, “The honor of the royal household has always been indebted to swords of such *mujāhidīn*.”

Al-Zeghel said, “You proceed to the court. I will go out to personally escort him there myself.”

Abul Hassan said, “No. Now since the question of the honor of the royal household has been raised by Abu Abdullah, it is important to have it addressed. I will personally go out to receive Badr bin Mughira. Order all the nobles who have gathered in the court to come out and send a garland of flowers for me and let Musa know that he should wait a little more with the procession at the gate.”

The people stood around Badr bin Mughira in front of the gate of the fort, raising thundering slogans. Musa moved forward on his horse clearing the way. However, before the procession could move forward, the Administrator of the Royal Court came running out, reached close to Musa and said, “It’s the royal order that the honorable guest should be stopped here for a while.”

After a while, Abul Hassan along with the nobles of the Sultanate appeared from the door and the people looked at him in amazement. Seeing Abul Hassan coming down the stairs, Musa and Al-Zaghairi quickly climbed down their horses. Naeem Ridwan, who was holding the reins of Badr bin Mughira’s horse, turned around and said, “His Royal Highness himself is coming.” Badr bin Mughira jumped off his horse.

In the meantime, Abul Hassan had approached close to him. Instead of shaking his hand, he hugged him and put the garland of flowers around his neck. He then took the flag from the flag bearer and after kissing it, said, “Musa! Give the good news to the people of Granada that from today, The Frontier Falcon’s flag shall flutter over our palace. Our flags have rotted. Badr bin Mughira has brought us a new flag. Our swords were rusted. Nature has given us someone who would give them a new shimmer. We are thankful that the honorable guest has obliged us with his presence.”

Musa climbed the stairs to address the crowd. The people gestured at each other to maintain silence. They considered Musa to be Granada’s spokesman. When he raised his hand, the people looked towards him dumbfounded. Musa began the speech:

“People of Granada! Today you have among you that great *mujāhid*, who has written his name in the history of Andalus with the tip of his sword, who has defeated Ferdinand’s tiny-hearted army several times with a handful of *mujāhidīn*. Badr bin Mughira, your Frontier Falcon, has come to you with a message and that message is that if a nation is willing to bathe in blood and is ready to jump into fire for its honor and liberty, then, no power on earth can defeat it.”

“Flags of our greatness have fallen in Cordova, Seville, and Toledo because we had chosen for ourselves the path that takes a people from their zenith to their disgraceful fall. Our ancestors who had garnished those cities with their blood have been washed away by our tears. O Muslims! If you do not learn your lesson from the plight of the people of Cordova, then remember that the historians of the future will search for your legends only in the scattered documents found in the ruins of the past.”

“The great sultanates of Cordova and Seville were not grabbed by some forces of the enemy. We have lost them with our own hands. The secret of progress and prosperity was on the highway shown to us by Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafā (Peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him). Taking that highway, we advanced from the desert of Arabia to the pastures of Hispania. Moving on this highway we crushed the crowns of Caesar and Kisra beneath our feet. This highway took us to the sizzling deserts of Africa and to the snow-covered peaks of the Alborz Mountains.”

“Our degeneration began once we had left this highway. Islam had given us a chance to open the gates of the rewards of destiny but we shut this door of mercy with our own hands. Islam commanded us to fight in the path of Allah but we fought amongst ourselves. Islam taught us to be united but we divided ourselves into groups and parties. Islam broke the idols of racism and laid the foundation of equality of brotherhood where the Arab and non-Arab were treated at par but we revived this idol in our sleeves. We left the Rope of God and bowed to the idols of nationalism and racism. In every corner of the world swords of Muslims of one race and nation clashed with swords of Muslims of another race and nation. Arab and non-Arab slit the throats of each other. Turks and Persians competed against each other and the rock of Islam reduced to a heap of sand. History is witness that our collective strength was a flood that would bring down any wall of resistance. But when the evil of racism arose amongst us, we faced the worst of defeats by the lowest of nations. Even then we did not take heed from these events.”

“Muslims of Granada! I ask you, after ruling for centuries, weren’t the other cities of Cordova, Seville, and Andalus grabbed from our hands after the evil of racism spread amongst us? Unfortunately, when the armies of the Christians were besieging these cities, the Muslims of Andalus – Arabs, Berbers, and Hispanians – were trying to slit each other’s throat. One by one the cities of Andalus were lost by us. Muslims were enslaved by those whom they had governed for centuries. Today, only a small sultanate, that of Granada, remains under our control. This is our last citadel and the enemy is planning to conquer it but we have still not taken heed. Even today the evil of racism is within us. Even now we are not ready to wipe out the differences of being Hispanian, Arabs, and non-Arabs.”

“Those Muslims living under the slavery of Christians, are tolerating the worst of tortures with the hope that the Muslims of Cordova will come to their rescue. You are their last support but, God forbid, if you are not able to defend even yourselves, then the history of the Muslims of Andalus would become a sorry legend for the generations to come and tourists would look at these ruined buildings and inquire, ‘Was it really the Muslims who built these splendid buildings?’”

“Ferdinand has demanded tribute from us and we have replied to him saying that only swords are made in our mint factory. And we have given him this reply with confidence that our swords can defend our freedom.”

After Musa’s speech the people started shouting, saying that they wanted to hear something from The Frontier Falcon. Abul Hassan looked at Badr bin Mughira and said, “Please do say a few words. Never has such a large crowd gathered in front of my palace.”

In a state of confusion, Badr bin Mughira looked here and there but Musa held him by his hand and made him stand on the stairs.

For Badr bin Mughira, addressing such a large audience was a big challenge. For a while he kept staring at the crowd in a state of confusion. Finally, he began his speech reluctantly:

“Vibrant people of Granada! After the great speech of Musa bin Abi Ghassan, I believe there is no need for another one and maybe you too don’t need any other ruckus to wake you up from your sleep after Israfeel has blown the horn. I strongly believe that if a people who are in a state of degeneration can produce a *mujāhid* like Musa, then, no power can wipe them out. Whomever you consider your leader, the important thing is to answer to his call with a deep conviction in your hearts. Do whatever he commands you to do. Remember! Even the best of physicians cannot help a patient who is bent on his fatality.”

“You are well aware of the situation around you. Dark clouds of problems have filled your horizon from all sides. In Cordova and Seville, the palaces of our authority have been razed. After ruling this country for eight hundred years, thousands of our people are being grinded in the mill of an enemy that neither has compassion nor justice for us in their hearts. Today, Granada remains our last citadel and if we were to repeat the mistakes committed by our brethren in Cordova, Seville, and Toledo, then, I fear that even this region will be taken away from us someday. When the Christian nobles were getting united against us, our nobles were squabbling with each other. One infidel was embracing another infidel but one Muslim was slitting the throat of another Muslim. Our enemy proved to us that all infidels are one but we could not prove that if all infidels are one then all of Islam is also one. The enthusiasm of victory united them but even the fear of annihilation could not unite us. The Moroccan Muslim became an enemy of the Hispanian Muslim and the Berber Muslim became thirsty for the blood of the Andalusian Muslim. The eventual result was that one after another, our cities fell out of our hands.”

“Once again the enemies of Islam are uniting. Their eyes are now on Granada. God forbid, if we’re not even able to defend Granada, then merely the name of Muslims will remain in Andalus. Abu Musa has already told you all these things. I just want to say one thing to you and that is that now instead of Alphonso, it is Ferdinand who wants to talk to us with swords and we have to prove that even today the Muslims know how to communicate in the language of the swords. People of Granada! A time comes in the lives of a nation when the language of the sword becomes more appropriate than that of the pen and for you, that time has arrived.”

After Badr bin Mughira’s speech, when the crowd was cheering, Abul Hassan said, “I am desperate to talk to you. Abu Musa will bring you to me after this procession is over.”

Ten days after the arrival of The Frontier Falcon, the citizens of Cordova came out of the city in the thousands and bid farewell to the army of Abul Hassan. After many years, the army of Cordova was not setting out to crush a rebellion of their Sultanate’s Emir, but was leaving to wage war on a front against an enemy. After many years, Muslim soldiers and nobles of Hispanian, Berber, and Arab descent had assembled under one flag.

Abul Hassan first inspected the army before ordering them to depart and then said to Badr bin Mughira, “Badr! You have joined hearts that were broken. By God! If the Arab, Berber and Hispanian Muslims stood like this shoulder-to-shoulder, then, there is no reason for us to be ashamed in front of our forefathers on the Day of Judgment. Once again we will reach up to France.”

Badr bin Mughira replied, “I’m sure till such time that your sword is out of the scabbard, there won’t be any discord among the people of Granada. They needed a platform to have a united front. Until our swords keep clashing with the Christians, the attention of the Muslims won’t be diverted to domestic conflicts.”

Al-Zeghel was adamant to support his brother in this mission but due to some circumstances he thought that it would be more appropriate to leave his brother in the capital with the security of the Sultanate and also to keep an eye on his son.

Abul Hassan did not include any foot soldiers in the contingent of this mission and charging with amazing speed reached the Valley of Lakka.

Musa bin Abi Ghassan was his deputy commander while the charge of the storming units of the vanguard troops was given to Badr bin Mughira.

After capturing a few border areas, Abul Hassan besieged Sakhra and when this news reached Cordova, a wave of jubilation spread among the people. The Christian ruler of Sakhra had the worst reputation among Ferdinand’s agents because of the barbaric treatment he rendered to Muslims living under him. For a long time, the people of Granada were hearing the tales of horror from Muslims who would flee Sakhra to take refuge in Granada. After receiving the great news, they went to mosques and prayed for Abul Hassan’s victory and long life.

Abul Hassan had anticipated that the siege of Sakhra would take a long time but after four days, during the night, a group of rebel Muslims attacked the guards and opened a gate of the city. Since this group had already informed Abul Hassan of their motives, the army captured the city after crushing a minor resistance.

The number of injured was quite low in this battle and on the orders of Abul Hassan they were transferred to a spacious room of the governor’s palace. During the afternoon, Abul Hassan, Musa, Badr, and a few other commanders visited the injured. The physicians taking care of the injured stood respectfully with heads bowed down but an individual who was engrossed in tying a bandage around the wounds of a soldier’s head and neck did not budge from his place even when Abul Hassan came close to him. Even his attire was more of a soldier’s than that of a physician or surgeon. His armor was shining.

Abul Hassan looked at the wounded for a second and called out to the Commander of the Medical Corps and said, “This man is in need of your attention.”

The Commander of the Medical Corps ran forwards and moving the armor-clad soldier aside said, “I had told you earlier that this is our duty.”

When the armor-clad soldier ignored even this, then, he said sternly, “If not for me then you should at least have some consideration for His Excellency the King. A soldier’s place is in the battlefield not here.”

The armor-clad soldier raised his neck for a few moments and replied, “Please don’t waste my time. The injured man’s condition is very critical.”

Badr bin Mughira jolted after hearing the voice of the armor-clad soldier but since only his eyes were visible because of the aventail he was wearing, therefore, Badr could not immediately recognize him. The Commander of the Medical Corps was bewildered and said, “If you’re so fond of dressing wounds then you can go out and do it on a dead body of the enemy.”

Closing the last knot in the dressing he said, “I’m not fond of dressing the wounds. I’m fond of treating the injured.”

By now Abul Hassan’s amazement had transformed to curiosity. However, the physician could not tolerate it anymore. While placing his hand on the injured man’s pulse he called out to another physician and said, “Take him outside. He seems to be a deranged man.”

The other physician came forward but on Abul Hassan’s signal he stopped short of implementing his superior’s order.

The Commander of the Medical Corps tried opening the dressing of the injured man but the armor-clad soldier stopped him and said, “His death is inevitable if you open his dressing. I would not have interfered in your work but please recall that you had left him thinking that he’s incurable.”

By this time Badr bin Mughira’s skepticism were far from removed. Besides his voice, he had also recognized his bag. He was also quite familiar with the hands that had treated his wounds on a number of occasions. His amazement changed to happiness. He said to the Commander of the Medical Corps, “Don’t worry. I know him. Bashir, how did you reach here?”

The armor-clad soldier slid the veil off his aventail, got up and stood respectfully in front of Abul Hassan.

Musa said in amazement, “Bashir bin Hassan! When did you arrive here?”

He replied, “I reached here today.”

Musa said to Abul Hassan, “This is Bashir bin Hassan. He takes care of our Falcon’s wings.”

Abul Hassan enthusiastically shook Bashir bin Hassan’s hands and said, “I have heard a lot of praises about you.”

Bashir bin Hassan kissed Abul Hassan’s hand and said, “Please forgive me if I had shown disrespect. The soldier’s condition was quite alarming.”

The Commander of the Medical Corps stood in a state of worry, guilt, and helplessness. Bashir bin Hassan said to him, “I am guilty of unnecessarily interfering but this person lay unconscious in the market and the soldiers left him thinking he was dead. I saw signs of life in him and brought him here. Since you were extremely busy you could not give him any attention.”

The Commander of the Medical Corps stretched out his hand for a handshake and said, “It’s an honor even to admit my inferiority in front of Bashir bin Hassan. In my view, when you got him here, his condition was hopeless. He was more in need of a miracle performer than a physician and in Andalus miracles are only associated with the name of Bashir bin Hassan. We have a few more injured who are in need of your attention.”

Another young surgeon came forward and said, “I had seen you in Cordova but because of the aventail I could not recognize you today.”

Bashir bin Hassan said, “I was afraid that without the aventail it would make it more difficult to know me. Apart from this, there are a few of our men among the injured. I was afraid they would have screamed my name and you would have left the wounded and gathered around me and I would not have given proper attention to that particular injured soldier.”

Abul Hassan said, “We apologize for not taking that into account. Please continue. Have a look at other injured soldiers and do meet me when you are done.”

Abul Hassan, Badr bin Mughira, and Musa went away while Bashir bin Hassan continued tending to the needs of the wounded. Like the other cities of Andalus, his fame had also reached Granada.

Entire staff of the medical corps would feel honored talking to him, shaking his hand and in carrying out his orders. Another reason that they were impressed with him was because he was The Frontier Falcon’s comrade.

The Commander of the Medical Corps still felt guilty about his behavior. Finally, he said to Bashir bin Hassan, “So far I have still not been able to find the right words for an apology. I’m afraid you might have formed a negative opinion about me.”

Bashir bin Hassan replied, “Don’t worry. Had I been in your position, maybe, I would have dealt more harshly with a stranger.”

After a while, the soldier whom Bashir bin Hassan had given treatment initially started to groan in a state of being subconscious. Bashir bin Hassan took out a medicine from his bag and while pouring it out in a cup, said to a physician, “He will be conscious in a while. Let him have this as soon as he opens his eyes. He’ll go back to sleep as soon as he drinks the medicine. In the evening, I will come and have a look at him myself. In the meantime, make sure that no one wakes him or tries to talk to him.”

In the afternoon when Badr bin Mughira got to speak to Bashir in private, he asked his friend of his unexpected arrival. Bashir bin Hassan replied, “It was my greatest wish to witness the departure of Abul Hassan’s army with my own eyes but I got this news only when the army had departed from Granada. But then I thought that I would definitely catchup with it during the battle. Abu Dawood was also quite persistent to take me along with him to Granada. On my request and Abu Dawood’s recommendation, Mansour bin Ahmed granted me permission. On reaching Granada I came to know that you had besieged Sakhra. I charged away and reached here this morning only to learn that the city has been captured.”

Badr bin Mughira said while smiling, “And since I was not injured, therefore, your medicines were used for the benefit of others. Tell me honestly, wasn’t all this running around not for me?”

“Your safety is the purpose of my life.”

“I don’t think an individual’s safety is that big a purpose that one should be proud of.”

Bashir bin Hassan looked at his friend in reverence and said, “Badr! For me you’re not an individual but a nation. And if I were to use a physician’s language, I would say that you’re a throbbing heart in Hispania’s unhealthy body.”

Badr said, “That’s a poet’s language.”

Bashir replied, “Thank God I’m not a poet. I had met a few poets at Al-Zeghel’s food-spread. Each one of them was competing with each other in praising you.”

“What were they saying about me?”

“Just that you can fly in the air, walk on water, the stormy waves of the ocean pacify on seeing you and the river…”

“The river what…?”

“I don’t recall but I believe they said that the rivers retreat back to the mountains.”

Badr said, “How silly of them.”

Bashir bin Hassan said while suppressing his laughter, “No, not all of them were silly. There was one who said something sensible too.”

“And what was that?”

“That The Frontier Falcon’s horse is whiter than Mount Sierra Nevada’s snow. When it walks it causes the land to shake. The shimmer of his sword blinds the eyes of the sun.”

Badr bin Mughira said, “Bashir, is it the victory or some other reason for your happiness.”

Bashir replied, “Badr! I’m really very happy. I strongly feel that the time has arrived for the dreams of several years to be realized.”

Badr enquired, “How is Angela?”

Bashir replied, “She is fine but you did not ask about Rabia.”

“What happened to her?”

“What? You don’t even know?” Bashir said in a grave tone.

“Bashir, have you brought some bad news about her.”

Bashir laughed.

Badr said, “You are a clown.”

Bashir said, “She sends you her ‘Salaam.’”

“Lie!”

“Okay my dear brother. Just think that she prays for your well-being.”

“I have no objection in believing that. Anyway, stop joking. How is Abu Dawood?”

He is very happy. On reaching Granada, Al-Zeghel has made him Prince Abu Abdullah’s special companion. He has been given a house in the Al-Hamra Palace. I think he’ll make the Prince become his fan in no time."

The direction of their conversation changed as Musa approached. He informed them that Abul Hassan would like to see them.

# New Endeavors

After the victory of Sakhra, Abul Hassan started preparing for a decisive war against the Christians on a massive scale. Those influential chiefs and leaders of tribes of the sultanate who, so far, had been involved in the internal squabbles between Arab Berbers and Hispanian Muslims, began uniting against the common enemy. For the Hispanian and the Berber chiefs, Abul Hassan had become a Muslim leader instead of being merely a leader. He had raised the crescent flag against the Christian flag. An influential segment of Islamic scholars had given this war the status of a *jihād*. After the victory of Sakhra, when Abul Hassan returned to Granada, for the first time he felt that he had become the leader of Granada in the true sense of the word. The people laid down flower wreaths in his path from the military headquarters till Al-Hamra. At night, he ran a glance from the top of the high minaret of the Al-Hamra palace. The entire city was lit and the people were joyfully raising slogans of victory in the streets and markets. Abul Hassan looked towards the sky, then raised his hands and supplicated:

“O Lord! Give strength to my weak hands. Grant me the determination of Tariq bin Ziyad and the morale of Musa bin Naseer. Grant my people, once more, the fire of those *mujāhidīn*, whose horses drank water from the rivers of France on one side and the rivers of China from the other. Transform our disunity into unity. You can change this pile of sand to a cliff. My Lord! Don’t disappoint these people who are so overjoyed by a small victory. I was not worthy of this task but if you have chosen me for it, then give me courage, determination, and perseverance. And if I’m not able to take back the sultanate of my ancestors, then give Abu Abdullah the ability to do so. Or else give me the ability to choose a befitting heir for the Sultanate of Granada.”

When Abul Hassan was standing supplicating on the minaret, his Crown Prince, Prince Abu Abdullah was sitting with his new tutor in one of the chambers of the palace. In a span of a few days, the student and teacher had come close to each other and Abu Abdullah’s uncle, Al-Zeghel, who was responsible in giving this position to Abu Dawood, was more than happy to see his unprincipled nephew dance at his talented teacher’s cues and disliked being separated from him even for a moment. Abu Dawood was cautious by nature. He was aware that Arab blood ran in his student’s veins. Therefore, he did not think it was appropriate in having to disclose his aims and objectives. Acting as an informal and casual friend, he kept probing and getting acquainted with Abu Abdullah’s views and in a few days he was able to figure out that he could use the Crown Prince of Granada as a tool when the time came.

Abu Abdullah was fascinated by Abu Dawood after their first solitary meeting. He read his palm and pointing to a few lines of his hand said, “O Prince! You were not born to rule over Granada.”

Seeing the disturbance on Abu Abdullah’s face, he smiled and said, "For you, these lines point towards Alexander’s destiny and Abdul Rahman the Great’s majesty. If my knowledge does not fail me, then, banners of your authority will flutter from Pyrenees to Gibraltar. The rulers of Morocco and France will be your vassals.

After looking at his own hands for a while Abu Abdullah said, “But my uncle calls me an idiot.”

“O Prince! There is a time set for a fruit to ripen and for a flower to blossom. You’re near and dear ones will keep saying this until your time to rise comes. But they want the best for you and not otherwise. Just wait for that moment.”

From that day onwards, Abu Abdullah thought of himself as Alexander and his teacher as Aristotle. Both waited for that moment according to their own designs. After a few meetings the teacher became aware of what moment the student was waiting for. But the student was oblivious of his teacher’s objectives and today when Abu Dawood left his house on receiving a message from Abu Abdullah, in a glance he judged that his student was engulfed in a new anxiety.

While getting up to show respect for his teacher, Abu Abdullah ordered a eunuch to shut the door. The teacher and student then sat on ebony chairs, cushioned in silk.

“O Prince! I was expecting you to be merrily taking part in raising slogans in the bazaars of Granada. What is that thought that is disturbing the Crown Prince of Granada at this time?”

Abu Abdullah said, “Is it also my teacher’s order that I should raise slogans at the victory of Musa, Al-Zaghairi, and Badr bin Mughira? Weren’t my stepbrothers, who were walking in front of their horses in the procession like servants today, enough? All this is happening because they know that I cannot do this kind of flattery and they want to prove to my father, once again, that I’m totally incompetent.”

Abu Dawood said, “I don’t know anything about your stepbrothers but I do know this much about Al-Zeghel, that he is not your ill-wisher and even if he was your ill-wisher, you should handle him tactfully. You are the Crown Prince of Granada and as the Crown Prince, it becomes your duty to be friends with even your worst enemies until you have worn the crown. A king can subdue his enemies with his sword but a crown prince cannot, and when there are other claimants to the throne, he should be extra cautious. If you aim to chop the heads of your opponents after you become the ruler, then today, it is imperative that you go against your wishes and place flower garlands around their necks so that their nerves don’t become firm against you.”

Abu Abdullah said, “You always have a favorable view of my uncle. I don’t think you know that he’s after the throne. He has even made my father a toy in his hands. He knows that I won’t become a puppet in his hands. That is why I’m sure it must be his wish to place one of my stepbrothers on the throne so that he can rule.”

“May the Sultan have a long life but my heart testifies to the fact that he would handover the crown and throne to a talented son like you in his lifetime.”

Abu Abdullah sighed and said, “In his entire life, I don’t know of any decision that he might have taken without consulting my uncle and my uncle’s advice would never be in my favor.”

After pondering for a while with his head bowed, Abu Dawood said, “O Prince! There was one thing I did not tell you after reading your palm. I was scared.”

Abu Abdullah said, “For God’s sake, do tell me.”

Abu Dawood looked around and said, “What I’m afraid of is that if this gets to a third pair of ears, then along with you, even I would be in trouble.”

Abu Abdullah said, “Don’t worry. There is no one here to listen to our conversation.”

“My knowledge testifies that you will be able to take the throne and crown of Granada in your father’s lifetime without his consent. Destiny will give you a chance. This decision will be very harsh but you will have to take it. It is not Abul Hassan’s destiny but yours to conquer Andalus.”

Overwhelmed by emotions of happiness, fear, and anxiety, Abu Abdullah said, “When will that time come?”

Abu Dawood replied, “Very soon. But remember my advice. Before that time arrives, it is your duty that your father and uncle should not have any suspicion about you. Why do you think they had left Al-Zeghel behind?”

Abu Abdullah replied, “I know why. Because they don’t trust me.”

“Then it is your duty to regain that lost trust. A lot needs to be sacrificed for the sake of the crown and throne. And also remember that if for some reason the Sultan or your uncle become suspicious of you then you will also lose my support forever.”

Abu Abdullah said, “I will follow your advice.”

“Then, my first advice to you is that you go to your father. If he has not slept yet, then congratulate him on the victory and also tell him that you deeply regret not having the privilege of taking part in this battle. Then, first thing tomorrow morning, go and meet all the senior officials of the army and, if possible, distribute prizes among them. The Sultan will be very happy at this and some of these people might be useful to you in the future.”

“I will go to father right away.”

The next day, Abul Hassan said to Al-Zeghel, “I would like to meet the teacher that you have appointed for Abu Abdullah. He seems to be an intelligent man. Today, I felt a lot of change in Abu Abdullah’s views. He was getting upset over the fact that I did not take him along with me to the campaign.”

Al-Zeghel replied, “Thank God we found such a person.”

After the third day of these events, Badr bin Mughira received the news that the Christians had restarted incursions along the border. So, he immediately ordered his troops to make preparations for departure.

Before leaving, when he met Abul Hassan, he said, “I first attacked Sakhra so that the people would awake from their deep sleep. Now the benefit of this victory is that in a few months, I will be able to prepare them for the decisive battle. In the meanwhile, stay engaged at your front. I won’t call you except in case of dire need. If you keep up the skirmishes at the border, then the advantage would be that it will give us more time to prepare and Ferdinand would also have his attention divided on two fronts.”

After meeting Abul Hassan, as Badr bin Mughira was leaving the Al-Hamra Palace, a slave girl handed him a slip of paper.

When Badr bin Mughira opened the piece of paper, these words were written on it: “Congratulations on your victory…Rabia”

For a few moments Badr bin Mughira felt delightful heartbeats and a familiar face emerged in front his eyes. Badr bin Mughira said to the slave girl, “Please thank her on my behalf and ask her to supplicate for me.”

In the evening, she learned from her father that The Frontier Falcon had returned to his habitat.

While Ferdinand was making preparations to avenge The Frontier Falcon’s victory, he received the news that Sakhra had been captured by Abul Hassan. He immediately ordered all his governors and chiefs to make preparations. His spies, disguised as Jewish merchants kept him posted of Abul Hassan’s objectives. He had a huge cross installed at the gate of his palace and pledged in front of Castile’s public that he wouldn’t rest until he had that cross installed on the gate of Al-Hamra. Every noble in the kingdom followed his example. Then people from every corner of the kingdom would come to Castile and would swear not to sheath their swords until Granada was conquered.

One day, one of Granada’s Jews came to Ferdinand and presented him a letter. After reading the letter, Ferdinand said to the emissary, “You have done us a great service and if you can take a reply back to Granada then you will be handsomely rewarded.”

The Jew replied, “I will do this service with the utmost pleasure.”

Ferdinand said, “If you feel there is danger in carrying a written reply then we can give you a verbal message tomorrow.”

The Jew said, “I don’t feel any danger in taking a written reply back. On my way from Granada I was searched at several check posts but despite that, they could not find this letter.”

Ferdinand said, “You seem to be a clever man but where had you hidden this letter during the checks?”

The Jew replied, “Abu Dawood had stitched this letter inside my shoe.”

“Very well then, meet us tomorrow.” Saying this, Ferdinand ordered a soldier to take the Jew to the Royal Guest House.

Once the emissary left, Ferdinand carefully read the letter again and after pondering, got up and went to the Queen’s chamber.

“O Queen! You have lost.” he said while sitting next to his wife.

“What do you mean?”

“You had made a bet about Abu Dawood, that he would betray us. Here, read this letter. All your doubts will be cleared.” The King presented the letter to the Queen.

The Queen read the letter and after thinking for a while said, “The content of this letter suggest that our doubts were baseless but we should not forget that the writer is Abu Dawood, who is quite capable of showing the truth as falsehood. He has asked us to unexpectedly attack Al-Hamma but I fear that this move too, could have some ulterior motives.”

Ferdinand replied, "I have learned a lot about Abul Hassan’s intentions and about his preparations from my spies too. I certainly agree with this suggestion of Abu Dawood that we should immediately capture any important city near Granada’s border to compensate the loss of Sakhra. This would dampen the joy and enthusiasm of the Muslims for a while and it would boost the morale of our troops. In my opinion, if the Governor of Cadiz makes a surprise attack on them, then, we should be able to capture Al-Hamma as easily as they have captured Sakhra.

“And what makes you so sure that they would be taken by surprise. Isn’t it possible that on reaching Granada, Abu Dawood might have seen his destiny with the Muslims and might have sent this letter with the knowledge of Abul Hassan?”

"My heart testifies that your doubts are baseless. But even if this is so, they will still wait for the reply to this letter to know what our objectives are while I can take the precaution of making them wait for a reply until the Governor of Cadiz captures Al-Hamma. Abu Dawood is not wrong in saying that Al-Hamma is the key to Granada and we will be able to win half the war by capturing it. I will send a message to the Governor of Cadiz this very day and will proceed to Loja. Their entire focus would be on me and Cadiz’s army would get a chance to capture Al-Hamma. I will also give marching orders to the armies of Cordova and Seville. If we were to take a defeat at a front, it certainly won’t be Al-Hamma’s.

Spies had informed Abul Hassan that Ferdinand had left Castile with a legion of his troops. Along with this, he also got to know about the troop movement of the armies of Cordova and Seville. He divided his army into three groups. He gave the command of one section under the leadership of Al-Zeghel, ordering him to block the forces advancing from Seville. For the second army, he could not find a more befitting man than Musa but on the advice of a few nobles he left Musa with Abu Abdullah in Granada and called for Badr bin Mughira to lead it.

Badr bin Mughira reached Granada with more than half of his troops and took charge of the force that was advancing towards the border of Cordova.

Abul Hassan was in charge of the remainder of the army. Before leaving, he called Abu Abdullah and said, “Son! With the absence of Al-Zeghel and I, a great responsibility rests with you. According to your age, you are old enough to take care of the Sultanate’s affairs. However, I’m leaving Musa behind for your assistance. In my eyes he is no less that Al-Zeghel. Don’t take any step without his advice. If something were to happen to me then remember that my soul won’t rest until you take back the lost Sultanate of Andalus.”

Abu Abdullah said, “It is my misfortune that even now, I do not have the privilege of being a soldier in your army. However, I will try my utmost to prove myself worthy to fulfill the responsibility that you have assigned to me but I feel that you would need an experienced general like Musa on every front. It is vital that he stayed with you. You may leave anybody else for my assistance.”

Abul Hassan replied, “You are right but another reason to leave Musa here is that he will be able to recruit new soldiers for reinforcement.”

After leaving Granada, Abul Hassan encamped near a border city, waiting for Ferdinand’s armies. With him were two brilliant generals of Granada’s army, Al-Zaghairi and Naeem Ridwan, to take Musa’s place.

Two weeks passed and Abul Hassan came to know that Ferdinand’s army had halted at a place across the border. Similar news was received from Al-Zeghel and Badr bin Mughira, that troops moving from Seville and Cordova have halted near the border.

But, in the third week he suddenly received the news that the ruler of Cadiz had immediately advanced his troops and captured Al-Hamma. With this news he realized the actual reason why the armies of Castile, Cordova, and Seville had halted across the border. With the news of the victory of Al-Hamma, Abul Hassan also started receiving reports that the ruler of Cadiz had massacred thousands of its citizens.

Al-Hamma was the most important fort for the defense of Granada. From there, the enemy forces could invade Granada anytime. The sounds of *My Al-Hamma* resonated far and wide in Granada. Everyone was of the opinion that the keys of Granada have gone into the hands of the enemy.

Abul Hassan realized that now Ferdinand would divert his attention from Al-Hamma and attack some other city. Therefore, he sent orders to Al-Zeghel and Badr bin Mughira to remain at their fronts and gave half of his troops to Al-Zaghairi to march towards Al-Hamma.

Al-Zaghairi besieged Al-Hamma and closed all the external supply routes for reinforcements and supplies. When Ferdinand received the news of the siege, he ordered his troops to march from all three directions.

The armies of Cordova were the first to clash with Badr bin Mughira. Instead of giving them a chance to cross the border, Badr bin Mughira crossed the border and attacked them. Compared to the troops of Cordova, the number of his troops were quite less but his battle tactics were far superior. Instead of openly displaying the strength of his troops, Badr bin Mughira was causing immense damage to Cordova’s army by conducting guerrilla attacks with his army’s thunder squads. Bands of his cavalry would suddenly appear and then disappear in front of the enemy’s cavalry, leaving the left, right and rear flanks in total disarray. This feat would be repeated several times a day.

By now, the soldiers of Cordova had come to know that the general of Granada’s army was The Frontier Falcon. They also knew whether they advanced or retreated, in both cases their destruction was inevitable. On the other side, skirmishes had begun between the armies of Al-Zeghel and Seville.

When Ferdinand came to know about the General of the Cordova’s army’s anguish, he invaded Loja. Anticipating his move, Abul Hassan reached within the vicinity of Loja but the spies informed him that Ferdinand’s army was far greater than his expectation. Since Abul Hassan was not expecting any major reinforcement from Granada, he called for Al-Zeghel. Al-Zeghel, too, inquired about the significance of Loja’s front but before coming to the aid of his brother he attacked Seville’s army intensely and after causing severe damage turned towards Loja. At the same time, he sent orders to Al-Zaghairi that if the armies of Seville were to move towards Al-Hamma, then, he should stop the siege and come to Loja.

From one side, Al-Zaghairi had damaged the boundary wall of Al-Hamma when the meek-hearted army of Seville approached. Now he faced a greater challenge than capturing the city and that was to seek a safe passage for his troops, who were surrounded by the armies of Seville, who were tightening the noose around them. Even in a hopeless situation Al-Zaghairi preferred to fight than to lay down his arms and so he reorganized his troops and charged them into a direction. Formations of lancers were at the forefront followed by foot infantry. The lancers broke the siege and cleared the way for the foot infantry and Al-Zaghairi’s troops fought their way out without any loss until they reached a bridge over a river. However, a unit of the enemy awaited their arrival on the other side of the bridge. Once again Al-Zaghairi’s army was under assault by the enemy with arrows raining upon them from all directions. All of a sudden the cry of “Allahu Akbar” was heard from the other side of the river and within moments some five hundred horsemen appeared from the clouds of dust and within no time wiped out the force that was blocking Al-Zaghairi’s path on the other side of the bridge.

When Al-Zaghairi’s infantry and cavalry reached a secure location on the other side of the bridge, he learned that his rescuers had come from Granada. When he requested to meet the General of the troops, a masked horseman came forward with his horse and said in a commanding voice, “This is no time to talk. Proceed to Loja immediately.”

Amazed after recognizing the voice of the masked man, Al-Zaghairi said, “Only Musa bin Abi Ghassan can talk to me like that and no one else.”

The masked man said, “But no one should know that I came here. The Sultan would be very upset. Don’t mention anything about me to him. Leaving Granada has its own dangers but Abu Abdullah thinks that I’m at the military headquarters.”

Saying this Musa signaled his comrades, prompted his horse and took off. The soldiers saw them disappear in the clouds of dust just as they had appeared.

When Badr bin Mughira received the news that the rest of Granada’s army was gathering to fight a decisive battle at Loja, he decided to give a final blow to the army of Cordova and sent a message to his deputy, Mansour bin Ahmed to position himself along with two thousand horsemen behind the army of Cordova.

Mansour bin Ahmed ravaged the cities and villages along his path and reached the rear of the army of Cordova with incredible speed. As soon as Badr bin Mughira received his news, he moved his infantry soldiers back a few miles and ordered his cavalry to attack the enemy’s left and right flanks. On seeing the infantry retreating, the General of the Cordova’s army came to the conclusion that like Al-Zaghairi, The Frontier Falcon too was removing his troops from this front to take part in the battle at Loja. He had already received orders from Ferdinand to keep the enemy engaged at this front until the outcome of Loja’s front. So far, he was unaware of Mansour bin Ahmed’s arrival. He ordered his rear cavalry to pursue the retreating foot infantry but within this period the infantry archers had positioned themselves behind a trench.

The lancers of Cordova were greeted with a volley of arrows as they approached the trenches and the only option the General saw was to retreat but by this time, Mansour bin Ahmed had already attacked from the rear and troops in the rear flank were pushing the troops in the center, as they took a beating.

With Badr bin Mughira’s troops on the right and left and Mansour bin Ahmed’s horsemen in the rear, the army of Cordova had been taken into a tight noose. In front of them was that trench across which the archers were positioned. The analogy of the army of Cordova was no different than that of a ship in the sea, whose stormy waves were shoving it towards the rocks.

Amid the confusion, a number of Cordova’s soldiers were trampled under the feet of their horrified horses. Several horsemen fell into the trenches with their horses. The officers were unaware of their soldiers and the soldiers were unaware of their officers. The Cordovan army that could have fought bravely for the hope of victory, became hopeless and lost its morale. Only a few found a safe passage to escape. By noon, the field was filled with the corpses of Cordova’s soldiers and the remaining few troops had thrown away their weapons.

At Loja’s front, Abul Hassan deployed thirty thousand of his troops in the face of Ferdinand’s army of fifty thousand. For two days, Ferdinand’s knights and Granada’s fighters were displaying individual feats of valor. The battle began when one of Ferdinand’s knights, who was covered in metal from head to toe, galloped forward and stood in the battlefield. He raised his sword. Naeem bin Ridwan, who wore an aventail on his head and a light coat of mail on his body, galloped forward.

The swords of both the horse riders clashed. Because of his heavy armor, the Castilian knight could not display his agility as Naeem bin Ridwan, however, his thick armor was causing damage to Naeem’s sword repeatedly. After blocking a few of his strokes on his shield, Naeem gave a profound blow with his sword on the knight’s shoulder. Not much injury was inflicted because of the armor but his body bent to one side. Without giving him a chance to balance himself, Naeem struck a few more blows consecutively, one after the other. His horse jumped and due to the weight of the weapons he could not maintain his balance. After falling off his horse, he tried to get up but Naeem quickly jumped off his horse, removed the knight’s helmet and chopped his head off. Abul Hassan’s army raised slogans of “Allahu Akbar.” When Ferdinand’s second fighter came onto the field, Al-Zaghairi got hold of a lance and trotted his horse forward. Besides a coat of mail, the knight also wore an iron shield over his chest. Both rivals moved towards each other holding their lances. While saving himself, Al-Zaghairi struck the knight’s chest with his lance. The lance broke as it hit the iron shield. But because of the powerful blow, the Christian knight fell to the ground and Al-Zaghairi pounced on him from his horse and finished him off.

Witnessing the fatalities of two of his heroes, Ferdinand gave the order for an all-out attack. An intense battle raged till the evening. By nightfall, both parties retreated to their encampments.

The next day too, the battle ensued in the same manner. Fighters from both sides entered the field and competed with each other, displaying their skills and then, the battle began. Until the evening there was no final outcome. Both sides had more dead and wounded than the previous day. The third day was crucial for both armies. But Abul Hassan’s concern was greater than his enemy’s. Musa had already sent a reinforcement of two thousand troops from Granada but in the past two days, five thousand of his troops had either been wounded or killed. According to an estimate by Abul Hassan’s officers, the number of soldiers killed and injured was no less than twenty thousand. But within the past two days they had already received fifteen thousand fresh troops from different cities of Andalus.

Abul Hassan had already known that Badr bin Mughira along with his small army of two thousand was blocking a huge flood of Cordova’s battalion. But despite being aware of this, Abul Hassan’s moral did not slump. Every soldier was there fighting without caring for victory or defeat. They knew very well that if they showed their backs and ran from the battlefield, the enemy would be able to reach the walls of Granada within the span of a few days.

On the third day, when the two armies came face to face with each other, a knight of the Castilian army, whose entire body was clad in metal armor, came on the field and invited the other side for a duel. His aventail resembled a bull’s face. The weapons he was carrying were so heavy that his horse’s back was slumping. A Berber youth came forward to take up the challenge but fell off his horse after being struck by the lance. Then, a Hispanian Muslim came forward but his sword and lance proved useless against the knight concealed in metal. Shortly, this knight had also killed his second opponent and Ferdinand’s soldiers were raising slogans in jubilation. The iron-clad knight raised his sword and made a small round. Then, standing, facing the Granada army, he waited for his next opponent.

Naeem bin Ridwan moved forward to seek permission from Abul Hassan but was interrupted by a horseman who appeared from one side. His sweating horse showed that he was coming from a far distance. Even his attire was different from that of Granada’s soldiers. He wore a white robe over his body instead of an armor and wore a turban on his head instead of an aventail. Except for the eyes, his face was covered with a red veil. Moving forward from the ranks of Granada’s army, he halted his horse for a moment and sheathed his shining sword. The onlookers thought that he would attack using a lance but he pierced it in the ground too. Spectators on both sides were perplexed by his moves.

Suddenly, the masked man kicked forward his horse. The Christian, iron-clad knight charged forward brandishing his lance towards him but he dodged him and moved forward. After making a small round with his agile horse, the masked man returned towards his opponent. Moments before the people who saw him empty handed now saw him with a rope. Before the iron-clad knight could turn around to face him, he dashed forward with lightning speed and placed a noose around his neck.

This knight of Hispania, who was second to none in strength and bravery, who was loaded onto the horse with great difficulty by four men because of the heavy weapons, fell off his horse like a boulder. The other end of the rope was attached to the saddle of the masked man’s horse. Granada’s army laughed at the helplessness of Castile’s iron man. The masked man quickly dragged him and after placing him at Abul Hassan’s feet, took off his mask and said, “I bring you the glad tidings of victory at the Cordova front.”

Abul Hassan cried out joyfully, “Badr! I’m sure the message that you have brought is definitely good but compared to the victory my joy is more because of your arrival. I was waiting for some unprecedented support. How many of the troops could make it here?”

“Only five hundred soldiers were lost but they were immediately replenished by two thousand. Mansoor has also arrived.”

But suddenly Abul Hassan’s face showed signs of concern. He said, “But why didn’t you bring the army? Today is the decisive day.”

Badr replied, “Don’t worry. They will arrive shortly.”

While raising the cry of “Allahu Akbar,” Al-Zeghel said, “O Muslims! Today is a blessed day for you. The army of Cordova has fled the battlefield and your Frontier Falcon has come to help you.”

The soldiers raised slogans in jubilation as soon as they heard the news. Badr said to Al-Zeghel, “Forgive me but you have not conveyed the news completely. We did not give the army of Cordova an opportunity to flee. Almost all of it is lying in the field. Only five or six hundred soldiers might have escaped.”

Naeem raised the slogan of “Allahu Akbar,” fixed the reins of his horse and said, “Owing to the happiness of the victory, I pledge to put fifteen of Castile’s horsemen to death but I would like to use your lance for good luck.” Saying this he handed over his lance to him and moved forward and grabbed Badr bin Mughira’s lance that was still pierced into the ground.

Four of Ferdinand’s knights, who came one after the other for a duel faced death at the hands of Naeem. After the fatality of the last knight, Ferdinand gave the order of an all-out attack.

By noon, when the battle was at its thickest, Mansour bin Ahmed arrived with Badr’s army. By afternoon, Ferdinand’s army started to show signs of defeat.

Naeem had already condemned fourteen men to death and before he could fulfill his pledge of killing fifteen men, someone’s lance pierced into his chest. He was going to fall but Badr bin Mughira placed a hand on his back and made him sit in front of him. Badr bin Mughira wanted to take him out of the battlefield to the camp for the wounded but Naeem said, “Badr, I know my time has come but I have not fulfilled my pledge. I have killed fourteen of the enemy’s soldiers. Now only one remains. Press my wound and stop the bleeding from it. Give me your lance and take me close to the enemy. Let me fulfill my oath. Then, you can take me anywhere you want. Badr! This is a request.”

Badr was more than moved. He handed over his lance to him and placed his hand over the bleeding wound. Then, he turned the direction of his horse towards the enemy but when they had approached close to one of the enemy’s cavalry, Badr realized that Naeem’s grip on the lance was loosening. To straighten the lance, Badr took Naeem’s hand in his and said, “Beware! This is your fifteenth target.”

Naeem, who was almost subconscious said, “Badr! Hold me close to you. If only I could fulfill my pledge.”

“You have already fulfilled your pledge.” Saying this Badr bin Mughira landed his lance into the chest of a horseman who had approached for a duel. The Christian horseman fell off his horse but at the same time Naeem’s head lowered in a state of becoming unconscious. Badr dashed his horse towards the tents of the wounded. A few young men took Naeem bin Ridwan inside after taking him off the horse.

Badr bin Mughira jumped off his horse and entered the tent. Bashir bin Hassan was busy dressing the injured but he immediately turned his attention towards Naeem.

Badr said, “Bashir, try to save him.”

After examining his pulse, Bashir bin Hassan quickly opened his armor and after reexamining his pulse, looked towards Badr and shook his head.

Badr said in a chocked voice, “Can’t you do something?”

Bashir replied, “After such a wound, his being alive even for a few moments is no less that a miracle. Looks as if some determination to complete a task is preventing the hand of death. He is gaining consciousness.”

“If he becomes conscious tell him that he has fulfilled his pledge.” Saying this Badr bin Mughira dashed out of the tent, jumped, and mounted his horse.

Moments later, on seeing traces of defeat in Ferdinand’s army, Badr bin Mughira gathered the best trained horsemen and ordered them to get ready for a pursuit.

A little before evening, Ferdinand’s army that had piles of dead bodies lying in the field started fleeing. When soldiers were raising slogans of victory around Abul Hassan, he dismounted his horse and prostrated. When he rose his eyes were filled with tears of gratitude. Abul Hassan looked here and there and then said, “Where is our Frontier Falcon?”

Al-Zeghel replied, “He has taken off with his warriors.”

“Where?”

“To give chase to the fleeing army.”

“We had asked not to. The soldiers are very exhausted.”

“But he asked me to convey his apologies to you. He does not believe in half-baked victories. However, while showing respect he did not take any soldier of Granada along with him.”

Abul Hassan said, “You have misunderstood us. By God, had he taken my entire army I would not have worried that much. I feel that the loss of even one of his men can’t be compensated.”

Al-Zeghel said, “Don’t worry. He knows his job well. He attacks his opponents like a lion and pounces on those who retreat like a falcon.”

Abul Hassan said, “We want to hear all the details of the victory at Cordova’s front. Abbas, you were with him? Do you think he exaggerated just to raise the morale of the army?”

Abbas was one of the commanders in the army of Granada. He said, “These events were such that they could only be believed by the eyes that had witnessed them but the ears might find them incredible to believe.” Then, Abbas narrated all the details of the battle. When he mentioned the feats of Mansour bin Ahmed, Abul Hassan said, “Had I known that Badr bin Mughira’s quiver possessed such arrows, then, instead of now, I would have declared war a few years earlier.”

After resting for a night, the exhausted soldiers woke up at the sound of the Mu’athin’s Aathān at dawn. Abul Hassan had taken a good sleep after a long time. When he came out of his tent for prayers, his first question to the guards was, “Has Badr bin Mughira arrived yet?”

The guards responded in the negative.

On Abul Hassan’s motion, supplications were offered after prayers for the safety of Badr bin Mughira and his comrades. By afternoon, Abul Hassan’s concern had transformed to perplexity. He dispatched a group of horsemen to know the whereabouts of Badr bin Mughira and his comrades while he along with his generals stood on a cliff looking out for him.

Suddenly an officer, pointing in a direction said, “Look over there!”

Abul Hassan’s heart started throbbing with joy. Rising clouds of dust could be seen on the horizon.

Abul Hassan ordered a few horsemen to head in that direction.

They returned after a while giving the news of The Frontier Falcon’s return.

Al-Zeghel said, “Listen to another good news from me.”

Abul Hassan said, “And what is that?”

Al-Zeghel replied, “The Frontier Falcon is bringing a huge supply of booty along with him.”

On Abul Hassan’s inquiry, the horsemen confirmed the fact that Badr bin Mughira is herding along a large stock of cattle. Besides goats and sheep there were several horses and mules loaded with grain.

# Father and Son

In the battle of Loja where *mujāhids* like Naeem bin Ridwan were writing the fate of the Muslims of Andalus with the ink of their blood, another fate was being written in the Royal Court of Granada.

On hearing the news of the Christians’ capture of Al-Hamma, Abu Dawood immediately went to his student and on seeing him in grief said, “O Prince, didn’t I tell you that destiny has chosen you and not Abul Hassan for the redevelopment of the Sultanate of Granada. The star of the fate of Muslims of Andalus will only shine when the Crown of Granada is placed over your head. O Prince! Your time is coming.”

“God knows when my time will come. Al-Hamma has slipped out of our hands. Now, they can invade Granada anytime.”

“But haven’t you thought that after the fall of Al-Hamma, the people, as well as some chiefs have started to feel that at this crucial period it’s important to make changes to the Emirate of Granada. I have already met a few Berber and Hispanian chiefs. They haven’t specified a very high price for themselves.”

“But who would dare to do anything while Musa is around?”

“When the time comes, we will deal with him too. If those chiefs who Abul Hassan had arrested for treason are set free, then they would prove to be a great support for you.”

“But this won’t be possible during Musa’s presence.”

“I think he is your friend.”

“But in this matter he will prove to be my worst enemy.”

“We’ll see when the time comes.”

“When will the time come?”

“After Abul Hassan’s defeat, the people of Granada will turn their attention towards you.”

“But what if he’s victorious?”

“I don’t think that will happen. Victories are only your destiny but even if he gets a victory here or there, it would prove to be a foretelling of a huge disaster. He will try to put your stepbrother on the throne. The reason he took him along for the battle is because he wants him to be popular among the masses.”

“If that happens then I won’t be in a position to fight with my father.”

“Rest assured. The need to fight won’t even arise.”

After a few days, later when Abu Abdullah heard the news of the destruction of Cordova’s troops, he said to his teacher, “The emissary has brought the news that the Frontier Falcon has left for Loja as soon as he had completed his task at Cordova’s front.”

Abu Dawood said, “O Prince! Now that moment has arrived which I had feared the most. It’s possible that Abul Hassan could become victorious at Loja’s front. This victory could prove to be dangerous for your future. When the Sultan enters the city, the masses would support every decision of his, whether it is right or wrong. In their eyes the status of your stepbrother would be much higher than yours. Even a regular soldier who took part in the expedition would be more honorable than you.”

A hopeless Abu Abdullah said, “I don’t see any way out. When I listen to your talk, I get disturbed. My mind asks me to jump into a sea whose depths throbs my heart with fear but when I am with my mother her words take me into a very different world. Even today she assured me that my father has repeatedly sworn to fulfill the pledge of making me his successor.”

Abu Dawood said, “Maybe now the time has come that I should not let you have any misunderstanding. Please listen to me carefully. Let me assume for a while that your father’s intentions regarding you are not negative. But, at the moment you are forty years of age. Assuming your father lives another twenty years, then, that would make you around sixty years old and this is that stage of life when aspirations fall cold. This is when a person is afraid of looking at himself in the mirror, when the greatest need for the person is a bed whether it be in a palace or a hut. No doubt, mentally, you would be extremely mature but that hot blood that compels man to conquer the world would become frozen…and who could say maybe in light of the events of the coming twenty years, the Sultan might decide something else for you. Prince! The door of honor, fame and glory is not such that you have a desire for it and it opens up. You have to knock on it and at times break it. There comes a critical moment in the lives of great men. Those who waste time in thinking are left behind. Their footprints get lost in the sands of time while those who are courageous enough, reach their goal. Although you have not told me what your heart desires, I know that you’re longing to sit on the throne of Granada. So far if you did not have the courage to fulfill your life’s ultimate dream, it is not because you respect your father…no…don’t mind my saying but there is a fear in your heart. The fear of what the world would say about you, what fatwa would public give regarding you. But remember, this world calls a successful dacoit a conqueror and labels an unsuccessful reformer a rebel. If Abu Abdullah takes over Granada’s throne and hoists the flag of his greatness all over Andalus, then the world will say that he is a fortunate son of an unfortunate father and that he had the right to seize the crown and throne from him. But if Abu Abdullah passes away while waiting to be crowned at the age of sixty or seventy, then, maybe the scrolls of history won’t even have a mention of his name. I did not entwine my fate with yours thinking that you’re any ordinary man, but if you want to waste your life in hesitation then from today our paths are separate.”

Abu Abdullah said, “For God’s sake don’t say that.”

“Then, today you have to decide. This opportunity might not come again.”

“I am ready but am I prepared enough to revolt against my father?”

"You were prepared even at the age of twenty but you have wasted away several years of your life. The police is in our hands. You have already bought the loyalties of the Palace Warden. Most of the Berber and Hispanic nobles are awaiting your orders. The treasury is in your hands.

“And Musa?”

“Imprisoning him is not difficult.”

“What about the people of the city?”

“Discord can be created among them. The flame of disunity between the Arabs, Hispanian and Berbers has simmered down but has not extinguished. I don’t expect any support from the Arabs. Only a handful among them can be bought but if you suspend the Arab officials and appoint Hispanians and Berbers in their place, then, there would be two benefits in this move. First, they will support you and second is that a tussle will begin between the Berbers and Hispanian Muslims and the Arabs Muslims. They will support you just as they support their chiefs. To please them even more, you can release their prisoners. You have merely two days to arrive to a decision. After this, you might never lay hands on such an opportunity. I have conceived on how to have Musa arrested.”

At night, a spacious chamber of the Al-Hamra Palace was lit by lanterns of silver and gold. Granada’s Berber and Hispanian Muslim nobles were seated on chairs talking with Abu Abdullah. Silence spread for a moment over the gathering as Musa entered.

Musa ran a cursory glance at the attendees and came close to Abu Abdullah and whispered, “I would like to say something to you in private.”

Seeing his attitude Abu Abdullah became nervous, but after a second he gathered himself and said, “You can say whatever you have right here. By the grace of God all of them are Muslims.”

Musa said, “Some things cannot be said in front of everyone.”

“But at the moment we are not ready to call off this assembly. If it is some important matter, then say it right here.”

Musa had already scrutinized the assembly. Most of those gathered were those who had been granted entry into the Al-Hamra Palace for the first time. To this date no noble of the Sultanate had dared to remain seated on seeing Musa. Hearing Abu Abdullah’s words, Musa thought that his ears were failing him. His face blushed with anger and restraining himself said, “Prince, I have heard that you have released the rebels.”

“What you have heard is correct.”

“And that you have suspended a few loyal officials of the Sultanate?”

“I had reservations about their loyalties.”

“And you have placed the worst traitors of Granada on very important posts.”

Abu Abdullah thundered back and said, “Musa, misbehaving with us is not one of your duties.”

“At times the feeling of duty makes a person bold and outspoken.”

“We do not appreciate such boldness and outspokenness. Why did you dare to enter the palace from its back door?”

“When the doors of Al-Hamra are opened to such devils then I am left with no choice but to have access to you from the back door.”

On hearing this, the nobles started whispering to each other and a Berber chief stood up and said, “Is the honor of Abu Abdullah’s diehard supporters not even safe in his own court?”

Musa turned towards him and said, “Who is it who claims to be a diehard supporter of Abu Abdullah more than me?”

Another chief stood up and said, “If the Crown Prince so commands, our swords are ever ready to shut the mouth of the disobedient.”

Musa said in a voice trembling with rage, “How dare you! Aren’t you the same traitor who pitched the Berbers against the Arabs? Do you think you have expiated your past crime just by reaching the Al-Hamra Palace from your prison cell? And you think that the metal of Musa’s sword would become soft by merely seeing a few traitors gathered at the Al-Hamra? I have come to Abu Abdullah and if anyone of you thinks that his sword can stop me from expressing my views in front of Abu Abdullah then I invite him to come forward. I would certainly like to see who is it who has come here with the desire of relieving the burden of his head from his neck. And Prince, you expect loyalty from these cowards who are ready to bite the flesh off of me but who would not even dare to place their hand over the handle of their swords? You consider the enemies of Granada to be your friends?”

By this time Abu Abdullah had lost his patience. He stood up from his place, came forward and said, “Musa, have you come here with the intention of killing me?”

“I and the intention of killing you? What are you saying?” Saying this Musa removed his sword and presented it to Abu Abdullah.

Abu Abdullah took the sword, tossed it to over to a side and clapped his hands. Eight armed Berbers and Negroes entered the chamber and waited for Abu Abdullah’s cue. Abu Abdullah said, “I knew the highest security at Al-Hamra’s gates won’t stop you from getting here but let me assure you that you won’t be able to leave through the same path you entered.”

A dumbfounded Musa was staring at Abu Abdullah. The very Abu Abdullah whom he had spent his childhood with. He had taught him to mount a horse, play with a sword and lance. He was baffled what wrong he had committed. In the morning, Abu Abdullah had personally called him and ordered him to recruit volunteers from nearby cities and settlements. When he returned in the evening he came to know that Abu Abdullah had freed some rebels and suspended a few loyal officials. He got disturbed by this news, however, he was sure that after they had a discussion, he would be able to convince him to rectify his fault. He left home without eating. The doors of Al-Hamra were closed for him and new guards were posted at its gates. He entered the palace using a secret path. Before this, he had spoken to Abu Abdullah even more harshly on several occasions but today as soon as he entered the room he felt that his childhood friend had changed somewhat. When he had removed his sword and had presented it to him, he was confident that Abu Abdullah would grab him by his arm to the other room and say, “You got upset over such a trivial matter?”

However, when he took the sword and threw it to one side, his heart was torn. He was staring at him while these words echoed in his ears, “let me assure you that you won’t be able to leave through the same path you entered.” He looked at the armed soldiers and thought that Abu Abdullah was fooling around. That this was all a joke.

While smiling he said, “Abu Abdullah! I am your criminal. I am guilty of recruiting volunteers for the Loja front. I am guilty of entering the palace using a secret entrance and I’m guilty of calling these traitors as traitors. My greatest crime is that I am your friend. Please recommend my punishment.”

Saying this Musa bowed his head down. Abu Abdullah’s eyes were filled with tears. He wanted to place his hand on his shoulder but someone came forward and held his hand. It was Abu Dawood.

Abu Abdullah looked at his teacher, who shook his head.

Abu Abdullah looked towards the soldiers and said remorsefully, “Take him away.”

Musa raised his head. He was standing between the bare swords of the soldiers and the chiefs who, so far, had doubted Abu Abdullah’s steadfastness, had also drawn out their swords.

Musa, whose thundering voice would unleash tremors in the walls of Hispania, was gaping at Abu Abdullah in a state of shock. The mujahid of Granada’s tongue had gone mute.

Abu Abdullah could not bear the sight. He looked the other way and shouted, “Take him away.” However, his voice resonated more grief than anger.

Musa walked in front of the soldiers without uttering a word while Abu Abdullah entered the other room wiping his eyes with his handkerchief. Abu Dawood said to the chiefs, “Please stay here. I will be right back.”

Coming to the other room Abu Dawood said to his student, “Prince! Great men should also have a great heart.”

Abu Abdullah said in a voice drenched with pain, “But he was my friend. My childhood friend.”

Abu Dawood said, “He was a beautiful thorn in your path that you loved but to reach your destination you have to remove many such thorns. If Musa wants, even now he can become a jewel of your crown and that can only be done when there is no other claimant to the Sultanate of Granada. When he’s sure that you have taken Abul Hassan’s place then he will have no objection in coming out of prison and serving you. Now get up. This is no time for thinking. This is the time to get work done.”

The next day after the victory of Loja, when Badr bin Mughira returned after chasing Ferdinand’s troops, Abul Hassan called in a consultative council of the chiefs of the army. Some chiefs were of the opinion to return to Granada, make proper preparations and then invade Ferdinand’s kingdom. But Badr bin Mughira emphasized that Ferdinand should not be allowed to rest.

He said, “If we were to invade right after this victory, the enemy would not be able to give us any worthy challenge in any field. No doubt we would be able to recruit a few thousand more troops if we return to Granada but we should not forget that our enemy’s resources are far greater than ours. They will benefit more from this break. Not only the Christians of Andalus but also those who honor the Cross in France and Italy would come running to his aid and the greatest apprehension is that Ferdinand might avenge this defeat on his Muslim subjects, who even now are a lot less than the population of Granada. On the contrary, if we were to march forward immediately, then Muslims of every settlement of Andalus would support us, and that number would be far more than the troops we would be recruiting once we’re in Granada. Our biggest challenge is maintaining a consistent supply of goods and provisions. And I take responsibility for that.”

Agreeing with Badr bin Mughira’s suggestions, Al-Zeghel said, “After this victory, we won’t even face any stiff resistance upto the walls of Castile. We should not give the crumbling enemy any chance to stabilize. As far as getting more soldiers from Granada is concerned, I think there is not a more suitable person than Musa.”

An elderly chief said, “I too support the fact that we should move forward instead of returning backwards but my opinion that the Sultan should hand over this mission to Al-Zeghel and return to Granada. In past centuries, during such situations, discord at home has caused us immense damage. There is no doubt that Musa is an able young man but when it comes to Granada, the sense of security we get with the presence of the Sultan in Granada cannot be compared with anyone else. Miscreants might try to take advantage of the Sultan’s absence but no one would dare raise their head while he is present there.”

Abul Hassan replied, “I am satisfied with the situation in Granada. However, I won’t reject your advice. I promise to return after another glorious victory.”

Before the evening prayers, the consultative council decided to depart the following morning. The next morning Abul Hassan gave the following speech in front of his troops:

“O mujāhidīn! I see the glorious victory at Loja a great reward of destiny. This is a proof to the fact that if the Muslims of Granada were to unite, they can, even today, smash every force of the infidels and if they were to rise with the passion for *jihād*, their metal, even today, could cut any other metal. This victory has opened the highway to other successes and if we don’t despair then I assure you that that day is not far when our flag would be hoisted, once again, over the parliaments of Cordova and Seville.”

“You must be knowing that the first mujahid of Islam to this country, Tariq bin Ziyad, came with a group of a handful of men. The orders given to him by his general were only to survey the situation of the country and return. But as soon as he set foot on the shores of Hispania, this mujahid changed his decision and sent back this message to his general: ‘I have already hoisted the flag of Islam on the shores of Andalus and until this flag does not reach to the end of Andalus’ limits, I will not look back. You have sent me here to assess the strength of Rodrick. With my pace of advancement you will be able to assess his actual might.’ Tariq had told his warriors that they had not come to Rodrick’s land to pierce the flag of their greatness but they had come to a land of God to raise the banner of His greatness. He said, ‘we are few in numbers, but the secret of Muslims’ strength lies not in their numbers but rather in their faith and purity of intentions.’”

“My brave soldiers! Today we have decided to walk in the footsteps of Tariq. Do you support our decision?”

The soldiers supported Abul Hassan’s call by raising a thunderous cry. After silencing them with a hand gesture, Abul Hassan continued his speech:

“In the battle of Loja you have proved to your enemy that a single sword of yours can challenge ten of theirs. This victory has opened the doors of our successes. The time has arrived for the prayers of our oppressed brethren in Aragon and Castile to be answered. There is not a doubt that if we return back to Granada for a few days, we will be able to participate in the celebration of victory. People will shower us with flowers. But if we head towards Cordova and Seville, then, our brothers and sisters, who have been enduring Christian excesses for years, with the hope that one day the mujahids of Granada would come to their aid would welcome us over there with tears of gratitude, instead of flowers.”

“A few days from today, who had hoped that nature would bestow such a great victory upon us and after this victory who can say that after a few days our Aathaans would not be echoed in the mosques of Cordova and Seville and our flag won’t flutter on the Royal Assembly of Castile.”

Abul Hassan’s speech was infusing new lamps of hope and fervor in the hearts of every soldier. They were seeing the assemblies of Cordova and Seville in their imaginations. They were hoisting the flag of victory over the Royal Assembly of Castile. After several years, they were seeing the tears of gratitude in the eyes of enslaved Muslims. They were saying to their oppressed Muslim brothers and sisters, “Now, you are free. Now, no one can enslave us. Andalus is ours. We regret that we were negligent to your plight for so long.”

But Abul Hassan suddenly stopped speaking. For a while his attention was diverted towards a horseman who was approaching closer as he galloped in full speed. The horseman dismounted his horse and without uttering a word, made his way forward by shoving people here and there. A soldier tried to stop him by grabbing his arm but he freed it with a jerk and continued advancing forward as usual.

When the people realized that he wanted to go to Abul Hassan, they started parting away, giving him way. Abul Hassan’s heartbeats were giving testimony to the fact that the horseman had not arrived with any good news. So, he stopped the newcomer by a hand gesture and restarted his speech to regain the people’s attention.

Al-Zeghel, who was standing next to Abul Hassan, came towards the new newcomer and said, “Have you come from Granada?”

The newcomer replied, “Yes! I have come with an important piece of news.”

“Have you been sent by Musa?”

“No. I have come on my own.”

“If you have not come through Musa, then, your news can’t be important and you should have given consideration to the fact that this assembly was being addressed by the Sultan of Granada.”

“But when you come to know the circumstances in which I have come, then, you will certainly forgive my audacity.”

Al-Zeghel said, “Go ahead. Say what you have to.”

After looking around the newcomer said, “Not here.”

Sounding upset, Al-Zeghel said, “Come along with me.”

Moving aside from the crowd, Al-Zeghel looked at the newcomer and said, “Before giving me any bad news tell me who you are first, so that I can weigh how important this is and also remind myself that people who spread rumors during wartime are dealt with severely.”

The newcomer said, "Had you looked carefully, you would have recognized me. I am the son of the Palace Warden of Al-Hamra. I am a student of Habeera bin Saeed. For a few days I had been propagating *jihād* with Musa…

A lot of the men here in the army recognize me, but if the terrible news that I have come here with were to be proved wrong, then, I would be more than happy to get hanged. I pray that my coming here is merely a dream and whatever I have seen and heard in Granada is also a dream." Tears were rolling down the newcomer’s eyes.

Meanwhile, Al-Zaghairi approached close to them. He recognized the youth from a distance and said, “Sulaiman! I hope all is well?”

Sulaiman looked at Al-Zaghairi for a moment then turned his attention back to Al-Zeghel, “I have come with terrible bad news. There has been a revolt in Granada.”

Al-Zeghel cried out and said, “No! No! You must have dreamt. A revolt in Musa’s presence is impossible. You have dreamt. You are a spy of the enemy and want to distract us from the war front. Say that this is a lie.” A distraught Al-Zeghel was shaking Sulaiman by holding both his arms. And Sulaiman was repeatedly saying again and again, “If only this was a lie. But it is not a lie. If only it were a lie.”

“But Musa and revolt? This is impossible. You are insane.”

Sulaiman said, “Musa has been imprisoned by Abu Abdullah.”

Al-Zeghel pushed Sulaiman to the ground and said to Al-Zaghairi, “Take him away. He is insane. Abu Abdullah can kill me, put his father in prison but he can die for Musa. Take this insane man away.”

Sulaiman said, “By today evening there will be more people coming, confirming the news I have given you. Abu Abdullah has announced his emirate. He has released the rebels and appointed them in the positions of the Arab officials. Some of those emirs who refused to recognize his emirate have been killed and the rest imprisoned. Hispanian and Berber emirs have taken over the Al-Hamra and they are making the people of their tribes fight the Arabs in the city. I can’t say how many houses have been burned and how many people have been killed. I am afraid this fire must have also spread to other nearby settlements around Granada.”

Abul Hassan could not continue his speech for long. Every now and then his attention was diverted towards Al-Zeghel and Al-Zaghairi and when they were approaching him with heads bowed down, after talking to Sulaiman, his heart started throbbing and his voice plunged. By looking at Al-Zeghel’s face it was not difficult to assess that the messenger had not come with any good news. He ended his speech, raised his hands and supplicated for victory and looked towards Al-Zeghel with answer-seeking glances.

Al-Zeghel moved forward and said, “Let us go!”

Abul Hassan said, “Where? Is everything okay?”

“Let us go to your tent.”

With Al-Zeghel’s grief-stricken voice Abul Hassan’s heart kept sinking. He got off the stage and walked with him towards the tent. A few chiefs wanted to join him but gesturing with his hand Al-Zeghel stopped them and said, “You all gather in my tent. We will be there shortly.”

After covering a short distance, Abul Hassan enquired, “Before giving me any bad news at least let me know where this messenger has arrived from. After such a great victory we should not be disturbed by trivial incidents. Tell me, what’s the matter? Your silence is becoming unbearable for me.”

Al-Zeghel did not reply. Sulaiman, who was still standing there, joined them after a cue from Al-Zeghel.

Abul Hassan moved his attention towards Sulaiman and said, “Where have you come from? Stop staring at me and tell me. Have you not come with the news that a city or village near the border has fallen from our grip and the Christians are avenging their defeat from the Muslims of that place?”

Instead of replying, Sulaiman looked at Al-Zeghel, who gestured by shaking his head to remain silent.

Abul Hassan could not bear it anymore. He yelled and said, “Al-Zeghel! Haven’t we been breastfed by the same mother? Don’t I have the courage to bear the news that you have just heard? Has this messenger come with the news of an earthquake? Has a fire broken out it Al-Hamra? Did Abu Abdullah have an accident? By God, any such news won’t be able to disturb me and if this messenger has arrived with the news that some Christian troops have taken over an unguarded fort of ours near the border then you could have given me this news in front of the army. To face this new scenario, we could have delayed our decision to march forward by a day. Al-Zeghel! Why has your tongue gone mute? Tell me what crisis has befallen that the swords of these mujāhidīn can’t compensate? Which palace has fallen that these mujāhidīn cannot rebuild? The greatest wealth of a general are his soldiers. Besides Musa and Abdullah, the people who are dearest to me are with me. Nobody’s death will be unbearable for me. Didn’t you see that there was not a trace of tear in my eyes when Naeem Ridwan was being lowered into the grave, although he was no less dear to me that Abdullah?”

Meanwhile, Abul Hassan’s tent came near. A pessimistic Abul Hassan was pacing swiftly towards the tent. After entering the tent and seating him on the chair, Al-Zeghel said, “My brother! This messenger has come with the news of a great calamity. Abu Abdullah has announced his emirate and after releasing the rebels he has started a civil war in the city. The gates of Granada have been closed for us. Musa is in Abdullah’s custody.”

These words fell upon Abul Hassan like lightening. He suddenly got up only to tremble back into his seat. He tried to speak but became tongue-tied. He stared at Al-Zeghel and Sulaiman with wide-eyed glances. He was reading the writings of his fate on their melancholy faces.

Al-Zeghel said, “Now, I can’t understand how I should break this news to the army. We can’t even hide this news for long. More people will arrive today before the evening. I fear, like Granada, here too the swords of Arabs and non-Arabs soldiers might clash against each other. The chiefs of the army are gathering in my tent. First, get their oath of allegiance and then unravel the news to them. Today, only if Musa were here. Don’t be pessimistic. I am sure the news of the victory at Loja would once again rejuvenate the flames of faith among the people of Granada. They will revolt against Abu Abdullah and open the gates of the city for us. Get up and be brave! This is no time to think!”

Abul Hassan’s lips were moving but his voice was lost. Sulaiman whispered, “Call in the physician. The Sultan is not well.”

Al-Zeghel bowed and looked at his brother and quickly went out and said to the guard, “Call Bashir bin Hassan immediately. He must be taking care of the wounded. Tell him that the Sultan is not well. But say this in private. Not in front of anyone.”

After a while Bashir bin Hassan entered the tent. After looking at the Sultan’s condition he said to Al-Zeghel, “He has had a paralysis attack but it’s not a severe one. God willing, he’ll soon be fine. It seems that he has received a big shock.”

After a while Al-Zeghel said to Sulaiman, “Go and take some rest but don’t reveal this matter to anyone.” Then he turned his attention towards Bashir bin Hassan and said, “If my presence is not required here, then, I would like to be excused for a while.”

Bashir bin Hassan said, “The Sultan’s glances are frozen on you. I think your absence from here for a while would be better for him. His attention could be diverted to something else.”

When Al-Zeghel entered his tent, all the high ranking army officials were gathered there. They had surrounded Al-Zaghairi and were pounding him with questions while he was repeatedly yelling back and saying, “I don’t know. Sulaiman wanted to say something only to the Sultan.”

Everyone became silent on seeing Al-Zeghel. After a while Al-Zeghel left the tent once he had taken an oath of allegiance and after breaking the awful news of Granada to them. The chiefs also moved in the direction of their respective tents. By noon, this news was known to the entire army and a little before evening a few men arriving from Granada had also confirmed this news. The very soldiers who moments ago were dreaming of raising their flag over the Royal Palace of Castile and given Aathan in the mosques of Seville and Cordova, were now contemplating on how to save their homes from destruction. The very poets who had penned ballads praising the mujhahideen of Loja were now writing elegies of Abu Abdullah’s treachery and betrayal. After a brief smile the star of fate of Andalus became oblivious into the clouds of misfortune.

The next day, with Bashir bin Hassan’s messiahship, Abul Hassan regained his lost voice. His first words were, “O my son! What have you done? The throne that you tried to snatch was actually yours but your desire to become king has destroyed the future of the Muslims of Andalus. I pray to God what you have sown will not be reaped by the Muslims of Andalus. My son! My Abdullah! But you are not mine.” Abul Hassan tossed, hid his face in the pillow and sobbed.

After a couple of days, the effects of paralysis withered away from him, but even at the age of sixty, the spark of life that was the envy of every youth had become cold. Just one accident had reduced this sword-toying mujahid into someone who was compelled to walk with the support of a cane.

The majority of the chiefs of the army’s decision was to move towards Granada and send a delegation to Abu Abdullah after encamping at a city close to it. They opinioned, “If he does not come to the right path, then, there would be no other option but to fix his crookedness with the swords. God forbid, if the need arises to go to war then the people of the city would certainly rise against Abu Abdullah. The only remedy to the ill-feeling spreading among the soldiers due to the tumultuous events in Granada is to take over the Sultanate immediately otherwise it wouldn’t come as a surprise if Abu Abdullah allies himself with the Christians and we are left nowhere.”

Abul Hassan agreed with this decision but before departing an incident happened that broke his back.

A day before Abul Hassan decided to leave for Granada, a group of a few horsemen from Granada met Abul Hassan and after speaking a lot of ill about Abu Abdullah assured Abul Hassan that they were ready to spill the last drop of their blood for his sake and even the people under their influence in Granada were waiting for Abul Hassan to arrive. Abul Hassan treated them with great respect and dignity but after staying with Abul Hassan’s army for four days, they had succeeded in their designs. Abu Dawood had sent them to create a rift among Abul Hassan’s troops. They first provoked the Arabs saying that their brothers were being killed at the hands of Berbers and native Muslims. Then they said to the Berber and native Muslims that Abu Abdullah’s government would be a mercy for them. He had suspended high ranking Arab officials and appointed ones from their people. It would be in their best interest to go to Granada and swear allegiance to Abu Abdullah. To some of the chiefs they offered high offices and to the ones who wouldn’t fall to any fraud, they would coerce them by saying that any official who sided with Abul Hassan, his family and friends in Granada would face the severest of punishments at the hands of Abu Abdullah. The loyalties of those lower in the hierarchy was bought with gold and silver. They carried out this task so cleverly that Abul Hassan’s loyalist didn’t even get a clue of it. First, they looked for those people who were already under their influence. Then, with their assistance they kept deluding the others.

One evening Abul Hassan’s army encamped at a distance of twenty miles away from Granada. In the third part of the night Abul Hassan got to know that eight thousand of his army’s Berbers and Hispania were deserting and leaving towards Granada.

Al-Zeghel entered Abul Hassan’s tent as soon as he got the news of this development. After a while a few more officials of the army gathered there. Al-Zeghel’s advised to block the path of the traitors and make them understand. And if they refused to listen, then war should be waged against them. Some chiefs agreed while some disagreed. Finally, Abul Hassan said in a feeble voice drenched in grief and sorrow, “Let them go. For as long as I live, I will not permit the swords of Muslims to clash with one another.”

After facing such drastic events, Sultan Abul Hassan moved towards Malaga. The ruler of Malaga had already announced his revolt against Abu Abdullah. He received the Sultan with great enthusiasm and emptied his palace for him.

In a few days, chiefs from the nearby areas came to their Sultan pronouncing their allegiance to him.

The very Sultanate whose people only a few months ago had risen to conquer all of Andalus was now divided into two. Granada and the suburbs was under Abu Abdullah’s control while Abul Hassan’s government was in Malaga.

The amount of grief Ferdinand had of his defeats was less than the immense happiness he had of Abu Abdullah’s revolt and so he started preparing to deliver a final blow to Abul Hassan.

Maybe Abul Hassan would never have given up hope no matter how major a defeat he would have taken at the hands of the enemy. But this failure, whose reason was his own son, was unbearable for him. He was no longer interested in his present nor in his past. His brother and his diehard supporters kept consoling him. Gradually, he declined to see people wishing to meet him. In isolation he would spend most of his time shedding tears. Little by little he started loosing vision.

One day Al-Zeghel and Badr bin Mughira entered his room. When Al-Zeghel started the conversation by talking about his own future course of action, the Sultan said tearfully, “O my brother! Talk about something apart from this. We can fight with the enemy but not with our fate.”

Badr bin Mughira replied, “The mujahid carves out his destiny with the point of his sword.”

Abul Hassan replied, “But my sword has been broken.”

Badr said, “You should not despair. In this world, every great man has to face such events.”

“Don’t drag those beings in the line of great men whose son is Abdullah. Go and leave me in isolation for I have nothing to offer but tears.” Saying this, the Sultan turned his face the other way. Bashir bin Hassan tiptoed into the room and whispered, “The Sultan’s condition is not good. Your talk would only aggravate his physical and spiritual condition. The only remedy for him is to bring Abdullah onto the right path.”

Badr bin Mughira looked at Al-Zeghel and said, “Abdullah can be brought to the right path.”

The Sultan gave a startled look at Badr bin Mughira and said remorsefully, “If only someone could make him understand but he is not one of those who would.”

Badr bin Mughira said, “He would be compelled to.”

“But I do not want a civil war among Muslims.”

Badr bin Mughira said, “In a few days if he tries to have the correct assessment of his strength against ours, then it would not reach a point for a civil war among Muslims.”

After this meeting, Al-Zeghel, Badr bin Mughira, Al-Zaghairi and other army officials decided, in a council, to restructure the army from scratch.

Al-Zeghel sent a delegation to specific chiefs of the entire Sultanate. Badr bin Mughira’s fighters grouped into small bands and began propagating *jihād*.

Badr bin Mughira personally left Malaga with five hundred of his fighters and reached the suburbs of Granada where he started the mission of mustering public opinion against Abu Abdullah.

Abu Abdullah’s troops tried to block their path but in vain. There were minor skirmishes at a few places between Abu Abdullah’s troops and Badr bin Mughira’s cavalry where Badr bin Mughira’s cavalry defeated them and left them in the vicinity of the four walls of Granada.

After a few weeks of running around, Badr bin Mughira, with the cooperation of the people living in the settlements near Granada, was able to completely cut-off all routes leading to it. The farmers also cooperated with him. They refused to send their produce to Granada. Seeing the effects of drought in the city, the people of Granada’s suppressed resentment against Abu Abdullah gradually began to emerge and some of them began fleeing towards Malaqa.

Feeling the sensitivity of the situation, Abu Abdullahsent five thousand troops to crush the Frontier Falcon but after a week helearned that two thousand out of them had joined Badr bin Mughira while therest, after being defeated, burned a few settlements of the farmers and were ontheir way back.

# The Spider’s Web

Badr bin Mughira had encamped at a distance of twenty miles from Granada. One evening an officer of his army informed him that a Berber had come with some important message. Badr bin Mughira called him inside his tent immediately. Mansour bin Ahmed was sitting with Badr bin Mughira.

The Berber entered the tent, shook hands with both of them, one after the other, and while settling down on a chair in front of them said, “I have come from Granada.”

“Go on”, Badr bin Mughira said.

After a little hesitation the Berber chief said, “I would like to say something to you in private.”

Badr bin Mughira looked towards Bashir bin Hassan, who he got up and left the tent.

The newcomer pulled out a letter from his pocket, stood up and while forwarding it to Badr bin Mughira said, “I have been sent by Abu Dawood. He has said that a reply from your side can save Hispania from destruction.”

Badr bin Mughira opened the letter and started reading it, while the Berber chief was studying, with extreme interest, the effects of its writings on Badr’s face. After reading the letter Badr bin Mughira looked at the Berber chief for a second and returned back to reading it with even more concentration. This was the content of the letter:

"From a person who has become an invalid organ for his people due to his blunder.

To that mujahid whose immense courage and high ambitions are the only hope for Andalusian Muslims.

You must have understood who I am. Despite such a big revolution in Granada, my silence was more because of some compulsion than for some broader interest. Even now I am not sure whether my letter will make it to you. But if I have not made a mistake in trusting the messenger, and you receive this letter and some positive results are derived from it, then, I would consider it an expiation for my past mistakes. But if, due to my emissary’s betrayal or some other reason, my letter gets in the hands of Granada’s nation sellers, then I would be of those whose best ambitions get hidden in the veils of a death of anonymity. Anyways, after me if Rabia is not a target of Abu Abdullah’s evil desires, then, she would be able to narrate all the events to you.

After Abu Abdullah’s revolt I wish I had never come to Granada. It is my misfortune that instead of learning about life’s lessons in the company of a falcon, I undertook the responsibility of tutoring a parrot that was confined to a golden cage. I tried to make him appreciate the pleasure of flying in azure skies but I too have been locked into the cage of Al-Hamra. If only it was possible for me to get Abu Abdullah to a decent level of civility.

I am surprised how unaware I have been with the real situation and not only me – Abu Musa, Al-Zeghel and Sultan Abul Hassan – were unaware of these conspiracies that were been hatched within the four walls of Al-Hamra. The real ruler of Granada is not Abu Abdullah but it is those chiefs and elders who have already received the price of Granada from Ferdinand before these events. When Abu Abdullah announced the revolt, Abu Musa was the only person in Al-Hamra who was loyal to Abul Hassan and now he lies in some dark cell.

In such circumstances, what am I to do? The spell of the organized power of the hypocrites could not even be broken by Abu Musa’s mesmerizing oration. And a slight interference from my part was not tolerated. I had only two options. One, to raise the slogan of treachery in front of Abu Abdullah and a packed audience and in return spend the rest of my life in a dingy cell of a prison. Two, to be a silent spectator and wait till circumstances compel Abu Abdullah to turn towards what I have to say. I chose the second route. Think of this as my prudence or take it as my cowardice but because of it the doors of Al-Hamra are still open for me. So far I have not been able to persuade Abu Abdullah to take any right step but a few more wrong moves have been averted because of my strategies. In the past few days, I am noticing a new development in Abu Abdullah’s behavior and the reason for this change is not that he has doubts about the future of Andalus but it is because he sees a bleak future of himself. The dangers that he anticipated far from Granada are now being viewed in the vicinity of the four walls of Granada. He is perturbed by the city’s isolation and its citizens’ anxiety. If he had any hope from an immediate relief by Ferdinand’s forces, he would not have been so disturbed. What Ferdinand has replied to his message is that he needs to prepare himself before the decisive battle. His anxiety can be gauged by the fact that initially I had to try very hard to meet him but now he calls for me, at times, even in the middle of the night, to pacify him and at times he turns up at my residence. Day before yesterday Abu Abdullah called me at midnight and expressed concern over Granada’s situation. I aggravated his tension by adding a few words and said whether it would be possible to reach a compromise between him and the Sultan. Abu Abdullah abruptly said, “I wish this was possible. Even if my father forgives me, my uncle would never clear his heart regarding me.” He expressed this concern even about you that you are thirsty for his blood. I asked him what his response would be if the Sultan sent a message of peace. He said, “In such circumstances, it would be insane to think that the Sultan would try to seek peace with me. After the Frontier Falcon’s successes, he might be thinking of me as a harmless enemy and would prefer more to have a rope noose around my neck than extending a hand of reconciliation.”

I said, “If I have not misjudged the Frontier Falcon, his interest in the affairs of Granada is not because of the Sultan’s friendship or an enmity with you. The reason is that he wants to unite and organize the Muslims against the Christians. If he learns about your capabilities, then it’s possible that he might compel the Sultan to abdicate in your favor.”

Abu Abdullah took his time to ponder. Finally, he said anxiously, “But how will I be sure that the Frontier Falcon will side with me and that my father would not insist on making Al-Zeghel or my stepbrother his successor.”

I answered by saying that the biggest objective he has in life is to topple the Christian government and for this purpose he would try to stop the civil war in Granada by changing any of his decisions.

These conversations with Abu Abdullah has instilled this hope in him that before attacking Granada you will first try to seek a compromise. He was ready to send a delegation to you for a compromise but I feared that all those elements who might have their lives endangered in case a settlement was reached might oppose Abu Abdullah’s decisions and replace him with some other stupid person on the throne.

Apart from this, there could also be a possibility that they might send a message to Ferdinand about the dangers arising from the father and son compromise and convince him to intervene immediately. Therefore, to keep them unaware, I have convinced Abu Abdullah that if he takes the initiative of sending a peace delegation, it is possible that they might see this as a weakness on his part. I also told him that it is also possible that some of the chiefs among your allies might leave you and join up with them before a compromise is reached just to save themselves from punishment. Or maybe even arrest you and hand you over to them. Therefore, it is of immediate importance that you not reveal your intentions to anyone and wait for a peace emissary from their side.

And now Abu Abdullah is waiting for the peace emissary. And my role is to ensure that he is not disappointed but I feel that the chiefs on Ferdinand’s payroll would not permit any peace emissary coming from your side to even come close to the gates of Al-Hamra and none of Abu Abdullah’s messenger can come to you openly and no negotiations can be successful that is in the knowledge of these nation sellers.

Therefore, I am putting you through a huge trial. I was thinking if you could enter into Al-Hamra using a secret path, then, I could arrange for you to meet Abu Abdullah. If my plan works out and you are able to bypass the guards and enter Al-Hamra then think that you have conquered Granada. Abu Abdullah would need to be convinced that his life is not in danger. Then, each gesture of yours would act as a command for him. This meeting would take place in a room of my own residence. Say, for example, Abu Abdullah is not convinced by your talk and he has ulterior motives, even then he would be in a closed room with the Frontier Falcon. You would be able to have him sign every order that is necessary to take over Al-Hamra and to implement the orders. There would be a few mujāhidīn in the palace whom I consider to be Abul Hassan’s loyalists. Those serving as spies to the nation sellers could be called into the room one after the other for whom I will also prepare four strong, well-built negro executioners.

After capturing Al-Hamra, Granada would be in your hands. Abu Abdullah would dance to your tunes. The chiefs of the nation sellers would be called into the palace in small groups and the ones that cannot be reformed would be handed over to the executioners. After this, on Abu Abdullah’s behalf, the army would be invited to gather at the gates of Al-Hamra and Abu Musa would be removed from prison and placed in front of them to deliver a speech. You can’t imagine how much love the soldiers still have for Musa. Then, Abu Abdullah, whom I personally believe is unpardonable, would be at your mercy.

Now all I need to tell you is what suggestion I have come up with regarding how you are going to enter the Al-Hamra. My residence is at the corner of Al-Hamra towards the river. If you are a good swimmer, you can cross the river and reach near the wall without the help of a boat. Next to the wall you will find a large tree that is bent towards the river so much so that its branches sink into the water. Towards the right of this tree, at a distance of a walk of about twenty steps, you will see a window of my house, at an elevation of about forty handbreadths. At night, this window would be illuminating. Standing below this window, if you grope on the wall, then you will find a thin rope. When you pull this rope, I will know about your arrival and lower down a rope-ladder. You will reach my room with ease. In case of danger, you will find a piece of paper tied to the end of the rope. Remove this piece of paper and go back and follow the instructions that are in it.

I have chosen Wednesday night for this. If you cannot come this Wednesday, then come the following Wednesday night but this Wednesday is better because the night is going to be dark and evidence shows that it will remain cloudy for a few more days.

If I am not in front of the window for your reception, then think that I am sitting with Abu Abdullah in some other room. However, in my absence Rabia will guide you. On the night of Wednesday, Abu Abdullah would be invited over to my place. Don’t be surprised at this. Ever since Abu Abdullah has seen Rabia, he comes over by making different excuses. Yesterday, he made the stupidity of covertly sending a marriage proposal to Rabia. Rabia was ready to pullout the hair of the maid servant who brought the message of a marriage proposal from Abu Abdullah but the issue was calmed down with Angela’s interference. In front of me, Abu Abdullah expresses his desire discreetly. In such circumstances, I don’t think I will be able to stay in Al-Hamra for long.

I am calling you to a very dangerous mission and I can’t every completely convince you of its success. After you reach near Al-Hamra, every step you take would be a very narrow and dark path between life and death, therefore, before following my instructions, do reconsider very thoughtfully. It could be that you might enter Al-Hamra using a secret door during the night and by morning all doors of Granada might open up for your comrades. What could also happen is that I too, along with you, be thrown into a dark nook where it would be fated for us never to come out and with us the future of Granada would also get buried. If my emissary has delivered this long communiqué to you then it is important that until this task is not completed, you should not send him to Granada and let your men keep him with them as an honored guest. I trust the nobility of his intentions but precaution is necessary. Ferdinand’s spies would be ready to weigh the person in gold who would help facilitate your capture."

“Abu Dawood”

After reading the letter again and being oblivious of the emissary’s presence, Badr bin Mughira got up and started strolling in the tent. Words of the letter were circulating in his mind with different interpretations. He was picturing the four walls of Al-Hamra. After entering it on a dark night from a window, he stood facing Rabia, who welcomed him with a smile drenched in tears of love.

“Rabia! My Rabia!” He felt dainty and beautiful heartbeats within his heart. “He fears the evil desires of Abu Abdullah.” His blood started boiling, “She was ready to pullout the hair of the maid servant who brought the message of a marriage proposal from Abu Abdullah.” He was smiling.

But within moments, these lovely feelings were suppressed by bigger plans. He began contemplating on all aspects of his mission. Abu Abdullah’s revolt despite Abu Dawood’s presence raised a lot of doubts in his heart regarding Abu Dawood which were finally removed after reading this letter. “I am calling you to a very dangerous mission and I can’t every completely convince you of its success. After you reach near Al-Hamra, every step you take would be a very narrow and dark path between life and death, therefore, before following my instruction, do reconsider very thoughtfully.” These words started echoing in his ears.

“I will definitely go.” This was his final decision.

It was raining heavily during the night. Abu Dawood was anxiously walking in that room of the house whose window opened towards the river. A black slave sat on one corner of the room. A bell was hanging from a wall of the room. Feeling hopeless Abu Dawood sat on a chair. “He might not come today”, he said while looking towards the black slave.

The slave replied, “It is not easy crossing the river in such a storm.”

Both silently stared at each other for a while.

Suddenly there was movement in the rope attached to the bell on the wall and it started ringing.

Abu Dawood said, “He has arrived.”

The slave quickly got up and lowered down the rope ladder and after a while, feeling some weight on the other end of the ladder, said, “He is climbing up.” After a few moments had elapsed he said, “I think he has climbed more than halfway and if we cut the rope now, then, it will save us the trouble of killing him in a different manner.”

“Speak softly. He is smarter than us. Instead of coming up himself first, he must have sent someone else.”

The slave said in a subdued voice, “However, when he comes closer, you will be able to recognize him by the sound of his voice and my sword will wait for a cue from you.”

Abu Dawood placed a finger on his own lips and directed the slave to remain silent. He then extended his neck out of the window to take a look. Lightning struck and he sighted a masked man at a distance of a few meters away, climbing up the ladder.

He softly said, “Thank God that you came.”

The masked man gave no reply to this. After a gap, Abu Dawood reiterated and said, “Are you alone or is there someone else below with you?”

The masked man took two or three final steps and entered the window and taking sighs of relief said, “I was delayed finding this part of the palace in the dark. The water in the river was flowing very fast.”

Abu Dawood said, “You have come from the cold. Come in to the next room and change your clothes.”

Removing his mask Badr bin Mughira said, “I am used to roaming in this weather.”

Abu Dawood said, “I was sure that you would come.”

“You had called me towards an obligation.”

“Please come. It is not appropriate to stand here.”

Badr bin Mughira entered into a spacious room that was furnished with extremely precious carpets and chairs. While asking Badr bin Mughira to sit on one of the chairs, Abu Dawood said, “Abu Abdullah is in one of the rooms upstairs, playing chess with a servant of mine. You reached after a very long time, but fortunately the love of chess has kept him from leaving to his residence. That servant is not reliable but he does have this quality that he can keep Abu Abdullah engaged in chess until morning. The palace lodge has been informed that he is busy playing chess over here. So therefore, even if he is here till morning no one will come to call him. You wait here while I go and find an excuse to get rid of that servant and then I will call you upstairs. And you know what you have to do next. In the next room, those four black slaves are ready to be called when needed. I will leave now. Sit comfortably. There is no danger here.”

Abu Dawood left room and Badr bin Mughira took to observing the room. Suddenly, he heard footsteps from a direction. He turned around and looked, and abruptly stood up. Rabia was standing in front of him, staring at him dumbfounded.

“Rabia”, he said involuntarily.

And she replied in a shocked voice, “You…why did you come here…?”

Badr bin Mughira could not comprehend her concern. Smiling, he said, “You did not like my coming here?”

She intuitively stepped forward and said, “Every night I would wish for such a dream but if only this was a dream but this is an interpretation of a dream gone wrong – a disastrous interpretation – Please leave this place for God’s sake.”

Despite being upset Badr bin Mughira forced a smile on his face and said, “There is no danger here. I think you are unaware that I came here on your father’s invitation.”

“I know. Angela has told me everything. You have become victim to a dangerous conspiracy. There is still time. For God’s sake, hurry up!”

Badr bin Mughira said, “Isn’t Abu Abdullah in the upper chamber at this time?”

“All this is a lie. I have heard everything standing by the door of the adjacent room. Even if the door was not locked, I would have put my life at stake to inform you about the danger.”

“But I can’t believe that your father…”

“You don’t know my father more than me. Don’t you remember, when we were staying with you at the frontier fort I had said that I saw a nightmare that the Christians have attacked you?”

“Yes, I remember.”

“That was not my dream. Actually, I had learned about my father’s plot and now Angela has informed me about this conspiracy.”

Bringing a remorseful smile to his face Badr bin Mughira said, “If this is a conspiracy then it would be so thorough that escaping now would be in vain. Not only would have the rope ladder vanished but his men would now be around the four walls below. But Rabia, if destiny would want me to deliver a task, then, no one can harm me.”

“He is thirsty for your blood”, Rabia said while bringing tears into her eyes.

“Dead nations are not resurrected without the blood of martyrs. But Rabia, there is little time left now. I have a lot to say to you.”

Footsteps of a few men could be heard at a distance. Rabia involuntarily stepped forward, grabbed his arm and said while sobbing, “There is no time to say too much. Please just say, ‘Rabia you are mine and I do not hate you.’ No! No! Do not separate me. Let him see. Maybe he is bringing Abu Abdullah along with him. Let Abu Abdullah see for whom I have rejected the crown of the Queen of Granada. Badr! My Badr! My master. Had this time not come, then maybe I would never have had the courage in my entire life to say that I love you. Living without you was beyond my imagination but no one can stop me from dying for you.”

“Rabia! You are more dearer to me than my life. For God’s sake leave. They are coming. What will he say if he finds you here?”

“He will say that I am in love with you and I will say who is it in Andalus, apart from Badr bin Mughira, whose sword has been raised in face of the excesses committed against the helpless and oppressed girls of Hispania. Who is the one whose glances have the chastity of angels?”

The door of the room opened and Abu Dawood and Abu Abdullah along with eight or ten men holding lances entered inside. Finding Rabia there, Abu Dawood appeared a little worried and said, “Rabia! Why are you standing here? Go to your room.”

Rabia took a step forward and looking at her father said in a trembling voice full of rage, “Tell me what punishment have you suggested for him? We both are in the same boat. If he is a criminal for having noble aspirations for Granada, then I too am a criminal.”

Abu Dawood grinned and said, “Sometimes Rabia gets into a rage because of her mental illness. Later she doesn’t remember a thing once she’s back into her senses.”

Rabia wanted to say something but Abu Dawood got hold of her hand and pulled her away to the other room.

For a while Abu Abdullah, in his perplexity, kept staring at Badr bin Mughira. Finally, he signaled to the soldiers who, pointing their lances, advanced forward towards him in a formation of a semi circle. Badr bin Mughira quickly removed his sword out and throwing it towards Abu Abdullah said, “You didn’t have to bring so many men to arrest just one man.”

On Abu Abdullah’s cue a soldier picked up the sword and feeling at ease, he moved forward and said, “I didn’t know that you would display such idiotic bravery to enter the Al-Hamra.”

Badr bin Mughira replid, “In the Al-Hamra Palace if wisdom is considered treachery, betrayal and cowardice, then I should not be sorry at my stupidity.”

Abu Abdullah was at loss of words and said, “I think this place is not appropriate to discuss such matters. A lot of people who are as high in stature as you are waiting for you in a chamber of the palace. For your own safety I am sure you will comply with the orders of my soldiers.”

Abu Abdullah left the room and the soldiers closed-in on Badr bin Mughira. A soldier moved forward with handcuffs and Badr bin Mughira extended his arms without any resistance.

Badr bin Mughira entered the Dar Al-Aswad under the strict supervision of the soldiers after passing through a number of corridors in the light of the chandeliers. Observing a guard of shining swords at every step he thought that the idea of not escaping was a correct one.

“Let me go. Let me go”, Rabia said while trying to free herself from Abu Dawood’s iron grip.

While pushing her onto the bed, Abu Dawood said, “Stupid girl. If you have no respect for yourself then at least have a little consideration for my white hair. You have degraded me so much that I can’t even face the lowest of people in Andalus.”

Trying to balance herself properly while sitting, Rabia looked at her father, then got up and helplessly fell at his feet and yelled, “For God’s sake, please save his life. If not for me then at least for Granada. If not for your own daughter, then at least for the thousands of oppressed daughters of Andalus. I promise I will never utter his name…or else I will burn in fire. I will jump off from the highest tower of Al-Hamra.” Although Abu Dawood possessed a heart of stone, he still had a spark of compassion that was still burning and despite his determination he could not crush this spark. All the chords of his heart that produced the beautiful tunes of humanity were broken. However, one chord was intact. That chord that could be moved by Rabia’s tears. For the whole world he was a vicious man. A ruthless man who could send thousands of beings to the gallows without hesitation just for fulfilling a trivial wish of his. But he was a father to Rabia. Despite all his vices he was not able to crush the burning spark of humanity from his heart that was lit by Rabia’s innocent smiles.

Abu Dawood raised his hands again to push Rabia but his fatherly love got entangled in those golden chords that were impossible for him to break. Rabia’s tears fell on his feet. He tried to move back but she had firmly gripped his feet. He bent down and put his hands on her head, and then he got a hold of her arms and tried to raise her up.

The father and daughter stood facing each other. For a moment Abu Dawood felt the futility of his desires in the face of Rabia’s flowing tears. He said remorsefully, “Rabia! I wish I had known the level of degree your madness has reached for him. I will try to save him but…”

Rabia pleaded, “Father! You can do everything. His death would be a prelude to the destruction of Granada.”

“I do not care about Granada. I merely want to pay the price of your tears.” Saying this Abu Dawood entered the other room. He opened a cupboard, and took out a bottle and putting a few drops in a cup, came and stood near Rabia and said, “Here, drink this and lie down. You are not feeling well.”

With shivering hands Rabia took the cup, looked at her father and said, “If you have prescribed a similar poison for him too, then, I am gladly willing to have that too. I wish you had accepted my death as a recompense for your injured feelings and would not have deprived the Muslims of Andalus of their last support.”

Bringing the cup close to her lips, Rabia looked at her father. Suddenly, Angela appeared from the next room and yelled and said, “Rabia! For God’s sake don’t drink it.” She ran to grab the cup from Rabia’s hand but Rabia quickly gulped it and threw the cup on the floor. Abu Dawood had a meaningful smile on his face. Angela stared at her stepsister dumbfounded while Rabia stared back sporting a victorious look.

“Rabia! What have you done?” Saying this Angela embraced her and said to her father in a trembling voice, “Please get me a cup of this poison too. Both of us were born in the house of the same snake. Our end should also be the same.”

“Both of you have gone mad. I have given her a sedating medicine. Until I do not come up with a positive solution, it would be harmful for her to remain conscious.” Saying this Abu Dawood held Rabia by the arms and placed her on the bed and went out of the room. He had not even taken ten steps when Angela ran and got hold of him and said, “Father! Do save him. Rabia can’t live without him.”

Abu Dawood remorsefully said, “Angela, I am going to gather the thorns that I have scattered with my own hands I am afraid I might injure my own hands instead of accomplishing the goal. Keep comforting Rabia that he will be saved until she falls asleep.”

“But all I want to know is whether you will use all your energies to save him?”

Abu Dawood said annoyingly, “Go Angela! Stop bothering me. You’re Rabia sister but I am her father.”

Angela returned back to Rabia’s room. She kept saying to herself, “Alas! If only you were a father.”

She sat on Rabia’s bed enfolding her. Rabia’s eyes were showing signs of drowsiness. While yawning she placed her head on Angela’s lap and said, “Angela! If there was any possibility of saving him then I won’t have been given this sedative.”

Angela consoled her and said, “I am sure they would think a thousand times before making a decision concerning the Frontier Falcon. Abu Abdullah would be certain that his soldiers would shake Granada to the core.”

“If Abu Abdullah had this realization then he wouldn’t have revolted against his father. He knows very well that they would stand the worst torture and still not lay a finger on Granada.”

“But the people of Granada can die for the Frontier Falcon’s name. They would not stand even the slightest hardship.”

Rabia said, “You’re so naïve. The people cannot see past the high walls of Al-Hamra. The secrets of Al-Hamra would be buried in Al-Hamra.”

“So I am certain for the sake of their lives, the nobles would oppose Abu Abdullah’s evil intentions against the Frontier Falcon.”

“No, but there is a greater possibility that Abu Abdullah, fearing for his own life, would comply to the wishes of those nation sellers, who have sold off Granada to Ferdinand. The only hurdle for Ferdinand in attacking Granada is the fear of the Frontier Falcon. After his assassination the traitors would be at ease, knowing that Ferdinand’s forces would come to rescue them from the revenge of his comrades.”

Angela said hopelessly, “Rabia, father would certainly save him but should his efforts fail, what should we do?”

Rabia opened her eyes, looked towards her, then suddenly got up and said, “Angela, I am still not hopeless. I believe in that entity that saved Ibrahim (AS) from the fire. Is it possible for us to reach the female chamber? I have a strong feeling that the Queen and Abu Abdullah’s wife will help us. I know that they respect him. I am amazed as to why I didn’t think of this before.”

Angela said, “The palace’s pass gate would be closed at this time but because Abu Abdullah is in his court, the guards and eunuchs would be awake waiting for him. My necklace would be enough to open any closed doors and the news of the Frontier Falcon being in Al-Hamra is not so trivial that the Queen and Abu Abdullah’s wife would get upset of being awakened at an odd hour. Let’s go! And also thank God that mother is snoring in her deep sleep.”

Rabia got out of bed and took a few steps with the help of Angela but darkness spread in front of her eyes. She was about to fall but Angela got hold of her and made her lie on the bed and said, “The medicine has taken its effect on you. I will leave now. Pray for my success.”

Rabia, in her state of drowsiness, removed hernecklace and handing it over Angela, she said, “Take this too.”

# The Mujahid and the Traitor

With mixed thoughts Abu Dawood was moving towards that very court where, according to him, the fate of Badr bin Mughira, and with him the fate of Granada too was going to be decided.

He would suddenly halt while walking and would continue walking forward without coming to a conclusive decision. For the first time in his life he felt that he was loosing self-control. A moment ago, he had cleared every hurdle of his path to reach the final peak of his rise. Getting Badr bin Mughira into his net of deception was his life’s biggest achievement. Against this he could have asked Ferdinand for the biggest prize possible. He had cleared the way to Granada for Ferdinand forces. A few days ago when he had tried to convince Abu Abdullah that soon he would present the Frontier Falcon in shackles, Abu Abdullah had replied by saying that he would not take his word for it even if he showed him that he could fly.

However, today he had compelled Abu Abdullah and his comrades to bow their heads in front of his greatness. Today he was convinced that Abu Abdullah and his comrades would be puppets in his hands and the time had arrived to realize the dream of capturing the throne and crown of Granada. Abu Abdullah was a pawn in his political game that he could easily remove from its place when the need arose. By instigating him to attack Malaga he could let Ferdinand into Granada with gates wide open.

But the thought of Rabia directed his thinking to flow in a separate direction. “Aren’t all my efforts for making Rabia and Angela the most honorable ladies of the world? Silly Rabia is in love with him. Will she be able to bear the shock of his death? Leaving Rabia grieving forever, will I be happy despite being the Sultan of Granada? Can there be a situation that could save the Frontier Falcon’s life? A situation that would not jeopardize my future?”

His mind would reply nothing but “No” to all these questions. He knew very well that Badr bin Mughira’s fate would be decided tonight and he won’t be able to defend him without demolishing the forts of his hopes. He thought, “Even if I am able to save him, I would not be able to remove the hatred in his heart that he has for me. He would oppose every wish of mine even after he becomes Rabia’s husband. He would become a rock which I would have to break to move forward. After becoming his wife, Rabia would drift away from me day-by-day and the gulf between us would be impossible to cover. To make Rabia happy and save his life would leave me with only one option and that would be to say goodbye to all the dreams of my life and go into oblivion somewhere. No! No! I would never be able to do that. After all, why am I so concerned about Rabia? She would be in shock for a few days and I will be able to console her. When there would not be anyone at par with me in Hispania apart from Ferdinand, when emperors and kings would be proud of eating at my table and when Rabia would sit on the throne as a Queen to some King, then surely she would realize that her father was not her enemy.”

Guards stood at every entrance of the court. The warden of the court welcomed Abu Dawood and opened its door. On seeing Abu Dawood the attendees stood up in respect. He responded by waving his hand in reply to their salutations and made his way towards the throne where Abu Abdullah sat. After bowing and greeting Abu Abdullah, he then sat on a vacant seat.

Badr bin Mughira stood right in front of the throne between the two rows of the nobles’ seats. His hands were handcuffed and his face glowed with rage. After softly enquiring from a chief seated beside him, Abu Dawood found out that he had finished his statement. The chief also told him that his words were intolerable for everyone. For Abu Abdullah he had said that not only was he ill-natured but also a fool and in both cases he found him pitiable.

For a while the nobles and scholars whispered amongst themselves while Abu Abdullah looked at Badr bin Mughira in amazement, anguish, uneasiness and bewilderment. Finally, he spoke. “We are giving you another chance. If you accept our government we will release you after a brief confinement.”

Badr bin Mughira replied, “I have already responded to this. I don’t beg for my life from cowards. I refuse to acknowledge the government of a person who is God’s rebel, who is the people’s traitor, who is an enemy of his father.” Badr bin Mughira’s glance fell on Abu Dawood and he raised his voice and said, “Abu Abdullah! You are nurturing snakes under your sleeve and you think that they will only bite your enemies? But you are unaware of a snake’s nature. They are friends to no one. You think that my crime is to wage war against you? But by the sword that has always been bathed in the blood of the enemies of Islam that if I had the desire to wage war against you, then the walls of Al-Hamra would not have stopped my warriors. I wanted to bring you to the right path using various excuses and that is why I accepted the invitation of one of your comrades and came alone to your palace. You can issue whatever orders you want regarding me but that doesn’t mean I am a criminal and have accepted you as a judge over me. I did not accept your father as my amir because he was the Sultan of Granada and he sat on couches of gold, in buildings of marble. On the contrary, I accepted his leadership because he had declared *jihād* against the worst enemy of Islam and you are a toy in Ferdinand’s hand. How did you even think that I would swear allegiance to you?”

Abu Dawood said something in the chief’s ear who sat next to him and the chief stood up and said, “O Great Sultan! So far whatever the criminal has said proves that he deserves the severest of punishments therefore, it is our request to pronounce the sentence to him and adjourn the court. This disrespectful way of addressing by the criminal is unbearable for your loyalists.” The rest of the of the chiefs and scholars got up one after the other in his support.

Badr bin Mughira said, “Unfortunate is that being who thinks such people are his loyalists. Abu Abdullah! These people are vultures that nurture on people’s corpses. By relying on them you are pushing yourself alongwith Granada onto a path of destruction.”

Abu Abdullah got up and said in a trembling voice, “I give Badr bin Mughira the death penalty for being the greatest enemy of the Sultanate of Granada. The criminal should be killed before sunrise.”

Badr bin Mughira stood like a rock. To date no such criminal had ever stood in this chamber of the Al-Hamra who had listened to his death penalty with such a pleasant and glamorous smile. His silence said this about his current situation, “I have always played with death. You can put me to death but you cannot take my smiles away from me. I have learned to smile like this under the shades of swords and below the rains of arrows and it will ridicule your cowardice, cruelty and deception until the last moment.”

The throne and crown of Granada became trivial in Abu Dawood’s eyes once he saw this model of liberty and determination. He asked himself, “Is there such a wealth in this world that could make death seem so petty to someone. What is that zeal, after all, that they get infused with, which makes these people see no difference between life and death? This youth smiles despite seeing the executioner’s sword so close to him and Rabia drank the cup of medicine thinking it was poison. Why after all? Is it because they have understood the secret of death and life? Or is it because they have not properly appreciated the comforts of life? And is there a zest in life that can be equated to tranquility when it is surrounded by death? I can take over the throne of Andalus but would that success teach me to smile in the horrible face of death? No! No! In fact, with every success the face of death would become even more horrible.”

For the first time in his life he realized that “the biggest success for a person in life is to conquer the fear of death. This is his greatest victory and this victory is achieved only by those who understand that life and death is only for the sake of the Almighty. Unlike me, Badr bin Mughira has learned to fight not for himself but for God. For him God is not an imaginary force but a reality. A reality that compels him to stand in the face of death like a rock. Alas! I wish I could conquer death in the same manner.” Abu Dawood began to view the entire palaces of his ideas nothing more than heaps of sand.

Abu Abdullah got up from his throne and went into in a room in the rear. The guards took Badr bin Mughira outside and one after the other the chiefs and scholars congratulated Abu Dawood on his marvelous victory but he felt as if they were mocking him. A slave approached him and said that Abu Abdullah was waiting for him in the other room.

Moments later Abu Dawood was in a beautiful chamber seated in front of Abu Abdullah. The inferiority that he felt in front of Badr bin Mughira gradually withered away in the company of Abu Abdullah. The self-styled Sultan of Granada considered him to be a supernatural being. When he entered the room, Abu Abdullah stepped forward and after shaking Abu Dawood’s hand, bent and kissed it. Even during conversation Abu Abdullah’s tone was unusually humble. When Abu Abdullah said that from today every “cue from you would be a command for me”, his superiority complex began to take life. He thought that the world in which his thoughts had strayed away a while ago were merely a supposition. “Majority of the people that live in this world belong to the world that Abu Abdullah lives in and in that world I am smarter than hundreds of them. I can make hundreds of the likes of Abu Abdullah dance to my tunes. I have cleared the path for my success in this world. I will keep treading this path and with every new success the people who respect me will grow even more. And while dying I would not have the bitter regret that any of my wishes were not fulfilled. I should not think about Badr bin Mughira. His world is different from my world. Thinking about him will cause me nothing else but concern. I belong to the world where idiots like Abu Abdullah reside. I have been born to be a leader and guide to hundreds of such people. I have been born to drive flocks of people.” During these musings, he thought of Rabia. What would he tell her after she gains consciousness? “Maybe because of the intensity of the emotions the medicine might not have had an effect on her? What will I tell her? And Angela is also stubbornly supporting her. She must be waiting for me at the door. She would trouble me with her tears of compassion for her sister.”

Like Abu Dawood, Abu Abdullah was also concerned that in case this news reached the harem he would be taken to task by his mother and wife, who had not touched their food for several days on hearing about Musa’s captivity.

He said to Abu Dawood, “I have asked the jailer to inform me as soon as he is killed. I don’t want to enter the harem until this task is completed.”

Abu Dawood said, “You must be upset at Rabia’s behavior. I didn’t expect this from her since she is quite sensible. She fell unconscious in the other room. I’m sure she is not conscious at this time too.”

Abu Abdullah said thoughtfully, “Don’t feel bad. Even if she said those things in her senses, I should not be surprised. Thousands of girls of Granada sing the praises of his bravery. Today after watching him, even I felt that I would have fallen for his masculinity, had I been a girl. But I am hoping that Rabia will forget him soon.”

To change the topic Abu Dawood said, “The jailer will not come before taking care of his body. In the meantime, wouldn’t it be good to play a game of chess?”

Abu Abdullah said, “You have spoken my heart’s desire. The only condition is that we spend the rest of the night here.”

Abu Dawood replied, “I am willing to sit with you untill the afternoon.”

Badr bin Mughira was maneuvered from complex underground pathways into a cell whose door was only opened on such occasion. Besides the eight soldiers accompanying Badr bin Mughira, there were guards standing at every step of the way. The cell had a torch alight and the executioner stood waiting for him. Without facing any resistance from Badr bin Mughira, the soldiers tied his wrists onto an iron rack.

At the jailer’s cue, the soldiers went out and he closed the door and said to Badr bin Mughira, “This might seem like a routine statement but your death will grieve me like no other death. So, I ask you, not in the capacity of the jailer of Al-Hamra, but as someone who sympathizes with you, would you like to express a wish that I am able to fulfill before your death?”

Badr bin Mughira replied, “I know you’re helpless. There is one wish that might be possible for you to fulfill and that is that someday if you might have to execute Abu Abdullah on the orders of Abu Dawood or anyone of his comrades, then, do not use this cell for this purpose. I do not want his blood to be mixed with mine.”

The jailer said, “Would you like to leave a message for Rabia?”

No. I do not have to use anyone to convey a message to Rabia. After I’m gone, she will be able to hear the message of my soul. You go ahead and finish your work."

The jailer looked towards the executioner. This was the first time in ten years that the executioner saw tears in the eyes of the jailer. At his hand gesture, the executioner raised the axe while the jailer looked the other way, wiping his tears.

Somebody started banging the door loudly and the jailer held the executioner’s hand and said, “Wait!” Then he went close to the door and shouted, “Who is it?”

In reply he heard the frightened voices of the guards, “Open the door.”

He quickly opened the latch and was surprised to see the Grand Master of Al-Hamra, Abu Abdullah’s elderly mother, his wife and Angela at the door. A few eunuchs stood behind them.

After peeping inside, the Grand Master of Al-Hamra took a sigh of relief and said, “We reached just in time. The royal ladies want to see the biggest enemy of the Sultan being executed with their own eyes.”

Appearing a bit worried, the jailer said, “Fulfilling the wish of the ladies is my duty but they would have to guarantee our safety from the wrath of the Sultan.”

While stepping inside, Abu Abdullah’s mother said, “You should have an expectation for a reward. Today our son has gained victory over a great enemy. The eunuchs will distribute rewards on our behalf to all those whose intelligence gave the opportunity of being victorious over the enemy. And we will also request them not to inform Abu Abdullah about our presence here. He is in the habit of becoming upset over every other thing.”

After the royal ladies and Angela entered, the jailer closed the door and said, “Would you like to say something to the criminal?”

Abu Abdullah’s mother whispered to the jailer and said, “Do you also believe that Badr bin Mughira is a criminal?”

The jailer looked at her in amazement. Abu Abdullah’s mother removed her necklace and handed it over to him and said, “This is your reward.”

Abu Abdullah’s wife followed suit and presented her jewel studded bangles to the black executioner. The executioner looked at the jailer in bewilderment and the jailer, taking a cue from the Grand Master’s eye signal, said, “Queen of the World! Command us and we will comply without any incentive. Please take the necklace and bangles back.”

Abu Abdullah’s mother said, “There is no doubt that the Emirate of Al-Hamra and its greatness have become a fable but the Sultan’s mother and his wife are not so empty-handed that they can’t even patronize their loyalists with ordinary rewards. Don’t give us the impression that we are poor. We want to shower these pieces of stone on the Frontier Falcon.”

The Grand Master said to the jailer, “Now what are you thinking? I have completed all the preparations. Set him free.”

The jailer gestured to the executioner, who immediately took the bangles from the hands of Abu Abdullah’s wife.

Badr bin Mughira’s face was towards the other side. He had listened to their conversation and his eyes swelled with tears of gratitude for the Supreme Being who never forgets his slaves no matter what.

The executioner unlocked the shackles.

Badr bin Mughira got up, turned around and looked at his benefactors. The Queen Mother moved forward and said, “Son! Consider me like your mother. We have done our duty but if you take this as a favor then when the time comes, do not take revenge from Abu Abdullah but consider him to be someone who deserves sympathy.”

Badr bin Mughira replied, “I still think he deserves sympathy. I have seen how helplessly he’s surrounded by the nation sellers.”

Abu Abdullah’s wife said tearfully, “I want to take a pledge from you that is that you won’t ever become disheartened and leave the people of Granada. Not only every woman of Granada, but also of Andalus considers you as their benefactor.”

Feeling touched, Badr bin Mughira replied, “My sister! Granada is Muslim Andalus’ last bastion. My comrades and I will protect it until our last breath.”

The Queen Mother said, “This is not the time to have a conversation. I fear one of Abu Abdullah’s comrades might come this way. We are releasing you on our personal responsibility and we are confident that we both will be safe from Abu Abdullah’s wrath even after he finds out. However, for the sake of the workers of the palace who have been faithful to you, you would have to remain underground until Abu Abdullah regrets his doings. Otherwise these people, instead of you would have to go underground, and the traitors of the Sultanate would have the upper hand in Al-Hamra.”

Badr bin Mughira replied, “Rest assured. Apart from a few reliable people, no one would know about my life. I have to remain underground for a very great purpose.”

The Queen Mother said, “May God be your protector and supporter.”

So far Angela was silently looking at Badr bin Mughira. Badr bin Mughira took notice of her. She nervously took a step forward and said hesitantly, “Don’t worry about Rabia. It was difficult for her to come here.”

Abu Abdullah’s wife said, “We are obliged to Angela who warned us in good time.”

Bringing a smile of appreciation to his face, Badr bin Mughira said, “Angela, I’m sure your physician will enquire about you. If you want to convey something, I’m willing to act as a messenger.”

For a moment, ever drop of blood in her veins gathered up onto her cheeks. After entering this cell, her biggest concern was to say something about Bashir bin Hassan. She had no hope that he would be a point of discussion. And she also knew she would be at a loss of words even if he was mentioned. But it was as if Badr bin Mughira had opened the gates of heaven for her. She said, “He is my benefactor…Please present him this handkerchief on my behalf.”

Angela reluctantly stepped forward and handed a red colored handkerchief to Badr bin Mughira.

The royal ladies had understood volumes by their feminine instincts. Therefore, they remained silent.

On the Grand Master’s suggestion Badr bin Mughira was put on a plank that was placed in the cell to carry the dead body. A sheet was put over him.

The jailer opened the door of the cell. All the three ladies went out. The guards stood at distance, surrounding a eunuch, who was keeping their attention focused on him by being very stingy in distributing the jewels among them. However, as soon as he saw the royal ladies, he quickly emptied the bag.

For a moment the jailer stood by the door. Once the ladies were at a distance, he came out and said to guards, “It was the Sultan’s order that the news of the killing should be confined to us. The Queen and the Lady-in-Waiting had come here without the Sultan’s permission. Now if the Sultan finds this out, he might not say anything to the royal ladies but we would be in grave danger.”

The jailer called four men inside to carry the corpse and permitted the others to leave.

After a while the four men carried out the plank on their shoulders on which Badr bin Mughira lay and walked behind, following the Grand Master and the jailer. After passing through several complex pathways they came and stood in front of a wall. It appeared that there was no way to move forward. Handing over the torch to the Grand Master, the jailer turned an iron latch mounted on the wall. After a crankling, a crack appeared in the wall which gradually expanded into a pathway and the loud sound of flowing water could be heard. On the jailer’s cue, the Grand Master placed the torch at one side and came out with him. The soldiers followed suit. Outside this wall there was a platform which was about eight to ten yards wide and five yards high. Below it was a gushing river. On the jailer’s signal the soldiers placed the plank down. The Grand Master said something in the jailer’s ear, who then addressed the soldiers and said, “You have been my companions since a longtime, therefore, in my opinion, hiding anything from you would be an insult to your loyalty. I would like to reveal a great secret to you.”

Seeing the jailer a bit shaken, one of the soldiers said, “Don’t worry. That secret has already been revealed to us and it will be secure in our breasts till our last breath. You don’t have to tell us that we have carried a living being on our shoulders instead of a dead body.”

The jailer remained silent and the Grand Master pulled out a bag of jewels from under his armpit. While handing it to the soldier, he said, “This is a reward for you and your comrades.”

He said, “No! No! For the people of Granada, the biggest prize for us is that the Frontier Falcon remains alive.”

For a while the soldier hesitated a little. But on the insistence of the Grand Master and the jailer, and seeing his companions in agreement, this soldier accepted the bag.

While taking a sigh of relief, the jailer enquired, “Were the other guards also suspicious that we wanted to save his life?”

“No! But most wished for the Queen to have mercy on him. I too had no such expectation from the Queen but after examining the slaughterhouse, I was satisfied. There wasn’t even a drop of blood.”

The Grand Master said, “The executioner must have taken care of that deficiency by now.”

Badr bin Mughira removed the sheet and threw it to one side. He got up, moved forward and said, “I believe I do not have to take your permission to come back to the world of the living.”

One after the other, the jailer, Grand Master and the soldiers stepped forward and shook his hand.

The Grand Master said, “Our sphere of influence and control ends at the banks of this side of the river. The water is cold and rough. If you can’t trust your arms, we can make other arrangements. But time is scarce.”

Badr bin Mughira said, “Don’t worry. The Supreme Being that had stopped the hands of the executioner at my neck can certainly save me from these defiant waves.”

The Grand Master said, “Very well, goodbye! Today you had entered from the backdoor of Al-Hamra and you’re leaving from a backdoor as well. We will wait for the day when the main gate of Al-Hamra is opened for you.”

Badr bin Mughira bid farewell and advanced towards the river bank and after a brief hesitation, plunged into the river.

Badr bin Mughira sat on a rock on the other side of the river to catch his breath.

The clouds had cleared in the sky and the stars were shining bright. As Badr bin Mughira intended to get up, he heard the sound of some footsteps. He quickly got up, tiptoed and stood behind a tree. Moments later, in the darkness, he saw two men walking along the banks of the river. He cautiously followed them from behind the trees.

One of them said softly, “He has taken a long time. It will be morning soon.”

The other said, “But he also said that we should not wait for him. In case of success, he would have to be there for a longer time.”

“But he also said that if there is a possibility he would lower a man down the ladder and apprise us of the actual situation.”

“Maybe he could not find the time for that. If you want to wait longer then we should remain standing at this place.”

Badr bin Mughira called out, “Mansoor!”

Both of them stopped, turned around, ran towards him and embraced him. The second person was Bashir bin Hassan.

Fed up with the bombardment of queries by his friends, Badr bin Mughira said, “Come on. Let’s get out of here.” While walking, Badr bin Mughira put his hand on Bashir bin Hassan’s shoulder, said something in his ear and simultaneously placed a wet handkerchief in his hand.

Mansoor turned around, looked towards them and said, “Looks like you have not come back on your own wishes.”

Badr bin Mughira replied, “You are right in your assessment.”

Bashir bin Hassan said, “I think we’re out of the danger zone. Let’s have your story now.”

Badr bin Mughira gave a brief account of his story while walking. After walking for about a mile, the three men passed through a dense garden and entered a dilapidated house. Here, five more of their comrades were guarding the horses.

After all of them got on their horses, Bashir bin Hassan inquired, “Where do we intend to go now?”

Badr bin Mughira said, "I will go my way after a short distance. I will take these five soldiers with me into the forest. Mansoor! Send the Sultan’s soldiers to Malaga as soon as it is morning and take your comrades and come to me. And Bashir! You go to Malaga. After apprisingAl-Zeghel and Al-Zaghairi about the events, tell them that it’s to ouradvantage that I remain underground for a while. Abu Abdullah and his comrades will promptly take the news of my death to Ferdinand, who will be ready to attack immediately. Advise Al-Zeghel, instead of attacking he should retreat into our territory. If Ferdinand pursues, we will be able to give him a decisive defeat. There is also a possibility that he might advance towardsMalaga after making Granada as their base with Abu Abdullah’s consent. In this case the Sultan’s forces should advance forward and try to stop them at the border and after a brief skirmish, should retreat into the forest. When the time comes I will send you to guide them. Make sure you stress the fact that in both cases he needs to leave at least half of the army for the protection of Malaga.

# The Man in Black

The rumor of Badr bin Mughira’s assassination spread in the length and breadth of Andalus like wildfire. It was Abu Abdullah’s wish for this news not spread among the people of Granada but Abu Dawood advised him that this news would dishearten Abul Hassan’s supporters. So, a few paid orators were assigned to broadcast the news of the Frontier Falcon’s assassination among the people of Granada.

Abu Dawood dispatched his emissary to Ferdinand with the message that this was the right time to strike a final blow to Abul Hassan.

According to his own opinion, Abu Abdullah thought that that he had gotten rid of his greatest enemy. However, the presence of the Frontier Falcon’s comrades in the vicinity of Granada was no less disturbing for him. But when he heard that the Frontier Falcon’s comrades have decided to leave instead of laying a siege on Granada, his jubilation had no bounds. Two or three days later when he got the news that they were abandoning Abul Hassan and leaving Malaga also, he feasted in the palace and distributed prizes among the nation sellers.

After a few days an emissary of Ferdinand came and informed him that in a few weeks their forces would reach the southern coast of Andalus. He informed and said, “Major part of the army would advance from the north and east towards Mount Nevada to crush the strength of the border tribes. The other contingent would head east of Cadiz and Jerez De La Frontera. Both armies would meet in the mountains of Sierra Nevada and then capture all the cities near the coastline. In the meantime, you need to immediately come out of Granada and attack Malaga. We anticipate that you will be able to capture Malaga by that time. However, if you are unable to capture Malaga due to stiff resistance of the enemy, which I doubt, then the ruler of Cadiz will come to your aid.”

Abu Abdullah thought that after assassinating Badr bin Mughira, he had cleared every thorn in Ferdinand’s path. He was confident that his ally and patron would not burden his shoulders with another war. He would descend on Malaga like a storm and return after annihilating his enemies and after recognizing him as the sole ruler of Andalus. On hearing Ferdinand’s message, he nervously asked Abu Dawood, “In the given circumstances, doesn’t Ferdinand know that the most secure place for me are the confines of the four walls of Al-Hamra? After the Frontier Falcon’s assassination, the people of Granada are extremely infuriated with me. As for the army, I fear that in case I invade my father, some of them might defect to his side.”

Abu Dawood understood Ferdinand’s strategy. He knew that Ferdinand could not trust Abu Abdullah completely and therefore he wanted him to attack Malaga so that the gulf of hatred between the father and son would become so wide that there would be no chance of a reconciliation between them.

So he replied, “Maybe he desires to divide the enemy’s attention on three fronts. If you avoid going to war, then he might even give up the idea of supporting you. Therefore, you should attack Malaga without any further delay. The Frontier Falcon and his comrades were the enemy’s biggest support. The Frontier Falcon has been killed and his companions have returned to their homes, so possibly, you can capture Malaga before Ferdinand’s arrival. After Malaga’s victory, all the rebel chiefs and tribes of the south would bear allegiance to you and this way you wouldn’t have to take Ferdinand’s favor.”

Abu Abdullah replied, “I am ready to attack Malaga but only when Ferdinand’s armies have entered the bordering areas.”

Abu Dawood replied, “If you so command, I can dispatch this reply.”

“Sure! But write it in such a way that the King should not think that I am a coward. I only want to be cautious.”

Abul Hassan had become paralyzed and blind. On the insistence of the emirs he nominated his brother, Al-Zeghel, as his successor. Ferdinand left Castile with his innumerable army, camped near Cordova and prepared to serve a final blow to the Muslims’ last bastion of defense in Andalus. He ordered the Christian nobles of Jerez De La Frontera, Seville and Cadiz to advance toward Sierra Nevada ravaging the cities South West of Granada and for another part of the army to be given under an experienced general to subdue the border tribes in the North East.

When Ferdinand’s army entered Badr bin Mughira’s independent territory, they hardly faced any stiff resistance apart from an attack or two from the rear and the side flanks. The Christians had destroyed a number of cities along their path and marched in the Frontier Falcon’s territory in high spirits. One day their general delivered a speech in front of his troops after capturing a deserted fort and said:

“Brave Men! This was the area where no bird would flap its wings without the Frontier Falcon’s permission. Now the leader of these rebels is gone and their morale is low. Our King thought that we would have to face stiff resistance but these people run away on hearing the trotting of our horses. Our swords are thirsty for the blood of the enemy but it looks as if their thirst won’t be quenched until we reach Malaga. Therefore, we should forge forward without resting in between. We don’t want our brothers, who are advancing from Cadiz towards Malaga to take precedence over us.”

The next day when they were passing through the forest, they faced some unprecedented situations. The rear flank was suddenly attacked by a thousand horsemen who killed three thousand men within moments of the attack and disappeared into the forest.

Badr bin Mughira’s biggest success was that after an attack or two, he had maneuvered the enemy’s army into dangerous gorges and pathways where every cliff could become an impregnable fort for the attackers. Some seasoned officers of the Christian army advised their general to change their route but he was blinded by power. Like the general, his soldiers too, who would normally be cautious in such pathways, were confident that the rebellious border tribes would have given up hope after the Frontier Falcon’s death. Under the leadership of the man-in-black, the thousand horsemen had inflicted substantial damage to them and it was intolerable for the Christians to move forward without getting even with them.

One evening the Christian army chased the frontier horsemen through difficult and narrow pathways and ended up into a valley after passing a narrow gorge. Huge mountains stood in front. Therefore, the general ordered the army to encamp there. To neutralize any unprecedented attack, he dispatched a few units to the mountains in the vicinity to stay on guard. After having a day of onslaught, the weary army slept, once they had a stomach full of food and wine. Even the general and the other officers slept thinking that the troops on guard on the mountains in the vicinity were enough to repel any unprecedented attack. Suddenly, in the third part of the night, the screams of the guards were heard. The general got up in distress, and came out of his tent rubbing his eyes. There was groaning everywhere and all around there were several tents on fire. The Christian army tried to reach for their swords but suddenly a rain of arrows ensued. Several troops were killed by the attackers in the illumination of the fire.

The general ordered the troops to take cover in the darkness. The troops started moving away from the burning tents. All of a sudden, cries of “Allahu Akbar” resonated all around and within moments the attackers descended and fell upon the bewildered Christians troops. In the darkness, several Christian swords clashed with each other.

Believing that the number of attackers would be few in numbers, the general ordered his troops to spread out and capture the mountains but the intense rain of stones and arrows prevented them from doing so. By dawn the condition of the Christians was such that neither the officers nor the soldiers were aware of each other’s plight. They tried to save their own lives by hiding behind rocks and trees. The attackers had captured and were riding many of the Christians’ horses. The rest of the horses that were cut loose were aimlessly running here and there in the forest. Many of their troops were crushed under their feet. In the light of the morning, the Christians saw that the attackers had captured their horses and were now using them by attacking them with lances. The Christian general had hoped that the attackers would flee with the approaching morning but observing their enthusiasm, he concluded that they had chosen this valley for a decisive battle. The corpses of the Christians in the field were demoralizing. Compared to the attackers, their army was still five times greater but the continuous attacks in the valley by the horsemen had uprooted them. The general decided to retreat by battling defensively. Exiting the valley and entering into a narrow gorge, he thought that his troops were now safe from the range of the lancers but here too he could not take a sigh of relief. Once again the cries of the mujāhidīn hiding behind grisly rocks were heard and the rain of stones and arrows ensued.

A stone came and hit the general and he fell down. The troops became hopeless as soon as he died. The lieutenant general ordered the army to quickly leave the valley. After coming out of the rain of stones and arrows and reaching an even area, the lieutenant general took stock of his remaining troops. Out of twenty thousand troops only eight thousand remained. Fearing the danger of being pursued, he did not even allow his troops to catch their breath.

After moving for about two miles, this army was now entering a dense forest when suddenly about a thousand horsemen appeared from behind the trees and in the first assault itself they threw the Christian army in disarray. Leading the attackers was the very same man-in-black whom the Christian general eagerly wanted to capture alive and who had brought him into these perilous regions. About two thousand Christians fled and hid in the forest while the remainder of the army surrendered after putting up a brief resistance.

After posting Al-Zaghairi for Malaga’s protection, Al-Zeghel along with five thousand warriors kept retreating after fighting defensively against the cowardly army of Cordova, Seville, Cadiz and other cities of the northwest and waited for the Frontier Falcon after reaching the foot of the Sierra Nevada.

Ferdinand was receiving very encouraging news of his general’s successes in the valley of the falcons. After hearing the news of Al-Zeghel’s repulse and retreat towards Sierra Nevada, he sent a message to the generals of both his armies that instead of heading towards the coastal areas they should corner Al-Zeghel from both sides. At the same time, he sent a message to Abu Abdullah in Granada that he should attack Malaga immediately.

Abu Abdullah had already received the news that major part of the army was with Al-Zeghel and that Al-Zaghairi was guarding the city with a very small number of troops. Therefore, thinking that victory was imminent, he invaded Malaga. Besides the chiefs who were bought-out by Ferdinand, the army also comprised of people who were hopeless about the future of the Muslims in Andalus and were pleasing Ferdinand just so that they could live.

A day before Abu Abdullah left Granada with his army, Ferdinand’s army had been annihilated and three days later, the Frontier Falcon’s warriors had rallied under Al-Zeghel’s banner. Al-Zeghel’s army feared the enemy’s size but their morale was boosted when they heard about the glorious victory. Al-Zeghel inspected all the checkposts around his camp alongwith Badr bin Mughira and Mansour bin Ahmed. Apart from Badr bin Mughira’s men, no one knew that he was alive. On seeing a veiled person with Al-Zeghel they would believe that after the snatching of Badr bin Mughira, destiny had given them a new supporter. His camp was a little away from the encampment of the rest of the army and only a few selected officers of Al-Zeghel’s army, who knew about this secret, had the permission to go there.

The bellicose tribes of Alpujarras thronged under Al-Zeghel’s banner. After a long time, they got a chance to fight alongside the mujāhidīn of the falcon’s territory. Because Mansour bin Ahmed used to be considered Badr bin Mughira’s successor, therefore, they requested Al-Zeghel to give them under Mansour bin Ahmed’s command. Mansoor prepared the battle map according to Badr bin Mughira’s instructions and spread the tribal mujāhidīn on the entire pathways. He instructed them to seal the areas behind the Christian army as it advanced forward.

This battalion was unaware of the consequence suffered by the army that had attacked the territory of the falcon. After encamping for five days at the fort of the Sierra Nevada they kept waiting for a message from its general. However, a few night raids by the tribal mujāhidīn compelled them to move forward.

After burning a few settlements and capturing a few men and women during their three-day advancement, Ferdinand’s battalion had finally entered this dangerous territory where the falcons of the frontier were anxiously waiting.

Badr bin Mughira attacked the enemy’s vanguard troops with a thousand of his elite warriors and vanished into the mountains after devastating them. While the General was coming to terms with the situation, he got the news of a rear attack by the tribes. This area was not wide enough for a full-fledged battle. The General commanded his troops to march forward swiftly. After this ravine was a steep slope followed by a valley. Feeling the intensity of the rear attack he decided to descend into the valley. After about two miles the lower part of this valley merged into a wide forest and its highland showed a narrow gulley between two mountains.

On one side, the General considered the tribal attackers to be extremely dangerous in the forest and on the other, he feared of being surrounded in a narrow gulley. He ordered the army to halt and sent the vanguard units in both directions to check the paths while he waited for the attackers. Moments later his rear troops also caught up and reported that they have repelled the attack of the aggressors.

The vanguard troops that advanced towards the lower part of the territory returned after facing a volley of arrows as soon as they entered into the forest and reported that the forest was infested with archers.

The troops that had gone to the other side of the valley reported that they had scanned the area within ten miles. This area was wide in some places and narrow at some. On both sides there were high mountains. They also reported that they had not spotted any enemy soldiers. Some shepherds informed them that after a distance of two days the valley merges into the fertile lands where the tribal settlements of Alpujarras begin.

The Christian General viewed this route also as being dangerous. Even after encamping here, he feared of being surrounded from all sides. He also feared that even if the attackers come out of the mountains and did not engage him in a proper battle even then they could inflict substantial damage by conducting night raids. Facing him were the mountains of Sierra Nevada. On his left was the forest which was impossible to cleanse from the enemy. Behind him was the slope where he would have to pass through the narrow ravine again where he had already incurred a huge loss. He also felt that once he turned back, the army hiding in the forest would ascend the mountains and block his path. Inevitably, he decided to take the route on the right. When the valley would be narrow, the foot soldiers would climb the mountains on both sides to secure the army from the enemy’s rocks and arrows. And when the valley would become wide they would come down from the difficult terrain and join up with the mounted troops. They continued moving this way until evening without any incident.

It was night but the General could not find a suitable place to encamp. After moving for a while in the darkness of the night, the narrow valley and mountains on both sides appeared to be huge. The darkness was so much that some horses almost tripped. Some officers advised the General that it seemed that the valley had no end. They opinioned that it might take them where it could become difficult to move forward and where the enemy might be lying waiting for them. Therefore, they advised that it would be better to either return back or get rid of the horses in the valley and take to the mountains. This way they would be in a better position to retaliate in case of an unprecedented attack. They also said that in the light of the morning if they had to return, even then, their foot-soldiers would ascend the mountains and secure the path.

As they were contemplating their options a rock fell from above. Perplexed, they stared at each other in the darkness of the night with eyes wide open. Moments later, a few more rocks fell and the screams of the casualties could be heard and this culminated into a rain of rocks. The General ordered the army to push back but there was no reduction in the pace of the raining rocks. The sound of rocks and the screams of the injured coupled with neighing horses, depicted a scene of doomsday. The attackers were raising the slogans of “Allahu Akbar” from the top of the mountains.

To prevent his army from annihilation the General ordered his troops to dismount the horses and take to the mountains. But only a few horsemen got to hear his orders in the clamor. The ones who could hear his command and wanted to comply, soon realized that it was not easy climbing the rocks. Most horsemen had turned the reins of their horses with the intention of getting to wider area of the valley.

Until morning this army rambled and faced immense destruction. Out of thirty thousand troops, twelve thousand became the target of rocks. Five thousand climbed the mountains and successfully escaped. The rest of the army reached where they had initially started their journey but they did not get time to stabilize. Fresh horsemen emerged from the forest. Their General had the flag of Granada in his hand. Within moments, they flew their horses and quickly reached over their heads. The Christians still outnumbered them. They fought intensely but soon five thousand additional troops descended a mountain under the leadership of a masked man. Their flag sported a picture of a falcon. They threw the enemy lines in disarray in the first charge. The battlefield started echoing with cries of “Long Live Islam”, “Long Live Granada”, “Long Live Al-Zeghel” and “Long Live the mujāhidīn”.

Three thousand horsemen of Ferdinand’s army left the battlefield and headed towards the forest while the rest threw down their arms.

The prisoners also comprised of about two thousand of Ferdinand’s knights and his army’s high ranking officers.

Abu Abdullah ultimately set out for Malaga. He had come to know that Al-Zeghel had left Malaga and taken to the mountains and only a small army was protecting Malaga. Besides this, he consoled in the fact that even if he is not successful in taking the city quickly, Ferdinand’s forces would arrive for his support within a few days after completing their mission of subduing the tribes of the mountains. But Al-Zaghairi came out of the city and battled with him. Al-Zaghairi’s troops were smaller but compared to Abu Abdullah’s mercenaries they had far more zest and zeal. When the armies faced each other, Al-Zaghairi, made an inspiring speech in front of his army and said:

“The enemy’s numbers are greater than yours but remember that a traitor is never brave. Today your battle is for your survival. If you lose, Ferdinand’s flag will be hoisted by Abu Abdullah over Malaga. Have trust in Allah’s support. These nation sellers and mercenaries are no competition for you. Abu Abdullah’s biggest support is Ferdinand but you have heard the good news that half of his army has been devastated in the territory of the falcon by a handful of mujāhidīn.”

“In the coming days, God-willing, you will also hear that the rest of his army in Sierra Nevada has had the same fate. Mujahids! Advance forward! The group chosen by God for today’s victory is none but you.”

Abu Abdullah and most of his companions had come with the intention of laying siege of the city. Challenging a warrior like Al-Zaghairi in an open field was totally against their wishes. While they were in the midst of this confusion, a General of Al-Zaghairi’s army galloped into the field and cried loudly:

“A Muslim only fights for the truth. If anyone of you thinks that they are on the truth, then I invite him to a duel. If your heart is a witness to the fact that you are not on the truth, then know that you won’t be able to stand up against us. You have come here based on Ferdinand’s support but know that not even one soldier of his will come to your aid. Half of his army has been destroyed in the Territory of the Falcon and the other half has been surrounded by our Supreme Commander. Abu Abdullah! Even then if you want to fight then come into the battlefield yourself. Maybe your culmination will bring those people who have been misguided to the right path.”

Abu Abdullah looked towards his soldiers and seeing the hopelessness on their faces said,

“That is a lie. Don’t listen to him. No power can defeat Ferdinand.”

On Abu Abdullah’s cue a Berber chief prompted his horse forward. A mujahid of Malaga raised a lance and attacked after making a round with his horse. Moments later, Abu Abdullah’s army saw the Berber chief agonizing on the ground.

Al-Zaghairi’s army waited for his signal. Al-Zaghairi shouted “Allahu Akbar” as he raised his lance and the mujāhidīn of Malaga attacked Abu Abdullah’s army like a storm.

After an hour the battalion of nation-sellers was heading towards Granada leaving four hundred corpses in the battlefield. Al-Zaghairi intercepted them for a distance but returned back thinking Malaga was vulnerable.

Before Abu Abdullah reached Granada, its dwellers had already received the news of the glorious victory of the Muslims in Sierra Nevada and the Territory of the Falcon. There were celebrations in the markets and streets. Some gathered in the mosques and prayed for Al-Zeghel’s long life while some gathered at road intersections encircling poets and listened to their odes and tributes honoring the frontier warriors and tribal mujāhidīn.

Shortly after Abu Abdullah entered the Al-Hamra palace, the news of his defeat spread in the entire city and the people started gathering outside the gate of his palace. The guards closed the gate.

As soon as Abu Abdullah entered the palace, the Sultanate’s deputy informed him that he had already confirmed the news of the Christians’ defeat on both fronts. He said, “Some of Ferdinand’s defeated troops had strayed into a settlement close to Granada. The settlement’s chief brought them to me. One of them was from the army that was destroyed in the Territory of the Falcon and the rest were those who were successful in escaping Al-Zeghel’s attack in Sierra Nevada. I received similar news from a number of protectors of the checkposts of Granada that they have seen bands of Christian troops that fled the battlefield. The news has caused jubilation among the citizens and besides the Grand Mufti, the students have also killed chiefs that were loyal to you. They have also burned several homes belonging to troops that accompanied you to the expedition”.

To take a stock of the new scenario, Abu Abdullah called for a meeting of the nobles in the Dar Al-Aswad as he sat in a separate room and asked a slave to go and fetch Abu Dawood. While the slave went to call Abu Dawood, Abu Abdullah got up and started strolling in the room. Later, the slave returned and informed Abu Abdullah that Abu Dawood had gone away somewhere.

Abu Abdullah asked anxiously, “Where?”

The slave replied, “Only the warden has this information and he requests the honor to present himself.”

Abu Abdullah said, “Call him immediately.”

Moments later the warden of Al-Hamra entered the room and stood in front of Abu Abdullah with his head bowed down.

Abu Abdullah enquired, “Do you know where Abu Dawood has gone?”

The warden replied, “All he told me was that he was going away to implement your orders.”

“He has gone somewhere out of Granada.”

“He left in a coach from here. He has also taken his essential belongings with him.”

“Go and ask his family. No! I will go myself.” Abu Abdullah advanced towards the door but the warden said, “His residence is empty.”

“What did you say?”

“All of them have left.”

Abu Abdullah was aghast and looking towards the warden said, “When did they leave?”

“Today at noon.”

“Why didn’t you stop them?”

“I couldn’t dare to do that without your permission.”

“Did any emissary come to him?”

“No. But it seems that he was quite disturbed after hearing the news of the Christians’ defeat.”

“Has he left any message for me?”

“No. He said he is going away somewhere to carry out your orders. Because there were mobs of people at the gates of Al-Hamra, they had to leave using the back door. He didn’t even want anyone from outside to recognize him therefore he donned the attire of a Moroccan merchant.”

Abu Abdullah dismissed the warden and after contemplating alone for a while entered the chamber where the emirs had gathered.

Abu Abdullah’s comrades were the type of people, having a defeated type of mentality, who had tried to carve out a future for themselves with the Christians, once they thought that the Muslims would surely be defeated in the upcoming battles. Abu Dawood had convinced them that Ferdinand would certainly pay them for their treachery once the time came but Ferdinand’s defeat and Abu Dawood’s sudden disappearance only multiplied their concerns.

When Abu Abdullah entered Dar Al-Aswad, he noticed that a lot of seats were empty. On enquiring he found out that some emirs had gone underground on hearing the defeat of the Christians. He was also told that it could be quite possible that some could have gone and joined up with Al-Zeghel while some could have joined-up with the demonstrators.

Abu Abdullah enquired from the audience, “What is your opinion now?”

They started looking at each other. Finally, a chief stood up and said, “Great Sultan! Very soon Al-Zeghel’s armies will be standing at the gates of Granada. The people’s zeal and excitement is such that if it was not for Al-Hamra’s impregnable boundary and iron gates, they would not spare anyone of us today. The ones we trusted the most are the ones leading them. After the defeat at Malaga, our army does not have the courage to fight Al-Zeghel. If he captures Granada, he will hang each one of us just for avenging the Frontier Falcon’s crime alone. The only way out for us is to leave Granada and take refuge with Ferdinand. He will certainly avenge his defeat. I’m sure that Ferdinand must have sent a very small army for this mission and he would not sit quietly after this defeat. Presently, Granada is insecure for us. If it was secure, Abu Dawood wouldn’t have disappeared so suddenly. Now the biggest challenge in front of us is how could we be saved from Al-Zeghel’s revenge.”

One after the other, each one of the nobles supported this advice. Abu Abdullah thought for a long while with his head bowed down. Finally, he said, “If this is your opinion then I will not oppose it.”

Taking a sigh of relief, the chief said, “So it would be better if we left as soon as possible. I think leaving at night would be better but today an agitated mob has surrounded Al-Hamra. Therefore, we should be prepared for tomorrow night.”

Abu Abdullah dismissed the assembly and ordered the Prime Minister to stay behind. For a while, both contemplated about their future with different options.

Abu Abdullah said, “Are you convinced that Ferdinand would be ready to wage another war to restore my lost throne after incurring such a huge loss. Taking my uncle as a formidable enemy, wouldn’t he extend a hand of compromise instead of waging war to save a weak and defeated ally? Let’s say for the sake of reaching a compromise with my father and uncle he hands me and you over to them?”

The minister thought for a while and said, “Future events will predict whether the steps we took were right or not. In any case, we have associated our future with Ferdinand. Now the only way out for us is to go to him. Abu Dawood has reached there and with his presence it would only be a miracle if Ferdinand extends a hand of friendship towards Al-Zeghel or your father. Don’t worry. Ferdinand would be needing us until he has avenged his defeats.”

The Warden of Al-Hamra entered the chamber, came forward and said after paying his respects, “The Governor of the Northern Frontier requests permission to appear.”

Abu Abdullah looked at the warden and burst out annoyingly, “Don’t you know that at the moment we are talking to the Prime Minister?”

The warden said, “Great Sultan! I tried to stop him but he insisted to meet with you. He has come with some important news.”

The minister said, “But why has he entered Al-Hamra at this time?”

The warden replied, “Today evening, just before the arrival of the Great Sultan, an honorable lady of the city who has been given permission by the Great Queen to enter Al-Hamra at anytime had come to the Great Queen with some message from him and the Great Queen ordered me to call him into the palace.”

Abu Abdullah asked, “The Queen has already met him?”

“Yes. And she had ordered me that I should come to Your Majesty and take permission for him to meet with you.”

Abu Abdullah asked, “Where is he now?”

“He is standing outside by the door. He was insisting that he should be presented in front of you during the meeting with the emirs itself but I stopped him with great difficulty. He is very disturbed.”

Abu Abdullah said, “If he has come with the news that Ferdinand’s armies have been defeated then tell him that I cannot meet him.”

“Great Sultan! He is injured and the Great Queen said that it is very important that he meets with you.”

Abu Abdullah said, “Okay. Call him.”

The warden offered his salutations and went out. Moments later, a tall, strong youth entered the chamber. He had a white bandage on his forehead and with his right hand he was supporting his left arm that was hanging on a handkerchief around his neck.

“Great Sultan!” He respectfully offered his salutations and said, “I apologize for causing disturbance to your rest at this time but it was important for me to be presented before you.”

Abu Abdullah said, “You are injured.”

Being indifferent, he replied, “These injuries are trivial. I have come to you with very sad news.”

Abu Abdullah said, “If you have come with the news that my uncle is going to attack Granada or that Ferdinand’s army has fled the battlefield then you won’t be adding to what we already know.”

“Great Sultan! I only want to tell you about my region.”

The people there must have rebelled against us. We are not interested even in such news. The rebels of your region would not be raising slogans against us more vehemently than the rebels of Granada."

“No. I have not come here to represent the rebels. I have come to bring the voice of the oppressed to your majesty’s ears. To seek revenge, the fleeing troops of the defeated Christian army have created havoc along the border. They have burned fifteen of our settlements. Apart from looting the people’s goods and wealth, they have also kidnapped about forty young girls. Christian soldiers of many checkposts from across the border have also entered into our area. I had a total of five hundred soldiers yesterday. Out of these, nearly three hundred have been killed. The numbers of the perpetrators are increasing over time. They are killing all the women, children and the elderly. They started a war against us without any declaration. The area along the border is becoming empty. If we don’t stop this storm of barbarism and savagery immediately then within two or three days several thousand refugees would leave their homes and head for Granada.”

Abu Abdullah said, “What can you expect from me in such circumstances?”

The youth replied with a bit of fervor, “I won’t say anything on my own. I have delivered to the Great Sultan’s ears the voice of those daughters of my nation whose honor is being looted, whose infants are being killed in front of them. If the Great Sultan asks me what is it that they want, then I would reply by saying that we should immediately declare war against these dacoits and looters.”

Abu Abdullah said, “Currently, our biggest concern is to keep the agitating people away from Al-Hamra. If you don’t have an idea of the problem we’re facing, then, go and see the people that are gathered at the gates yourself.”

“I have already seen them and even here I can hear the sound of their voices. All of them are saying that the Christian are our enemies. They have made life difficult for their Muslim subjects in Hispania and now they want to play the same game in the Sultanate of Granada.”

Abu Abdullah replied, “Your ears are quite sharp but can’t you hear them shouting, ‘Abu Abdullah is a traitor’ and ‘destroy Al-Hamra’.”

The Governor replied, “I have heard everything but I know that they are our own. They take you as their protector and caretaker. In the face of these immediate dangers, they want their Sultan, their protector and caretaker to lead them to face the challenges. Had they considered you alien, they wouldn’t have gathered at the gates the way they have. They are agitated but a few words from you could pacify them. In fact, those few words can divert their energies into in a different direction. I’m sure that if they come to know about the plight of their frontier brothers and if you announce in front of them that the Christians would be punished for this crime, then I’m sure every person would be willing to die under your banner. Or else…?”

Seeing the Governor hesitant, Abu Abdullah enquired, “Or else what?”

The Governor replied, “Or else you know that they won’t be wrong in associating their future with Al-Zeghel.”

Abu Abdullah replied, “They have already associated their future with Al-Zeghel.”

“But the Christians’ behavior at the border has made it clear what they have in store for the Muslims. After this, it is important that we become one. If you immediately order the army to crush the perpetrators of the borders, you will see that for every soldier, we will gain ten volunteers from the people of Granada. This would be an expiation of our past faults and I’m sure your uncle would also forget about the past grievances.”

Seeing Abu Abdullah impressed, the minister said, “Labeling any decision of the Great Sultan as an error is a crime and you are a responsible officer of the army.”

“If I had no sense of responsibility, then maybe, I would not have uttered these words.”

Abu Abdullah said, “We cannot take any decision at the moment. You go and rest and we will see about this tomorrow.”

The Governor said, “Great Sultan! I want to return to the border immediately. Several of our settlements must have been ravaged by now. If you can’t take a decision until tomorrow, then at least give me five hundred horsemen of the army. I’m sure I would be able to raise at least two thousand volunteers before dawn. The people only want to know that you will no longer bear the aggression of the Christians.”

The minister said, “We have an agreement of friendship with Ferdinand.”

“If this were not the case, I would have raised an army of volunteers without the Great Sultan’s permission and gone to the border.”

The minister said, “We will send an emissary first thing in the morning to Ferdinand and lodge a protest. I’m sure this attack by the Christians on our borders was without his permission and knowledge.”

The Governor replied, “A goat’s protest cannot change a wolf’s nature.”

Abu Abdullah replied annoyingly, “You can leave. We will call you if we need your advices. Now we need to take some rest.”

“So should I take it from the Great Sultan that we should leave these helpless people on their own?”

Abu Abdullah said in culmination, “So far we have not given any orders to you. Wait until morning. You are our guest till tomorrow.” Abu Abdullah clapped his hand. The warden of Al-Hamra entered the chamber. Abu Abdullah said, “Take him to the guest house.”

The Governor of the border areas looked at the minister and the Sultan in a concerned and perturbed manner and then left without saying anything.

# One Crore

After dismissing the Prime Minister, Abu Abdullah entered the harem in a very perturbed condition. As he approached his wife’s chamber a bondmaid respectfully offered her salutations and said, “The Great Queen and Your Majesty’s mother are in the tower of Al-Hamra’s big gate. They had received the information that Your Majesty would be busy for a long time. They have gone there just now.”

Abu Abdullah stood there in bewilderment for a while and then said, “They could have heard the protesters from here too.” Abu Abdullah’s words had helplessness more than bitterness in them.

The bondmaid said, “If your Majesty so commands, should they be informed of your arrival?”

Abu Abdullah replied, “No, we will go there ourself.”

Abu Abdullah stepped out of the harem with his head bowed down in deep thought. The guards at the door followed behind him as a matter of routine but he turned around and said while looking at them, “We would like to be left alone.”

The guards returned. Abu Abdullah took gradual step on the marble floor and proceeded towards the big gate.

He began to hear the slogans of the protesters outside even more clearly. He stopped at the steps of the tower and stood there for a long time in bewilderment. He wanted to apprise his wife about his life’s most important and bitter decision and so far he himself was not sure to what degree he would be able to fulfill the decision. There were very few moments of his life that he had spent out of the four walls of Al-Hamra. This was his world, this was his heaven and now circumstances were asking him to bid farewell to this heaven. He said to himself, “Will it be possible for me to leave Al-Hamra while I’m living? Is it possible that the gates of Al-Hamra would reopen for me once they are closed? I would have to seek Ferdinand’s help for this purpose. There is no other way apart from this and he would be happy to help me. But now i would have to take the help of Ferdinand’s sword not only against my uncle and father but also against my rebellious subjects. But after these defeats will he be willing to fight a war solely for my sake whose consequences can be dangerous for him as well? Won’t his final defeat be a exemplary destruction for me and my comrades? And even if he wins, will he consider me in having the rights to all of the rewards of his victory?”

He was replying to the answers to those queries himself. "Abu Abdullah! You are a cursed star on the sky of Granada. Reopening the closed gates of Granada for yourself at the hands of Ferdinand would mean to crush the entire deterrent force of the Muslims. To have piles of Muslims corpses at the gates of Al-Hamra. These people who are currently protesting won’t respect the throne that you would gain with Ferdinand’s help.

Corpses of Muslims agonizing under that throne would always call you a traitor. But now the only issue in front of me is to save my own life. I cannot stay here for more a day or two. My uncle will certainly attack Granada. These agitating people will support him and then he will make my paralyzed father a puppet and rule over Granada himself. To achieve this objective isn’t it possible that he could make peace with Ferdinand? Will Ferdinand refuse his hand of friendship just for my sake? Wouldn’t he surrender me to Al-Zeghel for the sake of his interest? Have I not sacrificed even my father for the sake of my wishes? What would be my worth in front of Ferdinand after my defeat at Malaga by a meagre force?"

To divert such disturbing thoughts, he used to take the aid of Abu Dawood’s magical eloquence. With Abu Dawood present, he never felt the need to think deeply. So far the blunders he had committed were mostly because Abu Dawood never gave him the chance to think about their ugly consequences. Whenever he saw him a bit serious, he would immediately say that the Crown of Andalus should not entertain such thoughts. “Kings have to go through these phases. A ruler’s heart should be very strong.” It was this very Abu Dawood that hoisted a sail to the boat of Abu Abdullah’s peaceful life and pushed it into a sea of mishaps. And it was this very Abu Dawood who consoled him in every whirlpool and now this boat was near the dangerous rock which Abu Dawood had always kept oblivious from the eyes of his student.

Gradually, Abu Abdullah reached the top of the tower after passing through a circuitous flight of stairs. Besides his mother and wife there were a few other ladies who were standing and peeking down from the gallery of the tower. Due to the noise of the protestors noone heard the sound of Abu Abdullah’s footsteps. For a while, he stood silently under the dome. Below, a huge crowd of people gathered in the vast ground facing the gate was shouting, “Abu Abdullah is a traitor!” “Abu Abdullah is a nation seller!”. “Hang Abu Abdullah!” “Burn Al-Hamra!”

Some people had torches in their hands and some were raising their lances and swords. Abu Abdullah asked himself, “Will I be able to rule over these people with Ferdinand’s help?” “No! No!”, he replied himself. “For my sake Ferdinand might ransack Granada and have piles of the bodies of these people at every corner of Granada. But it’s impossible for him to compel them to obey me. Has Granada destined to perish at my hands?” He shivered at this thought. He was saying to himself, “Abu Abdullah! There is only one way out for you now and that is to resign from this crown and throne forever. You should disappear from the land of Andalus. But where will you go? To Ferdinand? No! Going there would mean that you have resolved to destroy Granada at his hands. He will always use you for his objectives. You won’t be able to refuse to comply to any of his wishes and his greatest wish is to cleanse Andalus from the presence of the Muslims. You want to take the help of a wolf to guard the sheep. You will not go to Ferdinand. Until today you were his instrument and maybe that Abu Dawood was also his instrument and maybe you made the mistake of dancing to the tune of this person who was a mere servant of Ferdinand. You relied on him but when the time came, he left you and fled. You were a toy in his hands. He instigated you against your father and you revolted. He advised you to arrest Abu Musa and you sent your best friend to prison. He advised you to kill the Frontier Falcon and you agreed to deprive the people of Andalus from their best friend. He handed a flame to you and you were prepared to burn down your hay stacks. He made you commit such crimes that you would never have thought of committing in your wildest thoughts. And when the time came, he left you in front of the court of the people and fled.”

For the first time Abu Abdullah’s heart raged with Abu Dawood’s hatred. He imagined him sitting next to Ferdinand and making fun of him. He must be saying, “Abul Hassan’s son was far more stupid than what you and I had imagined. I came back because there was not anything more that I could have used him for.”

“Selfish, double-crosser, accursed – if only my hands could reach his neck.” Engrossed in his thoughts, Abu Abdullah said these words so loudly that the ladies in the gallery, who were unaware of his presence, were startled.

After a brief moment of perplexity, Abu Abdullah’s mother came forward and stood at a distance of a few steps away from him. For a while, the mother and son looked at each other in the blurry light of the moon.

Abu Abdullah said in a feeble voice, “With your permission, can I dismiss this assembly? I have something to say to you.”

Abu Abdullah’s mother turned and looked at the ladies, who understood her cue and went downstairs. Abu Abdullah’s wife also followed them but Abu Abdullah said, “You too stay back, my dear.”

She stopped and stood on one side of the dome. In the blurry moonlight, the threesome – the mother, son and wife – were looking at each other in silence while the slogans of the mob below were gradually increasing. “Abu Abdullah is a traitor! Abu Abdullah is an enemy of Islam!” But compared to these words, the silent glances of his wife and mother were far more unbearable for Abu Abdullah.

Finding this silence unbearable, Abu Abdullah said, “The Traitor of Granada stands in front of his mother and wife and asks if they too have suggested a punishment for him just like the people.”

Abu Abdullah’s mother replied, “The Traitor of Granada’s mother was only thinking that she was the one who always breastfed her son and was also thinking if she could only go in front of the mob of people and tell them that he is a son of that mother whose brother and husband can swear by her integrity.”

Had the dome of the tower broken and fallen on his head, then too, maybe Abu Abdullah would not have felt its burden. He looked at his mother with extreme helplessly and said, “Mother! Today I present my case in your court. Pronounce a punishment for me. Ask me to jump off this tower. Ask me to strangle myself with my own hands.”

The ambitious mother was not moved by her son’s words. She said, “You are only saying this because mothers can only hear pleas of mercy and cannot fulfill the duties of justice. Abu Abdullah, the tree that you watered was thorny. Alas! If only your mother was able to free you from its thorns. You are not regretting your blunder. You’re only distraught by its consequences. You want me to console you but today your mother cannot find the words to console you with.” Saying this much Abu Abdullah’s mother’s voice sank and tears started to gather in her eyes.

A tearful Abu Abdullah said, “Mother! There is no other way out for me. I will leave from here by tomorrow and then nooone will see my face. Now I want to ask my wife,”Aisha, tell me. Will you support me?"

Aisha remained silent for a moment, took a step forward and said, “You want me to take refuge with our enemy but I would prefer being buried in Granada’s graveyard than live in Ferdinand’s palace.”

A sorrowful grin appeared on Abu Abdullah’s lips and he turned his face the other way to hide his tears. Below, the slogans stopped and now someone’s speech could be heard. Gradually, Abu Abdullah advanced towards the gallery and bowed and look below. A tall youth standing between a group of people with torches was making a speech. The people were sitting down in their places as he gestured with his hand for them to do so. On observing carefully Abu Abdullah recognized him. This was the same Governor of the Border who had returned dejected a while ago from his court.

Governor of the Border was making a speech loudly:

The Abdullah you are chanting against is dead. He died the day he revolted against his father and seized the crown and throne. I have seen his corpse. Your slogans can’t breathe life into him. It is useless whipping a dead body. If only you would have opened your eyes when some of your chiefs had put this corpse on the throne. Today, those Christians, for whom Abu Abdullah attacked Malaga to please, are ravaging our border settlements. And you feel that Abu Abdullah is insensitive but you did not feel his insensitivity when he revolted against his father. You silently let an incompetent person grab the throne of Granada. Abu Abdullah had associated his future with the enemy of our people but let me tell you that you too are also an equal partner with him in this great national sin. Because of your insensitivity and criminal negligence, the government of Granada is in the hands of someone who is merely a toy in Ferdinand’s hands. Had you let Abu Abdullah know that you are alive and that you would not close your eyes to your future, then surely, he would not have dared to commit those blunders. But unfortunately, you have gathered here to wail Abu Abdullah’s insensitivity whereas your insensitivity is such that the Christian perpetrators are destroying our border settlements and mass murdering our women, children and the elderly. Thousands of homes have been burned and several women have had their honor looted. I have come to you with their pleas and ask you what reply should I take from you to them? Should I go back and tell your helpless sisters that at the moment the protectors of your honor are performing their religious obligation of cursing Abu Abdullah at the gates of Al-Hamra? I don’t stop you from doing so but had I free time at my hands maybe I too would have raised slogans louder than you. But now it is not the time for slogans. It is a time to act."

“My friends! A leader of a nation is a reflection of its people’s disposition. If you say that Abu Abdullah is insensitive, then what will you call a people who have recognized him as their leader. Abu Abdullah is a coward who fears the Christians immensely but isn’t it correct that you too were fearful of them until the warriors of the border and Al-Zeghel’s mujāhidīn proved to you that metal of the Muslims can cut any metal even today. You too, like Abu Abdullah, were afraid of the Christians and before this, until Abul Hassan dragged you into the battlefield by force, you were content living a life of humiliation as vassals to the Christians.”

“Remember! When the historians of the future write that Abu Abdullah was an inept and a coward individual, then they will certainly write that there was a large group of mean humans among Abu Abdullah’s people who betrayed their sincere, brave and wise ruler and had recognized his incompetent and coward son as their leader. My friends! Abu Abdullah is a punishment for your deeds. Abu Abdullah is a toy in the hands of your elders who consider the shackles of Ferdinand’s slavery their ornaments.”

“Abu Abdullah is like a cancer in your body and cancer is always produced in a body whose blood has become filthy. A tree that lacks resistance is taken over by creepers of the forest. Until you don’t let virtuous blood enter your bodies such cancers will keep reappearing in your bodies.”

“Remember! If you desire to live and if you know how to pay the price of your dignity and liberty, then the chronicles of Abu Abdullah’s life will end up as an individual incident. Historians will write that a dissolute and ill-intentioned prince had tried to sell his nation to its enemy but his fate was no more than humiliation. But if you cannot pay the price of your freedom then the historians of the future will write that those people were characterless themselves and the outcome was what happens to a characterless nation. The biggest flaw of such perishing nations is that they hide the bitter facts in empty slogans. They place the entire burden of their social responsibilities on an inept individual. Reflect and analyze a bit. You believe it is easier to curse Abu Abdullah than to come face-to-face with the enemy. You believe that it is much easier to break the gate of Al-Hamra than to break the gates of the enemy’s forts. You have not gathered here because you had to. No! But you have gathered here because it’s much easier to stand here and make noise than to endure the difficulties of war. And even Abu Abdullah knows that your vigor will whiter away after a few slogans and you will return to your homes. He knows that you are not that flood that could drown everything like garbage in its path. He also understands quite well that your example is like the water in a pond. If you throw a stone in it, it will cause ripples but after a while there will be deafening silence.”

“I am not saying that you should not raise slogans against Abu Abdullah but also take notice that your homes are on fire.”

“The honor of your sisters and daughters is being looted and they are inquiring if you are the sons of that nation which rose in the name of safeguarding humanity? Whether you are that dignified nation whose swords were raised to cut the hands of oppression? Your mothers want to know where their brave sons are. Your sisters want to know, where their proud brothers were when the hands of abuse were being raised upon their honor. Your elders want to know what became of the protectors of the honor of their white beards.”

“Should I go back with the reply that the guardians of their respect, freedom and dignity are busy raising slogans against your incompetent ruler and they do not have the time to turn their attention to you? Why are you silent? Say something! Reply!”

A youth, overwhelmed by emotions, came forward near the orator and said loudly, “Lead us to the battlefield. None of us is so dishonorable that they would not be ready to support you.” The rest followed suit. Within moments, cries of support resonated from everywhere, “We all are ready! We all are ready! We will avenge the enemy!”

The Governor of the Border’s name was Abu Mohsin. Before today he had never realized that his tongue possessed such capabilities. Seeing the people’s fervor, he raised his hands and started looking towards the sky. The orator who had enchanted the crowd stood quietly for a while. His eyes were being filled with tears of gratitude. His lips were shivering. Trying desperately, all he could utter is, “O Allah! Grant my people victory!”

After a while Abu Mohsin gathered himself. He addressed the people and said, “Those of you who are armed should stand in lines. Those who are without arms should immediately get their weapons and come here. Currently, I will give preference to the youth. The older ones will be called when the need arises. Don’t waste time. We have to leave immediately.”

Later in the afternoon, five thousand armed volunteers stood in lines in front of Al-Hamra and Abu Mohsin, mounted on his horse, was inspecting them. Above the gate, Abu Abdullah, his wife and mother were standing on the tower and watching the entire events as they were happening. Abu Abdullah’s expression portrayed a sad and hurtful picture. At the culmination of Abu Mohsin’s speech when his mother said, “Son, you must be tired. Go and rest.” Abu Abdullah could bear it anymore. He pleaded to his mother, “Mother! Please forgive me and tell me what I should do?”

The brave mother turned towards her daughter-in-law instead of her son and said, “Aisha, take off your bangles and present them to your husband. You are the Queen of Granada. The Queen takes care of the Sultanate in the absence of the Sultan. Open the gate of Al-Hamra and tell your people that my husband’s mother was stingy in feeding her milk to her son and his father too did not teach him manly games but the Queen of Granada will support you in the valley of arrows.”

Aisha looked at her husband and then addressed her mother-in-law and said, “Mother! I can’t present the bangles to my husband but I would certainly take-up the task if he presents me his sword.”

Abu Abdullah had lost his patience. He said in a loud voice, “Aisha! For God’s sake, be quiet.”

Abu Abdullah’s mother said, “Yes Aisha! My son is very sensitive. Don’t bother him.”

Abu Abdullah gave a perturbed look towards his mother and Aisha and without saying a word, moved quickly towards the stairs. The mother and daughter-in-law silently stared at each other until the sound of footsteps were heard. After a while Aisha said, “Mother! If I actually have your permission, I am ready to join the ranks of these mujāhidīn.”

Abu Abdullah’s mother said, “Daughter! After all this talk, my heart testifies that Abu Abdullah won’t let us down but if nature has written nothing but disgrace for us then I will stand by you. Pray that Abu Abdullah comes to the straight path after straying away from it.”

After conversing for a while, the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law stood in the gallery watching the formation of line after line of the mujāhidīn standing in front of the gate. After inspecting the lines of volunteers, Abu Mohsin stopped his horse in front of the gate of the palace and after pondering for a while he said loudly:

“Mujahids! A few days ago I thought that we had reached where nations cannot rise again but the glorious victory by Al-Zeghel and the mujāhidīn of the border has changed my pessimism into optimism. A few moments ago when I was standing before you, I didn’t know what to say. But I knew that it was important for me to say something and God knows what all I have said to you. I admit that I am not good at the art of speech but your enthusiasm is proof to the fact that you are alive and before departing I want to send a message behind the iron gate of Al-Hamra to Abu Abdullah, who is asleep, that my people are alive and you cannot enslave them at the hands of Ferdinand. You are that unfortunate being who left his proud people and associated your future with a mean enemy. Abu Abdullah! Your people are extremely generous. Even now if you come to the straight path, they are willing to forgive the past blunders. Come forward before all the doors of forgiveness close upon you. Seek forgiveness from your people or else remember that you won’t be able to sleep peacefully for long in your palace that has been built by spending the blood and bones of the youth. Do not sell the dignity and liberty of your nation for the sake of your fake prestige. By God, no one can give the respect that your own people can give. And if a people disgrace you, no one can uplift you. People of Granada! Be a witness that we are leaving after knocking on the iron gate of Abu Abdullah’s palace.”

Abu Mohsin wanted to say more but suddenly the iron gate of Al-Hamra’s opened and a few soldiers holding flames appeared. Behind them was a platoon of foot soldiers followed by twenty horsemen. At the end, a horse rider appeared on a white horse. He sported a white turban over his head and held that royal banner of Granada. The rest of the horsemen that came out of the fort stood flanked on both his sides. He came out of the gate and halted his horse. He hesitated for a bit but then decisively kicked his horse forward towards Abu Mohsin. This was Abu Abdullah! He said, "Abu Mohsin! Whatever you have said about me is correct besides one thing. No ruler can rest peacefully behind closed iron gates of his palace. I am present in front of the court of the people. I do not appeal for mercy from the people but I do request a chance to rectify my mistakes. You are the commander of this army. If you do not have an objection, then I would like to be part of this group of volunteers. From today, I am not a claimant to the throne of Granada. I will gladly accept whatever punishment my uncle and father would pronounce on their return to Granada.

For a moment, deafening silence prevailed on the gathering and then they started whispering to each other. An awestruck Abu Mohsin was staring at Abu Abdullah. Abu Abdullah said in a feeble voice, “Abu Mohsin! I know my crime is unforgiveable. I am standing in front of the court of the people. Tell the people to rip me apart. I won’t plead the people for mercy but if you take me along, then maybe, a few drops of my blood would wash away my wrong doings.”

Abu Mohsin looked at the gathering, then turned his attention to Abu Abdullah and said, “Your people are washing away your wrong doing by their tears of gratitude.”

Later on, five thousand soldiers were leaving from the western gate of the city. Abu Abdullah and Abu Mohsin were all the way in the front. This army offered Fajr prayers a few distance away from the city. Before leaving for the second time, Abu Mohsin took Abu Abdullah aside and said, “I heard that Abu Musa is in your custody. If this is true, then there is no better person than him to lead this army. If you have not yet thought of this, then, we have still not come that far.”

Abu Abdullah appeared very perturbed. He looked at Abu Mohsin and said, “Abu Musa is not in Al-Hamra and maybe I won’t be able to answer any question about him until we return from the battle…anyway, rest assured that Abu Musa is alive and when the time comes I will appear in front of him and say, ‘Abu Musa! Your criminal stands in front of you. Pronounce a punishment for me.’ And I’m sure by that time the list of my deed won’t be as dark. At the moment, even if he was not far away from me, I won’t have the courage to face him. I want to face him when I’m drenched in my blood and my face is blemished with wounds and when all I could have mustered to say is, ‘Abu Musa! Your criminal is going in front of a grand court. Will you not forgive his sins?’”

More than Abu Abdullah’s words, Abu Mohsin was more impressed with his voice. After pondering a while with his bowed down, Abu Abdullah looked at Abu Mohsin and said, “You can understand the condition of my heart but if these people ask me regarding Abu Musa, then I’m afraid no statement of mine would be able to satisfy them.”

Abu Mohsin said, “Rest assured! At the moment all they know is that you are with them. They don’t want to think beyond that.”

After Al-Zeghel’s glorious victories he encamped in Malaga, reorganized his troops anew and before advancing towards Granada sent a message to his nephew Abu Abdullah, saying, “The door of repentance has not yet closed for you. Now you must have been convinced that the hopes you had pinned on the Christians cannot be fulfilled. We want to enter Granada with open gates but if you try to be an obstacle then rest assured that the iron gates of Al-Hamra won’t be able to stop our path.”

Al-Zeghel’s emissary returned with the news that preparations were underway to welcome them in Granada and Abu Abdullah had taken-off for an offensive against the attackers of the borders. The emissary presented a letter from Abu Abdullah’s wife to Al-Zeghel and said, “The Great Queen has sent this letter for the Great Sultan.”

Al-Zeghel asked a few questions to the emissary, got up and headed straight to Abul Hassan. The aging Sultan was spending his last moments of illness in his bed. He had become blind. Hearing the unexpected news about his son, he quickly got up. “Is this true? Is this possible?” he kept enquiring from his brother again and again. “No! No! Call the emissary! I can’t believe it.”

Al-Zeghel said, “The Queen has dispatched this letter.”

Abul Hassan said impatiently, “What has the Queen written. Read it out to me.” Al-Zeghel opened and read the letter. The meaning of the brief letter’s contents was as follows:

“My Master! My motherhood had not become pessimistic of Abu Abdullah and I thought it vital to stay back in Al-Hamra. God gave the honor of accepting my supplications at a time when I was surrounded with pessimism from all sides. Abu Abdullah has left to face the enemy and if my motherhood doesn’t fail me, then, the purpose of this is solely to rectify his faults and nothing more. Granada seeks you impatiently. If you cannot come immediately then send Al-Zeghel. I’m afraid, apart from the warriors, even those people have left with Abu Abdullah who were the reason we had to witness such times. The group of these hypocrites will try to deceive Abu Abdullah until the very end. Therefore, it is important to secure Granada before Abu Abdullah’s return.”

The next morning Abu Abdullah ordered his army to make preparations to leave. After defeating the Christians, Badr bin Mughira and his warriors had reached the habitat of the falcons to keep the Christians away from the northern and eastern borders. Bashir bin Hassan had to stay back in Malaga for treating Abul Hassan.

Despite his illness, Abul Hassan insisted on going to Granada. Al-Zeghel was compelled to arrange a coach for his journey. Malaga’s security was handed over to Al-Zeghari.

Al-Zeghel’s army entered Granada hoisting the flags of victory and success. Flower wreaths were laid in front of Al-Zeghel’s horse from the gate of the city until the gate of Al-Hamra. Traveling in a slow pacing coach because of his illness, Abul Hassan was still far away from Granada. But nonetheless, besides shouting “Long live Al-Zeghel”, the people also raised the slogan of “Long live Sultan Abul Hassan!”

Another reason for the people’s jubilation was that they had heard the news of Abu Abdullah’s glorious victories at the north-western border. The people bringing the news from the battlefield to Granada had already told them that Abu Abdullah had ventured into the enemy’s territories and taken over some forts after cleansing them from the border.

Al-Zeghel was sure that after the latest defeat Ferdinand’s army would not be able to make a mass movement without a long preparation. Therefore, he sent a message to Abu Abdullah that he would come to his aid in a few days after reorganizing the army anew. He asked him to encamp at a secure position instead of advancing further into enemy territory and keep the enemy engaged in minor skirmishes. The generous uncle also wrote to his nephew, “You have expiated for your past mistakes and on your return you wouldn’t find your uncle and father any less generous than the people of Granada. Abu Musa is untraceable. We thought he would be with you but the people coming from the front do not confirm this notion of ours. Where is he? The people of Granada are very concerned for him.”

After four days Granada was a scene of mourning. At dawn the people of Granada received the painful news of Abu Abdullah’s defeat and his eventual capture at the hands of the enemy and by dusk a lot of details had been gathered by them.

With the fear of Al-Zeghel’s arrival several chiefs, who were traitors, and their comrades had already left with Abu Abdullah. When the rest of the traitors too saw that the change in them had a positive effect on the people, they too left Granada and went to Abu Abdullah.

These traitors wanted to a way to go to Ferdinand along with Abu Abdullah. However, when they saw that the victories had an unprecedented change in Abu Abdullah’s personality, they hatched a conspiracy. One evening Abu Abdullah had captured one of Ferdinand’s forts. Two of his army’s spies who were associated with the traitors came to Abu Abdullah one after the other. One of them informed him that a thousand troops belonging to the Christians were heading towards the fort from the west. The other informed him that he had seen a group two thousand Christian troops in the north and they too were heading towards this fort. On receiving this news, Abu Abdullah called a meeting immediately. With one voice the hypocrites said that they should not give those people a chance to siege the fort. They opined that maybe their army could advance and cut the supply route and in a day or two a larger army would arrive and attack the fort.

Abu Mohsin rejected the idea to come out of the fort at night and attack the enemy. He said, “Even if the enemy surrounds us, even then we can fight the enemy from inside the fort for at least three weeks. In the meantime, the reinforcements will arrive from Granada.” But the traitors played on Abu Abdullah’s emotions and he ordered the army to get ready as soon as it was night. The army was divided army into two. One part headed towards the west under Abu Mohsin’s leadership. And the other half moved towards the north under Abu Abdullah’s leadership. Majority of the traitors accompanied Abu Abdullah.

With the aid of his spies, Abu Mohsin scanned about twenty kilometers of the area westwards but the enemy could be found nowhere. Out of frustration he started cursing the spies. Late afternoon, he turned the direction of his weary horse towards the fort. In the morning, when Abu Mohsin was 4 kilometers away from the fort, he saw a group of soldiers that had left with Abu Abdullah during the night.

Abu Mohsin suddenly got a realization. He ordered the army to halt while he galloped and advanced forward. When he reached near the group, a youth who had blood stains on his helmet said without waiting for Abu Mohsin to enquire, “We lost. It was a conspiracy. The traitors in our army outnumbered us. The spy took us to an area where we were in the range of the enemy’s arrows from all sides and as soon as the hypocrites heard the slogans of the enemy, they told Abu Abdullah that we have been surrounded. They said it was useless to fight. When we refused to lay down our arms, they parted and stood aside. When the enemy came out and ambushed us, they stood silently for a while but then joined the enemy against us. Within no time eight thousand of our young men were killed and there was no other option for us but to flee.”

Abu Mohsin said, “And Abu Abdullah…?”

The youth replied, “He was with us during the fighting. A few men did see him fall-off the horse. I believe he has been arrested. This was a conspiracy. I wish we knew that we had such a large number of hypocrites who had joined up with us.”

Abu Mohsin said, “Even we were betrayed. Wait! Let me ask that spy.”

Abu Mohsin returned back to the army and after looking here and there, he enquired, “Where did that spy go?”

After looking around and after enquiring from each other the soldiers replied, “Noone has seen him after the morning prayers.”

Abu Mohsin replied dejectedly, “We have no other option but to head towards our border.” The news about the army’s defeat and Abu Abdullah’s disappearance came as a blowing wind to the flickering flame of Abul Hassan’s life. Once again gloomy clouds loomed over Granada. The next day a sympathizer commented at Abul Hassan’s funeral, “Granada’s sky has witnessed the funerals of several kings and emperors but thousands of aspirations of Granada’s future will sleep in the grave of this mujahid.”

After these events the war between the crescent and cross became cold for a while in Andalus. In Rabi Al-Thani 890, Ferdinand invaded the province of Malaga with a thundering force. His advancement was so sudden that Al-Zeghel was not able to use his defense optimally. However, the Christians incurred severe losses during their attempt to capture the forts of Baqwaan and Ronda and they did not have the courage to move forward. Ferdinand’s army attacked the strategic fort of Mashinal at the border while retreating but they did not success. Al-Zeghel attacked the enemy after repelling them and captured a lot their goods and supplies.

Al-Zeghel realized that unless and until he does not enter Ferdinand’s territory and gives him a decisive defeat, the Christian incursions will not cease but time was needed to prepare for a large scale war. The Frontier Falcon’s guard was on the south-east and north-western borders and he was completely satisfied with this arrangement. In the south, an experienced general like Al-Zaghairi was protecting Malaga. To utilize all the resources for a large scale operation, Al-Zeghel had to be in the center. So, he selected Abu Mohsin for the protection of the north-western border and he reached Granada and got busy with the preparations.

Abu Abdullah reached Castile in the capacity of a prisoner. He was sure that Ferdinand would pronounce the severest punishment for him but when the guards brought him in front of the palace, Ferdinand, his Crown Prince and the nobles of the kingdom stood at its gate. Ferdinand took a few steps forward and extended his hand towards Abu Abdullah. In a state of confusion, Abu Abdullah gave his hand in Ferdinand’s.

Ferdinand looked towards his nobles and said, “What are you looking at? Honor the King of Granada. He is our guest.” The nobles bowed their heads to honor Abu Abdullah.

With his hand in Abu Abdullah’s armpit, Ferdinand entered into the palace. Queen Isabella was standing in the middle of a few ladies in front of the door of the meeting room. Ferdinand came close to her and said, “Queen! This is that son of mine whom you had desired to see for such a long time. Until now Abu Abdullah’s face shows that he still considers himself our prisoner. Please convince him that he is our guest whom we had longed to see.”

Queen Isabella said, “I hope our soldiers did not hurt him along the way?”

Ferdinand replied, “We had issued orders that our friend should be treated extremely well but if we find out that he has not been treated well along the way then we will give them the severest punishment.”

The nobles stood at a distance from the door and Ferdinand, Isabella, the Crown Prince entered the room with Abu Abdullah. When all of these four sat down on chairs placed in a semi-circle, Ferdinand said, “All of your comrades have been allocated rooms in the royal guest house and we have selected the best rooms of our palace for you.”

Abu Abdullah said impatiently, “Maybe this type of humor does not suit the stature of Ferdinand. I am ready to hear the order of my punishment.”

Ferdinand said, “We do not retreat our hand of friendship once we have extended it and we also know that whatever you did was out of compulsion. Believe me that the attack on your territory was in violation of our orders. They became desperate after their defeat and you must have thought that we have broken our agreement with you. In such circumstances your fight with them but rather the attack on our territory with the feeling of vengeance was also right. If we have a regret it is only that because of a few stupid individuals’ grievous deeds, an ally whom we consider our son had become upset with us.”

Abu Abdullah was gaping at his host with wide eyes. Ferdinand said, “You still do not believe what we have said? Maybe there is someone who could convince you.”

Ferdinand turned his attention to the Crown Prince, “Prince! Order someone to call Abu Dawood!”

“Abu Dawood?” Abu Abdullah said in amazement.

Ferdinand replied, “Yes, he has come to us and he has this request that we should take some immediate steps to return your Sultanate to you but now a long preparation is required for this purpose.”

Abu Abdullah already had several doubts about Abu Dawood but a weak person always considers a strong person his last hope. Abu Abdullah had chosen Abu Dawood to be his boat’s navigator. After his disappearance, he got impressed with Abu Mohsin’s speech and once more he stood at a new crossroad of his life. Despite having this feeling that all of his life’s bitterness were created by Abu Dawood, Abu Abdullah was still positive that he would be mentally relieved as soon as he conversed with Abu Dawood. Ferdinand’s smiles had rekindled those dangerous designs in Abu Abdullah that he had left behind forever before departing from Granada. He was reluctant to become Ferdinand’s agent but at the same time he felt that someday Ferdinand’s smiles would once again push him to the path that he had forsaken. Abu Dawood’s voice would bury the voice of his conscience. In summary, the dormant emotions of hypocrisy were reawakening once again in the weak individual and he needed the support of a major hypocrite to sing a lullaby to his conscience. Abu Abdullah said to himself, “I will tell this dishonest person that you have dishonored me, you made me a traitor of my own people. I was stupid but now my eyes have opened up. No one can fool me now. Don’t push me to the path of destruction. I don’t need the throne of Granada. But no, maybe I won’t be able to wage war against my own fate. Maybe the stars of my destiny might take me to Granada against my wishes and I would be compelled to become Ferdinand’s tool. No, No, I will tell Abu Dawood have mercy on me for God’s sake. Don’t show me the wrong path. I don’t want to enlist my name in the group of nation seller. But Ferdinand had said that he wants to see me as a sovereign leader of my people. This is a lie. I will tell Abu Dawood not to try to justify Ferdinand’s lie in front of me but it is not important for me to display my emotions in front of these people. I will mislead them and flee once I get the chance.” Abu Dawood entered the room. Abu Abdullah felt as if he has awakened from a nightmare. Abu Abdullah stood up involuntarily. Abu Dawood extended his hand for a handshake. The smile on his face was saying this to his student, “Where will you hide from me, sonny! I know the condition of your heart all too well.”

# Al-Zeghel’s Hopelessness

Badr bin Mughira was residing in a mountainous fort. One evening, as he was standing and giving instructions to the soldiers and officers gathered around him in the fort’s courtyard, a horse rider galloped into the fort. He pulled the reins and halted his horse at a few distance away from Badr bin Mughira. Badr bin Mughira took two or three steps forward and said, “Bashir! It seems that you have not come with any good news.”

Bashir bin Hassan dismounted the horse and after shaking hands with Badr bin Mughira said, “The people of Granada would be happy with the news I have but I take it as a cause for serious concern. Where is Mansoor?”

“He just went to his room after offering his prayers. Today it’s his turn. He must be getting ready. Come on, let’s go to him.” Saying this he turned to the soldiers and said, “You will get the instructions after Isha prayers.”

After climbing the stairs, Badr and Bashir entered a room on the second story of the building. A candle was lit in the room and a cuirass-clad Mansour was tying the laces of his socks with his leg on a chair. On seeing Bashir bin Hassan, he stepped forward, extended his hand for a handshake and said, “Bashir! It is very good that you came. Just now I was thinking who would treat me in case I am injured tonight.”

Bashir bin Hassan said, “Castile’s armory has yet to make a sword that would be able to injure Mansour.”

The three of them sat on the chairs. Mansour asked Bashir bin Hassan, “The people of Granada must very worried about our veiled companion?”

“Yes, now in every gathering the Frontier Falcon’s place has been taken by the frontier’s veiled man!”

“So they are still convinced about Badr’s death?”

Some of the army officers suspect that he is still alive. There were many others who wanted to dig out information from me but I used to remain quiet after saying that a mujahid is ever-living."

Badr said, “Okay now tell us that news that the people of Granada were happy about while you were concerned.”

Bashir said, “Abu Abdullah has escaped from Ferdinand’s captivity and has reached Granada and Al-Zeghel has announced that he will handover the throne to his nephew as soon as he has dealt with the external threats. Currently he has been designated as the ruler of Loja.”

Badr bin Mughira said, “Is this true? Al-Zeghel cannot make this mistake.”

Bashir said, “If this is a mistake, then Al-Zeghel has made it. I had met Abu Mohsin. He was saying that before attacking the border, he was preparing to take refuge with Ferdinand. The circumstances compelled him to stand in the ranks of the volunteers. I do not doubt his intentions but he is an erratic minded youth. To give him a responsibility in the current scenario would not be without danger. Besides this, it can be said about Abu Dawood that he is with Ferdinand and he is such a man who can manipulate Abu Abdullah to do the worst of deeds.”

Badr bin Mughira enquired, “And the people of Granada are happy about this?”

“Yes. In their sight, Abu Abdullah has washed away his sins. There are many people who are restless but they too are not willing to take any practical steps for opposition.”

“What about their concern for Musa. Has that been addressed?”

“What Abu Abdullah has made known about him is that he had escaped from his custody. He had produced some witnesses in front of Al-Zeghel.”

“And Al-Zeghel believed this?”

“I told him that if he had escaped, he would have surely come to you but Al-Zeghel said, ‘Abu Musa was a very proud man and Abu Abdullah was his childhood friend. It’s possible that after Abu Abdullah’s misbehavior he did not see it appropriate to show his face to anyone in Granada. Maybe he might have gone to Morocco. Many of his family members have immigrated to Morocco. I am searching for him and if I find out that Abu Abdullah has lied to me then he would not get a good treatment.’”

Badr bin Mughira thought for a while and said, “Mansour! Prepare to leave for Granada!”

Mansour replied, “But I have already prepared for the attack and the troops must be waiting for me at the border.”"

“I will go instead of you.”

“But you need to rest. You have been on the horse all night.”

“It is important for you to go to Granada immediately. Take my letter to Al-Zeghel. Convey my message unequivocally that our war was not for a sultan, emir or king. The sole purpose of our sacrifices was to make Granada a defense bastion and gather our scattered bunch and to relieve the oppressed Muslims of Andalus from the slavery of the Christians. Therefore, we had first accepted Abul Hassan and then Al-Zeghel as our emir for this purpose. But Abu Abdullah has been tested. As an uncle Al-Zeghel has every right to forgive every fault of his incompetent nephew but he cannot be given the right to say that this nation seller has repented therefore accept him as your leader. Tell Al-Zeghel that even if Abu Abdullah has repented with utmost sincerity, even then he is a lifeless corpse and a nation that is between life and death should not be burdened with this corpse. He should fulfill his duties while he is alive and after him he should leave the choice of selecting a leader to those who have sacrificed their lives for Granada’s liberty and the dignity of the Muslims. I have no hostility towards Abu Abdullah. He deceived me and then tried to kill me. I can forgive him but I am against handing over the trust of the people to someone who has already deceived them. To show a proof of a change of heart if Abu Abdullah has expelled a few border attackers then the maximum recompense should have been that he should not have been punished for his past mistakes but making him the ruler of Loja and accepting him as the successor of Granada’s throne is a reward he no way deserves.”

Mansour said, “I know what Al-Zeghel’s reply would be. He will say, ‘Had he not been generous with his treatment towards Abu Abdullah, the people would have said that my struggle was for personal gains. Apart from this, I’m afraid of turmoil. Abu Abdullah’s supporters would start a civil war in Granada.’”

Badr bin Mughira said, “What would be a more generous treatment with Abu Abdullah that he has not been dragged into the markets of Granada with a noose around his neck. Tell Al-Zeghel not to give any weight to such people whose self-deceit is such that they want to build a nation with a tried and tested traitor. And unity does not mean that you tie a horse and donkey to the same coach. If fifty soldiers carry the corpse of fifty soldiers on their shoulders, they do not become a hundred soldiers. To stop a civil war you do not need to handover Granada at the hands of incompetent men but the remedy is to create a general opinion so that the incompetent people wouldn’t dare lay their eyes on the seats of power. A nation that wishes to survive crushes it traitors. It does not please them with bribes.”

Mansour said, “Write the letter. I am ready to go to Granada.”

After a few days, Mansour brought a reply from Al-Zeghel for Badr bin Mughira. It said:

"My dear! I received your letter after Abu Abdullah had served his last blow on us. Abu Abdullah has handed over Loja to the enemy. Eight thousand of Ferdinand’s troops have entered this city. My intentions were not bad but maybe nature does not forgive political mistakes. I have nothing but tears of regret in front of you and in front of the nation.

The capture of Loja by the Christians is no less than a stab in our chest. Maybe Granada’s days are numbered. If you were with me, maybe I would not have made this blunder and now a heart-broken old man is in need of your help. Not for me but for Granada. Not for safeguarding the crown and throne of Granada but for the respect and dignity of the Muslims.

At the moment I would not call you to Granada for my aid. You are Granada’s last hope. You are the last support of this sinking boat and I want you to be safe from evil. The valley of the falcon is our last bastion. If you increase your attacks on the border, the enemy will divide its attention on two fronts and I will try to recapture Loja.

I think Ferdinand considers the valley of the falcons no less vital than Granada. It’s quite possible that he could attack your territory before attacking Granada.

So, speed up your preparations. My son! I hope you would not be disheartened because of our faults. If you become hopeless then I’m afraid the flame of hope for Muslims in Andalus would vanish before the peep of the morning."

In a very melancholy environment Badr bin Mughira, Bashir and Mansour discussed the future of the Muslims of Granada and Andalus in the light of Al-Zeghel’s letter for a while. Then, Mansour bin Ahmed pulled out another letter from his pocket, presented it to Badr bin Mughira and said, “This letter was given to me by Abu Abdullah’s wife and she requested me not to present it to you unless your anxiety concerning Loja is not settled. She also expressed the concern that you might tear up the letter believing that she was defending her husband.”

Badr bin Mughira took the letter from Mansour’s hand and handed it over to Bashir and said, “Read it out.”

Bashir opened the letter and started reading it:

"My Respect-worthy brother! With the permission of uncle I had read your letter and uncle had also shown me his reply to your letter. He has taken the entire blame on himself. The truth is that the major blame of this national sin is mine. Had I not convinced uncle that my husband has repented sincerely, he would have surely tested him completely before trusting him. The Queen put in a good word for her son and I seconded her and now I am writing this letter to you so that you don’t have any doubt about uncle’s intentions.

I am one of the thousands of your sisters of Andalus for whom you have raised the sword to safeguard their dignity and believe me that I have more trust in your sword than the four walls of Al-Hamra. After shedding tears of regret, can a sister of yours hope for forgiveness from you, that you will forgive her first and last mistake and God is a witness that when I call you brother I feel that our relation is stronger than the relation of blood."

Your Sister, Aisha.

Badr bin Mughira looked towards Mansour and asked, “So this means Abu Abdullah’s wife is still in Granada?”

“Yes. Abu Abdullah was adamant to take her along but his mother said that her daughter-in-law should not go out of Al-Hamra until the danger of war prevails.”

Fifteen thousand Christian troops had gathered in Loja. Abu Abdullah sent his spies to different cities of Granada and started the mission of buying out the hypocrites with the wealth given by Ferdinand. Those who had associated their hopes with Ferdinand from the beginning itself, had now become even more hopeful and Abu Abdullah’s power increased with each day.

Apart from this, the peace-loving group that wanted peace at all cost began propagating that if the Muslims of Granada continue their war with the Christians, then Muslims in the rest of Andalus would have to bear the repercussions. They opinioned, “Andalus is a combined nation of Christians and Muslims and since the Christians are greater in number and power therefore we should accept their leadership. They would certainly not harm their fellow citizens. It’s the imagination of the Muslims that if they accept the government of the Christians, the Christians would swallow them up. If the Muslim has iman then they should not fear anything.”

They kept explaining to the general public that, “By reaching a compromise with Ferdinand, Abu Abdullah wanted to save the Muslims from destruction in the rest of Andalus. Ferdinand has extended a hand of friendship towards us and Abu Abdullah realizes that if he does not reciprocate then tomorrow Ferdinand would not treat us well when he is victorious.”

Abu Dawood had also reached Loja with the Christian forces. After monitoring the situation for a few days, he wrote to Ferdinand that this was the right time to render a decisive blow to Granada. Ferdinand personally came to Loja and took charge of the troops and after quickly capturing the forts of Al-Beera and Mashinal, laid a siege on Sakhra. Al-Zeghel left one-third of his army in Granada and advanced towards Sakhra and encamped a few miles away from the city. Routine skirmishes took place between the two parties. The citizens fought from within the confines of the city while Al-Zeghel attacked the enemies from the rear. Badr bin Mughira had suddenly started a mass advancement from the North-east. Ferdinand was compelled to lift the siege of Sakhra and at the same time Ferdinand received the news that the king of France was advancing towards Pyrenees with a legion of troops. Ferdinand removed the siege of Sakhra and ordered ten thousand of his troops to stop the advance of the mujāhidīn in the north-east. He left the required number of troops with Abu Abdullah for the protection of Loja, Al-Beera and Mashinal while he returned to deal with the threat from the King of France.

To reach a compromise with the King of France, Ferdinand sent a delegation of priests and made him realize that the war in Granada and Hispania was a war between the crescent and the cross and a war between two major Christian powers would benefit the Muslims. The Bishops of Castile and France embraced each other and compelled the two kings to shake hands with each other. To become part of the blessing of fighting the Muslims, the King of France gave two thousand horsemen and twenty ships under Ferdinand’s command.

For a long time Ferdinand realized had that Granada’s strength cannot be broken unless Malaga is not captured. Malaga was Granada’s most important port and after capturing it, it would be easy to take over the entire coastal regions of Granada. This way, apart from the port of Almeria he would be able to cut-off all the routes between Andalus and Morocco and he would be able to bring their belief to ashes that the Muslim world was behind them in support. He was certain that once Malaga was taken away, the Muslims of Granada would know that they were at the mercy of the Christians. From Malaga he could subdue the rebellious tribes of Sierra Nevada. After receiving twenty ships from France his navy had become powerful. He wrote to Abu Abdullah, “My army would launch a sudden attack on Malaga and because of its importance, Al-Zeghel would try to reach there. You would be able to capture Granada without any resistance.”

After a few days, Ferdinand’s naval fleet had left for Malaga. He too headed with his army towards Malaga after taking a long route from the southwest. The naval attack on Malaga was so unprecedented that the Christian troops landed without any resistance and laid siege on the city.

Al-Zeghel’s entire focus was on Loja. When he suddenly received the news of Malaga’s siege he left a handful of troops to guard Granada while he set-off for Malaga but when he was a station away from Malaga he received the news that Abu Abdullah was heading towards Granada with 8,000 troops. He hopelessly let most of the troops head towards Malaga while he returned to Granada. But before he could reach Granada the group of traitors had already opened the gates of the city for Abu Abdullah and Abu Abdullah’s flag was fluttering over Al-Hamra. With a dejected heart Al-Zeghel headed for Malaga once again but the treacherous nephew attacked him from the rear as soon as he found out that his uncle’s troops were few in numbers. Al-Zeghel’s soldiers fought bravely but when they saw that apart from the Christians their swords were also clashing with their brothers, they could not remain steadfast. After taking a defeat, Al-Zeghel took shelter in the area of Alpujarras. The next day he received the news that the rest of his troops have been defeated by Ferdinand and all the paths leading to Malaga from the coast and land have been closed. After organizing a small army of the bellicose tribes, Al-Zeghel made Bast his bastion. In Malaga Al-Zaghairi put up a ferocious fight but after a month the people became helpless due to a lack of supplies and reinforcements. A few times, Al-Zeghel tried to advance towards Malaga through the mountains but in vain due to the presence of a large number Ferdinand’s troops in the field.

Even Badr bin Mughira diverted his attacks towards the southeast instead of the northeast but the minor losses could not uproot Ferdinand’s cowardly troops and based on previous bad experiences he didn’t permit his troops for an onslaught.

The people of Granada were in a sorry state. People dying of hunger were willing to lay down their arms but Al-Zaghairi did not loose hope. To the ones preferring peace, he had just one answer, “The enemy can only enter the city over my dead body.”

When the troops’ morale would be low he would raise it by his feverous speech. But when nothing could be seen on Malaga’s sky but darkness, then, like the city’s population there was also a spilt within the army. Some traitors struck a deal with Ferdinand and opened the city’s gates, arrested Al-Zaghairi and handed him over to Ferdinand.

On Ferdinand’s orders, Al-Zaghairi was brutally tortured and killed. After this the people of Malaga witnessed a reign of cruelty and barbarism that was beyond their wildest imagination. First being intoxicated by their victory and then by heavy drinking, Ferdinand’s troops played havoc in Malaga. Women were dragged out of their homes into the market. They were forced to eat the flesh of swine and drink alcohol and at the point of the sword they were made to understand that it was an obligation of the conquered to obey every command of the conqueror. Men who displayed their honor were punished by being burned alive and when those traitors who betrayed Al-Zaghairi and opened the gates of the city for the enemy went and complained to Ferdinand, he replied, “Malaga is the door to Andalus. I want to see it cleansed from the existence of the enemy. If the treatment of my troops is unbearable for you then you may leave the city. My ships are ready if anyone of you would like to go to Morocco.”

After the fall of Malaga, all the areas under the Sultanate of Granada came under the hold of the Christians including the nearby cities of the coastal areas of Malaga in the south.

Al-Zeghel’s small sultanate extended from Jean in the north till Almeria in the south. After Malaga’s port was snatched, the port of Almeria became like a jugular vein for the Muslims. Apart from this Guaz and Beegha were under Al-Zeghel’s control. With respect to its resources, this sultanate was quite well-off. Alpujarras’s valleys were watered by the streams of the snow-tipped mountains of Mount Sierra Nevada. Here the production of fruits was the highest in Andalus. In the rest of the region that was mostly mountainous the people used to keep cattle that was more than their needs and the terrain of the mountains and forest provided a natural defense for the region.

After a few days of preparations Ferdinand attacked Beegha and laid siege on the city but the mountain tribes came down and started warring from all sides. Realizing the significance of Beegha, Badr bin Mughira gave the border’s security under Mansour bin Ahmed’s command and dashed towards Beegha with two thousand warriors and in the first attack itself he slaughtered five thousand of Ferdinand’s troops. The following night he attacked from the rear and Al-Zeghel came out of the city and rendered a surprise blow to the enemy. In the morning, Ferdinand lifted the siege and returned to Malaga.

After a year of preparations in Malaga, Ferdinand invaded Beegha again but this time instead of attacking the city, he destroyed all the areas within its vicinity, looted the cattle of the farmers, and ravaged their crops and gardens. To prevent any unprecedented attacks from the tribes he setup checkposts on every road leading to Beegha. The sudden attacks by Badr bin Mughira and the tribes proved quite detrimental for Ferdinand but they could offer no respite to the people of Beegha. After a long siege of six months the people of Beegha eventually gave in due to intense famine.

After making Beegha his bastion Ferdinand captured Al-Zeghel’s forts in one after the other.

Bashir bin Hassan was tying a bandage around Badr bin Mughira’s wounded arm. Mansour entered the room. Badr bin Mughira enquired, “Mansour! You have not left as yet?”

Mansour replied, “I had just stepped out of the fort when I met him.”

“Al-Zeghel is here himself?”

“Yes. I have made him sit in the meeting room.”

“Who else is with him?”

“Abu Mohsin is with him. They had some soldiers with them too but our men have stopped them across the bridge.”

“I hope they did not complain.”

“They were upset at this but I consoled them by saying that this is standard procedure. Since their visit was unexpected, the soldiers did not have any special orders.”

Badr bin Mughira said, “Did you tell them that you were going to him with my letter?”

“Yes, I had even presented the letter to him but he returned it to me without reading it. He said that after traveling such a long distance it would be better if he spoke to you verbally.”

“Didn’t you tell them that my reply would be the same even if we met?”

“He is so sad and upset that I did not think it was appropriate to say so.”

Badr said, “I wanted to avoid this meeting. Anyways, this is a compulsion but both of you stay with me. If I don’t live upto my obligation then please correct me.”

Later, Badr bin Mughira, Bashir and Mansour were shaking hands with Al-Zeghel and Abu Mohsin in a spacious room of the fort. When they sat down on the chairs after exchanging pleasantries, Al-Zeghel said after pondering for a while with his bowed down, “You must be knowing why I am here. I couldn’t wait for your reply. The expressions on your faces tell me that you are upset with me. I have not come here with the intention of clarifying my position. I regret that the circumstances did not give me a chance to take your advice. You might have thought that I was being a coward but God is my witness that I didn’t care about saving my life. Even now I don’t consider myself among the living. I have come to tell you that I threw my sword only when both my hands were cut. Alas! If I only knew that the water of the river cannot be stopped by dams of sands. My analysis were wrong and an incompetent person like me had no right to lead the nation and I have nothing but tears of regret in front of you. I know that you will not forgive me. Trusting Abu Abdullah is such a sin that I am not ready to forgive even myself for it. My conscious will always prick me for it I submitted to Ferdinand once I was sure that now any more sacrifices would be in vain. We have been uprooted and the enemy has surrounded us from all sides. One part of the nation is content with the slavery to the enemy and those who were the freedom fighters are also feeling that their strength to resist has weakened. For me, I had only two options. One was to accept Ferdinand’s slavery and save the rest of the Muslims from destruction and the second was to continue waging a war whose eventual result would be nothing but defeat. This way I could have protected my name from maligning every after my death. But I felt that this act of mine would be like closing my eyes to the present and future of the Muslims in the conquered regions of Andalus and Granada. The handful of Muslims who would support me would be able to remain independent for only a few years but the remaining thousands of Muslims whose liberty has been snatched would perish in the enemy’s fire of vengeance. Maybe after peace prevails they would be able to rise again and nature might send a better person for their leadership. Anyways, as for myself I was sure that if I kept them fighting in the turmoil then their days of destruction would come even closer. Only a few drops of blood run in the veins of my nation. Once those are also spent, they too would have nothing but tears of regret.”

Speaking upto this point, Al-Zeghel looked at Badr bin Mughira. He was quiet. After thinking for a while, Al-Zeghel said, “But please don’t think that I have lost hope in you and your warriors. You are the last hope for the Muslims of Granada and Andalus. I am sure that one day this valley would be our nation’s last fort but at the moment it is important to keep the flood of the Christians away from this valley so that you can have time to prepare. For this purpose I…”

Al-Zeghel halted at this.

Badr said, “Yes, yes, go on. Why are you silent?”

Al-Zeghel reluctantly said, “I have convinced Ferdinand that it was me alone who dragged you into the field. Now if he accepts this as your free territory, then, you would have nothing to do with the people of Granada.”

Badr said, “I hope you didn’t tell him that I am alive?”

“No. I have convinced him that your successor will follow my instructions.”

“So, you have come to us with a message of friendship from Ferdinand.”

“For God’s sake don’t misunderstand my intentions in this regard. My sole objective is to give you time for preparations. I have brought a letter for you from Ferdinand.”

While saying this Al-Zeghel put his hand in the pocket of his robe, pulled out a paper and presented it to Badr bin Mughira.

Badr bin Mughira took the piece of paper and handed it over to Bashir and said, “Read it out.”

Bashir started reading Ferdinand’s letter in a choked voice:

"On the recommendation of Sultan Al-Zeghel, we would like to extend a hand of friendship to Mansour bin Ahmed and his comrades. After a long war, we feel the need for peace and security between the Christians and Muslim for the benefit of the people of Andalus and we hope that our brave enemy would support us in establishing peace in the light of our extremely generous offer. These are our terms and conditions for a compromise:

1. The region between Mount Tadmeer and Al-Shaleer that is known as the Valley of the Frontier Falcon would be independent and sovereign. And the people of this region would be given the right to choose Mansour bin Ahmed or some other person whom they prefer to be their ruler.
2. Assistance would be provided by us in case of any foreign attack.

In return for this extremely generous offer, we request the following in return:

“Our forts in the northern and eastern borders that are currently under Mansour bin Ahmed should be returned to us and we should also get a commitment that neither Mansour bin Ahmed nor his successors should ever attack our kingdom’s borders. Apart from this, they should not interfere in the affairs of those kingdoms of Granada and Andercus whose rulers have become our allies and they will not support any rebel against us whether Christian or Muslim.”

After reading Ferdinand’s letter, Bashir looked towards Badr and everyone’s glances also focused on his face. Badr bin Mughira raised his neck, looked at his comrades and said, “Mansour! Would you like to say something regarding this?”

Mansour looked at Bashir then returned his attention back to Badr and said, “If you mean whether I am ready to carry the coffin of the hopes of the Andalusian Muslims then my reply is in the negative.”

Badr said, “And you, Bashir?”

Bashir replied, “Even if I’m sure that the ship of my nation is sinking, even then I would not want to take the support of twigs.”

Badr bin Mughira looked at Al-Zeghel and said, “Ferdinand is sure that we are weary and we desperately need to sleep. Before strangulating us he wants to make sure that we are asleep and to sing a lullaby to us he has chosen that very person who violently shook Granada time and again from its sleep of total obliviousness. His extreme generosity is a sedating potion and to administer this potion down our throats he has chosen the hands of that very person that was, until yesterday, the Maître de Arms of Granada. Today the last hope of Granada is pushing us to the lowest pit of hopelessness. Our lives are very valuable in the sight of our elders, our benefactors and our leaders. That is the reason you have come to us. To advise us that we should not let go of life even if we are without honor and dignity.”

“Sultan Al-Zeghel! You say that reaching a compromise with the enemy will give us time for making preparations but don’t you think that the enemy itself feels the need to make preparations to strike a final blow at us? In the practical world, the agreement between the strong and weak hold no significance. Such agreements are made to shackle the weak and give the strong time to sharpen their swords.”

“If we are powerful, we can survive despite the wishes of the enemy and if we are weak, then the mere expression of good wishes from the enemy are not enough for our survival. The sword is the only guarantee for our dignity, our liberty and our survival and our sword will not be put in the scabbard before we achieve victory or death. Can we trust an enemy that ordered the Muslims to vacate the coastal areas after they conquered Malaga? Are you here to ask us to trust the writings of a man whose hands are stained with the blood of our nation’s women and children? Where was the generous and kind-hearted ruler sleeping when the honor of the Muslim girls was looted in the streets of Malaga? If you are in the mode of self-deception then for God’ sake don’t ask us to be in that mode. You are concerned that our sacrifices will be in vain? But let me tell you that sacrifice itself is a goal. If fate does not have a life of dignity for us, then the path to a death of dignity is not closed for us as yet.”

Badr bin Mughira stood up from his chair in excitement and said, “A nation’s blood does not end by flowing. It only dries up when they accept a life of indignity. Tell Ferdinand that we know how to pay the price of our freedom. So far Ferdinand’s flood of victories have merely broken dams of sand but heading to this valley he will have to deal with those rocks that have faced many storms in the past centuries. I know that our concern has pulled you here. You don’t want us to continue treading a path that has nothing but thorns in it but these feet have become accustomed to these thorns. This body is not used to a bed of flowers. If you regret that our lives were wasted under your leadership, then we are also sorry to see that a person who was used to staying in residences of marble in Al-Hamra and was used to sleeping on silken beds had to endure the difficulties of war with us.”

“Congratulations to Abu Abdullah for Granada’s throne and congratulations to you for the Sultanate of Andercus. Don’t worry about us. We have opened our eyes in the shades of swords and would eventually sleep in the rain of arrows.”

Those tears that Al-Zeghel tried to suppress flowed out involuntarily. With shivering lips he said in a voice drenched in sorrow, “Badr! Badr! Stop striking unnecessary blows at your fallen friend. You won’t see me in this land of embarrassment every again. I’m going to Africa. You don’t need a weak person like me and the rest of the people have contented with Abu Abdullah as their leader. If the Muslims have a future in Andalus then you are its custodian. Those people of Andercus who wish to follow your path will come to you. I have some gold and jewels. I will send the nation’s trust to you. Before leaving I don’t want you to misinterpret my tears. They were tears of regret and Abu Mohsin, your dwelling is also this valley.”

Al-Zeghel stood up after saying this much. “Now, I would like to leave.”

Badr said, “You are tired. Please rest until tomorrow.”

“No. I would like to leave today itself.”

In the evening, Badr and some of his comrades were bidding farewell to Al-Zeghel on a bridge over a stream.

# Tareef bin Malik

When Abu Abdullah got to know that his uncle had left Andercus for Africa he sent a message of congratulations to Ferdinand in Malaga and ordered for a celebration in Granada.

During the night Al-Hamra’s pillars and walls shone in the light of lanterns. A feast was arranged by Abu Abdullah in a spacious chamber of Al-Hamra for the loyal chiefs and members of the sultanate. Dance and music began after food. Rounds of wine followed and when this party was at its climax, Abu Abdullah, intoxicated in wine got up and said, “Some of you used to say that I am unfortunate. Noone call me unfortunate from today. I am the King of Granada. Ferdinand’s promises are true. All the territories of Granada will be returned to me. Why are you quiet? Laugh, sing and drink wine till your heart’s content. I will make a river of wine for you in Al-Hamra. All of the grapes of Alpujarra would be used to make wine. We had also ordered the people of the city to celebrate but we have heard that some miscreants have put-off the lights in the streets and markets. This is the work of those who have come from out of Granada and are propagating that the Christians have been extremely cruel to them. I say that this is a lie. Next time such people will not be given permission to enter into the city. Any slogan against Ferdinand the Great will not be tolerated. He is our benefactor. Whatever you see today in Al-Hamra is because of him.”

But the city’s condition was quite contrary to Al-Hamra. The lights of the streets and lanes that were lit in the evening by official notification were extinguished forcibly by those protesting against Abu Abdullah. The entire night protestors gathered in streets, lanes and intersections and raised slogans against the traitors of the nation. Abu Abdullah’s supporters in the city who had illuminated their homes had their houses pelted with bricks. An influential group of clergymen was with the protestors and the young students did not hesitate to drag out and beat-up those namesake clergymen who congregated to supplicate in their mosques for Abu Abdullah’s long life. Like the men, a group of female protestors too rallied around the city the whole night and apart from the women of Granada, female refugees also participated in this rally, whose tears had conveyed the tales of atrocities of the Christians in Malaga and Beegha to the people of Granada.

Abu Abdullah celebrated for three days. For three days the walls of Al-Hamra acted as a separator between the laughter of the pleasure-seeking officials of the government and the sighs of the people of Granada. For three days, rounds of Aragonian wine over-flowed in cups as tears of blood flowed from the eyes of the people of Granada and on the fourth day Abu Abdullah was reading this letter from Ferdinand:

"We have come to know that our people in Granada are not happy with you and the rebels are gathering in the city.

To remove any possibility of a future war between Muslims and Christians, we believe it is vital that you handover Granada to us. The only reply to this letter that we would like to hear from you is that the gates of Granada will not be closed for our army. In any other scenario we would be compelled to use force. We will decide your future when we get to Granada. If you expect a generous treatment from us, then, unconditional compliance is a must."

Like Abu Abdullah, the effect of intoxication also vanished from the members of the sultanate. They glared at each other with eyes wide open. Cloud of hopelessness was settling allover Al-Hamra.

Abu Abdullah looked at Ferdinand’s emissary and said in a feeble voice, “Emperor Ferdinand will have a reply from us within a couple of days.”

Abu Abdullah’s new minister was Tareef bin Malik, who was the biggest chief of the tribal Berbers. He stood up and replied, “Ferdinand certainly has some misunderstanding about us and we are sure this misunderstanding will be removed. If you deem appropriate, I am ready to go to him.”

Another chief stood up and said, “Ferdinand has left only two options for us. The first is that we comply with his commands and get ready to welcome these savages into our homes whose main priority is to dishonor our sisters and daughters. The second is that we prepare for a dignified death.”

Yet another chief got up and said, “War is synonymous to death for us.”

Suddenly, Abu Abdullah had a thought and said with a bit of optimism, “Tareef! Go to Abu Dawood. He is the only person who can show us the correct path at this time. He will certainly be able to remove any misunderstanding Ferdinand has about us. Ferdinand has made him the ruler of Loja. Go to him immediately.”

After a while, Tareef was heading towards Loja.

Abu Dawood recognized Tareef bin Malik as soon as he saw him but contrary to Tareef’s expectation of a warm welcome, Abu Dawood did not even stand up from his chair for a handshake. He merely gestured towards an empty chair that was in front of him.

Tareef sat on the chair and said reluctantly, “Abu Abdullah has sent me to you.”

Abu Dawood replied, “I know that you have come to me for advice.”

“So…so you know that Ferdinand has broken his promise with us.”

Abu Dawood replied, “In the capacity of a Governor I am not willing to hear anything against my King and I cannot even advise Abu Abdullah not to comply with the orders of his Emperor.”

“But I came with the understanding that you are a Muslim. You are a well-wisher of Granada and in the capacity of the Governor of Loja you too are a member of the Government of Granada. This is our city. I have come here to ask what we should do.”

Abu Dawood replied, “The weak always has to comply unconditionally in front of the powerful. My advice to Abu Abdullah is that he should leave himself at the mercy of Ferdinand.”

“But you had told Abu Abdullah several times in front of me that Ferdinand would never deceive us. He is our well-wisher. He has no greed to expand his kingdom. He would handover the entire Sultanate of Granada to Abu Abdullah after defeating Al-Zeghel. What became of those promises? Regretfully, your enthusiasm to become the Governor of Loja has made you forget that you are an individual of the Muslim community and if Christian forces enter Granada then our aftermath would be even worse that the people of Malaga.”

Abu Dawood replied with the same indifference, “I had performed the duty of being an emissary between Abu Abdullah and Ferdinand.”

“No. You had tried to convince Abu Abdullah to have confidence in Ferdinand’s false promises.”

Abu Dawood replied, “Like Abu Abdullah can’t I too make an error? At that moment, were you all not my supporters? If you want to be saved from destruction, then wouldn’t it be better that someone more far-sighted than Abu Abdullah take the reins of the people of Granada? The only way to save yourselves from the revenge of the Christians is that a leader from among you should guarantee complete loyalty to them on behalf of the people of Granada.”

Tareef said, “If the people of Granada request you for their leadership, would you be willing to take-up this service?”

“When I feel that I can be of service to them, then I will come even without being called.”

“But I have heard that under your shadow, even the Muslims in Loja consider themselves closer to death than to life.”

“The reason for this is that they still have not accepted me as their leader wholeheartedly and that is why I cannot talk to Ferdinand on their behalf with full confidence.”

Tareef got up and said, “So this means that unless the people of all the cities of Granada do not take a petty spy of Ferdinand as their leader, till such time, they cannot be saved.”

Contrary to Tareef’s expectation, Abu Dawood replied calmly, “At these times emotional talks are of no avail. So I am Ferdinand’s spy but you too have not been negligent in serving him. Go ahead and ask yourself. Don’t you feel that the people of Granada would have been better off if you were in Abu Abdullah’s place?”

“No. I cannot betray Abu Abdullah.”

“Very well! So be it but the reason for this is not that you consider Abu Abdullah to be the best leader of Granada but the main reason is that to become Prime Minister you need to make such a person to be the Sultan. If you had the contentment of reaching to this position when leaders like Abul Hassan and Al-Zeghel were present, then you would have never betrayed them and as proof of my claim it is enough for me to say that the only reason you had a person like Musa murdered is that in his presence it would have been impossible for you to get even an ordinary position. Otherwise, who does not know that he could have become a great leader of Granada. My friend, we both have our interests in front of us. To fulfill your interests, you became a stooge for Abu Abdullah and to fulfill my interests I became a stooge for Ferdinand and even now you are not afraid for the destruction of the people of Granada. Your main fear is that if Abu Abdullah is overthrown then even your ministership would be snatched away.”

Tareef grinned sheepishly and said, “You are Satan.”

For the first time a smile curved on Abu Dawood’s face. “A small Satan is acknowledging the greatness of a big Satan” And then he became serious and said, “Tareef, you don’t not have to worry. Your objective is the ministership of Granada but for this if you think it is important for Abu Abdullah to be the King, then, you’re mistaken. So far I don’t know who Ferdinand has selected for the seat of Granada but when the time comes I will tell him that for the post of minister, there is no person more suited than you. Instead of taking support of a sinking ship, why don’t you take the support of that mariner on whose signals the ships sink and swim? You know that now if anyone wants to be the King or Minister of Granada it is important to have the approval of Ferdinand. I can’t understand the person who does not regret Musa’s murder but would be upset on handing over an idiot like Abu Abdullah to Ferdinand?”

Tareef replied, “When I was a traitor, I didn’t realize that the Christians were deceivers and vicious to such a degree. Now if you believe that I can ignore the treatment they have rendered to my people in Malaga, then it is wrong.”

“You are getting emotional again. If Al-Zaghairi had laid down his arms in Malaga immediately then certainly the Christians would not have rendered that treatment.”

Tareef said, “Fine. I will leave now.”

Abu Dawood stood up and while extending his hand for a handshake said, “Goodbye!” But suddenly, a thought crossed Tareef’s mind and his hand stopped from extending. He said, “No. From today maybe our paths are different.”

Abu Dawood said while calmly settling down in his chair, "As you wish. But I know you will finally meet up with me after taking a long turn. If you don’t want to deceive yourself, then it would be better for you if you went to Ferdinand instead of Abu Abdullah.

Tareef stopped as he reached the door, turned around and looked at Abu Dawood for a second and exited.

Abu Dawood clapped his hands after pondering for a while. A servant entered the room and waited for his orders with his head bowed down. Abu Dawood said, “Go to the police chief and tell him that I need four active, wise and brave men immediately.”

The servant left and Abu Dawood picked up a pen and got busy in writing. After a while four Christians who appeared to be army officers from their attire entered the room. Abu Dawood turned his attention to them after revising his writing. “The emissary of Granada is staying at our guest house and currently he must be preparing to leave. Follow him until you know for sure whether he’s heading towards Granada or towards Malaga. If he heads towards Malaga, then know that he’s our Emperor’s friend. In this case only one of you would have go to Malaga to give my letter to the Great Emperor and if he heads towards Granada then his existence is dangerous for us. In this situation it would be your duty to stop him from going to Granada even at the expense of your lives. He has only five men with him. Take two or three good archers along with you. I want his companions to be aware of your presence only when an arrow is pierced into his chest. Do not attack his comrades unless there is a compulsion to do so. After that, one of you should go to Malaga and present my letter to the Emperor and narrate rest of the events verbally. Now go. Even if Tareef has left he must not have gone far.”

After leaving Loja, Tareef did not talk to anyone of his companions for several kilometers. During the night he stayed at a small inn of a settlement along the way. The owner of the inn was a Moroccan Muslim. As soon as he got off the horse, Tareef said, “Our horses need food and rest more than us. We will leave in the wee hours of the night.”

The owner of the inn said, “You look like a respectable man. Two Christian officers are staying in the best room of the inn. If you do not have any objection I can empty a room of my house for you. Your servants will find a place at the inn.”

Tareef said, “I only need to sleep.”

The owner of the inn said, “I’m afraid you won’t be able to sleep restfully at the inn. Those soldiers will return shortly after drinking wine at a Christian’s house in the settlement and for the whole night neither will they sleep nor will they let anyone else sleep. There is only a wall between my house and this inn. Their noise would be heard there too but they won’t break down your door at night when they are drunk.”

Tareef said, “Very well, I’m your guest.”

After having food, Tareef intended to lie in bed but he heard some noise coming from the direction of the inn.

After listening carefully, he heard screams of a woman. He called out to the owner of the inn. The owner of the inn came into his room from the next room and without waiting for Tareef’s question said, “Looks like they have caught another prey today.”

“You mean they kidnap people’s girls from the town?”

The owner of the inn said, “A victorious nation compels its slaves to comply to such rights.”

“And the people do not retaliate?”

“The population of Muslims is very little in this town and to save their own house people are willing to silently watch houses of others being burned.”

“Don’t they have any self-esteem left?”

“It seems that you have come from a different land. Self-esteem is meaningless for a nation whose Sultan is a coward and its nobles are traitors.”

Raising his sword, Tareef said, “My friend! For a long time, I had lost my way. Today you have shown me the way.”

Tareef ran out of the house and entered the inn. The screams of the woman were coming from the upper floors. Tareef’s companions were standing in the veranda in bewilderment.

“You cowards! What are you thinking?!” Saying this Tareef ran up the stairs. The door of the room was at the end of the corridor but there was a window from where light was emanating.

“Have mercy on me…leave me…let me go.”

Tareef peeped through the window and couldn’t bear the heart-breaking scene. With all his strength he pushed and broke the door. Intoxicated in wine, the soldiers left the woman and turned their attention towards him but within a blink of an eye Tareef’s sword had decapitated one soldier’s head and had gone through the other’s belly. For a moment the shocked girl lay motionless on the floor. Then she looked at her naked body and left the room screaming. Simultaneously, Tareef’s companions were coming up the stairs with their swords. At their sight the girl gave a deafening scream and jumped from the gallery. Tareef ran down the stairs. The owner of the inn was standing downstairs. Tareef remove his robe and placed it on the girl’s naked body. The owner of the inn bent down and placing his hands on her pulse said, “She has been liberated from the chains of life.”

Tareef said to his companions, “Put the reins on the horses. We are going to leave immediately.” Then he turned his attention towards the owner of the inn said, “If anyone asks who killed these thugs, tell them that the persecution of a girl of his nation has made the treacherous minister of Granada into a Muslim once again.”

Later when these people were coming out, eight horsemen came and halted in front of the inn. One of them moved his horse forward, looked at Tareef carefully and said, “Where are you going at this time?”

Tareef replied in a bitter tone, “Who are you?”

“We are soldiers. We thought of staying at this inn for the night but it seems that even you did not find a place here.”

“There is a lot of place. In fact, we have just emptied a room.”

Saying this Tareef prompted his horse forward. After covering a distance, one of Tareef’s companions who was relatively close to Tareef galloped his horse close to Tareef’s and said, “After what happened, do you think it would be appropriate to go to Malaga?”

“Who asked you to go to Malaga?”

“You said that we might have to go to Malaga?”

“No. We are going to Granada.”

After a while, Tareef said to his companion, “Hassan! You must have mused several times that I am the biggest traitor of Granada.”

Appearing worried Hassan said, “You are my master.”

“No Hassan, I know. Your compulsions do not permit you to say how you really feel. You had been compelled to support me even in the worst of conditions, but say for instance that I choose the correct path today, then, what difference would it make to you?”

Hassan replied reluctantly, “My master! There is a huge difference in walking with a burdened conscience and a burden-free conscience.”

Tareef said, “Hassan! The Christians are our worst enemies.”

“My Master! If you don’t take it as an affront, then I would say that we have been our own enemy. If you accept someone as your killer, then you cannot demand that he should not kill you in a certain way and our situation is such that we have tied our hands and legs and stood in front of the enemy and we have also given our dagger in his hand. Now it is his choice if he slaughters us gradually or just slits our jugular vein quickly.”

Tareef replied enthusiastically, “No, our daggers are still in our hands. We will fight. If not a life of dignity, then the path for a death of dignity has not been closed for us.”

“May God give you courage. But I fear that Abu Abdullah will not support you.”

“He is compelled to support us.”

After a while, Hassan got startled and said, “Somebody is following us.”

On Tareef’s cue his companions stopped their horses. The sound of galloping horses could be heard behind.

Hassan said, “They must be the same soldiers that we met at the entrance of the inn.” To save his life, the owner of the inn must have told them who the killer of the two officers of the Christian army was and you too did not hide your secret. They must be following us in pursuit."

Tareef said, “They have been following us for long. We saw them as we left Loja. I have seen them two or three times along the way. All of you move away and stand behind the trees.”

With Tareef leading, his companions left the path and stood behind the dense trees.

The horse riders passed by and Tareef and his companions came out of from behind the trees and mounted their horses.

In the wee hours of the night, these people left the main road and were passing through a sandy track in the murky light of the moon.

Tareef sat on his horse with his head bowed. His tension increased as he approached the destination. He had passed the stage in which a person thinks as to what he should do. His feet were shaky when he left Loja after meeting Abu Dawood. He would sometimes think that he would go to Granada and tell Abu Abdullah, “We have deceived ourselves. Now war was the only way out. The flood whose dams we had broken ourselves was now heading towards our homes. When Ferdinand’s troops would enter Granada, neither will you remain a King nor I a minister. He might not even give us the privilege of living like a normal human being but are we capable of fighting the enemy? An enemy for whom we have opened the gates of our strongest forts. He is aware all our weaknesses. Now, we can’t even threaten him.”

Then he would think, “Could Ferdinand prove to be so treacherous? What if I go to him and tell him that we have been ashamed in front of our people because of you. We trusted you and fought with Abul Hassan and Al-Zeghel for you. We were confident that we could live a life of peace under your shade. For the sake of peace in Andalus, we gave most of the area of our Sultanate to you and now you want to take Granada away from us too? You are the Emperor of Andalus. This sort of default does not suit your stature. What will the world say? What will the historians say? Can you deny that had we not supported you there was no power in Andalus that could have stopped the floods of Abul Hassan’s victories? If anyone raised a voice against you, we did not hesitate in strangling him. If anyone raised his head against you, we slaughtered him and threw him at your feet. Is this the reward of our services that the gates of Granada be opened for those wolves who have ripped the threads of humanity apart in Malaga after all? What is our crime? No! No! There is no benefit of such talk. Ferdinand doesn’t need us now. Abul Hassan and Al-Zeghel are no threat to him now. For him, now that nation has become harmless whose flags of success fluttered for centuries in the fields of Andalus. Ferdinand took the shade of rocks in the rain of arrows. Now the bows of those who fought against him are broken and now he has no use for those rocks. Abu Abdullah, I and all my companions were those rocks who Ferdinand used to make his bunkers that won him the war. Now he feels that we are useless to him.” Then again he thought, “But like us, even Abu Dawood was a similar rock in his bunker and he has made him the Governor of Loja.” Tareef answered the question himself. “No, he still considers him useful. Ferdinand wants to put his defeated enemy to death and even in the capacity of a rock, Abu Dawood can be useful in sharpening his sword. Ferdinand wants to spill every drop of blood of life from the veins of his enemy and Abu Dawood can tell him precisely which vein to cut. Maybe a day would arrive when Ferdinand might realize that like us he does not even need Abu Dawood, but for now, he needs him. Abu Dawood has assured me that I can make Ferdinand happy by betraying Abu Abdullah but this would be treachery. Could it not be possible that the decision Ferdinand has taken against Abu Abdullah is because of Abu Dawood’s advice? And if Abu Dawood can betray Abu Abdullah, can’t he then betray me as well? I won’t go to Malaga. I will go to Granada but what can I do after getting to Granada? Musa is in my custody. I am willing to face the consequences after releasing him. I will fall at his feet and say,”Musa! The nation needs you but now what can even Musa do?"

When this mental conflict would become unbearable for Tareef, he would turn his attention towards his companions and strike a conversation with them. Before going to the inn of the settlement he did not know where his destination was. He would take a step towards Granada and the next towards Malaga, but when he left the inn he had just one destination. The incident of the tragic death of an innocent girl was the final jolt to awaken his drowsy conscience. His shaky feet had stabilized. The shrilling screams of a helpless girl of the nation had placed the Prime Minister in the ranks of those people who were compelled to fight without the consequence of a win or loss. Tareef hand just one option.

When the morning was about to break he halted his horse by a stream and said to his companions, “It’s time for prayer.”

After performing ablution from the stream, Tareef and his companions stood facing the Qibla and when Tareef raised his hands for supplication after prayers, then, instead of words, tears flowed out from his eyes. Tareef hid his face his hands. After much difficulty he uttered these words from his mouth:

“My Lord! We have strayed far away from the life of dignity. Now maybe our tears won’t be able to wash away the darkness of our sins. We rebelled against Your commands and rejected Your mercy and now when we are facing nothing but humiliation and indignity in front of us we are asking You for a respectable death. No! The word”respect" does not suit people like us. We don’t even deserve to imagine a respectful death. We merely want to be relieved from the torment of our conscience. Every moment of life is far bitter than death. Now our burden has become too much for your earth to bear."

This supplication that began with tears ended with tears as well. Tareef and his companions mounted their horses once again.

After crossing the stream and passing through dense trees, the minaret of Granada’s mosque and the dome of Al-Hamra came in Tareef’s sight. Pointing towards the horizon he said, “Look! Granada! Our Granada! Hassan! This is our last fort in Andalus. We will protect it. We should not be hopeless from the Mercy of God. If a hundred thousand youth out of a million in Granada vow to live, then who can erase them. Haven’t a handful of frontier falcons not taught a lesson to Ferdinand’s cowardly army? Didn’t a thousand of Tariq’s warriors shake the pillar’s of Rodrick’s supremacy? When we were in our thousands we defeated the largest of armies and today our numbers are in hundreds of thousands. Will we submit to the humiliation of Ferdinand’s slavery forever? Don’t we possess those swords that our ancestors…”

Tareef couldn’t complete his phrase. An arrow swooshed from the trees and got pierced into Tareef’s ribs. With a sound of “uff” Tareef ducked to a side but instantly another arrow hit his back. Tareef’s companions turned their reins around but in the meanwhile a few more arrows came and another one of Tareef’s companions got injured and right after that the sound of galloping horses could be heard from behind the trees.

Tareef proclaimed loudly, “Hassan! Don’t go in their pursuit. I have a lot of work to get done.”

Tareef prompted his horse forward and his companions, who were biting their lips in rage, followed him. After going a little further, Hassan brought his horse close to Tareef and said, “Please stop the horse. Let me take out this arrow.”

“No. These moments of mine are very valuable. Now, don’t waste time.”

“You can’t go very far in this condition. Atleast let me have a look at your wounds.” Saying this Hassan extended one hand and got a hold of the reins of Tareef’s horse and pulled the reins of his horse with the other.

While dismounting his horse Tareef said, “You are very stubborn, Hassan!” He stood with his chest against the horse and holding the reins with both his hands said, “Be quick.”

Hassan quickly removed his turban and said to one of his companions, “Tear this in two.”

Two men dismounted their horses and tried to lend support to Tareef but he lashed out saying, “I am fine. Hassan, be quick.”

Hassan pulled and removed an arrow at once and threw it but Tareef fell unconscious as he tried to remove the second one. After tying both the wounds, Tareef’s companions lay him on the ground. After a while, Tareef gained consciousness, opened his eyes and after drinking a few drops of water tried to get up but Hassan said, “It would not be advisable to travel on the horse in this condition. Wouldn’t it be better that we leave you in the nearby settlement and get a surgeon from Granada?”

Tareef got up and said decisively, “I am living merely to perform my last duty.”

Tareef mounted his horse but after about half a mile Hassan realized that it had become difficult for him to sit on the saddle of the horse properly. He would bend to one side at times or to the other. His grip on the reins of the horse was loosening. Hassan took his horse closer and he put his hand around Tareef’s back and pulled him onto his horse.

While groaning Tareef said, “Take me to Musa.”

After passing through lush green gardens Hassan halted his horse at an iron gate of the four walls of an old house. A black slave peeped out of the iron bars of the gate.

Hassan said, “Open the gate. Be quick.”

The black slave opened the gate as soon as he recognized Hassan and his companions. Hassan entered into a wide field as soon as he passed the gatehouse. In the meantime, a few slaves and servants gathered and on Hassan’s cue removed Tareef from the horse and took him into a room. Tareef was unconscious. Hassan said to the servants, “Call Yaqoob.”

A negro ran out and returned promptly and said, “He is coming.”

A middle-aged yet well-built man entered the room. Seeing Tareef unconscious on the bed he looked at Hassan with querying glances.

Hassan said, “Yaqoob, it is the master’s order to release Musa from captivity immediately and present him here.”

In a state of bewilderment and concern, Yaqoob first looked at Hassan and then at his companions. His silent glances were protesting against the unprecedented order.

Hassan said, “Yaqoob! Don’t waste time. Be quick.”

With a bit of audacity, Yaqoob said, “But master is unconscious and until he does not order himself…”

Hassan thundered back at him, “I order you on master’s behalf. Be quick.”

“But he won’t leave me alive.”

“Lions don’t raise their hands on foxes. Let’s go. I will come with you.”

Moments later, after passing through a narrow veranda, Hassan, Yaqoob and a slave stopped at an iron gate of a cell that was on the other side of the house. The Berber unlocked the door of the cell. On one side of a cell was a narrow stone ladder that led downstairs. After coming down about twenty steps these people stopped in front of an iron-bar gate. Yaqoob opened the door. It was pitch dark inside. When Yaqoob turned an iron latch near the wall next to the door, a small window opened up near the ceiling of the opposite wall and foggy light entered the room. This room was empty and a man stood behind the right side of another cell’s narrow door’s iron bars and looked towards those who had created a commotion to his solitude. This was Musa bin Abi Ghassan. Even a withered face of this awesome and formidable personality was enough to shake the hearts of onlookers.

Hassan took a step forward and said, “We have come to take you out of captivity on the orders of Tareef bin Malik.”

Musa kept looking at Hassan silently. Hassan repeated, “He is injured and his last wish is that you give him a chance to fall at your feet. We have brought him here in a state of unconsciousness. We know that you won’t forgive him but he has repented and maybe after a while his matter would be in front of his Lord. All of us are your criminals and if you want to punish us then you won’t face any resistance from our side.”

On Hassan’s signal, Yaqoob opened the door fearfully. Musa came out of the cell and stood silently for a moment and then spoke, “I fail to understand how this punishment descended upon Tareef when he was willing to commit every sin for Abu Abdullah.”

Hassan replied, “Tareef has been wounded by Ferdinand’s men. You might consider him forgivable once you’re aware of all the events but at the moment the flame of his life is flickering. He is waiting for you. He wants to say something to you.”

Musa said, “Let’s go.”

Tareef groaned in pain and said, “Quick, take me to Musa.”

One of his companions said, “Hassan has gone to fetch Musa. They must be coming here shortly.”

Tareef opened his eyes, looked around and while sitting up on the bed said, “I don’t want to see him in this condition. Take me in front of his cell. I’m not worthy enough that he come to me. Be quick.”

Tareef hung his feet down from the bed. Two men assisted him. When they took him out the door, a negro slave said, “They are coming.”

Tareef said, “Leave me. I don’t need support.” The servants complied to his orders against their wishes. Tareef took a few steps. He could see Musa on the other side of the veranda.

He began to blackout. He stumbled forward and stood embracing a pillar of the veranda. Musa came and stopped close to him and stared at him in bewilderment. With shivering lips Tareef said in a voice drenched in pain, “Musa! Your criminal is knocking at the gates of death but before that…before that…”

Tareef left the support of the pillar, took a few steps forward and involuntarily fell at Musa’s feet. For a second, Musa stood numb without any motion. Then he tried to move back but his feet were clutched in Tareef’s arms. Even in a state of unconsciousness this grip was quite strong. Suddenly Musa realized that his feet were becoming wet. Tareef was spending away his saved tears at his feet. No, these were not tears. Musa was heart-broken. He had forgotten all the ills of the past. He bent down and picked Tareef up. Instead of tears, a stream of blood was flowing out of his mouth. Musa picked him up and took him inside. He placed him on the bed and tried to revive him but the fatigued traveler had breathed his last after arriving to his final destination.

Musa supplicated, “Surely we belong to and to Him shall we return” and despite trying hard to hold back tears, they flowed over. These tears fell on Tareef’s face. Musa moved his head from his lap onto the pillow and said in a husky voice, “Tareef! You were one of us.”

# Renewed Enthusiasm

After a long time Musa stood by the bridge of the stream, once again, across which the independent territory of the Frontier Falcon began. A wooden plank was stuck on this very tree near the bridge but the writing on the plank was different from that Musa had previously read when he had first entered the Valley of the Shaheen. These were the words of the writing:

“Beyond this stream is the kingdom of the Frontier Falcon. Anyone who has accepted the government of the Abu Abdullah, the traitor, is not permitted to enter. The oppressed Muslims who want to seek refuge from the atrocities of the Christians are permitted to enter but the punishment for spies of the enemies is death.”

It was time for Asr prayers. Musa dismounted his horse and tied it to a tree and after performing ablution from the water of the stream, stood on the lush green grass to offer his prayers. About twenty-five armed youths appeared from around the trees and gathered close to Musa. Musa got up after completing his prayers, turned to them and said, “I would like to meet your emir. My name is Musa.”

“Musa! You?!”, a youth said after moving forward and taking a closer look at him. “You were alive? Where were you all this while?” The youth’s concern was transforming into joy.

Musa said, “Tell your emir that I seek permission to present myself before him. I will wait here for his orders.”

The youth replied, “The Lion of Granada does not need any permission to enter the Valley of the Falcon.”

The youth was the commander of this group of mujāhidīn. On his single cue, a soldier brought Musa’s tied horse. The youth addressed Musa and said, “Please mount your horse. Our horses are on the other side of the stream.”

After crossing the stream, the youth and five of his companions mounted their horses and accompanied Musa while the rest disappeared into the woods again. After passing through the narrow and dark pathways of the forest, they reached outside the gate of a fort by midnight. Contrary to Musa’s expectation, the gate of the fort was open, while a few men were standing, waiting outside for them. One of them held a torch. When Musa came near the gate, someone came forward and got a hold of his horse’s reins. Musa got off the horse and looking towards him in the blurry light of the torch, said, “Is it Bashir?” Bashir immediately embraced him. Overwhelmed with emotions, Bashir kept repeating these words, “Where were you? Why did you keep us uninformed about yourself for so long? Is this a dream?”

After being separated from Bashir’s grip, Musa turned his attention towards the other men. A man clad in black extended his hand towards him. While shaking his hand, Musa looked at Bashir and Bashir said, “This is Mansoor bin Ahmed.”

After shaking hands with Mansoor, his glance fell upon Abu Mohsin. Abu Mohsin stood numb and still looking at his commander. Musa extended his hand towards him and said, “Abu Mohsin! Don’t you recognize me?”

In a display of reverence, Abu Mohsin kissed Musa’s hand.

All of them entered into the fort. The food-spread was laid out in a spacious room. Musa said, “You have still not eaten?”

Bashir replied, “We were waiting for you.”

“So even at the gate you all were waiting for me? But how did you know that I was coming?”

Mansoor replied, “When you were about four miles away from our border, we were informed that a guest is arriving and a little after Maghrib prayers we got the news as to who our guest was.”

After sitting at the food-spread, that scene came in front of Musa’s eyes when he first entered into the valley of the falcons with Al-Zeghel. He was imagining that feast in the forest whose host was Badr bin Mughira. Today when Mansoor bin Ahmed assisted him in washing his hands, he suddenly felt like a stranger. Despite Bashir’s rapport and Mansoor’s sincerity, he felt a sort of loneliness in the gathering. He tried to bring Badr bin Mughira’s topic but he could not utter the words. The hosts were waiting for their guest to extend his hand towards the food.

Basher said, “Please start.”

Musa involuntarily picked up a morsel but he had lost his appetite. His hand stopped as it reached his mouth. Curtains of tears drew in front of his eyes. A voice drenched in pain came out of his mouth, “Badr! Badr!” and he put down the bite onto the cloth-spread.

In a state of immense concern, the hosts were looking at him. Musa hid his face in his sleeves. The mujahid who would make the hearts of lions to shudder, who had learned to fight storms and play with lightening, who had the boldness of laughing in the horrific face of death, was crying in this packed gathering like an innocent child whose dearest toy had broken. “Forgive me. I was not hungry.” Saying this in a husky voice, he got up and left the room.

The hosts looked at each other. Mansoor said, “Wait for a while. I will be right back. Bashir, you may come along with me.”

Musa stood in the courtyard, staring at the twinkling stars in the sky. “Badr! Badr!”, he said while sobbing.

Mansoor stepped forward and while placing his hands on his shoulders said, “This pessimism doesn’t suit the stature of the greatest mujahid of Granada. Granada’s plight is pathetic but we should not loose morale.”

Turning around and looking towards him, Musa said, "At the moment I’m not thinking about Granada. Mansoor! You don’t know. Broken walls can be re-erected. Forts can be rebuilt and the nation’s population can be increased but a messiah that infuses iman into the veins of dead nations is not born again and again. Badr was a messiah of our nation but we executed him at the gallows. He was the last drop of blood in the veins of this dead nation. He was our sword that was broken, he was our arm that had been chopped off, he was a sun that has set and now we are wandering in the dark.

Galloping of horses could be heard outside the fort. Mansoor looked at Bashir. Comprehending his cue, Bashir walked towards the gate.

Mansoor said to Musa, “You are exhausted. Let’s go and sit inside.”

Abu Musa went along with Mansoor without saying anything. After climbing a flight of stairs made of stone, they entered into a room in the upper story. Torches were lit in the room. On Mansoor’s cue, Musa sat on a chair. While sitting down on another chair close to him, Mansoor said, “If nature can do one miracle, then, it can also do another. We had become hopeless in your case. Today when we heard of your arrival, then, we thought that our men were mistaken. Isn’t it possible that just as we found Musa, similarly, you might find Badr? Can he also not disappear just like you?”

Becoming a little optimistic, Musa looked towards Mansoor, but then, became disappointed again and said, “Given the circumstances, looks like you too have become a poet like me. Hopelessness makes everyone a poet. All along the way I kept falsely consoling myself that Badr bin Mughira is alive and maybe the person Abu Abdullah executed was someone else. It could also be that he might be in prison like me and even while sitting for dinner at your cloth-spread my eyes were glued at the door. I was waiting for a miracle from nature and when you asked me to extend my hand towards the food, my flickering flame of hope was put-off. The reality that Badr bin Mughira’s place lies vacant in this gathering was unbearable for me. If I had raised his topic on my arrival, then, I would not have behaved like a child at the cloth-spread. But I was waiting, thinking that he was alive, not dead. Instead of saying anything from my mouth, I wanted to hear something from your tongue. Mansoor! I am not unaware of the meaning of life and death. The memories of the dead has never bothered me. Even in my dreams I have always seen them in another world instead of this one. Despite the fact that the span of our friendship was very brief, I feel that he was really close to me in this world. Rather he was part of my existence.”

Someone’s footsteps could be heard away from the door. Brining a meaningful smile to his face, Mansoor said, “Would you like to meet Badr bin Mughira instantly?”

For a moment Musa kept staring at Mansoor dumbfounded. Hearing the footsteps outside, he turned his attention towards the door and suddenly his entire life gathered in his eyes. Clad in iron from head to toe, Badr bin Mughira was in front of him.

For a moment, Musa sat still in his chair without moving a muscle. Then gradually his heartbeat started throbbing. His lips shivered. He yelled, “Badr! Badr!”

Badr took a step forward and opened his arms. Musa got up and embraced him. He was saying, “Badr! You are alive! My heart has not disappointed me. My friend! My companion!! My arm!!!”

Tears had already come into Badr’s eyes but he remained silent and when they sat in front of each other, Musa looked towards Mansoor and said, “Both of you are so mean. Why didn’t you inform me as soon as I arrived?”

Manoor answered, “Don’t you think that you deserved some sort of punishment for disappearing for so long? Ask Badr how concerned he was for you. But it was not our intention to cause you any anxiety. Badr has just come from outside. Had we told you before, it would have become unbearable for you to wait even for a moment.”

Bashir entered the room and said, “Your arrival is awaited at the cloth-spread. Please come!”

Badr looked at Musa and said, “Carry on. I will change my clothes and come.”

After dinner, Badr bin Mughira, Musa, Bashir and Abu Mohsin returned to this room and talked for long. Musa had reached here after a long journey and Badr had come to the fort from a couple of remote checkposts after changing three horses, but, despite this unprecedented meeting, no one was tired or sleepy. Both narrated their accounts. Later, a discussion ensued on the present and future situation.

After asking Abu Mohsin a few questions, Musa said, “After release from captivity, I had gone to Granada in the guise of a merchant. I stayed there for only a couple of days within which the opinion I formed of the people there is that they will support us to save themselves from an undignified death. Now there is no misunderstanding about Ferdinand. Four hundred thousand immigrants from other cities are now in Granada and hearing their ordeal every citizen of Granada is sure that if Abu Abdullah opens the gates of Granada for Ferdinand’s forces, then, their fate won’t be any different than the Muslims of Malaga and the other cities. Contingents of volunteers are guarding the gates of the city. Day and night there are protests taking place against Abu Abdullah at the gates of Al-Hamra. I’m positive that if Abu Abdullah does not respect the feelings of the people, then, the army would support the people and now even the group of traitors also believes that they would have to empty their palaces for Ferdinand’s troops. At first they were sure that they would take advantage of being a part of Abu Abdullah’s government, and with the patronage of Ferdinand, plunder the people with both hands. But now fear was looming over them that if Granada was captured by Ferdinand they would have to then face dacoits that were more dangerous and merciless than themselves. One of Tareef’s companions had delivered his last message to Abu Abdullah and Abu Abdullah and his companions were now feeling that if Ferdinand’s men can kill a person like Tareef then no one should have any misunderstanding about themselves. I’m sure Ferdinand won’t delay his attack on Granada. Time is short and we have a lot to get done.”

Badr said, “Ferdinand’s troops have left Malaga. I got this news today afternoon.”

Musa was startled at this and said, “If this is true then I have to reach Granada immediately.”

Badr bin Mughira said, “I think you still have some misunderstanding about the people of Granada.”

Musa said, “When I thought that the people of Granada would support us for a life of dignity then that was a wishful thought but now they want to save themselves of an undignified death and I’m sure when the only option they would have is death then they would give priority to a death of dignity instead of death of indignity. This will be the first war against Ferdinand in which maybe the nation’s old traitors and the peace-loving people would also support us.”

Badr bin Mughira said, “And for this *jihād* you will have to pledge again at the holy hand of Abu Abdullah.”

Musa replied in a state of concern, “I have come to you for Granada not for Abu Abdullah. Maybe I have some misunderstanding regarding the people of Granada but I have no misunderstanding about you. Even if I had not come here, even then you would have come to the aid of the people of Granada.”

Badr bin Mughira remained silent for a moment then got up towards the window and started peeping outside. His back was towards Musa.

Musa said, “Had I not known that given the circumstances we were able to defend the four walls of Granada, then, I would have joined the ranks of your mujāhidīn as an ordinary soldier but I am sure that with your help we can win this war. Even now, more than one hundred thousand volunteers can be recruited in Granada.”

Suddenly, Badr bin Mughira turned around, looked Musa and said, “Musa! You know very well that I will not hesitate to offer the biggest sacrifice to save Granada but the past events have compelled me to think whether we can save Granada. Whether our past sacrifices for Granada could be of any use? And even now if we make Granada our defensive entrenchment, wouldn’t our further sacrifices go to waste? Till when will we keep supporting these falling walls whose foundations have been shaken and till when will our blood keep watering the tree whose roots have been infested with mites. What I say is a bit harsh but hiding the vicious face of reality under the veils of beautiful words in useless. I am willing to admit that the people of Granada are realizing their mistakes. The courage to defend is sprouting in their hearts and maybe they might fight too, but, unfortunately, even today, their emir is Abu Abdullah and even today those people are in power whose treachery turned our glorious victories to defeats. The people of Granada’s shoulders are burdened with dead bodies that should have been buried a long time ago. You say that the people demonstrate at the gates of Al-Hamra day and night but isn’t the objective of these protests to have Abu Abdullah come out of his palace and lead them? What can I say about a people who pickup a rotten corpse and place it on their shoulders for their guidance in the battlefield. Musa! The sweat and blood of our ancestors has been spent in building the Al-Hamra but if today its walls are giving refuge to traitors like Abu Abdullah then for God’s sake tell the people of Granada to bring down those walls. If the gates of Al-Hamra stop their hands from grabbing the necks of the nation’s traitors, then, break these gates. If the dead have taken the seats of power, then, bury them with those very seats.”

“You should not have any misunderstanding. Our swords were not unsheathed for some king. We had no love for the so-called royal family of Granada. The reason we joined hands with Abul Hassan was because he vowed to rid the nation from the slavery of the enemy. We accepted Al-Zeghel’s leadership because he jumped into the battlefield of the nation’s freedom but our failures were because they did not feel it important to cleanse Granada of the traitors before jumping into the field. Al-Zeghel got a chance, but instead of hanging his nephew at the gallows, he made him the ruler of Loja, who handed over that city to Ferdinand.”

“Ask Abu Mohsin. He got a chance to guide the people of Granada but, he too, made the same mistake. He assembled an army of volunteers and made Abu Abdullah its leader but along with Abu Abdullah the traitors also came into the field and his victories transformed to defeats.”

“Musa! If you have come here with an invitation of *jihād*, then you won’t be disappointed but despite all these incidents do we still have to carry the coffins of Abu Abdullah and his companions? Rest assured that we are not the type who would close their eyes to an ensuing flood but instead of sitting in a ship made of twigs, we would put our faith in our hands. We cannot fool ourselves by taking refuge behind walls of sand.”

“You say that seeing their interest in danger, Abu Abdullah and his comrades will support the people but can you prove that if Ferdinand assures them that their interests would be safeguarded and that they would be shoved over the people and would be allowed to suck their blood, won’t they stop supporting the people? Till these people are alive, the life of Granada is in danger and I don’t want to extend their unnatural life. I said what I had to say. Despite all that I have said, if you command, then, I am at your service and my men are at your service.”

Badr bin Mughira sat on his chair. Musa thought for a while with his head bowed down. Finally, he said, “You have come to know that Ferdinand is going to attack Granada and God is my witness that the only question in front of me is how to save this enclave of the Muslims of Andalus. For us, this is not the time to think about Abu Abdullah. We will deal with all the traitors when the time comes. Do you think I would have any mercy in my heart because of whom the honor of thousands of the nation’s daughter has been looted? But now, on one side we have the enemy who has positioned his lance over our chests and on the other we have these culprits. If we focus on them, then, the enemy will not miss his blow. And if, God forbid, Ferdinand captures Granada, then, we’re finished forever. Badr! At the moment my main task is to save the honor of the thousands of women. If we are able to push back the Christians, then these hypocrites will be left with only two options. Either they would go after the people or they would be crushed under their feet. I will leave for Granada first thing in the morning. If Ferdinand is headed towards Granada, then, you will know about the strengths of their resistance in a few days. If I become hopeless, then I would think that instead of Granada, these forests and mountains are our bastion. I will come to you along with those who want to fight the enemy till their last breath.”

Badr said, “You know well that when you raise your sword against the enemy, our swords will not be able to stay in the scabbard. If any group in Granada has vowed to fight till the end, then, do not advise them to come here. They will come here in a state of hopelessness and there is no place here for hopeless people. If they stand their ground, then not only us, but Muslims from all over the world will come to their aid. As for Abu Abdullah and his comrades, I will reiterate that if circumstances do not permit you to take immediate action against them, then too it is important that they are watched closely.”

Musa said, “If you don’t mind, I would like to take Abu Mohsin along with me.”

“How can we have any objection. You may take anyone of us along.”

After the morning prayer, Badr bin Mughira and his companions were bidding farewell to Musa and Abu Mohsin.

Ferdinand had laid siege on Granada. His cowardly troops repeatedly attacked the city but they had to retreat in the volley of arrows. However, Ferdinand and his troops were intoxicated in their might. They paid no heed to the minor losses and continued their siege on the city. The people from the nearby settlements had already taken refuge in the city once they heard about the advancement of the Christians. Ferdinand’s troops ravaged their lush green gardens and destroyed their crops.

The city’s leadership was in Musa’s hand and his morale boosting speech had breadth new life into the people of Granada. Like the rest of the people, Abu Abdullah and his comrades had also accepted him as their leader and the people too had forgotten their past sins. The theologians, along with their students and followers, had already proclaimed *jihād* against Ferdinand. The chiefs did the same on behalf of their tribes. The fervor of the youth was such that they had hung two influential tribal chiefs for being spies of Ferdinand.

Ferdinand was sure that the people of the city would lay down their arms themselves as soon as their provisions were exhausted. But one day a little before sunrise while Ferdinand’s troops were awakening, all the gates of the city were opened and the Muslims came out and attacked. This was an unexpected attack for Ferdinand. Within no time Muslims had killed about four thousand Christians. In the meantime, Ferdinand’s archers embedded themselves into the trenches while his foot soldiers and cavalry got time to get organized. Musa came out and attacked from the western gate with a thousand cavaliers and played havoc in the formations of the enemy and captured the forward posts of the archers.

Abu Abdullah appeared from the southern gate and the foot soldiers of the enemy were compelled to say that the puppet King of Granada has still not forgotten the skill of marksmanship and horsemanship of his ancestors.

By noon, Ferdinand’s troops were retreating from every front but by late afternoon they had organized their foot soldiers and cavalry behind the last trench, which made it impossible for Granada’s troops to move forward. The flying arrows became a separator between the formations of the two parties. Musa had sufficient infantry troops but he did not issue an order for an all-out attack. His archers had taken up positions in the vicinity of the city. His cavalry would move forward and launch attacks in small bands and would return after causing loss to the enemy.

Despite incurring heavy losses, Ferdinand was not shaken. He was now sure that starvation had forced the Muslims to come of the city and fight and in a day or two they would have no morale to continue. Therefore, instead of fighting an offensive battle, he instructed his troops to fight defensively.

After Dhuhr prayers Musa organized his army’s formations and ordered his commanders to prepare for a final assault. When the time came, the heralders would call them out loudly from the tower of every vallation and then they should attack the enemy as soon as they hear them.

The experienced people were not optimistic about the outcome of this attack but rather they thought it to be suicidal. A straight attack onto the entrenchment of the archers was very dangerous and besides this, Ferdinand’s cavalry was atleast eight times more than Musa’s. The infantry, on whom Musa was relying upon the most, would not be effective in this assault but the people had full faith in Musa. They were also prepared to jump into the fire on his cue.

After instructing the troops, Musa entered into the gate of the city, then, got off his horse and climbed on the boundary wall. Turn by turn, he got up on every gate of the towers and scanned the horizon. The setting shadows started aggravating his pessimism. Running on the boundary walls he would jump off a gate and climb the next and then would ask the guards, “Have you seen anything as yet?” And when the guards would reply in the negative, he would look towards the horizon again to console himself.

On the other side, Ferdinand was saying to the Bishop of Castile, “Holy Father! Pray that the enemy does not postpone the idea of attacking us. If your prayer is accepted, then, this war will end today.” And the Bishop prayed while kneeling on both knees, in front of the statue of Mary.

For the third time, Musa was climbing the stairs of the tower when a guard called out, “Dust is rising on the horizon. Maybe some troops are approaching.”

Musa ran up the tower, looked towards the horizon and yelled, “They have arrived! They have arrived!! Our falcons have arrived!!! Today God has granted us victory.”

And when the horsemen appeared from the clouds of dust, tears of gratitude flowed out of Musa’s eyes. He looked down from the tower and proclaimed loudly, “Be aware!!”

And within no time the heralders standing on the boundary walls brought the voice of the emirs of the brigades to the ears of the soldiers. The cavalry got hold of their lances while the infantry took to their swords.

Musa said “bazin” and this sound of “bazin” echoed at every corner of the boundary. Musa ran out and mounted his horse.

On the other side, Ferdinand said to the Bishop of Castille, “Holy Father! Your prayer has been answered. Death does not need to knock at the door of the enemy. Now they are advancing towards death themselves.”

The eyes of the last rays of the setting sun were witnessing yet another battle between the standard-bearers of the crescent and the cross. The people of Granada advanced in the volley of arrows. Ferdinand ordered his cavalry to attack and a thick battle ensued.

Musa, Abu Abdullah and Abu Mohsin were leading the contingents of the cavalry from three sides of the city while the infantry had already attacked the archers in the trenches. Musa advanced forward after breaking through the enemy lines from the northern gate. Ferdinand galloped his horse forward and yelled, “Don’t let anyone of the horsemen of this contingent to go back to the city alive. Don’t pursue them. They will return.”

After passing through the enemy lines, Musa vanished into the thick trees of a garden in the rear with five hundred horsemen while Ferdinand’s archers waited for their return. But Musa came behind the troops from the other side of the city and simultaneously a new army appeared from the north – an army who, besides Musa and Abu Mohsin, no one was aware of.

The mujahids of the Frontier Falcon had arrived to the aid of the people of Granada. Badr bin Mughira attacked from the rear of the enemy with three thousand horsemen and within no time crushed the enemy lines. A confused Ferdinand ordered his troops to move to the right but in the meantime Musa had already attacked from the rear. Now Ferdinand’s troops faced Badr bin Mughira’s horsemen in the front while Musa’s fighters were in the rear. On the third side, Ferdinand’s troops had pushed Abu Abdullah’s cavalry back but here too the Christians had to face an unprecedented challenge. Suddenly, two thousand horsemen appeared from their rear and in the fog of the evening they thought that reinforcements had reached them but when the advancing troops attacked with the slogans of “Allahu Akbar”, they started retreating towards the right. The troops under the Abu Abdullah that were retreating saw this change in situations and re-launched an attack. Now Ferdinand’s entire army were pushed to one side of the city. On their right and left flanks were Badr bin Mughira and Mansoor bin Hassan’s horsemen. In the rear were Musa’s fighters while the remainder of the army were in front fighting under the leadership of Abu Abdullah and Abu Mohsin. On the fourth side of the city, next to which the river flowed, was peaceful.

Because of the light of the twelfth night of the moon, there was no decline in the pace of the battle. The enemy’s forces were gradually retreating and the handful of Musa’s fighters in the rear were enough to stop their path.

Mansoor rode his horse around the enemy and ended up in the rear and said to Musa, “Remove your troops immediately from here.”

Musa said, “But I think instead of moving from here it would be better if I moved a contingent of my troops here. They can get here maneuvering either from the left or right. If we push them towards the city, then they would come in the range of the archers.”

“But what if they enter into the city?”

“I have ordered for the gates to be closed.”

“This suggestion of yours was not bad but the infantry cannot be brought back to the rear so quickly. The number of the enemy’s cavalry is far more than ours and if they maneuver right or left then we cannot stop them without incurring a huge loss. This is no time to argue. If we delay any further, I’m afraid the enemy will become aware of a very vital strategy of ours.”

Musa said, “Very well. If Badr bin Mughira agrees with your suggestion, then I have no objection in removing my troops from here.”

“Both of us think on the same wavelength. Leave this front and come to the other side immediately otherwise the enemy will be alerted. Keep retreating to a far distance and then empty the field for the enemy.”

This battle had reached a decisive stage. Surrounded from three sides, the Christians were retreating. Seeing this, Ferdinand was compelled to call in his reserve troops to the field that were away from the battlefield, guarding the camps. Once again the Christians had consolidated their position.

Suddenly, a little away from the battlefield, a fresh group of border mujāhidīn appeared from the dense trees of a garden. These horsemen, who were around a hundred had torches in their hands and they were headed towards the encampment of Ferdinand’s forces instead of the battlefield. Most of the reserve troops had already arrived at the battlefield. Ferdinand’s remaining soldiers tried to save the camps and supply of provisions but the bolt-speed horsemen entered the encampment from one side, and burning the camps, left from the other. The reserve troops were trying to recover when another band of horsemen appeared from the rear.

In one of the tents was the Bishop of Castile with some thirty monks bowed down, praying for the victory of the cross in front of the statue of the Holy Mary. The guards outside started yelling, “Holy Father, the tent is on fire!”

Apart from the fire of the tents, a huge stock of hay too had caught fire and its light was reaching the battlefield. The soldiers of the Christian army, without waiting for orders from their commanders, and the commanders without waiting for orders from their general turned their attention towards the tents and with this, immediately all of Badr bin Mughira’s cavalry stormed them.

The retreating troops saw no refuge in their encampment that had nothing but burning tents all around. Taking advantage of the light, the troops in pursuit would surround and slaughter them. The bewildered horses were falling after getting entangled in ropes.

Ferdinand gave the order to blow the trumpet for a retreat and the remainder of his troops left the tents and ran. Musa ordered his infantry to guard the provisions while his cavalry was ordered to continue the pursuit of the enemy.

Badr bin Mughira and Mansoor bin Ahmed had surrounded the enemy from the right and left and the cavalry of Granada was behind them. The only way left open for Ferdinand’s troops was towards the front.

After chasing the enemy for about three miles, Badr bin Mughira came close to Musa and said loudly, “There is a stream at the little distance. Stop your troops. The enemy has come in the range of our final blow. Bring the mounted archers forward. The enemy will soon return.”

Musa ordered his troops to halt. He had understood that Badr bin Mughira had not revealed his plans to the people of Granada due to some broad interest. He had also evaluated how dangerous and devastating Badr bin Mughira’s last arrows of the quiver would be for the enemy once they reached the stream.

Ferdinand halted his horse thinking that the enemy was no longer in pursuit. He gathered his scattered troops but once he heard the galloping of enemy horses from the right and left flanks, he ordered his troops to move forward. At the banks of the stream, the defeated army had to face a new challenge. The bridge was broken and the corpses of the soldiers were lying around who Ferdinand had assigned for guarding the bridge.

For the first time, the people of Castile felt that a new problem awaited them across the stream but Ferdinand had no time to think. He ordered his troops to cross the bridge The stream was not that deep. Even the water was hardly reaching the stirrups but the banks were high.

As soon as the first batch of horses jumped into the water, the soft tones of the pleasantly flowing water transformed into an uproar. The cries of “Allahu Akbar” were raised from the other side of the stream and immediately a volley of arrows rained from the trees.

Injured horsemen were falling into the water as they got hit while the horses ran here and there in utter confusion. Once again the people of Castile were facing a doomsday. The remainder who hadn’t entered the stream, turned their horses to retreat and the ones who survived in the stream also turned around and retreated. In the meantime, the pursuers from the right and left flanks had caught up with them. Only the rear was open to them. When they turned around and ran a short distance they came in the range of Musa’s archers. After passing from the range of the archers, they were to face a wall of lancers. Mansoor bin Ahmed had left the right flank and joined up with the cavalry of Granada. The Castilians turned towards the right. Now they attempted to move along the stream towards the south and cross the stream from a safe place but on the other side of the stream another group of cavalry was advancing with them, who were also shooting arrows as they moved along. In such circumstances, Ferdinand shuddered at the imagination of an ultimate destruction. Now he was confronting that situation. The only option left for him was to cross the Genil river in the south. This stream from whose banks his troops were being pursued flowed out of this river. From the left and rear flanks, they were being badly pushed towards the stream by their pursuers. On the other side of the stream, the contingent of cavalry archers that was on fresh horses was continuously raining arrows at them.

As they approached the stream, most of the horses of Ferdinand’s troops were free from the burden of their horsemen. The mujāhidīn were slaughtering them with their swords instead of their lances. Their hands were becoming numb but the joy of victory was making each one outshine the other. Badr bin Mughira saw a horseman from Granada on his left. His aventail and armor shone in the moonlight but the thing that caught Badr bin Mughira’s attention was his beautiful horse. After slaughtering a few enemies, he advanced forward. A Castilian cavalryman who got injured from his lance turned his horse around and attacked him. The Granadian horseman blocked his blow with his sword but in the meantime another Castilian soldier injured him with his lance from behind and moved forward. Despite being injured, this horseman did not halt his horse but killed two more men, one after the other.

Words of appreciation flowed out of Badr bin Mughira’s mouth and he went up close and said, “I’m glad at your bravery but there is no need to go into the midst of the enemy.”

After a while when Badr bin Mughira’s glance fell on the horseman from Granada again, he was drained and bent towards his saddle.

Badr bin Mughira advanced his horse and said, “You’re wounded.” The horseman’s sword fell from his hand and he rested his head on his hands. Badr bin Mughira put his arm around his back and pulled him onto his horse.

By midnight the remainder of Ferdinand’s troops were crossing the river and the mujāhidīn were raining arrows at them. This was the biggest defeat of Ferdinand’s life.

After this glorious victory, Musa came down from his horse and performed a long prostration. His lips kept repeating this supplication: “Oh Oft-forgiving, Merciful Lord! We were not worthy of this yet You rewarded us. This is Your mercy upon us.” Then he got up and looked at his companions. Badr bin Mughira was at a distance, calling Bashir. Musa ran and grabbed the reins of his horse, pulled his hand towards his lips and said, “Badr! Remove your aventail. The people of Granada are dying to see the face of the angel who has brought a thousand blessing of his Lord with him.”

Badr replied, “At the moment, the only faces worth seeing are those whose foreheads are shining with the blood of martyrdom. After this victory I have no objection to reveal myself but at the moment, don’t turn the people’s attention towards me. Currently, Ferdinand’s infantry is scattered in the region. We should not give them a chance to escape.” Saying this Badr bin Mughira removed his aventail’s veil.

Musa said, “God-willing very few of them will escape. I want our horses to freshen up.”

In the meantime, Abu Mohsin, Mansoor and the other officers of the army gathered around them. Badr bin Mughira said, “Mansoor! Today you deserve my sword and my horse. I didn’t know that you were so well-aware of this area’s ups and downs. I’m proud of you.”

For a valiant commander such words from a revered leader were a huge reward.

Badr bin Mughira looked here and there and said, “Bashir has still not arrived as yet. I hope with the grace of God he survived!”

“Where is Bashir?” said Musa alarmingly.

“I had left an injured man of your army on the other side of the stream. I had sent Bashir to provide first aid to him. His white horse was very beautiful and by his attire too, he appeared to be a high ranking official of your army. He’s certainly brave but very zealous. I would like to see him. I think he has been injured very badly.”

A horseman came forward and said to Musa, “No one knows the whereabouts of the Sultan. Some men have seen his vacant horse.”

A sort of anxiety appeared on Badr bin Mughira’s face and he said, “I thought that the soldiers of Granada had freed themselves from the burden of the corpse by now. If by the Sultan you mean Abu Abdullah, then I’m afraid he could have reached Granada once again and might have ordered the gates of the city to be closed for the soldiers by now.”

Mansoor said, “I have seen him but you will be surprised that I had patronized him two or three times against my wishes. When Abu Mohsin told me that he’s Abu Abdullah, I couldn’t believe him.”

Musa said, “Instead of the city, I bought him to the battlefield thinking he would be harmless.”

Before Badr could say anything, Bashir arrived galloping his horse close to him and said, “That injured man is desperate to meet you.”

Badr enquired, “How is his condition now?”

“There is a wound in his rib but, God-wiling, he will survive.”

The injured man sat resting against an olive tree. A few soldiers stood around him. Seeing Badr bin Mughira and his companions the soldiers stepped aside. Badr got off his horse and went close to the injured man. At first glance Badr bin Mughira couldn’t recognize him but as he sat with a knee on the ground and looked at him, a shiver ran through his body after which he stood up. The injured man raised his head and said in a feeble voice, “Today you have saved the life of someone who didn’t deserve to live. I am your criminal. I am your murderer. I regret my sins and you have all the right to pronounce the worst of punishments for me.”

Badr bin Mughira stood silently looking at him. It was Abu Abdullah in front of him. That very Abu Abdullah whose reputation of being a nation seller was engraved in the heart of every mujahid of Andalus…something that was difficult to forgive or forget even for a person like Badr bin Mughira.

He was saying to himself, “Alas! I wish I hadn’t seen your face at this auspicious occasion.”

Musa, Bashir, Abu Mohsin and Mansoor stood silently behind Badr bin Mughira looking at each other. From Badr bin Mughira’s face, it was not difficult to analyze his thoughts.

Abu Abdullah suddenly got up, limped a step forward and started looking at Badr bin Mughira. A voice drenched in pain came out of his lips, “Why don’t you kill me. The burden of my sins has become unbearable for me now.”

Tears flowed out of Abu Abdullah’s eyes. Badr bin Mughira stood like a rock. Abu Abdullah again said, “I had gotten rid of the burden of life. The horses of my enemy were about to crush my body but you oppressed me. For God’s sake, kill me. My burden has become too much for this earth to bear.” He was crying.

There was no room in Badr bin Mughira’s heart for a traitor like Abu Abdullah but even an ordinary mujahid isn’t accustomed to assaulting a fallen enemy no matter how angry he might be. He said, “Abu Abdullah! Your tears don’t impress me but your robe has stains of blood. In the battlefield, your blood has mixed with the blood of martyrs. I can’t raise my hand on you. As far as I’m concerned, I forgive you but as for a nation’s criminal, only the people have the right to forgive you. I also know that the people of Granada are benevolent to the point of stupidity. They will forget the past when they see the blood on your clothes. They will proclaim, ‘Long live Sultan Abu Abdullah’ as soon as they see you. But Abu Abdullah! For God’s sake, next time don’t try to betray such a benevolent and simple-hearted people. Believe me, had this meeting taken place in the parliaments of Al-Hamra instead of the battlefield, then, maybe my sword wouldn’t have given you the opportunity to talk. Despite the protests of the people of Granada, I wouldn’t have stopped from chopping the head of a man who sold the honor of the daughters of the nation at the hands of the enemy for the love of wearing the crown. But at the moment you are a soldier of the nation. Your sword is stained with the blood of the enemy and maybe a few drops of your blood might have wiped the darkness of your past.”

Abu Abdullah had no more strength. He limped backwards and supporting himself with a tree and said, “You a very benevolent but I know that even the entire water of the oceans is not enough to wash away my sins. Alas! If only you wouldn’t have saved me from the fangs of death.” He closed his eyes becoming a bit fatigued. He was about to fall when Bashir stepped forward, held him and gradually laid him on the ground.

As he placed his foot in the stirrup, Badr said, “Bashir! His protection is your responsibility. We have a lot to get done.” Musa, Mansoor and Abu Mohsin also got on their horses.

Ferdinand’s infantry that was left behind the cavalry was running here and there in a state of confusion and the contingents of Granada’s cavalry were hunting and slaughtering them down. Those who tried to hide in the gardens and farms were being tracked down by contingents of Granada’s infantry. To strike a final blow at the fleeing enemy, even the city’s elderly men and young boys had come out of the city into the battlefield. The field was empty by dawn. The enemy’s corpses lay at every step. The prisoners taken were around five thousand while the number of those killed were four times more.

The victorious army offered its Fajr prayers at the banks of the river Genil. On Musa’s insistence, Badr bin Mughira performed the duty of leading the prayers. After prayers, this was his brief supplication, “O Giver of reward and punishment! Grant us the iman of our ancestors. Let our heads not be bowed in front of anyone but You! Grant us the guidance to submit to You and grant us the courage to die for the sake of the religion of our beloved Nabi (Peace be upon him). Aameen!”

After the supplication, Badr bin Mughira stood silently for a while. The mujahids of the valley of the falcon were looking at their leader with pride and the glances of the people of Granada were filled with love, respect and gratitude towards their benefactor. Badr bin Mughira said:

"My dear elders and brothers! Congratulations on this glorious victory but don’t think that you have gotten rid of the dangers to come after winning this war. You have merely pushed back the enemy from the four walls of Granada but most part of your Sultanate is still under enemy occupation. Even after recapturing those areas your work will still not be finished. You cannot take a sigh of relief until you capture all of Andalus. If you sleep after this victory, then remember that nature does not wake up a sleeping nation again and again. When it sees signs of life in a nation it shakes it but when it becomes hopeless, then, it sings it a lullaby into the paws of death. The Muslims of Andalus are suffering because of the deeds of these rulers of yours, who had given up most of the areas to the enemy and slept thinking that a small area of Granada is sufficient for them. For centuries the oppressed Muslims of Andalus were waiting that their brothers from Granada would come to their aid but you kept sleeping. Your brothers were ground in the mill of tyranny and oppression in Andalus. The hand of savagery and brutality kept ripping away the dignity and honor of your daughters but you kept sleeping. Your honor did not gush out. Their lips kept pleading, tears kept flowing from their eyes but you didn’t budge an inch. You kept entertaining yourself with melodies of happiness.

Abul Hassan rose to expiate the sins of his predecessors but the ones who are used to sleeping to the sweet sound of the rubab found the sound of clashing swords disturbing and you tied the hands of this great mujahid.

You woke up when the flood reached at your doors. For the first time your emirs thought that besides the huts of the people even their palaces were in danger. I consider that too as a mercy of the Lord but remember that this victory of yours is the first step to your destination. Your destination is very far. Your path is filled with trenches that you have to cross with your corpses. You have merely seen a glimmer of light on the dark horizon of your life. If you remain awake, then the morning is not far but, God forbid, if you go to sleep again, then, this victory of yours would be the last ray of light of the setting sun.

I’m not impressed by the enemy but you shouldn’t have any misunderstanding regarding them. Their resources are unlimited. The number of their troops is far greater than ours. France, Rome and other Christian states of Europe are backing them. To obliterate us, they all have rallied under one banner and in contrast, we have been cut-off from the Muslim world after the fall of Almeria and Malaga. The enemy has surrounded us from all sides. Despite all this, if you guarantee not to repeat your past mistakes then I assure you that no power can defeat you. And if you don’t learn from your past and if you don’t unite against the combined forces of the enemy and continue to fight with each other on the instruction of those hypocrites who spread racism amongst you, then, remember that just as your brothers in the rest of Andalus are paying the price of the mistakes of their ancestors, similarly, your generations would carry the burden of your sins.

Be vigilant to the moves of your enemy and more than the enemy beware of your traitors. No doubt that most of them have fought with you in this battle and some have washed the darkness of their sins with their blood but it is possible that in dire circumstances they could betray you once again. Keep a close eye on them and don’t give them the opportunity to repeat their mistakes. This can only be possible if you have strict accountability and there is no place for mercy in your national character for traitors and nation sellers.

This is the first battle in which Abu Abdullah might have fought with noble intentions alongside his people and I pray that he keeps supporting his people in the future but make sure that he knows that he would not be successful in betraying you again.

The enemy will not sit silently after this defeat. They would attack again with an even larger force and you should start preparing for this from today itself. It is your great fortune that you have been blessed with a leader like Musa.

I have to return immediately. It’s possible that the enemy might move towards our territory but I promise that you will find me among you whenever the need arises."

After Badr bin Mughira, Musa got up and made the following speech:

"Muslims! Four hundred years ago when the Christians took advantage of our internal anarchy and captured most of the areas of our Sultanate, then, destiny sent Yousuf bin Tashfeen to our aid who got rid of such an enemy for the Muslims that had a tight noose around us for a long time and today when the hypocrites amongst us had opened the doors of our homes for the enemy, when a group of hypocrites had made us wear the shackles of Ferdinand’s slavery for a few pieces of humiliation, Badr bin Mughira came as an angel of mercy for us.

Yesterday’s sun saw dark clouds of hopelessness on your faces and today’s sun sees the smiles of gladness on your lips. The mujāhidīn of the border have taught you a forgotten lesson and that is that the secret of the strength of the Muslims is not in their number but rather in their iman.

History is a witness that whenever Muslims have taken a defeat, it was because of the traitors amongst us and not because of the enemy’s strength. This victory of ours today is proof that we can crush even a formidable enemy even in these pitiable circumstances. Whatever has been lost upto today is because of our mistakes. You listened to the traitors, you supported the hypocrites. You left the support of the Lord and took the support of Ferdinand and you saw with your own eyes that children, the elderly and the women of Basta, Almeria and Malaga are taking the punishment of your deeds. You came to the battlefield when you knew that fighting was the last option left for you. You came to put out the fire when most of your homes were gutted.

At this auspicious occasion, I don’t want to repeat the bitter events of the past. But remember! We have merely won a battle and the war is yet to be won. A long and patience-demanding war, without which, we cannot a take a sigh of relief in this country and to get the ultimate victory in this war it is vital that we cure all those diseases that transformed Abul Hassan’s and Al-Zeghel’s glorious victories to defeats. We would have to rid ourselves of those traitors that have sold our dignity and liberty at the hands of the enemy for the sake of a few pennies. We would have to cleanse Granada from the existence of these coward and mentally-defeated men that are impressed by the might of the enemy. We should be wary of those miscreants who are trying to pit the Hispanians, Berbers and the Arabs against each other.

I know that Al-Hamra has still not been cleansed of hypocrites. And some of you might also have the understanding that I might not extend my hand towards those criminals of the nation who are still Ferdinand’s agents due to the fear of invoking Abu Abdullah’s displeasure. But let me assure you that even if I have doubts about Abu Abdullah’s intentions then I will grab his collar and bring him in front of you and tell you that he has betrayed the nation even after repenting and now it would be a sin to show mercy to him. Abu Abdullah has promised me that he would not favor anyone of the nation’s traitors. I announce before you that I will not tolerate any interference from Abu Abdullah on all those matters pertaining to Granada’s security and God forbid even I were to commit a national crime, then, what I expect from you is that you do not forgive me either."

An elderly chief of Granada got up and said, “It is our collective wish that our brothers of the borders to passby Granada before moving on. The people must be desperate to see Badr bin Mughira.”

Musa looked at Badr bin Mughira but he shook his head. Musa said to the elderly chief, “A while ago even I had wished to host our benefactor for atleast a day but after exchanging views with Badr bin Mughira I came to the conclusion that even we should not go to Granada at the moment. We should continue our advance. The people of those regions that are currently occupied by the enemy are more desperately waiting for us compared to the people of Granada.”

# Loja’s New Ruler

Loja’s new ruler, Abu Dawood, was sitting in his palace looking at some official papers. His door-keeper entered the room and stood silently for a while. After a few minutes, when Abu Dawood did not pay heed to him, the door-keeper reluctantly said, “John Michael is waiting for you in the meeting room. If you command, I can bring him here.”

“John Michael!”, Abu Dawood stood up and said. “No, I will meet him there. I hope he was not waiting for long.”

“He has just arrived.”

Abu Dawood exited the room, walked a few steps and entered into a spacious room. A middle-aged, but, well-built man saw him and got up from his chair. Abu Dawood shook his hand and sat on a chair beside him.

Abu Dawood took a good look at John Michael and then said, “If I’m not mistaken, you were at the front.”

John Michael replied, “Yes, but right now I’m coming from Castile. The King had called me there for advice on some issues.”

“So, you are going to take my position in Loja?”

While handing over a communiqué to Abu Dawood, John Michael said, “Here are the King’s orders. I have come here for the sake of implementing his command, otherwise, it is quite painful for a soldier to be away from the battlefield at such a critical time.”

Abu Dawood opened the communiqué and after giving it a quick look, said, “I am glad that he has sent an experienced person like you here. I will leave for Castile tomorrow itself.”

“But I wanted to take a lot of guidance from you.”

Abu Dawood said, “My first and last instruction is to protect Loja at all cost from the enemy.”

“You can trust me for that. There will be another five thousand troops here by tomorrow.”

“The only thing I will say after this is that the enemy’s latest victory has somewhat pumped enthusiasm into the local Muslims. I have arrested the dangerous men. There is no fear of a revolt now. A group of elders of Muslims is working to calm their enthusiasm. Please cooperate with them. Make sure they don’t face any financial difficulties. I will make sure you meet them before I leave.”

John Michael said, “How long will you stay out-of-station?”

“That depends on the circumstances. If all the clergymen that have been invited to Castile reach there, then, I will return early. Otherwise, I will take some time.”

“I think about five hundred clergymen have already reached there from Cordova, Seville and other cites.”

“So my work will finish quickly over here. But then I will have to go to other cities after that. Okay, now tell me what is the condition of the war?”

“The condition of the war is deteriorating by the day. The people of Granada have taken a lot of territory away from us. After Granada’s defeat, we were not able to fight properly.”

Abu Dawood said, “This is the last sight of a setting sun.”

“But the people of Granada are taking this to be the light of a rising sun. Our army is very disturbed by a rumor.”

“What is that?”

“The people think that the Frontier Falcon is no other person but Badr bin Mughira. Some of the prisoners of our army who have escaped, have confirmed this. The King is also of the same view. It could be possible that Abu Abdullah has not killed him.”

Abu Dawood said, “If Abu Abdullah is not stupid then this could have been possible.”

“A while ago, I also thought that Abu Abdullah is a person with an erratic disposition, but his latest victories compelled me to change my opinion about him.”

Abu Dawood said, “All I know is that Granada is destined to be destroyed at his hands. Insanity has various forms. At one time his insanity was such that it made him revolt against his father and uncle, clearing that way upto the four walls of Granada. Now there is a change in his insanity. With time, this madness with also wither away. You will be hearing strange and incredible news coming out of Granada for a while.”

John Michael said, “The King has already decided to attack Granada with all his might. He thinks if your plan works out, then, the siege of Granada will not last long. May I know what have you planned? Do you intend to send some delegation of theologians of Andalus to Granada? Do you want to negotiate a compromise with Abu Abdullah?”

“All I can tell you is that the biggest mission of my life is to hoist Emperor Ferdinand’s flag over Al-Hamra. We have made a lot of mistakes before this. There won’t be any mistake now. The wind can only bring down those walls whose foundations have become hollow. The mission that I have planned for Granada will destroy their defensive strength so much that your army would not have to face any difficulty. Therefore, it would be better if you don’t ask me the details now. Now, the first thing I need to do is find you an accommodation and to arrange a meeting with those people who can give you useful advice in my absence. One part of the palace is lying completely vacant. My family will stay here. However, few more rooms can be emptied if you need.”

John Michael said, “I am a soldier. Apart from that, I am all alone. My needs are limited. A small house is enough for my needs. I don’t think it would be appropriate to bother your children.”

Abu Dawood said, “The right side of the palace is completely empty. Please do have a look. I think it will be enough for you.”

John Michael had dinner at Abu Dawood’s place. Apart from a few of the city’s nobles, the women belonging to the elite were also present at this feast. Rabia was absent on the pretext of being sick. Angela also made an excuse of a headache but her excuse did not work in front of her mother. Angela’s disposition had changed considerably after leaving Granada. Like Rabia, she too did not want to take part in any assembly. These stepsisters had become soul mates to each other. They looked forward for solitary moments so that they could talk to each other. Maria knew that her daughter was very impressed by Rabia’s habits and views. She had the complain that even on a Sunday, Angela would prefer to stay home with Rabia instead of going to church for worship. Like Rabia, she did not like meeting anyone. Maria would curse Rabia immensely whenever she got angry and would admonish Angela to stay away from her but Angela knew how to play on her mother’s weakness. She would lie down and refuse to eat and drink on the pretext of being ill. Maria would try to please her in vain and then would eventually yell out, “Rabia! Rabia! I know she won’t touch her food until you tell her to. You have enchanted her. She’ll sleep without eating. She has already become as thin as a needle. She thinks I’m her enemy. Rabia! What have I said to you after all? Doesn’t a stepmother have the right to say even that much?”

Maria would give up and go to her room and then after a while a maid would come and inform her that both the sisters were having their food.

A few days would pass peacefully after such incidents. Maria tried to listen into the conversation of Rabia and Angela several times but Angela had learned to speak Arabic from her stepsister and this was the language that the Christian government of Andalus had declared as anti-government. She would complain to Abu Dawood, who would merely tell her that Angela would perform vital functions for the Sultanate after she learns the Arabic language. “When a weak moment arrives, we will use such girls to spread anarchy in the ranks of the enemy.”

Today when Maria asked Angela to attend the dinner, then, without uttering a word she went to Rabia and said, “Rabia! I don’t want to go there. Their conversation would be unbearable for me.”

Rabia said, “Angela! There is no choice. That time has not arrived when we can do anything we want. You need to go so that maybe we will get to know something new.”

When Angela left the room, Maria was standing at the door. She said, “Angela, for God’s sake, please stop making my life miserable. John Michael is a very high ranking person. Ladies of Hispania’s elite consider it a matter of prestige to talk to John Michael. You are of age now and I’m concerned for your future. Such opportunities do not recur in life. John Michael’s wife is dead. Today you will see how desperate the ladies of Loja are to get his attention.”

Angela replied furiously, “Mother dear! I will never go in front of him if you talk like that.”

Maria said hopefully, “Angela! You are a wise person. I will not force you to take any decision but it is your duty to show respect to a guest. He is the King’s knight and a protector of the cross.”

“Mother dear! I will only go there to comply to your orders, otherwise, I have no interest in him. I hate these savages who are stained with the blood of the honor of innocent girls.”

“Rabia has made you hate your religion.”

Angela replied, “If a religion allows the killing of children, slaughtering the innocent and dishonoring women publicly, then, I despise even the name of such a religion.”

Maria said a bit remorsefully, “Angela! John Michael will be the governor of this city in your father’s absence. I think we will be able to impress him more if we get to know him. Now get ready. The guests are going to arrive.”

After dinner, when the guests were leaving, Angela surreptitiously left the room and taking quick steps, entered into Rabia’s room. She closed the door and said in a trembling voice, “Rabia! I am scared of him. He was looking at me like a hungry wolf. I had to sit next to him against my wishes. He was drunk and now he is going to stay in this very palace. Rabia! Rabia!! I am scared. He was saying that the army of Granada has captured a fort thirty miles from here. Alas! I wish we could go there.”

Rabia consoled her and said, “Angela! God is aware of our helplessness. He will help us.”

Someone knocked at the door. Angela opened the door in a state of shock. Maria quickly entered inside and said, “Angela! Don’t embarrass us. You should not have run away before the guests left. I had to make an excuse that you could not be there because you had a headache. The rest of the guests have left but John Michael is insisting to come and enquire about your well-being. Now for God’s sake, go to your room. I’ll bring him there.”

Angela replied, “He is drunk. I will not meet him.”

“He will take it as an insult.”

“But I care more about my dignity.”

The argument carried on for a while between the mother and daughter. In the meantime, Abu Dawood entered the room.

Maria looked at her husband and said, “Angela will not listen to anyone but Rabia.”

Abu Dawood sat on a chair without giving any attention to Maria. Maria repeated herself, “Angela is not willing to go to her room. He will think that she purposely insulted him.”

Abu Dawood said remorsefully, “A drunkard should not be so sensitive. I have left him in his room. Maria, I think I made a mistake by allowing him to stay at the palace. Alas! I wish I could take you all along. He wouldn’t dare misbehave with you in my absence, but still, keep the girls away from his sight. When he’s drunk, he is not the same person whom I had granted permission to stay in one section of my home.”

Maria said, “I don’t think that the Emperor Ferdinand’s knight would be so low that he would…”

Abu Dawood cut her short and said, “However, there is no harm in being cautious.”

Appearing speechless, Maria said, “You already know that Angela doesn’t even talk to anyone without Rabia’s permission. Rabia will not permit Angela to talk to a Christian even if he’s an angel. So, there’s no use talking to me about it. Whatever you want to say, say it to Rabia.”

Rabia said, “Mother! I will do my duty even if father dear doesn’t ask me to.”

“So you think I’m Angela’s enemy?”

“I didn’t say that.”

“You want to keep Angela away from the people of her own faith.”

“I want to keep her away from evil eyes. Angela is my sister.”

“You have cast a spell on her. You preach her your religion. You have taught her to speak Arabic. You have sowed seeds of hatred in the heart of my innocent daughter against me. You are my enemy. You…”

Angela screamed and said, “Mother! For God’s sake, don’t talk like that. If Rabia starts hating me because of you, then, I will die. I will go to the highest tower of this palace and jump.”

Angela had touched the sensitive cord of motherhood. Maria looked at her daughter with fear. She was crying. Maria’s lips were sealed once she saw tears shine out of her daughter’s eyes and she left the room without saying anything.

Abu Dawood said while getting up, “Rabia! I am leaving Angela in your custody. Don’t worry about what Maria says.”

The clergymen and elders, who were invited by Abu Dawood from far-flung cities, had gathered in a spacious chamber of Castile’s royal palace. Abu Dawood had met most of them separately before the meeting. Making a speech in front of the gathering, Abu Dawood said:

"Religious Scholars! Today the issues you have been called here to ponder upon concern the future of the Muslims in Spain. Apart from a little land and a few mountains, the rest of the Andalusian Muslims have become subjects to the Emperor Ferdinand and before the war with Granada, the Muslims of Andalus were living in peace under the shade of their just and kind-hearted King. The rulers were kind to the majority of us but now you complain that the Christian government is not as benevolent with you as it used to be. Some of you think that life is becoming difficult for the Muslims of Andalus. Muslims are falsely accused and arrested for being spies. The Christians doubt their loyalty to the government. These events are very tragic but if you analyze sensibly, you will feel that we too are to blame. The people are always short-sighted but our biggest misfortune is that even our religious scholars have not been able to recognize the direction of this flood. Who amongst us does not know that the battle of Granada and Castile is similar to a competition between an elephant and an ant? The path that the people of Granada are treading on is only a path of destruction. They can postpone their destruction for a few weeks or months but they cannot change their destiny.

If this issue was limited to the armies of Granada and Castile alone, then, we would not be that concerned and I wouldn’t have given you the trouble of coming here but the bitter truth is that our present and future is deeply attached to this war. Thousands of Muslims are at the mercy of the Christian majority and their governments. The war of Castile and Granada has now become a war between Islam and Christianity. In such a scenario, Muslims of Andalus cannot expect any good treatment from the Christians. The relatives of the Christians that die in the battles of Andalus would take revenge from Muslims and as the war prolongs, the urge to avenge will intensify. I’m not concerned for the people of Granada. They have been stupid to opt for war with a powerful neighbor and they will be punished for that but we should not be heedless to the future of the thousands of Muslims of Andalus. There is only one way we can be saved and that is for the war of Granada to stop immediately. Till this war continues, the government of Andalus will keep doubting our loyalty and our treatment by them will go from bad to worse.

You might ask what role can the religious scholars and elders of Andalus play to stop this war? But before I answer this question, I would like to ask you whether you feel that this war should come to an end at the earliest?"

Someone replied, “Every Muslim of Andalus feels this need.”

Another got up and said, “We all agree with you.”

Abu Dawood didn’t even expect any opposition from them. They all were royal guests and before this meeting Abu Dawood had met them separately and had told them why they have been called here. The leaders of these scholars got up one after the other and supported Abu Dawood’s views, who resumed his speech after being satisfied with them.

"Gentlemen! To pacify the fears of the Christians, I have given a suggestion to the King to induct Muslims of Loja and other cities, on voluntary basis, into the army of His Majesty. In the last battle, some five hundred Muslim youths supported the government’s army but unfortunately most of them, acting emotionally, joined the army of Granada. The result of this was that the Christians lost all trust they had on the Muslims and the tragic incident that happened in the various cities was a result of that.

“The mistake I made was to trust such immature people who would get emotional. Now I am going to give you gentlemen a very important mission. You will have to go to Granada in the guise of refuges from Andalus. Once there, explain to the rulers and especially to the people that achieving the goals of this war is impossible. That the rest of the Muslims of Andalus are being punished because of you. Life is being made difficult for them. Gentlemen! If you convince the people of Granada to lay down their arms, then not only will you save the Muslim subjects in Ferdinand’s Kingdom but also the Muslims of Granada from revenge of the Christians and this would be a huge accomplishment.”

“You will be facilitated fully by the government for completing this mission. The rest of the details of the mission will be given to you in tomorrow’s meeting over here. Before adjourning the meeting, it is important for me to know if there is anyone of you who disagrees with me, then, he should be given a chance to express his opinion.”

The audience started looking at each other. A white-bearded scholar sitting in the corner stood up and said loudly, “Gentlemen! I have reached here today itself. I had come here with the intention of saying something to our Christian ruler but it appears that I won’t be able to talk directly to the Emperor Ferdinand. However, I’m thankful to the president of this conference for giving me the opportunity of freely expressing my views in the capital of the King. It was the responsibility of the president of the conference to decide whether it was appropriate for a Muslim to freely express his opinion or not. Anyways, after this invitation, they have placed a duty upon me and I will live up to this duty. Instead of expressing my opinions, I will voice the feeling of all the religious scholars of Islam.”

“Gentlemen! The end of the rule in most of the areas of Andalus was a major loss for us. The other major loss was that the majority of us were satisfied with the life of indignity. But these losses were not such that they could not have be compensated. Hope gives life to the oppressed, destitute and helpless. When all our candles were extinguished, we saw a torch in Granada. For a long time, a storm in Granada has been trying to extinguish this torch. For a long time, a storm tried to extinguish this torch and after many unsuccessful attempts this storm is asking us to put this torch off with our own hands. Today those religious scholars have been chosen to carry the coffin of the nation who used to blow the Trumpet of Israfeel into the ears of the deceased nation.”

“Abu Dawood! You will be my witness on the Day of Judgment. All these elders and scholars who are seated here are my witnesses that despite all my weaknesses, I refused to support those who turned away from a war of truth to be part of the rewards of the victories of the evil.”

“Abu Dawood! If you have given me the chance to express my independent opinion, then listen! Maybe this would be the last voice of truth that you will hear in Castile. The day the flag of victory of the Christians flutters over Andalus, every Muslim’s house will be guarded by death. You say that the Christians are upset because of the defensive war being fought by the people of Granada. But I ask you, how were we treated at the time when there was no war between Granada and Ferdinand. Were not the innocent killed at that time? Weren’t our daughters-in-law and daughters insulted? Despite being friends with Granada, weren’t thousands of Muslims sent into exile by the Christians rulers of Andalus? Weren’t they forced to become Christians? Weren’t our mosques changed to churches? Wasn’t Arabic made illegal for us to speak and was there any cruelty that was not made lawful to be done upon us?”

“Abu Dawood! Every nation’s dignity is guaranteed by the strength of its resistance. I remember when Abul Hassan’s forces were advancing towards Loja, our Christian rulers had announced that officers who maltreat any Muslim would have to face severe punishments. But after Abu Abdullah’s treachery and when our government saw that the danger from Granada had receded, then, they thought that we deserved the worst of treatments.”

“Granada is the last bastion of the Muslims of Andalus. If it falls, then remember that life for Muslims in Andalus would even be worse than death.”

“The president of the conference said that since death is certain for the people of Granada, therefore, to please the enemy, we should strangle them to death. But I say to you that by the time our hands reach their jugular vein, our own jugular vein will be cut.”

Slogans of protest were being raised by the audience but contrary to their expectations, Abu Dawood was listening to his speech very calmly. A few people tried to make noise during the speech but Abu Dawood calmed them down by raising his hand. When the elderly scholar finished his speech, Abu Dawood calmly said, “My respected elder! Is there anything more you would like to say?”

“No”, he replied while sitting down.

Abu Dawood said, “Gentlemen! I appreciate his honesty in speech but unfortunately my speech has raised some misunderstanding in him. I would like to talk to him alone. And if there is any other elder who has developed some misunderstanding after his speech, then, I would like to exchange views with them too. If anyone supports those ideas, then, please let me know.”

Four scholars from Seville stood up.

Abu Dawood said, “Only five gentlemen from this conference do not agree with me. I am sure we will arrive to a consensus after a candid discussion. I will call you after the evening. Before adjourning this meeting, I would request the attendees not to mention the proceedings of the meeting to anyone.”

At night, one of Abu Dawood’s servants took the five scholars along and after that no one knew where they had disappeared. The next day, some of their companions believed that they were in some other world.

After being trained by Abu Dawood for about two weeks, this group of so-called scholars and elders set out towards Granada. After this, Abu Dawood got the orders issued for the governors of all the provinces from Ferdinand and then set out for the purpose of recruiting volunteers from different cities. After creating a group of like-minded people in every city, he made Seville a base for his activities. The governors of other cities would recruit trust-worthy individuals and send them to him. He would, in turn, train them and send them to Granada.

Due to Christian atrocities, Muslims from Andalus were leaving their cities and settlements and heading towards Granada. Abu Dawood’s spies would join these caravans and reach Granada without any difficulty. The refugees were raising many challenges for the government of Granada but the people’s hospitality and compassion relieved the burden of the government. They would accommodate the refugees in their homes and would share their food with them. The entire fertile regions of Alpujarras had been liberated and many refugee families had settled there.

About a million refugees had arrived in Granada and its surrounding areas. Two thousand among them were those influential people who were following the orders of their guide and mentor from Seville. These people would narrate the tales of horror of Andalus to the people of Granada to get them on their side and then they would then try to implant such ideas into their minds: “When will this war end? What would be its outcome? It’s unfortunate not to receive any help from the Muslims of Africa. The Christians are far more in number than the Muslims but only if we were fighting with the Christians of Andalus. Now, not only the people of Hispania but also the Christians from all of Europe have vowed to obliterate our tiny Sultanate in Granada. Muslims are heart-broken. Muslims aren’t cowards. They know how to kill and how to die. Even today if Ferdinand comes into the field with all his troops, we will be able to crush them in a few days. But now all the Christians of Europe are gathering to support him. On the contrary, our brothers in Africa are unaware about our plight. Until when will we fight? What will be the outcome of this war?”

These kinds of posters were stuck in the mosques of Granada in the morning:

“What do the religious scholars say? Is it permissible to continue this war even if its end result is nothing but death?”

With such endeavors of the hypocrites, the number of people with defeated mentality increased. Even the elders of Granada got influenced by the elders of Andalus. So far, the army was still not infected with this poison but Abu Dawood’s men were being recruited in the army as well. Some Jewish merchants had also come here in the guise of refugees and they were buying the souls of influential nobles with Ferdinand’s gold and silver.

The new governor of Loja, John Michael, was more inclined towards using force instead of wisdom. Even in Abu Dawood’s presence the Muslims of Loja did not feel safe from the atrocities and high-handedness of the Christians. However, because of Abu Dawood’s practical wisdom, their urge to avenge was more or less suppressed, but as soon as Abu Dawood left, the Muslims felt that life was becoming difficult for them in Loja.

The five thousand troops that had come to protect Loja would roam the streets intoxicated in alcohol. They would enter mosques and beat-up the attendees. At night, they would break into Muslim homes and drag their women into the army camps.

One day a youth, in a fit of self-respect, killed three soldiers who had attacked a neighbor’s house. After this, John Michael installed a military government upon the city. A delegation of prominent Christians in the leadership of a well-intentioned priest met the governor and requested him to place a restriction on the troops to enter the city. They informed him that the drunken soldiers would not only break into Muslim homes but at times would also break into Christian homes. The governor issued orders that Christians should place a sign of a cross on their doors so that the soldiers wouldn’t have any misunderstanding.

An affluent Christian merchant was John Michael’s friend. John Michael often went to his place during the night. Every night the soldiers would kidnap an unfortunate girl and bring her here.

One night John Michael was drunk. He said to his host, “I have now decided to get married.”

The merchant laughed loudly. “Marriage! You want to get married.”

John Michael thundered back and said, “Quiet! You think I’m blabbering because I’m drunk but I have decided to get married. I want to get married to the most beautiful girl in Andalus and she is in Loja. Do you know who that is?”

“I know who.”

“Really? Who is it?”

“She is Abu Dawood’s daughter.”

“Do you know her name?”

“Her name is Rabia.”

While picking up the glass of wine the governor said, “You don’t know anything. Her name is Angela.”

The merchant said, “I have seen Angela but I have heard that Rabia is far prettier than her.”

John Michael thundered back and said, “Who is this Rabia?”

“She’s Angela’s stepsister. She doesn’t come in front of men nor does she go to church. I have heard that her mother was a Muslim.”

“You are lying. There is no girl in Andalus prettier than Angela. I cannot tolerate her insult. If you repeat that there is someone prettier than Angela, then, it could be fatal for you.”

“So you have decided to marry Angela.”

“Yes, my decision is final but she hates me.”

“She hates you?”

“Yes she hates me.”

“I can’t understand why a girl would hate one of Ferdinand’s knights? Her mother is a Christian and I’m sure she would consider it to be her good fortune. If I have your permission, I can ask the Bishop to talk to her.”

“I have already spoken to her mother myself and she has no objection. But the girl hates me. The day before I had invited them over. Her mother came but she made an excuse of having a headache. Do you know when pretty looking girls make an excuse of having a headache? You wouldn’t know, you’re stupid. When they don’t want to see someone, they make an excuse of a headache. I had sent her flowers through my maid. Do you know what she did? You wouldn’t know. Wait let me tell you.”

John Michael grabbed the bouquet on the table and slammed it on the merchant’s head and then in a fit of laughter, he said, “She took the bouquet of flowers and slammed it on my maid’s head and then, she warned her that if she came again with anything, she could loose her life.”

The merchant replied, “But you should not be hopeless.”

John Michael gulped down a glass of wine and said, “Me and loose hope? You don’t know me. There is only a distance of a few steps between me and her, but, even if there was a distance of seven seas, even then I wouldn’t be hopeless. She is mine. Angela is mine. There is no other way for her. Do you know who I am? You don’t know. You are a stupid merchant.”

In normal circumstance, Maria wouldn’t have taken any step against Angela’s wishes but an incident occurred that compelled her take some quick decision concerning Angela’s future.

Maria was not used to sleeping late but one night due some illness she couldn’t sleep. Angela’s room was next to hers. Around a little after midnight, she felt thirsty. The water vessel was in the verandah. Instead of calling out to the maid, Maria fetched the water herself. On her way back, she thought of something and started towards Angela’s room. The door was open but Angela’s bed was empty.

The next room was Rabia’s and voices of people talking could be heard. Maria tiptoed and stood close to the door. She slowly shoved the door and started peeping through the opening. A candle was lit inside. Angela sat on the carpet in front of Rabia slowly trying to read a book that she held in her hand. Whenever she got stuck on a word Rabia would help her with it. This was the same book that Maria had often seen Rabia read with intense devotion and fervor. This was the Quran.

Maria stood spellbound for a while. In her view, Angela had become guilty of committing the greatest crime. She felt like rushing to her daughter and snatching the Quran from her hand but her feet were pierced into the ground. She had lost her decision-making power.

Angela closed the Quran and after wrapping it in a silk cover, put it in the cupboard. After this, both stood up and performed their prayers.

Maria returned to her room in extreme grief and pain. A number of times she thought of dragging Angela by the hair into her room but she felt that the situation had gone far beyond the danger mark and any hasty action would compel Angela to revolt openly. For a long time, she sat numb and motionless. Suddenly she thought of something, then, got up and went out. After the exterior gate her direction was towards the Bishop’s residence. Before this, no servant or soldier had ever seen her outside on foot.

Moments later she was saying to the Bishop of Loja, “Holy Father! I want to get Angela married but she’s very disobedient. She doesn’t listen to me.”

The Bishop enquired, “Does she want to become a nun?”

“No Holy Father! She doesn’t like any proposal.”

“I wanted to meet you concerning this myself. John Michael has said several times that he likes your daughter.”

“Holy Father! I consider this a great honor but Angela is very stubborn. Please talk some sense into her.”

The Bishop thought for a while and said, “Maybe if you had given a chance for your daughter to meet John Michael, this task would have become much easier.”

Maria replied, “Holy Father! If this matter was so easy, I wouldn’t have troubled you. Angela has been enchanted by my stepdaughter. She is Muslim and she has infused a lot of hatred in her heart about our brethren-in-faith. I fear that she might go astray. That is why I want to get her married off as soon as possible. I want to keep her away from Rabia.”

The Bishop said, “If that’s that case then we should not be lazy. I also want to know if your husband would approve if Angela is married against her wishes?”

Maria replied, “He is not against getting Angela married into a decent Christian family but I’m afraid he’ll side with Angela if she refuses to get married.”

“Is Angela against getting married to John Michael or does she hate every Christian?”

Maria became nervous and said, “Holy Father! She hates people who drink alcohol and this is because of her stepsister’s influence upon her. The first time when John Michael came to our place, he was drunk and maybe that is the reason Angela began to hate him.”

The Bishop replied, “I feel that the environment of your home has been quite different from normal Christians homes. You should not be so worried. This matter will resolve. I will passby your house today evening. Make preparations to have John Michael for dinner. At present, there is no need to invite anyone else.”

Maria replied, “Holy Father! I’m afraid that she might make an excuse of some illness and would lie in her bed as soon as she hears the name of John Michael.”

“Then there is no need to mention John Michael’s name in front of her. He will arrive at the time when we have been seated at the dinner table.”

After meeting the Bishop of Loja, Maria sat with Rabia and Angela for the whole day. Angela was grieved by the fact that she could not join Rabia to perform her prayers. However, she was glad that there was a positive change in her mother’s behavior towards her stepsister.

Today Maria was extremely benevolent towards Rabia. She insisted on Rabia to groom herself and change her clothes. She would say, “Rabia you are very careless when it comes to dressing. People must be saying that your stepmother doesn’t take any interest in you. You sit sorrowfully the whole day. Look at your complexion. It has become so pale. When your father returns, he will think that I have been bothering you a lot. For God’s sake, take care of your health.”

Seeing such a big change of heart in her mother’s attitude for Rabia, Angela was so impressed that at night when Maria asked her to join her and the Bishop for dinner, she could not refuse.

After talking about various topics at the dinner table, the Bishop mentioned John Michael. Angela listened heedless to John Michael’s heroic feats. Mentioning different achievements of his, he said, “Unfortunately, the only vice I see in John Michael is that he does not drink moderately, otherwise, there is no knight in Spain at par with him. However, those who know his weakness, believe that he’s excusable. He loved his wife immensely. After her death he started drinking heavily to forget his grief. He could not find a life partner who could reduce the bitterness of his life. Respected households of Andalus consider it an honor to be related to him but he hasn’t come across a girl that he likes. In fact, even the girls of the royal families don’t meet his standard. Now a friend of his tells me that he wants to marry a very innocent girl. If that girl is smart as well, then, I’m sure she can bring a change in all the habits of John Michael and this would be a great service to the church. At the moment, the sons of the church are fighting against the enemy and it is the duty of the daughters of the church to provide them with the goods of relief. Instead of criticizing John Michael’s habit of drinking we should focus on the reasons behind which he prefers to be drunk all the time. He is in a state of grief after his wife’s death. Apart from this, he has lost a lot of his best friends at the hands of the savage Muslims in front of his eyes. It would be sad if the daughters of the nation would despise him instead of feeling sorry for him.”

Angela’s anxiety was increasing. She felt that a trap was being laid out for her. She looked at her mother and then at the Bishop. She wanted to say something but a maidservant whispered something in Maria’s ear and Maria became upset and said, “Why have you made him sit in the meeting room? Bring him over here.”

The maid looked at Maria in perplexity. Maria could not understand the reason for this. She became upset and said, “Why don’t you go? Why are you staring at me?”

But the maid bent down and said something again in Maria’s ear and Maria’s face suddenly went pale. The Bishop and Angela looked at Maria with quizzing glances. Appearing a bit worried, the Bishop enquired, “What’s the matter?”

While getting up, Maria said, “Nothing. I will be right back.”

But hearing someone’s footsteps in the veranda Maria halted and at the same time she heard her black slave saying, “I cannot let you go inside in this condition.”

In reply to this, a voice of a person who appeared to be drunk could be heard saying, “You cannot block my path. I am the governor of this city. Move away or else I will hang you.”

Maria’s feet froze to the ground. After a moment, John Michael stood at the door. He held a golden, long-necked flask in one hand and a cup in the other. Terror beamed through his eyes. Maria, Angela and the Bishop stared at him in a state of perplexity.

Maria said in a petrified voice, “Angela! Go to the room in the back.”

But Angela’s honor did not consider leaving her mother alone. The Bishop wasn’t prepared to face this unprecedented situation. At times he would look at John Michael with anger and regret and at times he would look at Maria with apology-seeking glances.

John Michael had another glass of alcohol while standing at the door and stumbled forward. He placed the flask and the cup on the table and sat on an empty chair close to the Bishop. Angela dragged herself and stood close to her mother.

John Michael said, “Why are you standing? Please be seated. Your servants are very ill-mannered. Every man in Loja knows me but your servants don’t even know that I am the governor of this city. Holy Father! I have come here to arrive to a final decision but why are they standing? Angela! Are you scared of me? For God’s sake, sit down. I am not your enemy and look at your mother. Am I a monster? She had invited me over and now she is trembling after seeing my face.”

The Bishop said, “Maria sit down. My daughter Angela! Don’t be scared. Michael is a knight. A daughter of the church should have no fear of him.”

Michael said, “Holy Father! Respecting them is my duty but no knight would bear being insulted after being invited to a house. Didn’t she invite me here?”

Angela gave a contemptuous look at her mother. The Bishop reiterated, “I was just telling you that the current situation is such that a lot of our best soldiers have become accustomed to drinking heavily. When the circumstances change, so will this habit. Maria! Angela! Sit down. John Michael wouldn’t even think of insulting you.”

After a little hesitation, Maria sat down. But Angela remained standing.

While changing his tone John Michael said, “Holy Father! I had promised you that today I will drink moderately but unfortunately this is beyond my control. I know Angela hates alcohol. Holy Father! I will leave it…I can do anything for Angela. Angela! For God’s sake, sit down! You don’t want to sit? You have to sit. I can’t bear being insulted after I have come to your house.”

With trembling hands John Michael filled and drank another cup full of wine to his mouth.

Maria held Angela’s hand and whispered, “This is a drunkard’s obstinacy. For God’s sake, sit down.”

More than her words, Angela was moved more by her mother’s pleading glances and she finally sat down. Her fear of Michael had changed to hatred. A few moments ago, modesty would have compelled her to run away from there but now honor dictated that she faced the situation.

After staring at Angela silently for a while, John Michael said, “Why have you left your food? Eat! Don’t worry about me. At this time, I do not eat. I only drink. Holy Father! This flask is at your service if you want to join me. The type of drink I got today was very light, that is why I brought the flask along. Maybe like Angela, you too hate alcohol but if you were in my place, you too would have drunk a lot. Even more than me. You would have been drunk all the time. A lot of thoughts trouble a man when he’s sober. Don’t think that I used to drink like this all the time. There was a time when I hated alcohol so much that I didn’t even touch it during religious celebrations but now I drink the most. Angela does not like this habit of mine. Maybe Angela wouldn’t also like my habit of going to people’s homes during the night. Maybe Angela might call me a tyrant.”

The Bishop thought of interrupting Michael and said, “I have already told Angela that you had become addicted to drinking after the death of your wife.”

Michael replied, “That is wrong. That is totally wrong. I know that the cause of her death was my habit of drinking. Apart from my drinking, she hated a number of my habits. Whatever happened after the victory of Al-Hama, she used to say that I was a savage but it wasn’t my fault. Before the victory of Al-Hama, I used to drink very little. But on that day of victory, I emptied a lot of jugs and then that incident happened. I didn’t know what I was doing since I was intoxicated. She was very pretty. I had even promised her that I would save her life. Her crime was not minor. She had killed two of our soldiers. Four of her brothers died in the battle. The people of the city had laid their arms down. It was their duty to open the doors of their homes for us but the door of that pretty girl’s house was shut. I ordered to break the door down. I wouldn’t have done that but I had drunk a lot due to the joy of victory. When my soldiers were breaking the door a few arrows came down from the roof. Eight of my soldiers were injured and died on the spot. When we entered the house, there was only a girl there. She attacked me with a dagger but I snatched the dagger from her hand. If I had not stopped my soldiers, they would have ripped her apart. The soldiers left but I remained there. I ordered more alcohol to be brought in. I presented a glass to her. I said that I promise to save your life. I told her that I will leave her outside the city but she was very stubborn just like Angela. She threw the glass on my face. She avulsed my face. Her curses were unbearable for me. After that I was not in my senses. Then, I didn’t know what I was doing. Her agony increased as my grip on her neck became tighter. The next morning when I awoke, her corpse lay next to me. Her beautiful neck bore the marks of my fingers. I thought she was sleeping. Looking at her face, I couldn’t believe that I have killed her with my own hands. I was trying to wake her up.”

“After that I drank the whole day. From that day onwards, I have always been drinking heavily but this thirst is such that it can never be quenched. The first time when I saw Angela, I remembered that girl. The responsibility of whatever I have been doing till this day lies on that girl and whatever I do from today will be because of Angela. Today I have come here to decide that. Angela! You have to give me a reply whether you agree to get married to me or not.”

Tears had already swelled in Angela’s eyes. She was imagining the deafening screams of that girl. At John Michael’s question, she got startled. “You know my answer.” Angela stood up.

Michael said in a thundering tone, “If that is the same as the one that that girl had given, then, hear this that I have become accustomed to crushing that flower whose fragrance is not mine.”

Angela replied, “You wanted to blacken your face with that girl but you have sent me a marriage proposal. The only answer to Ferdinand’s knight and defender of the church is that, in my sight, compared to you, a beggar of Loja is much more respectable than you. For that helpless girl you were a hungry wolf but for me you are a mad dog. Even then you deserved to be hated and even now you deserve to be hated.”

“Angela! Angela!! The Bishop and Maria said in one voice but she paid no attention to them. She said,”You are a gruesome stain on humanity. You threatened me but until God’s hand is over me, you can’t harm me even a bit. The ground on which you have built a magnificent church is the very ground where the blood of the innocent has been spilled. The time will come when these buildings will become ashes and the coming generations won’t even be able to see their ruins but the hand of time won’t be able to wipe out the writings on the pages of history by the blood of these innocent ones."

Angela then turned her attention towards the Bishop and said, “And you make the statue of Marium and worship it. And you think that it is a great service to the religion of her son by dishonoring innocent girls at the hands of your soldiers. You worship this cross on which the son of God was crucified? But I ask you, aren’t there hundreds of innocent souls whom you hang everyday in every city of Andalus?”

The Bishop got up and said, “This girl has gone astray. Her sister has cast a spell on her. She doesn’t know what she is saying. Michael! Come on, let’s go!”

“No, I won’t leave without a decision.” After drinking his last cup, Michael was reaching the stage of becoming unconscious. He got up and advanced towards Angela. His feet were stumbling. Angela took a heavy vase from the table and moved to a side. Maria called her black slave. He came running into the room. In the meanwhile, Michael had come close to Angela. Angela crashed the vase on his head. Michael merely needed an excuse to fall. The slight hit from the vase threw him off balance.

As soon as he fell, the Bishop stepped forward and said to the black slave, “Pick him up and take him to his room immediately. If his servants enquire, tell them that he became unconscious after drinking.” The well-built black slave put John Michael on his shoulders and went out.

The Bishop looked at Angela and said, “Angela! I had invited John Michael over here. It’s not your mother’s fault and it is totally wrong when I say that your stepsister has led you astray. If she has taught you all this, then you should learn a lot more from her. I initially thought that Michael’s behavior could be corrected but I was wrong. You should keep away from him. I am going to resign from my position tomorrow. For a long time, I had felt that I was not doing the church any service in the capacity of a Bishop but my conscious needed a jolt. I am thankful to you that you have awoken a sleeping individual and Maria, write to your husband that if cannot come here immediately, then, he should call you over there.”

# Crime and its Punishment

The next day John Michael’s maidservant brought a letter to Maria from him. Reading the letter she could not believe that it was written by Michael. Every now and then she would enquire from the maidservant, “Is this really written by him?” And the maidservant would have to swear by the Holy Mary to convince her.

John Michael had apologized with extreme humility and modesty. He had written, “I am at a loss of words to express how regretful and sorry I am for my behavior. I am extremely ashamed. As you know I was drunk, therefore, I hope you will consider my error forgivable. I promise never to set foot in your house after drinking alcohol and wouldn’t dare speak to Angela till such time she herself says with her own tongue that there has been a very significant change in my character. I will wait patiently till such time she is compelled and starts considering me a human being by my behavior, I know that after last night’s incident the door of your house is closed for me but rest assured that I wouldn’t dare knock that door until you don’t call me yourself.”

Before the arrival of John Michael’s maidservant, Maria had already written a long letter to her husband but she decided against sending the letter through her messenger once she received Michael’s letter.

When she was thinking of a reply to Michael’s letter her maidservant informed her that the Bishop was waiting for her in the meeting room. Maria said to John Michael’s maidservant, “You leave. I will send him a reply to the letter.”

Maria came down and entered into the meeting room. After an exchanged of customary talks, the Bishop said, “Only a while ago I received a letter from John Michael. He writes that last night he was not in his senses and he regrets it deeply. He has requested me to convey his apologies to you.”

“He has sent me this letter too. Here, read it.” The Bishop took the letter from Maria’s hand and after taking a cursory look at the letter, he said, “He has written similar things to me and I have come to ask whether you have sent a letter about last night’s incidents to your husband.”

“No. I had written the letter but haven’t sent is as yet.”

“Has Angela read the letter?”

“No.”

“Please call her. I want to say a couple of things to her.”

“I have no objection in complying to your orders but at the moment I don’t think she would like to hear anything related to John Michael.”

“I have not come here as John Michael’s emissary.”

“Fine. Let me call her.”

The Bishop said, “Take this letter. It would be better for Angela to read the letter before she comes to me.”

Maria went upstairs to call Angela.

Angela was quite impressed by what the Bishop had said last night before leaving, but once Maria informed her that the Bishop wanted to meet her after handing her the letter, she immediately said, “If the Bishop has come as that drunkard’s emissary, then, I will never meet him. Yesterday he was saying that he would resign from the post of the Bishop of Loja and now doesn’t he have any shame for providing this mean service for that hateful person?”

Maria replied, “Angela, this letter was brought to me by John Michael’s maidservant. If you don’t believe me, then, ask your maidservant. The Bishop is not connected to this letter.”

“So have you replied to this letter?”

“So far I have not given any reply. I had shown this letter to the Bishop. He said that Michael has written a similar letter to him too.”

“Then he must have come to make a reconciliation between us?”

“You should not doubt his intentions without meeting him.”

“Let us go.” Angela said while getting up.

As soon as he saw Angela, the Bishop asked, “Daughter, yesterday I had told you that I had decided to resign from my position but today I got a letter from John Michael. He has expressed severe regret for his behavior. If this change is not sudden and temporary then I should not be hasty in submitting my resignation. Apart from that, I also think that I should be in Loja until your father’s absence. Even your mother has just shown me a letter from him.”

Angela said, “I have also seen that letter.”

The Bishop replied, “What’s your opinion about the letter?”

Angela replied, “All I think is that circumstances have compelled him to adopt the slyness of a fox instead of the viciousness of a wolf. He has merely changed his modus operandi but hasn’t changed himself. He is weaving a web for the prey he couldn’t kill with his claws. And I consider a silent, web-weaving spider more dangerous that a hissing python.”

“It is possible that you are correct. Besides God no one knows the true condition of the hearts. In this case, my sympathies are with you people. The advice that I want to give you and your mother is to give a reply to his letter in a way that he doesn’t get infuriated. I would not advise you to socialize with him but I will also not advise you to use harsh words in a reply to his letter. Some jolts in life get a person on the straight path. Possibly, yesterday’s incident might change his life. Even if the change in his behavior is temporary and until such time he is the governor of the city and lives so close to you, I want him to remain a peaceful neighbor. Our armies are going to attack Granada. Abu Dawood’s engagements in Seville are such that he might not return before Granada’s victory. If you proceed with caution in his absence, then, I’m hopeful that he won’t bother you.”

Angela said, “He has promised that he won’t bother us again and until he keeps his promise there is no need to be at loggerheads with him. If you think that any reply from my mother can change his barbaric nature then get it written and send it to him but as far as I am concerned, even if Michael worships for a thousand years and I witness with my own eyes that angels descend from the sky to offer salutations to him, even then, I will consider him to be hateful.”

A month after this incident, Ferdinand had attacked Granada. After vowing not to return without conquering Granada, Queen Isabella and the King had entered the arena with all their might. Leaving Seville, Abu Dawood had made a city that was a few miles away from Granada, a base for his activities. In the past four months, he had already trained several spies and sent them to Granada. He wrote telling his wife that Granada would be conquered before their anticipated time and that the King had promised to make him the Regent of the Sultanate.

For about a month, Maria did not face any problem from John Michael in Loja. Since the last meeting there was a significant change in his attitude. Once a day his maidservant would come and enquire if there was anything they needed or a problem they faced. Maria would thank her in return. Personally, John Michael would keep aloof from them. After a few weeks, Maria was convinced that he was a man of his word and that he wouldn’t set foot in their house without an invitation. At times she would be glad that this change was because of Angela but her heart would sink at the thought that there was no way Angela would agree to marry him. She would feel sorry for John Michael.

John Michael would now spend most of his night with his merchant friend and his attitude towards helpless girls of the city had become even more barbaric. Maria was oblivious to this but the news of the plight of the Muslims of the city would, one way or another, reach Rabia who would convey it to Angela and Angela’s hatred for John Michael became intense by the day.

One day the Bishop told Maria that John Michael would be leaving for the battlefield in a day or two and a new man from Castile would be taking his place. The next day Maria received an invitation from the city inspector’s wife to attend a farewell function in honor of John Michael that would take place in the evening. Maria tried to persuade Angela and Rabia to attend the function but they refused. Maria tried to make Angela understand, “Daughter, now he is going to war. You should not have any ill-feeling towards him in your heart. All the respectable people of the city would be gathered there. If you don’t go, people would think that there has been some issue between the two of you.”

But Angela stubbornly stood by her decision. Maria was compelled to go alone. In the evening, when Maria mounted her coach and was leaving the fort, she saw John Michael at the gate. He stood in their midst of a few soldiers of the army, talking to them. Maria ordered the servant to halt the coach and while peeping outside, she called Michael by waving her hand.

John Michael went close to her and said, “I believe you are going to the inspector’s place?”

“Yes, but I will always resent that you did not tell me that you are leaving.”

“Leaving Loja without saying goodbye to you was no easy task but I had vowed not to bother you until and unless Angela doesn’t call me. And a knight has to keep his word.”

Maria said, “Angela has changed a lot now. She wouldn’t object calling you over once you’re back from the war. Maybe, I’m going before time. When will you arrive there?”

“I’m waiting for a few friends. You carry on. I am coming. But how come you are alone?”

“Yes! I regret that Angela is not well otherwise she was ready to come along with me.”

Michael said, “She falls sick a lot. She needs treatment. Okay, carry on.”

When Maria’s coach had travelled a distance, then, Michael said to his companions, “She needs a physician and I have cured a lot of patients.”

Rabia and Angela were having food in a room in the upper story when suddenly they heard some noise coming from downstairs. Rabia was startled and said, “Maybe someone is fighting with Ahmed.”

Angela said, “This must be James. I’ll straighten him up today. Sometimes I get upset with Ahmed too. He’s strong as an elephant but still he takes a beating from every servant.”

Rabia said, “Every Muslim here considers a Christian to be his master.”

Angela said to the maidservant, “Go and call James. I will fix him up today.”

But suddenly someone’s footsteps were heard in the stairway and Angela said, “Wait! I think he’s coming here himself. Now he’ll complain against Ahmed.”

After a second, Rabia, Angela and the maidservant were dumbfounded, looking towards the door. Instead of the servant, it was John Michael who stood in front of them. Angela stood up.

“You!” she said in frightened voice.

“Yes, me! But why have you gone pale? I have come to enquire about your well-being. No, I have come to treat you. You are always sick.”

John Michael took a step forward while Angela took four backwards. In the meanwhile, Rabia ran near the door of the room in the back. The maidservant stood trembling severely in her place.

John Michael said, “Angela! Running and shouting won’t do you any good. No one can come to your aid at this time. Your servants are in the custody of my men, your mother has gone to the inspector’s place to attend my farewell ceremony. Until I don’t go there she will not be able to come here.”

John Michael took a few steps forward and Angela ran and stood in a corner. She yelled, “You are a savage. You are mean. You are intoxicated in wine!”

Instead of replying to Angela, he turned his attention to the maidservant and said, “What are you looking at? Run away from here!” The maidservant took off.

Michael stepped forward again and cornered Angela and took her into another corner of the room. Then he looked at Rabia and said, “You are her sister? The people aren’t wrong in what they say. God has divided all the beauty of Andalus between the both of you but at the moment I have come only for Angela. You may go.”

But Rabia didn’t budge from her place. Michael shouted, “Go!”

Rabia looked at him with extreme contempt and said, “You are so brave. Compared to women, you are indeed very brave. You merely brought along a few men to attack a girl whereas an entire army was needed for this mission. Why don’t you take out your dagger? Angela! Tell him that your hands are empty. Ferdinand’s knight’s blow should not go in vain or else one feat of bravery would be discounted from the history of the church.”

Trembling in rage Michael said, “You tongue-lashing female! Be quiet. You don’t know me.”

Rabia said, “I do know you. You are a brave knight. You are the governor of this city. The church is proud of you. The church is proud of the fact that you have colored its flag with the blood of the honor of innocent girls. The church is proud that its ship is afloat in the sea of blood of the innocent because of bravehearts like you. I know your type. You are a lamb when competing with men and lions when competing with women.”

Michael advanced forward like a wounded beast, got hold of Rabia with both his hands and after shaking her violently, pushed her into the rear room. Rabia fell on her face. In the meantime, Angela had escaped from the door that opened towards the stairs. As soon as Michael moved his attention to her, Rabia quickly got up, closed the door and locked it.

Michael ran after Angela. Angela yelled for help as she ran down the stairs. Halfway down the stairs she realized that there was no one to come to her aid. She thought of Rabia and her feet halted there itself. Suddenly she heard the laughter of a few men coming from downstairs. The torches of the stairs were alit. She suddenly struck the torches down with her hand. Michael’s men were laughing as they proceeded up the stairs. Angela thought that if she could reach the outer gallery of the upper story, then her screams could reach the guards at the gates of the fort. She tiptoed upstairs. She heard a frightful laughter right at the last turn of the stairway. She had come into the firm grip of Michael’s hands. She was yelling, “You tyrant! You treacherous person! Rascal! Let me go! Let me go!!”

John Michael called out to the soldiers who were coming up, “Now go and stand at the gate of the fort. Don’t come here unless I order you to.”

The soldiers returned and Michael took a screaming, yelling Angela within an iron grip of his hands and brought her to the same place where a while ago Rabia and Angela were having their food. Closing the door with one hand, he said, “Yelling won’t harm me. You are the one who’ll be disgraced. I’m not afraid of your father. He has sold his conscience to us and we have paid him its price. The King won’t entertain any complaints from him against me.”

Angela scratched his face with both her hands and said, “Let me go! You savage! You tyrant! Rascal! Let me go!” She was been agonized in the firm grip of his hands.

Suddenly John Michael yelled in pain. His finger had come between Angela’s teeth. He pressed Angela’s throat with the other hand and freed his finger. Michael became distraught after that. He had Angela by the throat with one hand and was ripping her dress with the other.

Suddenly the door of the rear room opened. Rabia tiptoed forward with a javelin in her hand. Michael’s back was facing her but Angela saw her. Rabia came close to Michael and rendered a blow with the javelin with all her might and he stumbled and fell to a side. The sharp end of the javelin had pierced across his chest. He was tormenting with pain.

Angela embraced Rabia. She was sobbing. “Rabia! Rabia! I thought you left me and ran away.”

She was saying, “I took time searching for a javelin. I had to go down to Ahmed’s room from the stairs in the corner.”

“But you have killed him. What will happen now? No! No, Rabia! You have not killed him. I have killed him and I will be able to justify this in front of the biggest courts as to why I have killed him. His soldiers will arrive shortly. Go to your room. Hurry up, Rabia. For God’s sake.”

Rabia calmly replied, “No Angela! Don’t deprive me from the reward of this deed.”

“No, Rabia! I won’t let you do this. No, no, never.” Angela burst into tears.

Rabia said, “Angela, your dress! Your entire body is being revealed. Come on, change your dress.”

Angela said, “First promise me that you will remain silent in this matter.”

Instead of replying to her, Rabia dragged her by the arm towards her room. No one was in the gallery. Michael’s men were raising a hue and cry downstairs.

The small room where Angela’s clothes and other stuff was stored was behind the bedroom. Angela opened the door of this room. It was dark inside therefore Rabia grabbed a torch from the other room and placed it inside and said, “Quickly go inside and change your clothes. I’m standing right here.”

When Angela was changing her clothes, Rabia closed the door behind her and placed the latch. Angela was shouting from inside, “Rabia! Rabia! For God’s sake, open the door.”

Rabia said, “Goodbye, Angela!”

She said from inside, “No, no! We will be together in life and death. You are betraying me. Rabia! My Rabia! My sister!” Angela was crying.

While wiping her tears Rabia said, “Angela! Why did you think that I will allow you to commit suicide for my sake? Do you remember that you saved his life in Al-Hamra? Even at that time I couldn’t take anyone’s obligation on him. I envy your bravery. Angela! That was a favor I thought that I could never repay in this life. You always had this impression about me that I’m weak-hearted and maybe even now you might be feeling sorry for my weakness, but, I know my duty.”

Angela said from inside, “Rabia, open the door. I promise to remain silent.”

“No, Angela! I know when they will be ripping my flesh apart like wolves, you won’t be able to take it. You won’t be able to remain silent.”

Angela said, “Rabia! Listen to me! Isn’t it possible for us to run away from here?”

“You know that such a feat can never be successful. Firstly, this is not possible and by some way we do manage to escape from this fort, there won’t be a place of refuge for us in the city. By morning, every home would be guarded. Even if we successfully escape from the city even then by morning the entire city would be pursuing us like hunting dogs. Angela! I haven’t committed any sin. Why should I run away from death? Why shouldn’t I say in the court of Loja that I have done my duty? I won’t even plea them for mercy. My father is a traitor of the nation. He should get the reward of his treachery. Maybe with my sacrifice the door of repentance will open up for him.”

Rabia heard some noise of men coming from the gate of the palace. She ran towards the gallery and after taking a look in the back, returned and said, “Angela! People are gathering at the gate. Maybe someone from the inspector’s house has come to enquire about him and maybe one of Michael’s men might come up to inform him. I will leave. Goodbye, Angela!”

“No, no, Rabia! Listen to me! I will support you till death embraces you. Rabia wait. Rabia! Rabia!!”

Rabia had left.

After bidding farewell to Angela, Rabia went to the room where John Michael’s corpse lay. His blood had thickened on the carpet. His face had become frightful. Rabia got a sheet from the other room and placed it on his face while she went and sat on a chair.

After a while she heard some footsteps on the stairs. Someone came near the door and said, “Master! It is getting late. The inspector’s men are enquiring about you.”

With a thumping heart Rabia got a hold of herself, stood up, opened the door and while peeping outside said, “Come here. There is a dead body of a drunkard in my room. See if you recognize him?”

The perplexed soldier entered the room. He looked at Rabia for a second and then bent down and raised the sheet and said, “John Michael!” he yelled ghastly.

Rabia said, “Do you know him?”

The soldier replied, “He is the governor of the city. He’s a famous knight of Ferdinand. He is the Queen’s relative. Who has killed him?”

Rabia replied, “You have no right to ask me this. Go and inform the inspector.”

“But we will all be hanged for this. It is important that we arrest the murderer before we leave.”

“I am the one who has killed him.”

For a while the soldier was dumbfounded and kept staring at Rabia.

Rabia yelled and said, “Why don’t you go? What are you gaping at? Don’t you know that the real ruler of this city is my father? He’s not only the ruler of this city but also a good friend of Ferdinand. Why did you take the responsibility of guarding such a person who enters the homes of decent people while he’s drunk? Where were you when a helpless girl was screaming in this room? You were downstairs having a good laugh. I order you to leave or else it won’t be good for you and see that until the inspector’s arrival, none of your men are allowed to come up.”

The disturbed soldier could not decide his course of action. He left the room while staring at Rabia.

A short while after the soldier’s departure, Rabia got up and left the room. She stood in the gallery and peeped outside. The sound of knocking was coming from Angela’s room. Rabia advanced towards her room but her feet stopped at the door. She heard Angela’s voice, “Rabia! Rabia!” Rabia stood there for a while in a state of confusion and then tiptoed back.

From narrow and dark stairs at the corner of the gallery, she managed her way to the terrace of the house. She ran a cursory look around in the enticing light of the moon and then started looking towards the sky. Streams of light were gushing from the forehead of the moon. The stars were smiling. This is how the world was established and there were thousands of goods to fuel the desire of life. Rabia was bidding farewell to all those interesting things. However, the focus of all these interests was still there. The various accidents and incidents could not take Rabia’s desire for Badr bin Mughira away from her. The storms had passed. Now she was contemplating calmly about her future. She did not fear the darkness of the prison cell. She was not scared of being hanged or burned. The face of death wasn’t frightful for her. But standing at the gates of death with the desire for Badr bin Mughira in her heart was indeed challenging for her. If only she could see him before dying. If only she could say that she would be waiting for him in the new life. If only she could live for him. If only these stars and moon could remind Badr of her. If only they could tell him that there wasn’t an evening in her life in which she hadn’t thought about him.

Rabia said in her heart, “But what am I thinking? Badr is not only my but also a warrior of the nation. He is fighting for the honor and dignity of thousands of girls like me. I am so naive. I am thinking that he too might be standing on the top of some mountain and looking at this moon and these stars and all this might be rekindling my thoughts in his heart. I am thinking that he might be listening to my sighs and looking at my tears but this would be an insult to him. His imagination can’t be limited to me. At the moment he might be listening to the screams of thousands of helpless girls. He must be seeing their tears. In this storm of tears and sighs, the sound of my voice wouldn’t even be recognizable to him. Standing on a peak of a mountain, instead of mentioning my name to the moon, he must be saying to it, ‘You have seen the rise of my nation. Today have a look at its fall. You have witnessed the majesty of Tariq and Abdul Rahman in this land. Today have a look at Abu Abdullah’s humiliation and disgrace. You must have seen those mujahids who had burned their ships at the shores of Andalus. Today have a look at these nation sellers who are receiving the price of their nation’s honor and liberty from the enemy. You have seen our cavaliers take to the battlefield. Today also have a look at them converged within the confines of the four walls of Granada. Do you recognize that this was that very nation that used to remove the crown of emperors and place it on the heads of slaves? Is this that very nation whose sons would obliterate mighty empires for the sake of the dignity of a poor sister?’”

After a while when Rabia was coming down the stairs, she was mentally relieved. She was saying, “Rabia! During these trying times of communal strife, your life is insignificant but if you want, you can certainly make your death a famous incident in the history of Andalus. If death is inevitable, you should face it with bravery. You have to prove that the hands of oppression are hate-worthy and not fearful. Your’s and Badr’s aim in life is the same. He is fighting against evil and you are sacrificing your life for the truth. On the Day of Judgment, you would be able to grab his hem and say that we both were each other’s companions in the world.”

The city’s inspector, some army officers, the Bishop and some influential people stood around Michael’s corpse.

The inspector was scolding the soldier who had reported the incident, “You are an idiot. There might be several ways of exit from this house. She has certainly left the fort. You didn’t even ask your companions to shut the gate of the fort? My question is why didn’t you arrest her?”

The inspector turned his attention to the other officers of the army and police, “What are you all looking at? Go and seal-off the city and start searching the homes of Muslims. Leave some men for searching this palace.”

“There is no need to search the palace”, Rabia said while entering inside from the gallery.

Everyone looked at her dumbfounded. She calmly advanced forward. There was an extraordinary dignity beaming from her face.

The inspector said, “Did you kill John Michael?”

“Yes! I have killed this man who entered our house with shameless intentions.”

“Was there anyone else who was involved with you in this murder?”

“No.”

Maria dashed into the room breathlessly and nervously. “Rabia! Where is Angela? Where did she go? What happened to her? For God’s sake, tell me.”

She replied, “Angela is here. Don’t worry about her.”

“But where is she?”

“She got a major shock when she saw this dead body. She was screaming and running here and there. I have locked her in the storeroom next to her bedroom but it would be better for her if you don’t bring her here at the moment. I’m afraid she might get another fit and fall unconscious.”

Maria went running into Angela’s room calling out, “Angela, Angela” and advanced towards the door of the storeroom."

Angela yelled from inside, “Where is Rabia? For God’s sake, open the door. I am the one who killed him. I am the one who killed him. Rabia is innocent.”

Maria’s hand stopped at the latch of the door and she ran and closed the door that opened toward the gallery.

On the other side, the inspector was in a bizarre situation. John Michael’s murder was no minor issue but his murderer was the daughter of a man whom Ferdinand was very benevolent towards. Arresting and holding the governor’s daughter like an ordinary prisoner before a court decision would prove to be difficult for him. Moreover, he was also afraid that if he didn’t deal with this properly not only the general opinion of the city’s Christians would go against him but the knights of all of Andalus would become his enemies. In the evening when he saw that Maria was leaving by herself, John Michael had sent him a message, “I might arrive late since I have to take care of something important but I need to speak to Maria on something important, therefore, you should keep Maria there with all means possible until I arrive.” Now it became clear to the inspector what that important task was. But despite being a drunkard and characterless person, he was still a knight and Rabia, besides being Abu Dawood’s daughter, was a Muslim girl. Therefore, he anticipated that Abu Dawood could reverse the ruling of any court against his daughter for the services he had rendered.

When the inspector sought the Bishop’s advice, he said, “In my opinion, she should be confined to an isolated room in the fort until the court’s ruling or atleast she should not be kept with ordinary criminals until a new governor is appointed. In the meanwhile, you can also get some instructions from the King regarding this girl.”

For a week, Angela was bedridden with high fever. Whenever she gained consciousness, she would sit up saying, “Rabia! Rabia!” Sometimes in a fit of excitement she would try to run out of her room, but would fall unconscious after taking a few steps. At times, Maria would have to force her with the help of the servants to make her lie in bed. She would shout in a state of helplessness, “Leave me. Let me go to her. I am the one who killed Michael. He was killed because of me. To save my life she’s sacrificing hers.” Maria would run and close the door nervously. The ladies of the city would come to see her but Maria would stop them with one excuse or the other from going to Angela’s room. Abu Dawood’s arrival in these days was another one of Maria’s concern. She was afraid he might not sacrifice Rabia for the sake of Angela. Compared to Angela he loved Rabia more, therefore, she did not inform him about this incident. At first she was also afraid that Rabia would not stand by her statement in court but now this danger had passed. In the court of priests, Rabia had confessed to her crime.

Orders from Isabella for the court had already arrived to punish the murderer of John Michael severely. The fervor of the Christians after John Michael’s murder was such that they had killed several Muslims before attending his funeral. The city’s inspector had already written to the ruler of Seville that if this girl was punished immediately then there would be a danger of a law and order situation in the city. Ferdinand got the news of this incident when he was in the battlefield. Had the deceased been someone else, he might have tried to cover it up but Michael was his knight. He was a close relative of the Queen and she was not interest in knowing who the killer was and what her father’s services were. After all, John Michael was a knight and his killer, a Muslim girl.

Had this incident occurred six months ago, then, maybe Ferdinand or the Queen might have hesitated in hurting Abu Dawood’s feelings but now he had been used. Because of his tireless efforts, several nation sellers were born in every city of Andalus. Those chiefs and religious scholars whom Abu Dawood had trained and sent to create chaos among the people of Granada had now established direct contacts with Ferdinand. The greed of a higher reward would prompt them to apprise Ferdinand and the Queen about their activities instead of Abu Dawood. The King and Queen were satisfied knowing that now they had several people that could take Abu Dawood’s place. They also knew that to crush the remainder of the defensive force of Granada, they would require the swords of the soldiers and if the killer of Michael is not punished then a negative sentiment would run across the army. Great knights would go against them.

The Queen said to the King, “After all isn’t the sole purpose of this war is to show the Muslims the superiority of the might of the church. Isn’t it an insult to the church that a girl kills a knight like Michael and we aren’t even able to avenge it? Abu Dawood has sworn allegiance to the church. He has stated several times in front of us that he has no concern for the Muslims whatsoever. The only reason he’s a Muslim is because in that garb he can deceive the Muslims and do a great service to the church. The time of his trial has arrived. If he’s not deceiving us, then, he should have no concern for this girl who has killed one of our best soldier. That girl is a Muslim and she has killed him because of religious fervor. We have rewarded Abu Dawood very well for his services. We made him the governor of Loja. We had given him the authority to spend as much as he wants from our treasury. Loyalty demands that if we ask him to preside over this case, then he should not hesitate to punish his daughter.”

Ferdinand said, “I’m afraid when he’ll come to me, I would be compelled to change the court’s decision.”

The Queen angrily said, “You are the King and your Queen would never tolerate that you become compelled to change the ruling of any court of the church for the sake of a servant.”

On the insistence of the Queen, the King sent orders to the new governor not to delay in punishing the criminal by the court.

Rabia stood in front of the court. Crowds of men were gathered inside and outside courtroom. The jury of priests had given their verdict to the Bishop. Rabia had confessed her crime. After hearing the statements of the inspector and Michael’s servants, the court decided not to hear any more witnesses. Two days ago the statement that Rabia gave had already made her deserve the severest of punishments. She had ridiculed the court. She had insulted the church. She had stated:

“I refuse to recognize this court that does permit a drunkard and scoundrel to barge into people’s homes and does as he pleases but does not permit a helpless girl to raise her hand for safeguarding her honor. Where were you when this knight of yours would break into people’s homes? When innocent and helpless girls would scream for you to come to their aid. When they would say, ‘Wholesalers of justice and equality! Come. Our honor is being looted. Save us.’ There was no need for you to hold a trial for me. You could have certainly punished me without a trial. To prove the superiority of the church you have already sent several girls like me to the pangs of death. Your clothes are stained with the blood of the innocent. A few drops of my blood can’t add to its ugliness. You can’t do justice and I consider pleading you for mercy to be an insult to humanity. So far you have not asked me why I killed him. You haven’t asked me with what intentions he had entered my room. All you need to know is that I killed him. To save her honor, a Muslim girl has killed one of your knights. You think that a pillar of the church has fallen after the death of this beast? You are compelled to punish me. It’s beyond you to provide justice to me. You are the builders of a new church in Andalus. You have laid its foundations with the blood and bones of the innocent. To pronounce the edict of my death all you need to know is that I am innocent. All I have tried to do is save my honor. I am a Muslim, therefore, my blood and bones can be used for the construction of the church. I have only killed one John Michael but all of you are John Michael. He would kill innocent Muslims intoxicated in wine, whereas you pronounce edicts of death to the innocent sitting on seats of justice. He defaced humanity and you slit the throats of the voice of truth and sincerity.”

Two days after giving this statement, today, Rabia stood in the court to hear the verdict of her case. In the capacity of the grand judge for the case, the Bishop of Loja, John Lucas was not ready to read out the verdict given by the new governor, Don Louis, which was endorsed by the rest of priests. His verdict was to send the girl into exile. He had also tried to bring criminal charges against John Michael. The governors and priests were of the opinion that Rabia had enchanted John Lucas. Therefore, some other priest appeared on the seat of the grand judge on the day of the verdict.

The people that had gathered inside and outside the court knew what the court decision would be. Rabia had insulted the court of the church. She had killed a soldier of the church. Some people found out the reason for Bishop Lucas’s absence and they believed that Rabia was a dangerous sorcerer. The people were whispering to each other, “She will be hanged.” “She will be stretched on an iron frame.” “She will be burned alive.”

After ordering the people for silence, the judge read out the verdict. The audience’s eyes were on Rabia. Death had been pronounced on her but she stood silently. When the judge said that the accused deserved the severest punishment after insulting the church and the court but keeping her father’s services in mind the court decided to kill her instead of burning her alive, a young girl tore forward through the lines of the crowd, came close to Rabia and yelled, “Wait! Stop the murder of justice and humanity. I have killed John Michael.”

Absolute silence spread over the court.

Rabia looked at her in a shock. This was Angela. For a while, the priest judge and the audience of the court were taken aback. Angela held a small cloth-bundle pressed under her armpit.

Rabia addressed the judge and said, “Don’t worry. She is my stepsister. These events have had a major effect on her mind.”

Angela took a step forward and said, “That is incorrect. That is a lie. Rabia has done all this to save my life. She is innocent. I have killed Michael and killing him was my duty.”

The judge enquired, “Where were you all this time?”

Angela replied, “After Michael’s murder, Rabia had locked me in a room. After that I remained unconscious for a few days. My mother had placed a guard on my room. Like my sister, she too wanted to save my life.”

The judge said, “You still appear to be sick. Before taking your statement it is important for the court to test your mental condition.”

Angela said, “The only burden on my mind was that my innocent sister wants to sacrifice her life for me. Now that burden is over.”

“The court needs evidence.”

“Evidence? Have a look at this!” Angela stepped forward and while placing the bundle of her clothes on the judge’s table, said, “Look at it carefully. This is that same dress that I was wearing that night. Your brave knight had ripped it apart. This dress will prove on whom the brave knight of the church had laid his hands on before night fall.”

Once again there was absolute silence in the court.

Maria entered the courtroom breathlessly, came forward and embraced Angela. “Angela! Angela! My daughter you are unwell. Let’s go home.” Saying this Maria was trying to pull her outside.

The judge said, “Wait! We would like to ask a few questions.”

Angela shrugged her mother’s hand off. With pleading glances Maria looked at the judge and said, “My daughter has nothing to do with this murder. She is sick. She is mentally unbalanced.”

The judge opened the cloth-bundle and while showing the torn clothes to Maria said, “Can you recognize who this dress belongs to?”

Instead of replying, Maria was looking toward Angela. Angela said, “Why are you silent, mother? You had bought this dress for me yourself. You know everything that happened. You know that he came looking for me and this was his second assault. He insulted me in front of you on purpose the first time you invited him over. The Bishop of Castile is a witness to the fact that I broke a flower vase on his head to save myself. You have the letter in which he expressed his regret for his behavior. Then to fulfill his evil designs he, very cleverly, tried to keep you away from the house on that fateful night. You wanted to come home but the inspector didn’t allow you to do so.”

Then Angela turned her attention to the judge and said, “The love that my mother has for me might not allow her to speak the truth but Bishop Lucas is a witness that Michael did not have good intentions regarding me. In the presence of Bishop Lucas I had refused to marry him and he was looking for an appropriate opportunity to avenge his insult.”

Maria looked at the judge with acute helplessness and said “Holy Father! My girl is innocent. She is under Rabia’s magical spell. She has misguided her from her religion. The effect of her magic spell is such that she reads the Quran and performs the Muslim prayers surreptitiously. I wanted to get her married off with Michael but Rabia misguided her. Rabia uses her power of magic to get anything done from her. Angela is innocent. She does not know what she is saying. All this is the effect of Rabia’s magic. I’m afraid that even Bishop Lucas might be under Rabia’s magical spell. My daughter has been having fits of madness ever since Michael’s murder. She tries to run outside by breaking the door. The dress that you are seeing has been torn by her in a fit of madness.”

Angela threw a despising glance at her mother, then, turned towards the judge again and said, “My sister has already taken my crime on her head. She wouldn’t have done that if she had ill-intentions for me. But instead of being impressed by this, just to save my life, my mother is trying to put a veil on the face of the truth. My mother thinks that since Rabia is Muslim the court will believe every wrong thing about her. She’s convinced that if no charge can be brought against a Muslim girl, then proving that she’s a sorcerer would be the easiest to prove. But I announce in this court that like my sister, I too am a Muslim. If Islam is a magic, then its effect have taken over me and no power on earth can remove its effect. The only regret I have is that before this I have been praying in hiding. This was my cowardice but now I know the true meaning of life and death. Now I am afraid of nothing. If there is a punishment for becoming Muslim then I’m willing to take it but as far as Michael’s murder is concerned, that was not a crime. He was a savage. He was a rascal. The only reason this court is concerned about this matter is because he is a relative of the Queen. Alas! If the Queen only knew that a woman, especially the one that has proclaimed the Kalma-e-Tawheed, considers her honor and dignity dearer to her than her life. The court of the church is only sorry that a hand that instilled the fear of the church in the hearts of the people has been cut. But only if those hands that ripped my dress apart had been raised against the daughters and daughters-in-law of the church’s torchbearers.”

The judge, priests and the audience in the court did not have the strength to bear it anymore. The judge thundered back and said, “Disrespectful girl! Shut your mouth!”

But Angela’s voice kept getting louder. In a feverish condition, she did not know what she was saying. The city’s governor, Don Louis, who had just received news of a new complication in the case, was standing and listening to Angela’s speech at the door of the court. Angela was making fun of the church’s justice and equality. She had gone to the extent of saying that “you oppress the poor, helpless and unarmed but become a lamb in front of the powerful. You got a chance to govern after eight years but you proved that you were not competent for it.”

Don Louis stepped forward and said, “I can’t bear this contempt of the court. This girl has proven that she deserves the worst of punishments. She is giving a bad name to the church. She is a traitor of the kingdom. It is not important for us to know what link she has to Michael’s murder. I want the case of these two girls to be reanalyzed.”

Angela turned her attention towards Don Louis and said, “If your church is not earning a bad reputation from its deeds then it doesn’t have to worry about my words. If your government patronizes the oppressor and doesn’t give the oppressed a right to plea, then, I am a rebel. I have the right to insult a court that permits a mad dog to tear my flesh apart but does not allow me to break its head.”

On the governor’s cue, the soldiers dragged Angela out of the court. She kept on yelling, “You are oppressors! You are savages! You are that coward who fears to look at their face in the mirror.” Maria fell down unconscious. The soldiers picked her up and took her outside. Rabia was still standing in the court. The governor stepped forward and said something in the judge’s ear. The judge shook his head, turned his attention to Rabia and said, “Do you confess that Angela murdered John Michael?”

Rabia replied, “I have finished my statement. The court has already pronounced its verdict on me. Therefore, I don’t think it is important for me to say anything more. Whatever Angela has said is in a state of illness. She has nothing to do with Michael’s murder.”

The judge enquired, “Is it correct that Angela has strayed away from her religion?”

“No, Angela has not gone astray. She had adopted a true religion.”

Again the governor stepped forward and said something in the judge’s ear, who shook his head and said, “Due to an unprecedented change in this type of case, the court retracts its verdict regarding the accused Rabia. After hearing the statement of the accused’s stepsister, it is the court’s opinion that both these sisters are involved in the conspiracy to murder John Michael and apart from this they are guilty of revolting against the government and spreading hatred against the church. To give the police a chance to investigate, the proceedings of the court are adjourned till tomorrow.”

Until evening, Maria kept screaming in a state of unconsciousness. When she gained consciousness she was lying in a small room instead of her own room. Her maidservant was sitting close to her on a chair. For a second, she kept looking at the dilapidated ceiling of the room. Then she suddenly sat up and said, “Where is Angela? Where am I?”

Filling her eyes with tears, the maidservant said, “Angela is with Rabia in custody.”

Maria recalled all the events of the court and she got off the bed and stood up. “I will go to the governor. He cannot do this to my daughter.”

The maidservant got up and while getting a hold of her hand said, “You are unwell. You are not fit to go outside.”

Maria said, “No, I’m perfectly fine but where am I? Maybe I fainted in the court. Whose house is this?”

Without waiting for a reply from the maid, Maria started peeping out of the door and then turned her attention to the maid and said, “No one is here. Who brought me to this broken down house? Am I dreaming? How did the goods of my house come to the porch of this house?”

The maid was sobbing away instead of replying.

Bishop Lucas entered into the porch and Maria came out on seeing him. She said in a shocked voice, “Holy Father! What is going on? Where am I? The goods of my house are scattered all over. The maid is not giving me any reply.”

The Bishop replied indifferently, “All this is a punishment for your deeds.”

Maria became confused, took a step back and started staring at the Bishop with extreme helplessness. A second later she ran towards the main door, and after taking a look outside, turned her attention again towards the Bishop. “Holy Father! Have mercy on me. Tell me what is going on? How did I come here? What will happen to Angela? Save my daughter.”

“No one can save your daughter now. You did not value your stepdaughter’s altruism. You accused her of being a sorcerer. Stupid woman! You thought that if you slander a Muslim girl then it will hide Angela’s crime in the eyes of the court. If only you hadn’t stopped Angela from going to the court on the first day itself. At that time no one knew that she had become Muslim. You had enough evidence that Michael had entered your house having bad intentions for Angela. If you hadn’t done this stupidity, this would have been a totally different type of case. The people would have had the perception that Angela is a Christian girl and even the King and Queen would not have had the courage to say that whatever she did to save her honor was punishable. Now both of them are in custody and what you got out of this stupidity is that the governor removed you from the palace in a state of unconsciousness and sent you to this cottage.”

Tears were gathering in Maria’s stoned eyes. She stepped forward and falling at the Bishop’s feet, she said, “Holy Father! Please have mercy on me. Please save Angela. For God’s sake, save Angela. I can’t believe that she has killed Michael. But even if she really has killed Michael, even then, she is innocent. Whatever Angela has done was to save her honor.”

Lucas wasn’t moved by Angela’s tears. He took a step backwards and said, “Stupid woman! Now what’s the use of crying? Angela could have been proven innocent despite this murder but now, because of your stupidity, she has been accused of more serious crimes than murder. Insulting the church, hatred for her own religion and conspiracy against the government are not trivial accusations. Saving her life now is not in my hands.”

Maria held Lucas’s hem and said, “No, no, you can do a lot. You are the Bishop of Loja.”

“From today, I’m not the Bishop of Loja. I have refused to give a statement tomorrow according to the wishes of the governor and subsequently I have sent my resignation to the Lord Bishop. Hence, I have fulfilled my duty towards Angela and Rabia. I have sent my written statement to the court. I have written how shameless John Michael’s intentions were for Angela. In my statement, I have tried to prove Angela was justified in killing Michael. But since my statement is not according to the wishes of the governor, therefore, I am sure the court will suppress it. I am going to Abu Dawood. Maybe he can appeal to the King and Queen for mercy despite the fact that the mission because of which he was given so much importance has more or less been completed. Ferdinand has laid a siege on Granada. Because of Abu Dawood’s endeavors, an influential segment of the people of Granada has become opposed to the war and the King is sure that the victory of Granada is only a matter of a few days. A number of people in Abu Dawood’s group have now become his competitors. In such circumstances, I am not optimistic that the King would entertain a plea of mercy by him but maybe there might be still be an arrow in his quiver of wisdom that the King might find useful and would be willing to look into his request. Now the important thing that I came to tell you is that you have to go to the court tomorrow and say that the court cannot give its verdict until I do not stand as a witness. If the court overrules your objection and it becomes hasty in giving a decision, then, ask for time to appeal to the King against the verdict. It is possible that the court might not give you time for an appeal. But after this request of yours the court will be compelled to get an endorsement from the King. In the meantime, your husband will get time to run around.”

Appearing extremely obliged, Maria said, “Holy Father! You are so merciful. I will not forget this favor of yours. When are you leaving?”

“I am leaving tonight.”

# Angela and Rabia’s Father

In the month of April, 1491, Ferdinand attacked Granada with all his military might. Like the King and Queen, all the knights of Andalus too had come after taking the oath that they would not return without conquering Granada. To keep the Shaheens of the valley and the mujāhidīns of Alpujarras engaged, he had already dispatched an army of horsemen. The command of the army of Granada was in Musa’s hand. Although there was a huge group of hypocrites and traitors working against them, however, majority of the public was ready to give up their lives on Musa’s cue.

Ferdinand had learned from his past failures. Despite the superiority of his might, instead of directly attacking the city, he encamped at a distance and started assaulting the settlements in and around the vicinity. He had already surrounded Granada from three sides but instead of attacking the city directly, his army was busy in burning the gardens and destroying the crops out of the city. Ferdinand was certain that after a long siege the people of Granada would be compelled to lay down their arms after being exhausted by starvation. Therefore, after burning the fields of the farmers outside, he was forcing them to take refuge in Granada. Within two months, he had desolated a lush green and fertile area of several miles around the three sides of Granada. The only route open to Granada for supplies and reinforcements was from Mount Basharat. Limited supplies of grain, fruits and vegetables were coming into Granada from the fertile valley of Sierra Nevada but this wasn’t enough for the thousands of people of Granada. The condition of the people of Granada was deteriorating day-by-day. As for Musa, it was not easy for him to come out in the open field and challenge Ferdinand’s cowardly army. Bands of a small group of horsemen would go out and return after inflicting damages to Ferdinand’s army. Musa thought that Ferdinand would be compelled to attack the city once he saw the daily increment in the destruction of his troops but these losses did not have any effect on Ferdinand. His army kept busy in digging trenches and fortifications around the city.

Several famous legends of individual acts of bravery of the cavaliers from Granada are associated with the time of the siege. A cavalier would gallop his horse out of the city and would cry out the name of a famous knight of Ferdinand from a far distance and invite him to a duel. Not taking up a challenge was considered a disgrace by a knight. He would be compelled to enter into the field. Usually the cavaliers of Granada had the upper hand in such feuds. After taking care of one knight, the cavalier of Granada would call out for another knight for a challenge. Many of Ferdinand’s knights had been killed in these individual duels. One day a horseman from Granada came into the field. His armor was shining and his entire face, apart from his eyes, was hidden in the aventail. His horse was extremely beautiful. He halted his horse at some distance away from the front rows of Ferdinand’s troops and proclaimed loudly, “Is there anyone who has a desire for death?” After a while when he did not receive any reply from the enemy, then, he said, “Look at my horse. Even your King wouldn’t have had the privilege of riding such a horse and my sword is embedded with jewels that are not even in your King’s crown. Is there anyone who desires this sword and horse?”

Prompting his horse forward, Count Tendela replied, “More than that horse and sword, my heart desires to rip away that audacious tongue.” After a while the corpse of one of the best knights of Ferdinand was agonizing in ashes and blood. Marcos of Cadiz came into the field, but he too, met with the same fate. After that, Granada’s cavalier had condemned seven of Ferdinand’s best knights to death, one after the other. The spectators on the boundary wall of Granada were raising slogans in jubilation. The cavalier waited for a competitor for a while and then said, “Where is your King? Till when will their spirits wait for him in the other world? Tell him that a he-man’s sword would like to witness the color of his blood.”

One knight got excited but Ferdinand held the reins of his horse and said, “No. No. You do not have the permission to go and duel with him.”

The cavalier from Granada removed his aventail as he approached close to the gate of the city. The guards lowered their heads in his respect. This was Musa bin Abi Ghassan. The last sword of the Muslims of Granada.

Abu Dawood stood in front of Ferdinand. In a state of extreme helplessness, he was witnessing the effects of his pleas on the face of the King. The King had rejected his appeal against the religious court of Loja. Hopeless to get justice, Abu Dawood had appealed for mercy. The King’s silence was nerve-wrecking for him. He was feeling that his star of destiny had fallen onto an ill-fated path. This was the first time he was standing in front of Ferdinand instead of sitting on a chair. When he had first entered the tent, he was sure that Ferdinand, as usual, would step forward, shake hands with him, seat him on a chair and after enquiring the reason for his visit would say that the priests of Loja have gone crazy. But, as soon as he entered, when he saw him and Ferdinand said, “My sympathies are with you but this is the verdict of the court of the church. The court has sent that verdict to me for endorsement. I am helpless. I didn’t expect this from your girls.” Abu Dawood couldn’t believe his ears. He kept staring at the King for a long time. Finally, he began his speech with a few broken words. After a few sentences his speech had gained fluency. He gave several justifications to prove Rabia’s and Angela’s innocence but Ferdinand shook his head negating them and said, “You can’t convince me. Your girls have confessed to their crime. It was possible for me to forgive Michael’s murder but insulting the church and revolting against the government are crimes that can’t be forgiven under any circumstances. For one of your girls, the court is right in saying that she is a sorcerer. For the other one, I am ready to believe that whatever she did or said was because of the sorcery of your other daughter but the words she used against the government, church and the court are unbearable even for me. Even if the Lord Bishop’s daughter would have said those words, even her condition would have been no different than your daughter’s.”

Abu Dawood’s voice sank. However, he mustered up courage again and requested for mercy. He appealed against the services he had rendered. He said, “Your Highness! I have whitened my hair in your services and these girls are my last support. Please have mercy on me!” In reply to these pleas, Ferdinand remained silent for a while. Finally, he said, “My mercy cannot overrule the verdict of the court of the church, Abu Dawood. I am sorry. You have to be patient. This is a testing time for your loyalty.”

He said, “Your Highness! There has been no wavering in my loyalty but they are my daughters. They are daughters of that servant of yours because of whose efforts your forces are standing in front of the four walls of Granada today. They are the daughters of that person who has completed the preparations of opening the gates of Al-Hamra for you, who has removed cliffs like Abul Hassan and Al-Zeghel from your path to Granada. My Master! So far I have not even spread out my hem for the promises that you have made to me. I had merely come with a trivial request. You have decided to make me your Regent in Granada. Don’t my girls have even this much right that they can defend their honor in my absence?”

“But they have killed Michael and he is the Queen’s relative. We appreciate your services but we can’t ignore Michael’s services either.”

Queen Isabella, who was listening to these talks from behind a curtain, entered into the room. Appearing extremely under obligation Abu Dawood said, “Your Highness! Please have mercy on me.”

Without giving any reply, the Queen went and sat next to the King. Ferdinand said, “Abu Dawood! If we cannot protect the dignity of the church, then what is the use of these victories?”

Abu Dawood said, “Your Highness! I too have a share in these victories and I still have to do a lot for your final victory.”

The Queen said, “If you want to frighten us that we cannot conquer Granada without you, then, you’re mistaken. Through you we have merely bought the conscience of a few men. We would have done that even if you were not there. You have merely closed the deal but its price has been paid by our treasury. Now if you threaten to leave us then listen! There are people present in Granada that are more clever and more useful than you.”

Abu Dawood thought of something and then looked at the King and said, “Your Highness! Maybe I didn’t live up entirely to your expectations. It is possible that you don’t feel the need for me for conquering Granada but there is still a front where you need me. Still there is strength in the wings of the frontier falcons. Even after Badr bin Mughira’s death there has been no difference in their ferocity and agility.”

Ferdinand became startled and looked at Abu Dawood and said, “Do you know that Badr bin Mughira is alive! You have deceived us.”

Abu Dawood replied, “As far as I know, he is dead. I had arrested him. Abu Abdullah had handed him over to the hangman, however, if a miracle from nature has saved him then I take the responsibility that I will present him alive in front of you. I would have to take a huge risk for this mission but if you promise to save my girls then I am ready to go for this mission. If Badr bin Mughira is alive, then, I will bring him to you. If he is not alive, then I take the responsibility of killing his successor and spreading anarchy among his group.”

Ferdinand said, “A few prisoners of Granada have told us that he is alive. But you have deceived him once. Before promising you anything, it is important for us to know what your chances of success are in this mission.”

“Your Highness! I seek forgiveness for my audacity but this is a deal. I am sure that the chances of my success are very bright but I won’t tell you anything until you promise to save the lives of my girls.”

Ferdinand looked at the Queen and after thinking for a while said, “Sit down, Abu Dawood. Listen! If your girls were not accused of the crime of insulting the church, then, it would not have been difficult to forget John Michael’s murder, however, after your success in this mission, we will be able to have the punishment of your girls forgiven by the Lord Bishop.”

"Your Highness! You will have to make a promise with this slave of yours.’

“We promise that the sentence of your girls will be forgiven but if you don’t fulfill your obligation, then, don’t mention them in front of us next time.”

Abu Dawood said, “Your Highness! I seek a time of a month. Today, the date is the fifth in the lunar month. Please order the court to postpone to carry out their sentence to the fourth of the next month. If I don’t return successfully from the mission within this time, then the court has the right to punish my girls on the fourth of next month at sunset. My absence would mean that I am not alive and would be waiting for my daughters in the next world.”

Ferdinand said, “I will dispatch my orders for the Governor of Loja today itself but before that you will have to tell us what are your chances of success.”

Abu Dawood replied, “Badr bin Mughira wanted to marry my elder daughter, Rabia. If he is alive and if I am successful in convincing him that the King will forgive your past mistakes, then, for the sake of Rabia he would be willing to come along with me.”

The Queen and King were not ready to believe this but when Abu Dawood narrated the events, with necessary additions and deletions, of his stay at the fort and of the arrival of Badr bin Mughira at Al-Hamra, then they believed him to a certain extent.

The King said, “What if he is not alive?”

Abu Dawood replied, “If he is not alive then you will hear that his successor has been killed or you will see that an influential segment of their group is extending its hand for a compromise with you.”

Ferdinand said, “In both cases I promise to save the lives of your girls. Apart from that I will consider you for deserving the biggest reward but if you are not successful in this mission then the girls will certainly be punished. You should come to be me at least two days before the fourth of next lunar month so that I am able to stop the ruler of Loja in time from carrying out the orders of the court.”

Abu Dawood replied, “It is possible that I may come back within a couple of weeks. If I stay away for some reason, even then, I will apprise you of everything before the end of this month. If necessary, I might ask for more time and I am sure, given the circumstances, Your Highness will surely grant me an extension of a few more days. But if, by the end of this month, Your Highness does not get any message from me, then, know that this slave has been sacrificed for your sake.”

Ferdinand said, “On your request, we will be able to grant you an extension of a few more days.”

Abu Dawood stepped forward, knelt on both his knees, kissed Ferdinand’s hem and then said, “Your Highness! Please pray for my success.” Then he turned his attention towards the Queen. The Queen had extended her hand towards him. Once more he came down on his knees and kissed the Queen’s hand and said, “Your Highness! I know Michael is your relative. I am sorry about his death. After performing the required services, I hope this servant of yours would be able to reinstate his position of goodwill in your eyes.”

The Queen said, “I will consider your success in this mission an expiation for Michael’s murder. An attack or two, from the rear, by the tribals are bothering us.”

After a while Abu Dawood was riding a faced-paced horse and heading towards the valley of the falcons. He was witnessing the magnificent buildings of Al-Hamra on one side and the tents of Ferdinand’s army lined up on the other. He climbed upon a cliff and halted his horse. For a while he kept looking at Al-Hamra and after taking a sigh, he said, “Al-Hamra! A number of funerals of great kings have left your four walls. Look at me. I am a funeral of someone else’s desires. My helplessness is the realization of someone’s pleasant dreams.” Abu Dawood looked towards the tents of Ferdinand’s troops and said in his heart, “Historians will say that Granada was conquered by Ferdinand. It would be written in history that Ferdinand’s armies were stronger than the armies of Granada. Alas! Before going, if only I could write on every stone of Al-Hamra that if Abu Dawood was not there, historians wouldn’t have remembered Ferdinand as a conqueror. O sky of Granada! You are a witness that nations are not destroyed by any Ferdinand of the enemy, but, there are their own Abu Dawood’s among them who send them to the pangs of death. Goodbye, Al-Hamra! Farewell, Granada!!”

A little after Isha prayers, Badr bin Mughira was sitting with Bashir bin Hassan, Mansour bin Ahmed and some other main commanders in a room of his mountain fort. A day before, his army had returned after conducting a successful assault at the border and now the details of a new attack was being finalized.

A soldiers entered the room and after offering his salutations respectfully, said, “Four soldiers have arrested and brought a man from the border. They believe he is a spy. The soldiers say that he refused to give his statement in front of the Commander of the Border. His demand was that he should be presented in front of the Supreme Commander.”

Badr bin Mughira said, “At the moment, put him in prison and present him in front of me tomorrow morning.”

The soldier said, “But he insists on meeting you right away. He says that he has got an important piece of news.”

“What is his name?”

“He even refuses to tell his name. He says that if the Supreme Commander cannot meet him then he should be presented in front of Bashir bin Hassan.”

After thinking for a while, Badr bin Mughira said, “Who can he be? Fine, call him!”

After a while the soldiers brought Abu Dawood into the room. For a few seconds, Badr and his companions kept glaring at him in amazement and concern instead of anger. So far, Abu Dawood didn’t believe that Badr bin Mughira was actually alive. After looking at him a few times with frightened glances, he spoke and said, “You must have been surprised to see me but I had to come.”

Badr bin Mughira said, “Don’t you think you have gone overboard in displaying your bravery?”

“I know I deserve the worst punishment but even you cannot prescribe the punishment I have suggested for myself, but, before that, I would like to say something.”

“You want to say that Ferdinand’s army is huge, therefore, we should lay our arms down.”

“No. What I have come to tell you is that the court of Loja has sentenced Rabia and Angela to be burned alive and if you want, you can save them.”

Badr bin Mughira and Bashir bin Hassan would at times be looking at each other and then at Abu Dawood. Their glances were saying that Abu Dawood is lying. He has brought a new trap for them but their heart was saying ‘what if this news is true?’ In their sight Abu Dawood was the meanest person ever but despite this conviction, imaging Rabia and Angela being burned alive was enough to get them disturbed and worried.

Abu Dawood reiterated, “I know you won’t believe me. You are right to consider me a double-crosser, conman and a hypocrite but you and Bashir bin Hassan know Rabia and Angela far more than you know me. Rabia was already a Muslim and now Angela too has become a Muslim. You know that they possess feminine modesty and pride in their hearts. I have come to tell you that one of Ferdinand’s knight had assaulted their honor and they had killed that knight. There was a court case for the crime of murder against Rabia and it had given her the death penalty, but on the day of the verdict, Angela suddenly reached the court and stated that she was the actual criminal of the murder of Ferdinand’s knight. In her statement she also confessed that she had become a Muslim. Apart from that, she had insulted the court and the church and her speech against the government was extremely rebellious. The court has declared Rabia to be a sorcerer and an enemy to the government and church, and Angela has been charged with rebellion against the government, apostasy and insulting the church and court, and both of them have also been accused of the murder of Ferdinand’s knight. Now they have been condemned to be burned alive.”

Badr bin Mughira enquired, “When?”

Appearing a bit worried, Abu Dawood replied, “I was waiting for an appropriate time to reply to that question.”

Looking towards his companions, Badr bin Mughira said, “Apart from Bashir and Mansoor, everyone can leave.”

When they had left the room, then Badr said, “Abu Dawood! A believer can’t be bitten by the same trick twice. If the city of Loja is not in the sky, then believe me, my men will get to the bottom of this incident within a week and the reason I am saying this is because if you have come here with the intention of deceiving me, then, you should not be unaware of the consequences.”

Abu Dawood replied, “I won’t advise you on what you should do. Because of my past deeds, you have all the right to be suspicious of me. You must be thinking that this time, instead of Al-Hamra, I must have prepared a trap for you in Loja but before sunrise I will be able to prove that whatever I have said regarding Rabia and Angela is correct. Keep me in your custody until morning. I will present my written statement to you in the morning. I want to be permitted to write while I’m in custody.”

Bashir said, “Don’t try to become a puzzle for us. If the magic spell of your tongue has been broken, then your writings too won’t be able to fool us. We will confirm every detail of your talk from Loja. You have not replied to Badr’s question. When will they be punished?”

“They will be burned alive on the fourth of the next lunar month at sunset.”

Mansour said, “Do you want us to attack Loja on that day? We would have entertained this request of Ferdinand but unfortunately Loja is a bit far from here. You people have miscalculated our intelligence in military matters. Had he spread his web of deceit in some city in the vicinity of the border, then, we might have been compelled to respect his wish. Now if we are not ready to be deceived then we should feel sorry for the stupidity of the one who did not think that the Shaheens, whom we want to trap, are not deprived of vision.”

Badr said, “Abu Dawood! Even if I suppose that Rabia and Angela have been sentenced by the court, but knowing you, why should I believe that that you have not cooperated with the court and government in the conspiracy hatched to give us directions to attack Loja. Why shouldn’t I think that all this is a game? The government arrested them with your consent and the court has sentenced them with your consent and they will be looking forward for us in Loja till the fourth of the next lunar month. Maybe a dummy stack too might me prepared that day and you might not even feel embarrassed in having your daughters stand at the stack but you might be compelled to remove the web of conspiracy once you become hopeless of our arrival. Alas! If only you had a little bit of compassion and you would not have made a laughing stock of your daughters in front of the people of Loja for the sake of a few pieces of humiliation. Remember! On the fourth of next lunar month, my men will be present in Loja. They will stay there till the end of this game and when I come to know that Rabia and Angela have been dropped home after being removed from the fake stack then you will be hanged. Till that time, you will be in my custody. You deserve the worst of punishments despite this new crime. But I am willing to set you free if you tell me the complete details of this conspiracy. I don’t like your girls becoming a drama in front of the people of Loja.”

Abu Dawood replied “In the given circumstances had I given my life any worth, then, I wouldn’t have come here. I have asked until morning to submit a written statement. At the moment I, I think whatever I have said so far is sufficient.”

Badr said, “I will not refuse your request but I am sure that your writing won’t be more effective than your tongue.”

Badr bin Mughira clapped his hands. A soldier entered inside. Badr said, “Take him away and make preparations for his accommodation in a secure room. Take care of his food, drink and rest. Grant him the facility of writing but there should be no carelessness in guarding him.”

Saying this he moved his attention towards Abu Dawood and said, “I also want to tell you that trying to escape from here would be in vain.”

Abu Dawood left the room with the soldier without giving any reply. Four more soldiers, who stood outside with naked sword, also joined up with them.

For a while, Badr, Bashir and Mansoor kept staring at each other for a while in silence. In a condition of restlessness, Badr got up and stood in front of the window and started peeping outside. “Is this possible? Can this happen?” He was asking himself. Despite consoling his conscience with a thousand consolations, he would shiver at merely the imagination of Rabia being in the burning stack. His heartbeats were saying to him that it can be possible for Rabia to do such a thing. Rabia can risk her life to save her honor. It’s quite possible for her that she might have killed some knight. She loves Islam. She has the courage to raise the voice of truth in the biggest of courts but no, no, Abu Dawood is a fraud. All this is a deception."

Mansoor got up and went close to Badr and while putting his hand on his shoulder said, “Badr! If this is true, then you should have the consolation that no wall of Loja will be able stop our path.”

Badr suddenly turned around, looked at him and said, “The lives of two girls of Loja are not more valuable than the lives of the thousands of girls of Loja. These mujahids are shouldering the responsibility of the entire nation. I won’t put my share of the burden on them. This matter will be limited to Bashir and me only.”

Both of them looked at Bashir and he stood up. It was difficult to analyze his reaction. There was no effect of that storm on his face which was brewing deep down in the bottom of his heart. For a while, he remained standing like a rock and then left the room after saying, “I am going out to attend to some wounded patients.”

After looking at Badr for a while, Mansoor said, “If Abu Dawood has convinced you that his information is correct then I can compel you to confess that our attack on Loja would be able to yield very vital results. Even now our main issue is to divide Ferdinand’s attention on two fronts.”

The next morning Badr, Bashir, Mansoor and some other officers were having breakfast when a soldier nervously entered into the room and gave the news that, instead of his bed, Abu Dawood is lying unconscious on the floor. These people went running into his room.

Abu Dawood was lying with his face on the floor. Bashir bin Hassan quickly turned him around after putting his hand on his pulse and said after opening his eyes, “He is dead. I think he poisoned himself.”

In the corner of one side of the room, a pen, an inkpot and some papers were lying on a small table Badr bin Mughira picked up a few papers that had Abu Dawood’s writings on them. On Bashir’s cue, the soldiers picked up Abu Dawood and lay him on the bed.

After frisking him, Bashir bin Hassan recovered a small silver box from his pocket. After opening and taking a look inside it, he said, “He has taken that poison whose antidote is not known to this day.”

The rest of the soldiers of the fort too were gathering in front of the door of his room. Closing the door after ordering everyone else, besides Bashir and Mansoor, to leave the room, Badr said, “Bashir! We were wrong. This is his letter. Read it.”

Initially, Bashir extended his hand a bit indifferently towards the papers but after reading a few sentences his entire concentration became focused on this writing.

Badr said, “Bashir! Read it aloud. I have merely seen a few lines.”

Bashir got startled, looked towards his companions and started reading aloud. This was the content of the last letter from Abu Dawood that was addressed to Badr bin Mughira:

"You will get my letter at the time when I am not in this world. Without this disgraceful death I had no other way of convincing you that my news regarding Rabia and Angela is correct and I had come prepared for this. With my death those mean desires and filthy intentions will perish because of which I became a nation seller and a traitor in your sight. The truth is that the Abu Dawood who dreamt of ruling Granada, who had desired to build palaces for himself on the corpses of his nation, had died a few days ago. He had become compelled to strangle himself at that very moment when Ferdinand refused the plea of mercy for his daughters and that Abu Dawood whose corpse lies in front of you was present in front of you, the previous night, only in the capacity of a father. The issue of saving the lives of his two daughters was in front of him. Therefore, my second death is a death of a father and whatever I am writing before my death and in a situation when lying won’t benefit me, I am feeling a kind of relief in saying the truth.

All you know about me is that I conspired to kill you after calling you in Al-Hamra and instigated Abu Abdullah to revolt but my crimes are far from that. I am your father’s killer. I am the one who wrote to him and invited him to Toledo. The first time when I came in the capacity of a guest, I was Ferdinand’s spy and the attack by the enemy on your fort during the night was on my behest. I got Musa arrested in Al-Hamra. I had convinced Abu Abdullah to become a nation seller. In Granada, the Muslim spies from Andalus who have been sent to propagate against the *jihād* were trained by me. You have asked me, when will Angela and Rabia be punished and I have told you that they will be burned alive on the fourth of the next lunar month. You must be surprised as to why the court has given them so much time. At night if I had told you the reason then you would have suspected me even more. To get a time for a month I had to promise Ferdinand that if Badr bin Mughira is alive then I will present him in front one you under one pretext or another. I had also promised him that I will create schism in the ranks of the mujāhidīn. Against this, Ferdinand promised to save the lives of Rabia and Angela.

Abu Dawood, the politician, might never have confessed to these crimes of his under any condition but Angela and Rabia’s father sees their benefit only in this that before dying, he should remove all his masks. After me, if the lives of these girls can be saved by some plan of yours, then, I entrust Rabia to you and Angela to Bashir bin Hassan. For quite sometime, I knew that they had chosen both of you to be their friend and protector but in the scheme of my life there was no place for the respect of their wishes. I viewed them as a father only when I got to know, that in my absence, the court of Loja has sentenced them to death. I don’t feel the need of pleading you to save their lives. You know that the relation between Rabia and Angela was only a bond of blood and this relation will end with my death. I won’t see their outcome. Their screams won’t reach my ears from the burning stack. Even if I was alive they wouldn’t have regretted while dying that they were being separated from their father. They have no interest in my world. They are only interested in the world in which you and Bashir breathe in. They have no attachment with my forts in the air. They wouldn’t have any regret in leaving the palace of the governor in Loja. At the burning stack, they would only imagine that valley in which they had found a secure habitat for their wandering souls. They would look towards the sky and say, “Badr and Bashir, where are you?”

My sight cannot get to the bottom of the depth of the ocean of life in which you have found each other. All I know is that they have jumped into that ocean only because of you. Now if the flame of their life is going to be extinguished then the reason for that is because you have instilled the desire in them to play around with storms. That honor which compelled Rabia or Angela to kill John Michael was actually granted by you and Bashir. That courage which taught a girl’s feeble hands to use a javelin, that tongue that gave a rebellious speech in the court, was an interpretation of your views. I couldn’t see Rabia and Angela in prison but someone who did see them has told me that they don’t regret even a bit of what they have done. It is their firm belief that if God desires for them to live, then, He is capable of converting the fire of the stack to a garden. Badr and Bashir! You know better than me as to who has produced that faith their hearts.

If you do not deny on taking all of these things on your head, then I would say that Rabia and Angela’s matter is yours and Bashir’s matter and that I do not have to worry about it. After handing over the responsibility of saving their lives to you, I am freeing myself of it. I can’t tell you the way in which you can save their lives. That is your duty.

I would like to say something regarding the future of Spain. Time has proven that whatever I have thought or done till today was wrong. I chose flowers for myself and spread thorns for my nation but my share of the flowers became the adornment of Ferdinand’s lap. My hands and feet are wounded with thorns and I don’t know the culmination of my nation. My politics is finished. I am dying a death of humiliation and failure. You might consider my suicide hateful but today I have come to realize the fact that a death of dignity is only for those people who select a path of a life of dignity.

I have not said anything regarding my wife. I don’t consider her worthy of mentioning. To save Angela, she stood as a witness against Rabia. If she had not taken poison after hearing the court’s decision, then, I would have strangled her with my own hands.

With the culmination of this letter, I have written the final lines of the book of my life.

Abu Dawood

“Angela and Rabia’s father”

# Tears and Smiles

A little before sunset thousands of men and women were gathering around Angela and Rabia’s stack in an open ground on the outskirts of the city of Loja. They were tied to wooden poles next to each other. A group of monks was singing songs in praise of the Holy Mary near the stack. The people were anxiously waiting for sunset. The Governor and the new Bishop kept looking at the evening horizon every now and then. The people had come to know that Ferdinand’s final verdict would be awaited till sunset. If the King’s emissary did not bring any new order then the stack would be burned. Two soldiers stood ready near the stack with burning torches.

Rabia and Angela had no doubts about themselves but they didn’t know the reason in the delay in the burning of the stack.

Angela said, “Rabia! I used to be very scared of death but now I am feel that death is not such a scary thing but this waiting period is nerve-wrecking for me. What are these people waiting for?”

“I am amazed myself. The sun is setting. Maybe…”

“Maybe what?”

“Nothing, Angela! I was thinking…maybe destiny has disapproved the verdict of the court of Loja. Look, the sun is still there where it was.”

Angela said, “Rabia! This is no time for taking support in fictitious hopes.”

Rabia replied, “All I was saying is that God has the power of changing the decision of any person and when the flames of fire come close to me, even at that time, I will say the same thing.”

“Rabia! Even I am of that faith but now only a few steps are left to the gate of death. Pray that my feet don’t stumble.”

Rabia said, “Your feet won’t stumble. Angela! I am proud of you. Every daughter of Islam will be proud of you.”

“Pray for me, Rabia! Support me.”

Rabia looked towards the sky and said, “O Granter of reward and punishment! Give us steadfastness. You are witnessing our helplessness. You are aware of our weaknesses but let not our weakness and helplessness be known to others. May our plight only knock the door of Your Mercy. May these people not hear our screams.”

As Rabia was performing her supplication, five hundred horsemen appeared from the direction of the ground and the people started shouting, “They have arrived!”

The people encircled around the horsemen. Now no one’s focus was on the stack. The horsemen were wearing the uniforms of the soldiers of Castile. The people were asking them, “What order has His Majesty the King issued? Why did you take so long?” The Governor of Loja and the Bishop tore forward through the crowd. Even the monks who were singing, dispersed around and tried to get close to the horsemen but one of the monks kept singing as usual and went and stood near the stack. Like the rest of the monks, his entire body was hidden in a white robe. Hearing the sound of his voice, Angela and Rabia’s attention focused on him. While singing, he dragged himself closer to Angela and Rabia and slid away the heavy cloth from his head. For a second, Rabia and Angela could not believe their eyes. They were looking at him spellbound. This was Badr bin Mughira. Suddenly another monk came and stood close to him. From his voice it sounded as if this was his first attempt at singing. He tried to sync his tone with that of his companion but despite trying, his voice would either become too low or two high. This was Bashir bin Hassan.

With the last ray of the setting sun, Rabia and Angela were witnessing two bright stars of hope on the sky of their destiny. When the pace of the heartbeats reduced a bit, Rabia looked here and there and then whispered, “Don’t commit suicide for our sake. For God’s sake, leave.”

Badr gestured for her to be quiet by placing a finger on his lips and got hold of Bashir’s arm and singing as usual, moved towards the crowd.

Don Louis silenced the people that had gathered around the horsemen with great difficulty and then addressed the horsemen and said, “You arrived very late. We were about to set the stack on fire. What order have you brought?”

One horseman said, “We would like to talk to the Governor.”

Don Louis got upset and said, “I am the Governor.”

The horseman calmly said, “His Highness the King has dismissed you. Count Antonio will arrive here shortly with the royal decree. He has ordered us that the sentence of Abu Dawood’s daughter be postponed. We have arrived here in a hurry. Count Antonio will be here in a short while and announce the final verdict of the King to you.”

Don Louis stood in a state of shock. In a state of hopelessness the people would, at times, look at the Governor or the Bishop and at times at the horsemen.

Finally the Bishop said, “We have the written order of His Highness present with us and that is that if His Highness thinks there is a need to alter the verdict of the court of Loja then today before sunset another written statement of his would reach here and if his emissary does not reach here before sunset, then, it should be thought that His Highness is in agreement with the verdict of the court. Now the sun has set. So far the King’s emissary has not come to us with any decree of his, therefore, if Don Louis gives the order of burning the stack, then, he will be doing his duty. If you are the emissary then present us His Highness’ written statement or else we are not ready to listen to anything.”

The horseman replied, “But we have come with the emissary and this Governor has been dismissed.”

The Bishop said, “But until he doesn’t get the King’s orders, there won’t be any difference in his authority. If the King has actually sent Count Antonio with some orders and he couldn’t make it here on time, then that responsibility will be on him. Don Louis won’t be answerable for that. Don Louis was instructed to wait till the evening and now it is evening.”

The horseman replied, “We have been sent so that we can protect these girls and we will do this duty even if we have to sacrifice our lives.”

The Bishop and Governor became concerned and started looking at the public. The people were not happy with the interference of these armor-clad soldiers. Some men tried to provoke the public but no one was ready raise their hands on Ferdinand’s soldiers. Finding most of the public subdued, Don Louis said to the horseman he was having a conversation with, “I do not know who you are and how far your information is correct. I will wait a little more but if your news proves to be wrong then you should be prepared for the worst punishment. Count Antonio is the Governor of Cordova. I don’t understand how is he being sent over here and what mistake have I committed because of which I have been dismissed.”

The horseman replied, “It could be that Abu Dawood complained about you to the King. Nonetheless, this matter will clear in a little while. Count Antonio must be arriving. In the meantime, we will remain on guard around the stack. Count Antonio had expressed the concern that the people might maltreat the prisoners in a state of agitation.”

Don Louis replied, “My soldiers are enough to guard around the stack.”

The horseman replied, “No, Count Antonio will be upset with us if he sees such a big crowd around the stack. It would be better to push the people further away to the back.”

Don Louis was an extremely tough man but after hearing the news of his dismissal he did not have that initial fervor and enthusiasm. Every now and then he would ask in his heart as to why he was dismissed, what mistake had he committed, why was he being rewarded in this way for his brilliant services. He thought that Queen Isabella’s recommendation might be able to break Abu Dawood’s magic and he wanted to fly away and go to the Queen. Displaying their lances, when the horsemen started shoving the crowd backwards away from the stack, then, he did not show any opposition and seeing this change in the Governor’s attitude, the Bishop’s anger too had mellowed down somewhat. Now he regretted his words and was mustering favor with the soldiers and was saying to each one turn-by-turn, “Look, had you brought the written statement of Don Antonio, these things wouldn’t have happened. Anyways, he must be coming. How far was he when you left him? It has been quite a while. Now even the moon is setting. Maybe he might have lost his way?”

Over here, now Don Louis himself was scolding the people and pushing them back.

The moon of the fourth of the lunar month was culminating the short distance of its destination and gradually the darkness of the night was increasing. Badr bin Mughira and Bashir bin Hassan were circling around the stack in the garb of monks. The Inspector of the city, too, was circling the stack vigilantly. Badr said to Bashir, “Keep his attention focused on you. He seems to be a clever man.”

Bashir stepped forward and said to the Inspector, “This is so unfortunate. To this day the verdict of any court of the church has not been humiliated so much.”

The torch-bearers had been pushed back quite far away from the stack by the horsemen therefore the Inspector could not take a good look at his addresser. He enquired, “Who are you?”

Bashir replied cautiously, “I am a monk from the monastery of Toledo.”

“How did you get here?”

“I was going to Seville. Seeing this drama I stopped here. I am a physician too. The Bishop of Seville has called me for treatment. I wanted to ask you that if the King so commands, then, will the court of the church take back its verdict for such a serious crime?”

The Inspector replied, “The church of the court does not have to take its decision back. The King will nullify the verdict with his decree.”

“This would be an insult to the church.”

“The King understands the interests of the church better than us.”

When Bashir bin Hassan was talking to the Inspector, Badr bin Mughira went close to Rabia from behind her and while cutting the ropes of her hands and feet, whispered to her and said, “Rabia! Will you be able to ride a horse?”

As soon as Rabia freed herself of the rope, she turned around and started looking at him instead of replying.

Badr said, “Not now, Rabia! Stand in the same way for a while.”

Rabia stood in the same way, attached to the pole.

Badr said again, “Today you will have to travel all night long. You will be able to ride a horse, wouldn’t you?”

Trying to bring her throbbing heart in control she said, “With you?”

“Yes, with me.”

“Traveling with you, I will not complain about the longitivity of the trip.”

“Angela also knows how to ride a horse, doesn’t she?”

“Angela is a better rider than me.”

“Very well. Be ready then.”

After this, Badr went close to Angela and cut her ropes and then went near a horseman and said, “Be quick. Give me your scaling rope”

The horseman removed the scaling rope tied next to the reins and gave it in Badr’s hand.

In the meantime at a distance, the sound of galloping horses was heard and all of the people’s attention became focused the other way. Bashir bin Hassan still had the Inspector’s attention by talking on various topics but after hearing the sound of galloping horses the Inspector said, “Holy Father, maybe they are arriving. Please forgive me but do meet me tomorrow before leaving.”

Without waiting for a reply from Bashir the Inspector ran forward. Both, the Bishop and the Governor, were now talking to a horseman. The Governor was saying, “It seems to me as if some army is arriving with Count Antonio.”

The horseman replied, “He must be having some fifty men with him.”

The Bishop said, “I don’t understand the reason for bringing along so many men.”

Badr bin Mughira stepped forward and said, “Let me explain you the reason for this. Please come with me!”

The Bishop became worried and said, “Who are you?”

Badr said, “You don’t recognize me?”

The Bishop replied, “I can’t see you properly in the dark and even your voice is foreign to me.”

Badr said, “Holy Father! Let me say something important to you then there won’t be any reason left to ask any question.”

The Bishop said, “But what is it that you do not want to discuss in front of Governor Don Louis?”

Badr replied, “I will apologize to him later. Please come, I would like to talk to you on something important in private.”

Badr got hold of the Bishop’s arm, who started walking along with him in a state of nervousness and worry. Bashir was standing at a distance of a few steps. Seeing Badr he came closer. The Bishop said, “Those people are approaching. Quickly say what you have to and let go of my arm.”

Pulling his arm into the iron grip of his hand, Badr said, “Be quiet.”

For a moment, the Bishop lost his wits. Badr said to Bashir, “Take him away and also take this rope. Keep half of it for the Governor. Let me bring him along too.”

The Bishop tried to shout but finding a dagger close to his jugular vein, his voice did not come out of his mouth. He began walking in front of him.

The sound of the galloping horses had now came closer. Don Louis intended to go there when Badr bin Mughira stepped forward and got hold of his arm and placing the tip of a dagger on his ribs said, “Come with me. If you try to talk then…” Instead of completing his sentence, he pressed the dagger and Don Louis became helpless and started walking along with him.

Now the horsemen were also trying to push the Inspector’s men quite far away from stack. They were circling around the stack with greater speed and the Inspector’s soldiers, trying to be keep a safe distance from the range of running horses, were stepping backwards.

Moving Rabia aside, Badr tied the Governor in her place to the wooden pole. In the meantime, Bashir bin Hassan had already tied the Bishop in Angela’s place. On the other side, the fifty horsemen raised slogans of “Takbeer” as soon as they reached close to the crowd and started driving them away using the other side of their lances. In a state of extreme panic, the people, screaming and shouting, began colliding with each other. The policemen of Loja were now running here and there with the people instead of guarding the stack.

Four of the horsemen who were on guard around the stack jumped off their horses. Taking the garb of the monk off and after throwing it into the stack, Badr bin Mughira took a leap and got on a horse. Bashir, Rabia and Angela got on the other three horses.

Badr said, “Bashir! You take Rabia and Angela and wait for us over there. We will reach there soon. Be quick.”

Bashir turned the reins of the horse around. Badr moved his attention to a fifth horseman and said, “You also go along with them.”

Taking Rabia and Angela along, Bashir and this soldier too off from another side. Badr bin Mughira prompted his horse forward and grabbed a burning torch from a soldier’s hand and threw it into the stack. The hay that was placed in the stack to burn the wooden sticks caught fire immediately. The Governor and the Bishop were screaming terribly but no one was there to hear their voices in the midst of the commotion in the ground, which depicted a scene of doomsday. The attacking horsemen were trying to push the people away only with the other side of their lances but the people were colliding with each other and were getting severely injured. In the darkness, the citizens of Loja thought that thousands of foot soldiers and horsemen had attacked them. The whereabouts of the Inspector and his policemen were unknown. In the flames of the fire, some people recognized the faces of their Governor and the Bishop but no one felt the need to go to their rescue.

The ground was empty after a little while. After organizing the horsemen, Badr bin Mughira said, “Our job is done but we need fresh horses for our return and there is no lack of horses in Loja. We have to return within an hour. Are you all ready?”

Mansoor bin Ahmed’s voice could be heard, “We are ready.”

“Let’s go.”

After riding for about three miles, Bashir and his companions stopped at the gates of the four walls of a monastery. Two monks stood waiting for them at the gate. As soon as they recognized Bashir bin Hassan, they called out to someone inside to open the gate. The guard opened the gate from inside.

Three more monks stood in the ground of the monastery. They got a hold of the reins of their horses. Angela and Rabia entered into a room of the monastery along with Bashir. This room was furnished with valuable things. Chandeliers of silver were hanging from its ceiling. A few chairs made of ebony were placed around a table on the marble floor. Eight candles were lit in a candle-holder at the center of the table.

Bashir said, “For the time being, this is our home. You can rest here for a while.”

Angela nervously said, “But in this monastery…”

Smiling, Bashir removed his garb and threw it aside and said, “This monastery has been under our control for the past three days. These monks that you have seen are our men and the residents of the monastery are locked up in three rooms of the upper story. You must be hungry.”

Angela first looked at Rabia and then turned her attention towards Bashir and said, “If this is your house, and if is not considered rude to get informal, then please permit me to say that my sister is dying with hunger.”

Rabia replied, “My brother is the greatest physician of Andalus. I’m sure he won’t make a mistake in recognizing which one among the two of us is hungrier.”

“Both of my guest are suffering from hunger.” Saying this Bashir clapped his hands. A monk entered into the room.

Basher said, “Bring food for them and remove the robes. There is no need for them now.”

After a while the same man entered into the room in a soldier’s uniform, carrying a tray. Apart from bread there was a roasted leg of a goat in the tray. After this another soldier came and placed a large plate full of apples and grapes.

While getting up, Bashir said, “Please eat comfortably. I will leave to the other room.” Rabia said, “Won’t you also eat?”

Basher replied, “I will eat with the rest of the men.”

After exiting and passing through the verandah, Bashir entered into another room. Four men were seated here, who stood up on seeing Bashir. Bashir enquired, “Have all of you eaten your food?”

One of them replied, “Yes, but Abu Mohsin has not eaten.”

Bashir said, “He must be upstairs arguing with the senior monk.”

The soldiers burst into a laughter. Basher said, “Okay, call him and also get our food.”

Badr bin Mughira’s horsemen entered this monastery close to midnight. In this brief period, apart from securing the best horses for themselves from the army headquarters, they had also burned the tents and houses of the army headquarters. They contented themselves in capturing the government’s treasure and setting the Governor’s house on fire.

Rabia, Angela and the rest of the men in the monastery whose number amounted to fourteen, stood ready even before their arrival.

Before giving the orders to depart, Badr said to Abu Mohsin, “Abu Mohsin, our job is finished in Loja. Tell me, were you successful or not?” Bashir bin Hassan started laughing at this and Abu Mohsin became a bit embarrassed and said, “By God, he is absolutely a donkey. You left me here unnecessarily. He called me himself and said that he is somewhat being convinced about the truth of Islam. He said, ‘Today you are leaving. Therefore come and propagate a little more about Islam to me.’ And after breaking my head one time, I found out that that unfortunate fellow would have a good time with me after having alcohol.”

Badr said, “I hope you did not strangle him?”

“If I didn’t have your orders, then, I would have certainly done that.”

Badr said, “Okay, now let’s go.”

Before entering his secure territory, Badr stayed at three different places. He would travel during the night and during the day stay at those monasteries that were away from the cities and settlements in which his soldiers, in the garb of monks, had consolidated their positions a few days earlier. The residents of this monastery, like the monks of Loja were in custody. In whichever monastery Badr bin Mughira would enter, his men would be ready with food for his men and fodder for the horses. With every destination, the quantity of his men kept increasing. When he was crossing the border of Ferdinand’s kingdom, then the number of his men had become one hundred and fifty.

Badr bin Mughira was strolling anxiously in a room of the mountain fort. His face had the effects of hopelessness, concern and anguish. Rabia entered into the room. Badr was in some deep thought. After a while when he did not notice her, then, Rabia took a step forward and said, “You had called for me?”

Badr got startled and looked at her. “Yes Rabia! I wanted to say something important to you. Please sit down.”

His tone was so gloomy that Rabia became terrified. She went near the chair but in a state of confusion she remained standing. Once again Badr said, “Sit down, Rabia.”

While sitting down on a chair, Rabia said, “You seem very worried.”

After being quiet for a while, Badr answered, “Rabia! I was thinking about something concerning you. The war with the Christians has entered into a crucial phase. I now believe that it is not right for you to stay here.”

Rabia suddenly stood up. She wanted to say something but her voice sank. She was looking at him with pleading glances.

Badr said, “Sit down, Rabia! I still have not finished my talk.”

Rabia sat down and after thinking for a while, Badr said, “You know that because of Ferdinand’s long siege, Granada’s condition has become alarming. Whatever little supplies that were being sent there by our efforts through Sierra Nevada can’t be not enough for the needs of thousands of human beings. People are sick and tired of starving. Now winter is approaching. With me, Musa had decided that he would attack with the army of Granada on the first of the next month and I had promised to attack, with all my might, from the rear on this day. We were sure of our victory but today I received Musa’s letter. He has written that Abu Abdullah’s minister has begun negotiations for a peace deal. Majority of the leading nobles are in support of peace and with the efforts of the hypocrites there is a growing segment among the public who is desperate for peace. Since there was a concern that there might be a possibility of Abu Abdullah and his nobles to have a change of heart, therefore, Musa had postponed this attack. He has written that he will inform me once he has decided on some other day for the attack. Musa is not of those beings who would become hopeless but after reading his letter I feel that the conditions in Granada are very alarming. Rabia! You can understand that, God forbid, if Granada slips out of our hands then the flood of Castile will surge on us. Therefore, I have decided to send you to Morocco before that time comes. The Sultan is my father’s friend. Many members of Mansoor and Bashir’s relatives are over there. You won’t have any difficulty over there.”

Instead of looking at Rabia, Badr was now looking towards the window that opened outwards.

Rabia’s heart sank. She sat silently for a while. Finally, in a voice filled with emotions, she said, “So, you have decided to send me to Morocco.”

“No. You shouldn’t have any misunderstanding about me. I have merely given an advice and I am hopeful that you will accept my advice.”

“Your advice?” Rabia said tearfully. “Why don’t just say, ‘Rabia, you are weak-hearted. You can’t keep pace with the powerful speed of a Shaheen. Therefore, it is my command that you should leave from here. You are not needed over here.’”

Badr said, “My world has nothing but thorns in it and nature has not created you to walk on thorns.”

Rabia replied, “Nature had put me in a stack of fire and instead of burning, I had desired to walk on those thorns. The thorns of your path are dearer to me than flowers. My feet won’t stumble walking with you. And why don’t you think this way that just, like you, I too, am alive for a purpose? Nature has joined the path of my life with the road on which you are traveling on. You had promised that after the siege of Granada is over…but…” Rabia could not say anything more. She hid her face between both her hands and began sobbing.

Badr bin Mughira was touched and said, “Rabia! Please don’t misunderstand me! Becoming your life partner is a matter of pride for me. For me you’re that lush green tree under which a weary traveler takes refuge. The other day when I proposed to you for marriage I thought that spending a few moments with you after the war of Granada would be a reward for my life’s past bitterness and difficulties. But now I feel that, in my desert, there is one windstorm after the other. The shore of the sea in which I have placed my boat in gets farther and farther away with each passing day. There would be one whirlpool after the other in front of me. Rabia! It would be in your betterment to go to Morocco. Before taking a major decision, I would like to be reassured about your future. Maybe someday my horse might return empty and you might feel that there is no one that you know in this valley.”

Rabia stood up. She said, “If this is your command then I wouldn’t dare to disobey but if this is not your command, then, I should be given permission to decide about things that concern me.”

Badr said, “I have still not finished my conversation. What I want to make you understand is that if the people of Granada lay their arms down then this valley, too, won’t be safe from the storm of fire and blood and a time can also come upon us when there would be no path left for us except for a death of dignity.”

Rabia said, “So, can’t I support you in a death of dignity.”

Badr bin Mughira said, “Rabia! I don’t have any misunderstanding about you. I have seen you smile in front of the stack but I don’t have the right to take you onto dangerous pathways of my life for the joy of a few days. There are nothing but calamities for you in my companionship. Rabia! I knock on the door of death everyday. For me there is only today no tomorrow.”

Rabia said, “Badr, God is my witness that I would give priority to a few moments in your companionship than to a life of a thousand years. If life is purposeless then what’s the use of prolonging it? You say that you want to leave me on some shore before the storm. But if the end of life is nothing but death then instead of counting the waves sitting at the shore, why shouldn’t I support you in the whirlpool? If you have any consideration for me, then, believe me when I say that, instead of this land, I have always seen you in the sky of my imagination. I am aware of my helplessness and inferiority. I won’t compel you to comply with any of your past decisions. I am not worthy of becoming your life partner but don’t deprive me of the blessing of becoming a companion in your mission. I can’t show off any skill of archery or swordsmanship in the field but I can provide first aid to the wounded. Please don’t send me to Morocco. Please don’t compel me to say farewell to life even before my death.”

For a while Badr bin Mughira kept staring at this model of selflessness and loyalty. Suddenly a little smile appeared on his squeezed lips but he turned his face around and started to stroll slowly in the room with his head bowed down. After taking two or three rounds, he stopped close to Rabia. Rabia was witnessing the result of her destiny on his face. Her heart was throbbing.

Badr said, “Rabia! I wanted to give you a chance to review your decision. This was my duty and even after that if you have decided to walk on life’s rocky pathways with me instead of velvet floors, then, I am thankful to you. If you are willing to close your eyes to the bitter reality that my life is only of a few years, months or days, then, I am willing to marry you today itself. Give me a, Rabia! Are you ready for this?”

Redness of modesty spread over Rabia’s face. She lowered her neck. She was tongue-tied but her heartbeats were giving a reply to Badr bin Mughira’s question.

After a while, Badr bin Mughira said, “Rabia! I have proposed to marry you. Please answer.”

Rabia raised her neck and looked at him. Words came and stopped at her shivering lips. Emotions of gratitude and gratefulness took the aid of lowering eyes. Badr bin Mughira was looking at those tears in her eyes that had a world of words enclosed in them. In amazement, he said, “Rabia! I am ready to apologize if I have hurt you. Rabia, you are crying.”

Rabia wiped her tears quickly and looked at him and said in a pleading tone, “Please accept my apology for these tears. After the prologue, I didn’t know that our conversation would end at this. These tears are an expression of a helpless woman’s gratitude.”

“So, you don’t have any objection in getting married to me today itself?”

She became serious and said, “You are joking.”

He said, “I don’t joke. If no incident occurs today then the last glance of the setting sun will fall upon Badr bin Mughira and Rabia bint Abu Dawood in the capacity of husband and wife.”

“But today itself? So soon?”

Badr said, “Yes, if you don’t have any objection.”

Rabia looked at Badr bin Mughira and taking quick steps, went out of the room without saying anything.

Rabia’s feet were stumbling. With the pace of her heartbeats, the speed of her motion was increasing and, at times, decreasing. Crying “Angela, Angela” she entered into her room. Angela stood in front of the window peeping outside. She turned around and looked at Rabia. According to her own understanding Rabia had brought a major piece of news for her but seeing tears in Angela’s eyes she said, “What happened, Angela? You are crying.”

Angela said in husky voice, “Don’t you know?”

Rabia was looking at her in a state of immense concern. After wiping her tears, Angela looked at her and enquired, “When are the two of us leaving?”

“Where?”

“Rabia! You don’t have to hide anything from me. He has already told me everything.”

“Who? Bashir bin Hassan?”

“Yes, he came here moments ago.”

“He must have told you that we both will be leaving for Morocco?”

“Yes.”

“But we both won’t be going to Morocco. Angela, believe me we will be staying here.”

Angela said, “There is no use fooling yourself now. This is what our fate had instore for us.”

“What reply did you give to Bashir?”

“What reply could I have given him? He came and went away after telling me that you, along with Rabia, are going to Morocco. He was very sad. Rabia, I know that this was not the voice of his heart. Before I could say anything to him, he quickly left the room. I have no complaints against him. He had made no promises with me but your Frontier Falcon had given you the message of a marriage proposal. He must have given you the reasons because of which we are being compelled to go to Morocco. I am afraid that the situation in Granada is alarming.”

Rabia said, “If I haven’t conversed with him in my dream, then, today before sunset, your sister will become his life partner. Angela! Believe me you are not going to Morocco. That decision has been cancelled.”

Angela stepped forward involuntarily, embraced Rabia and while sobbing said, “Rabia, don’t try to fool me. For God’s sake, say the truth.”

“I am not lying, Angela! Believe in what I am saying. Let me tell you everything. Sit down.”

Angela sat on a chair and Rabia sat on a chair close to her and began telling her the tale of her meeting with Badr bin Mughira.

In a spacious room on the other side of the fort, Bashir bin Hassan and other physicians and surgeons were busy in taking care of patients. Badr bin Mughira entered into this room. Bashir bin Hassan was tying a bandage around a wounded person. Getting a cue from one of his companions, Bashir turned around and looked, then, stood up after giving his bandage a last knot.

Badr said, “How long will it take you here…”

Bashir replied, “My work is almost done here.”

“I want to say something important to you.”

“If you are not in a hurry, I would like to attend to just one more patient. He won’t let anyone besides me come near him.”

“No, I’m not in a hurry. Come straight to my room once you’re done.”

After a while, Bashir entered into Badr’s room and said to him, “You appear to be quite worried. Is there some latest news from Granada?”

“No. I wanted to say something regarding Rabia and Angela.”

“I have already told Angela. Have you received any news when the ship from Morocco will reach here and where it will dock?”

“So far there is no news regarding it. It would definitely reach here within a day or two and they will probably dock in the north of Almeria in the same place they had docked last month.”

“So, I think, Rabia and Angela should leave for the shore very soon.”

“That’s the issue I wanted to discuss with you.”

“I think this matter has been decided.”

Badr bin Mughira said after thinking for a while, “Bashir! After having a discussion on this issue with Rabia, I have changed my opinion of sending her to Morocco.”

Freshness suddenly appeared on Bashir’s melancholy face and he said, “My dream came true.”

“And you will be amazed after listening to the last part of the realization of this dream.”

While smiling Bashir said, “I already know the last part of the realization of this dream.”

“Okay. Then tell me.”

“You are getting married to Rabia.”

“And when is that?”

“Today.”

“But how did you come to know all this. Angela must have told you and she must have heard it from Rabia.”

“No, Badr! Your face is like a book to me. You’re are a mystery for the whole world, not for me. Now ask me, how did I come to know all this?”

“Tell me.”

“After meeting Rabia, when you came to me in a state of concern, I knew that you have changed your decision. You confirmed my understanding after you told me that your worry was not connected to any latest development of Granada. Apart from this, if there was some military or political issue then instead of searching for me, you would have called Mansoor or a meeting of the council. Then, after that when you told me yourself that Rabia will be staying here, then, I understood that our falcon doesn’t fancy staying in his habitat alone.”

“But how did you come to know that I was getting married today itself.”

“It’s written on your face that you have taken an important decision and your important decisions are implemented immediately.”

“So, you mean to say that I am hasty?”

“No, I am praising the most important quality that I find in a soldier. The time normal birds take in thinking to take flight, within that time the Shaheen swirls around the heights of the sky and returns. When you have decided that Rabia will be staying here then there is no question of delaying the marriage for tomorrow.”

Badr said, “Okay, let’s suppose that I am getting married today.”

While laughing Bashir said, “I don’t have to suppose. I know.”

“Okay, now I want to ask the Aristotle of Andalus what his plan is.”

Bashir replied, “The obligation of apologizing to a girl and taking back my wrong decision rests upon me and this obligation is not very pleasant. Aristotle’s mind does not work in such situations.”

Badr became serious and said, “Bashir! I want your marriage too, to take place today.”

Bashir replied, “Badr! You don’t need to say that. Imagining being separated from her was nerve-racking for me. I am thankful to you that you have decided against sending them to Morocco. Had she left, despite my outwardly appearance, you would have felt that your friend has lost a lot from his wealth of life. Despite my empty laughter you would have felt I am hiding something from you.”

Badr said, “Bashir! Had I come to know that like Angela, you too are fond of her I wouldn’t even have raised the issue of sending them to Morocco. In the morning when I said that now it would be better to send them to Morocco then your face was telling me that you’re not concerned even a bit by my decision.”

Basher replied, “At that time, I was not concerned about my issue. I had a realization for those compulsions that compelled a mujahid like Badr bin Mughira to say farewell to his dearest wishes. I was witnessing that that mujahid whose sword is providing refuge to its nation is bidding farewell to that girl that was going to become his life partner. You were standing in front of me like a rock. Your greatness was overwhelming me. For the sake of cutting the chains of the nation, you were breaking all the bonds of life and so how could a friend of yours say that someone has tied him to their hem with the golden strings of love? I felt sorry for Rabia too. I knew instead of being alive in Morocco she would prefer to die with you.”

Badr said, “Bashir! This is the first decision of my life that I have been compelled to change. I couldn’t break Rabia’s heart. I have apprised her of all the dangers of the future. Instead of the shore she has chosen the whirlpools with me. Now, only God knows whether this decision is right or wrong. For my part, I would like to console you that there would be no alteration in my objectives. For the enemy, there won’t be any difference in the swiftness of my sword. I was afraid that you might ridicule me for changing my decision so soon regarding Rabia but I am indebted to you. Now go to Angela and console her.”

In the evening, the sound of drums was resonating in the valley of the falcons from one end of the border to the other. The couples, Badr bin Mughira and Rabia, Bashir bin Hassan and Angela were married.

# The Last Defender of Al-Hamra

The siege of Granada had entered into its seventh month. The condition of the city was deteriorating. The people were sick and tired of starvation. The elders of Granada were gathered in a spacious room of Al-Hamra. The Lion of Granada, Musa bin Abi Ghassan, was looking at Abu Abdullah and his courtiers with wrath-filled glances.

Ferdinand’s emissary of peace entered into the room. He came in front of the throne, bowed, offered his salutations and then stood respectfully after taking a few steps backwards. He had Ferdinand’s letter in his right hand. Seeing Abu Abdullah and the attendees of the court focused on him, he opened the letter and began reading:

“One more time, Emperor Ferdinand the Great would like to advise the King of Granada Abu Abdullah not to add to the difficulties of his subjects by prolonging this fruitless war. By now, the King of Granada must have been convinced that the army of Castile will not return until Granada is conquered. There is no chance that the Sultans of Africa, who are involved in civil wars themselves, will send an army for the aid of the people of Granada. Ferdinand the Great is convinced that his might in sufficient to defeat the strength of the people of Granada and their supporters, the tribes of the mountains. Despite this, the King and Queen would like to extend their hand of conciliation toward Abu Abdullah and his subjects. If Abu Abdullah does not intend to further increase the plight of his subjects then it is important that he lay down his arms immediately and send his emissary to the court of the King to finalize the conditions of a treaty. The King assures that his treatment will be extremely benevolent. In any other scenario, the responsibility of an exemplary destruction of Granada will rest on King Abu Abdullah.”

The attendees of the court were silently looking at Abu Abdullah, Abul Qasim and Musa. The emissary rolled up the letter and presented it to Abu Abdullah. Abu Abdullah looked at his right and left towards his Prime Minister and the Commander-in-Chief.

Looking at the emissary, Abul Qasim Abdulmalik said, “You will have our reply by tomorrow.”

The emissary left the room after bowing and offering his salutations to the King. Two guards waiting at the door went along with him and ushered him towards the Royal Guesthouse.

After opening and having a look at the letter, Abu Abdullah turned his attention towards Musa and said in a gloomy tone, “Musa! What is your opinion?”

Musa stood up and after taking a look at the attendees of the court for a moment, said,

"We were told that Ferdinand’s emissary is coming with a message of peace but the first condition for a compromise that he has sent is to lay down the arms. In my opinion we won’t have much say in the other conditions after we have complied with the first one. The interpretation of this letter is that we should first bend down on our knees in front of Ferdinand’s might and then be at his mercy. Abul Qasim Abdulmalik had told us that Ferdinand is willing to do an honorable compromise with us, therefore, we should give up the idea of fighting a decisive battle in the field. You did not listen to me. You wanted to be in a state of self-deception and today you are witnessing its consequences. Great Sultan, Prime Minister and elders of the nation! You all know my opinion. Swords have always scrapped the decisions of the pen. Ferdinand thinks that Granada’s corpse has been lowered into the grave and now all that needs to be done is to pour sand over it. The message his emissary has brought to you is that if you are ready to be buried in the grave then your graveyard will be made according to your wishes. Once you’re ready to strangle yourself with your own hands then your corpse won’t be dishonored.

Great Sultan! If you ask me the reply to Ferdinand’s letter then send him a sword on behalf of the people of Granada. Writings of honorable agreements are not written with the pen, but with the tip of the sword."

Musa sat down. Silence prevailed in the court for a while. Abu Abdullah looked at his Prime Minister and said, “Abul Qasim! Would you like to say something?”

Abul Qasim stood up and replied:

"Great Sultan! I am not Musa bin Abi Ghassan’s opponent. I respect his feelings but if he doubts my good intentions then I am ready to resign at this very moment. My crime is that I have opposed the idea of going out of the city in the open ground for a decisive battle. But Musa bin Abi Ghassan knows that my opposition was not because of cowardice. I had merely given the opinion that if the outcome of the battle was not in our favor then we would have to face dire consequences.

Musa knows the condition of the army better than me. The plight of the people is not hidden from anyone’s eyes. Certainly Musa will not blame me for the other day when the people demonstrated in front of the Al-Hamra in favor of peace and that this was a result of some conspiracy by me and after that the commanders of army and the elders of the city who opposed the idea, in front of the Sultan, of going for a decisive battle in the field were all taught by me and those people of the city who are rejoicing today at the arrival of Ferdinand’s emissary are doing so on some covert instructions by me.

Elders of Granada! If you agree with Musa’s idea that there is no other way for us but to fight till our last breath, then I am with you. The enemy will be informed about your decision."

A chief stood up and said, “In my opinion, we should be ready for a decisive battle but along with this, if there is a chance of an honorable agreement then the door of negotiations should not be closed.”

Another chief stood up and said, “Swayed by emotions, we should not ignore the harsh realities. The people of the city are dying of hunger. If this siege continues till winter then our condition will become even worse. Besides Badr bin Mughira’s handful of troops on the outside, we have no hope of aid from anyone else. Our people are sick and tired of the double trouble of starvation and war.”

A religious scholar stood up and said, “Even if we assume that we stay in the boundary or compel Ferdinand to remove the siege after going to battle in the field then who can say that the war will end and Ferdinand won’t launch a second attack after making better preparations. Until when will we keep fighting, after all? We should not also forget that the prolongation of this war is increasing the suffering of those helpless brothers of ours who are at the mercy of the Christian majority and the Christians government in the rest of Spain.”

Musa got up and said, “If today, instead of being besieged in Granada, had we been in front of the four walls of Castile, then, this wouldn’t have been the condition of our brothers in Spain. Mountains of calamities broke on their heads when the Christians had realized our insensitivity.”

A person got up and said, “Some scholars of Granada think that this ongoing, indecisive war of ours with Ferdinand is not *jihād*. A major segment of our nation is being governed by the Christians and the result of this war will only aggravate the problems for us and our brothers.”

Biting his lips in rage, Musa stood up. He said in a shivering voice:

"Our war is a war for the sake of humanity against tyranny and oppression. Our victory would be a victory for humanity and our defeat would be the defeat of humanity. I will not permit some idiot to be remembered as a scholar in this council who doesn’t consider this a *jihād*.

Citizens of Granada! Why don’t you think that we are fighting for that piece of land on which we are standing on? If this is snatched away from us, we would have nowhere to go. If Granada goes from our hands then the flame of Islam will extinguish from Andalus forever."

After this, the people of the court took part in this discussion, turn by turn. This discussion ended at midnight. Apart from Musa and a few of his companions, the decision of the rest was that as a reply to Ferdinand, Abul Qasim Abdulmalik should be sent to him and a discussion to take place on the conditions of the treaty that Abul Qasim brings back from Ferdinand. If these conditions are acceptable then it’s good otherwise ponder upon the proposal of a decisive battle.

Musa was certain that the conditions of the treaty set by Ferdinand would be so humiliating that the citizens of Granada would not accept them. Therefore, when Abul Qasim left, against Musa’s wishes, for negotiations with Ferdinand, he commanded his army to be ready for a decisive attack. He also sent instructions for Badr bin Mughira and his companions to be prepared. For three days, Abul Qasim Abdulmalik kept negotiating the conditions of the treaty with Ferdinand and meanwhile in the mosques of Granada, Musa’s spirit-elevating speeches had infused a new life into the people of the city. Due to the fervor and enthusiasm of the people, the effect of the war opposition had been suppressed to a large extent.

After three days of long meetings, the conditions of the treaty that Abul Qasim Abdulmalik was successful in finalizing with were as follows:

1. Both parties will keep the war postponed for seventy days and within this period the government of Granada will be handed over to Ferdinand based on the conditions mentioned below.
2. Both parties will release the prisoners of war.
3. The Christian government of Granada will take the responsibility of guarding the lives, properties and honor of the Muslims. The Christians will not interfere in the mosques, endowments, and the religious affairs of the Muslims. They will have complete liberty to offer prayers, fast and give the Athaan. No Christian will have the permission to enter the houses of the Muslims and their mosques. The court cases of the Muslims will be decided according their Law of Shariah and Muslim judges will be appointed for this purpose. No Christians or Jew will be allowed to decide such cases.
4. If the Muslims so desire, they will be allowed to immigrate to Africa and the Christian government will provide its own ships to them.
5. Muslims will not be compelled to change their religion. The Christians, too, who have become Muslims will not be compelled to leave Islam. Christian soldiers will not be deployed outside Muslim homes and nor will they be burdened with any new tax.
6. After leaving Granada, Sultan Abu Abdullah will have the government of Alpujarras handed over to him.
7. Within seventy days, the city of Granada, the fort of Al-Hamra and all the military equipment would be handed over to the Christians.
8. Apart from Ferdinand, the Pope of Rome will also sign this treaty and will be responsible for its implementation."

Before reading out the conditions of the treaty in the court of Abu Abdullah, Abul Qasim took an oath from the attendees that whatever is discussed in the royal court regarding these conditions would not be disclosed to the people of Granada.

Most of the nobles and the scholars present in the court thought that Ferdinand’s offer was extremely generous but Musa was using all his power of eloquence for the opposition of this agreement. The discussion took place for four days. The majority of the nobles had already expressed their opinions in favor of this agreement. Today was the last day of the discussion.

The last roar of the Lion of Granada could be heard in Al-Hamra. The attendees of the court were looking at him spellbound. Musa bin Abi Ghassan was saying:

"People of Granada! On your withered faces, I am reading the verdict of the destiny of that nation that has ruled this country for eight hundred years. I know my hue and cry won’t have any effect on you. The blood in your veins that could have been moved with words has dried up. But despite knowing that my voice would be lost in thin air one more time, after colliding with the walls of this court, I am compelled to say something to you.

Words cannot be used as an elixir of life for the dead but if there is a glimmer of life left in you then listen to me attentively. On the Day of Judgement these lifeless stones of the walls of Al-Hamra will be witness to the fact that when you were strangling yourselves with your own hands someone had asked you not to. When you were in a sleep of death someone came and awakened you after shaking you violently and when you were choosing for yourself and your nation a life of indignity then someone had shown you a path to an honorable death. Hopeless of your courage and the mercy of God, you think that you will be able to live a peaceful life after you lay your arms down in front of the enemy but you don’t know that in a life of slavery every moment will be worse than death for you. If you don’t have the shame that you will be facing those ancestors of yours on the Day of Judgement whose bones are buried in the dust of Granada then, for God’s sake, atleast think about what your coming generations will say to you. You had inherited the government from your ancestors and what are you leaving for your coming generations? Slavery, humiliation and disgrace!

If you lay down your arms then not only our sacrifices of the past few years will go to waste but all that blood will also go to waste that has been shed by the Muslims from the time of Tariq bin Ziyad until today. Today the spirits of the martyr of the nation are looking at you. Do not dishonor their blood. Even today it is my faith that we can win this war. You say that the people of Granada are tired of hunger and starvation but is it hunger that makes a coward brave and a brave coward. If you don’t lose courage then even today the people are ready to fight. We have already defeated the enemy in the battle of Loja with forty thousand mujhahideen. Can’t a hundred thousand soldiers defend Granada? So far we have taken the protection behind the four walls of Granada but now we will tie a shroud around our heads and go into the field. If we live, our liberty would be safeguarded and if we are martyred even then there won’t be a stain on our dignity. This land, where the legends of the dignity of our ancestors is engraved in every particle, will not see our humiliation. This sky, which has seen the swords of our elders for eight hundred years, will not see the chains of slavery on our feet. On the Day of Judgment our hem will be colored with the blood of martyrdom but they won’t have the blackened stains of slavery and humiliation."

An influential chief stood up and said, “Again you are being carried away by your emotions. There is no doubt about your bravery but you are ignoring the bitter realities. You know very well that no fortification can be captured by mere words.”

Musa bin Abi Ghassan thundered back and said, “Sit down. You are the one guilty of ignoring the bitter realities not me!”

But as soon as he sat down, a religious scholar stood up and said, “Musa! Suicide is not permitted in any religion. We are helpless and powerless in front of God’s will. No one can wipe what destiny has written.”

Musa’s face was glowing with rage. He said in a shivering voice:

“You consider martyrdom to be suicide compared to a life of humiliation and slavery. This is nothing new. When Tariq had burned his ships at the shores of Andalus and ordered his troops to march forward then even at that time, far-sighted people like you thought this it was suicide and when the army of Sultan Abul Hassan was advancing toward Loja, even then you thought that this move was suicide. Tariq and Abul Hassan were ordinary people like us but even in the Battle of Badr when the Leader of Humanity Mohammad (PBUH) stood with 313 diehard supporters facing a huge army of the enemy then a group among the hypocrites got overwhelmed by the size of the infidels and began saying that the flame of Islam is not yet capable of facing the winds of the infidels. I don’t know which God’s will you believe in. I only know one God. I follow only His command and only know to bow my head in front of His will. My Lord is He who had revealed the Quran to Mohammad Mustafa (PBUH). My Lord is He who saved the ark of Noah (AS) from the storm. My Lord is He who had given victory to 313 over a thousand. My Lord is He who had removed the crowns from the heads of Caesar and Chosroes and threw it at the feet of desert dwellers. This God’s Beloved Messenger (PBUH) has taught me that if a believer survives in battle he is a”Ghazi" and if he dies, he is a “Shaheed”. Believers in that God walk on the edge of the swords and do not carry the burden of the chains of slavery. The will of this God is that we go into the field with shrouds around our heads and pursue oppression, tyranny, savagery and barbarism to the limits of the world.

People of Granada! I see tears in your eyes but Granada needs your blood. The history of the dignity and freedom of nations is not written with tears but is written with blood.

You are the leaders of the nation. The nation has given you the authority to make a choice for their future. If make a mistake then the entire nation would have to bear the consequences. In the law of nature there is a margin for overlooking personal errors but collective errors are not forgiven. If you want to sink yourself then atleast don’t advise the nation to do so too. You have resources. In the time of crisis, you can leave Granada and go someplace else but don’t create a situation for the people that they are left in the middle of nowhere."

Musa sat down. Silence prevailed over the court. For a while, the attendees kept looking here and there. Finally, Abul Qasim stood up and said:

“Elders of the Nation! The verdict for the destiny of Granada lies in your hands now. On your directives, I had negotiated the terms of the treaty with the enemy, but, the choice to accept or reject the terms is yours. If you think we can continue the war in these circumstances then I will welcome your decision but if you have become disheartened then I will say that we should consider these terms of the treaty more than satisfactory. In a personal capacity, I would like to second Musa’s views but in the capacity of Prime Minister, I will await your decision. All those chiefs and scholars gathered here at this moment have the right of representing the army and the people. All I know is that if you decide to continue the war then despite the discouraging circumstances all the people will, once again, rise to the occasion but if you are in support of the treaty then expecting anything from the army and the people will be in vain. I pray to God that He guides you in making the decision.”

A Berber chief stood up and said, “Musa bin Abi Ghassan knows that we have supported him in war despite being in the most pessimistic of times but now the circumstances are such that drawing a veil over them would be in vain. Ultimately there would be two outcomes of the war. Total victory or total destruction. But in case of a peaceful treaty, the path of being safe from total destruction will be open for us.”

Another chief got up in his support. Then the religious scholars got up, one after the other, and started saying that this was the Will of God. “We cannot fight against it.”

A mufti of Granada, who had written several books on the religion of Islam, stood up and said, “There is no doubt that at the moment the Christians are our enemies but after the treaty we will get the chance to propagate Islam to them in peaceful ways and the walls of hatred that are currently built around us will collapse automatically. I can envision the day when the enemies of Islam will be its best soldiers.”

An immigrant from Cordova, who had gained a lot of influence in the past few months in the court of Granada because of his brilliance, stood up and supported these views.

This round of speeches continued till noon. The nobles and scholars had given their verdict in support of the treaty. In the end, Abul Qasim stood up and looked at Abu Abdullah. The last monarch of the unfortunate nation sat with his head bowed down. Abul Qasim said, “Great Sultan! The verdict of the leaders of the nation is that the terms of the treaty should be accepted. What is your command?”

Abu Abdullah looked at the attendees of the court with extreme helplessness. Apart from Musa, despair dripped from every face. Abu Abdullah said in a melancholy voice, “I had thought that these leaders of the nation would have changed their opinions after Musa’s speech but it seems that there is no remedy to this fire of destruction that I had scintillated with my own hands.” Abu Abdullah wanted to say something more but his voice sank and his eyes became filled with tears.

Abul Qasim looked at Musa. Horror was dripping from his eyes. Abul Qasim said, “Musa! Is there anything more you would like to say?”

In reply to this, Musa got up and after pausing for a second, said:

“For the last time I would like to say something to you. After this you won’t hear my voice. From today our paths will be different. I can support you for a death of dignity. I won’t be your companion in a life of humiliation. You think that there is a message of peace and friendship in the terms of Ferdinand’s treaty. You think that you will be able to sit peacefully after handing over your freedom to the enemy but don’t deceive yourself. These words are more temporary than the paper on which they are written. My soul shivers at the imagination of the humiliation that would become your fate in Ferdinand’s slavery. When he conquers Granada, the interpretation of the words of these benevolent conditions will change completely. You think that you will be able to sleep peacefully in Ferdinand’s guard. You think that after becoming homeless and humiliated you will be able to serve the religion of Islam? But remember! Along with Ferdinand’s government will come that rule of savagery and barbarism that the world has ever seen. That tongue that takes the name of God and The Prophet (PBUH) would be ripped away. Your mosque would be desecrated. Your homes would be looted. Your womenfolk would be publicly disgraced. You would be converted to Christianity at the tip of the sword. There won’t be spacious and luxurious palaces but dark and tiny prison cells for you. The land will see your tears and the sky will hear your moaning. I won’t witness all this. A death of liberty is easy for me while a life of slavery will be difficult for you. I will leave now and you won’t see me after this.”

Taking quick steps, Musa left. Abu Abdullah’s wife and mother stood at the gate of Dar Al-Aswad. There were tears in their eyes. On seeing them, Musa stood for a second and then continued his stride with the same pace. After a while, a large crowd of people had gathered at the gate of his palace. Musa mounted his beautiful horse and rode out of the palace. He was clad in iron from top to toe. The people moved aside after seeing him and without saying a word to anyone, he prompted his horse. After leaving the gates of the city his agile horse got lost in the clouds of dust.

To this day no one knows what ultimately happened to the Lion of Granada. Some people say that he was martyred fighting with Ferdinand’s soldiers by the banks of the River Genil and some say that after barging into the midst of Ferdinand’s army and killing several men and getting severely wounded himself, he jumped into the river.

The secrets of Al-Hamra could not remain hidden from the eyes of the people of Granada for long. The city’s youth, who considered Musa their savior, became against the nobles. Although there was such a group that existed in the army that was in support of the treaty, however, the majority was of those people who were not willing to accept a defeat without a war.

One morning when the people awakened such posters were stuck outside every mosque of Granada saying that Abu Abdullah and his nobles have made a deal of the people’s honor and liberty with the enemy. But the very next morning the peace-lovers and the people with defeated mentality stuck up posters saying that it is ungratefulness to reject Ferdinand’s benevolent terms and conditions. This was the beginning of anarchy. In a few days, this went to the extent that in every gulley, every neighborhood and every seminary the peace-lovers and the supporters of war began clashing with each other. Speeches of conflicting views began to take place in mosques and seminaries. One evening, a huge crowd of the people demonstrated intensely against Abu Abdullah and the nobles of his sultanate. A group of peace lovers tried to pacify them but the enthusiasm and fervor of the people was such that they manhandled them. After beating them up, the people took out a procession in the city and set some of the houses, belonging to those nobles and scholars who were suspected of being Ferdinand’s spies, on fire. Fearing a danger of an outbreak of a civil war, Abu Abdullah decided to handover the city to Ferdinand even before the expiry of the grace period of seventy days. Hence on the 12 Rabi Al-Awwal, 897 Hijri i.e. 1492 C.E, Granada was given under the possession of the enemy.

Abu Abdullah rode out on his horse from Al-Hamra. Behind him were fifty nobles of the city who were also on horses. Ferdinand and Queen Isabella stood out of the city with their army in formations. Abu Abdullah came off his horse as soon as he came close to the Christian King. Despite trying hard to control himself, tears flowed out of his eyes. Ferdinand got off his horse and hugged him.

While presenting the keys of Al-Hamra to him, Abu Abdullah said, “God has granted you the government of Granada. I pray that he makes you capable of being merciful, just and fair.”

Abu Abdullah turned his attention to Queen Isabella. Despite the greatness of the Queen of Al-Hamra she could not help but be moved by the sight of the helplessness of the last monarch of Granada. For a moment she was a woman. She became emotional and started looking towards her husband tearfully. Taking the cue from the Queen, Ferdinand wanted to say something to console Abu Abdullah but without pausing Abu Abdullah mounted his horse and turned its reins around. After a while he joined up with the caravan that was heading towards Andercus with his wealth and belongings. His mother and wife were also part of this caravan.

Ferdinand’s armies entered the city in the sound of victory trumpets. The King and Queen requested their respective religious leaders to install the sign of the cross on the tower of Al-Hamra with their holy hands.

Eyes of the men, women and children were glued to the tower of Al-Hamra. This city that had, for centuries, heard slogans being raised in jubilations by the mujāhidīn of Islam after their return from far-flung victories was now hearing the anthem of the enemy’s victory. So far, the flag of Islam was fluttering over the tower of Al-Hamra. The people of Granada were witnessing that star of their destiny which was going to set forever. When Granada’s crescent flag was being removed and the flag of the cross being raised in its place, Ferdinand’s soldiers were singing anthems of jubilation on one side and on the other side, the shrieking screams of the people of Granada could be heard. Blood of life was running in the veins of a victorious nation while the pulse of a conquered nation was sinking.

On reaching a peak of a mountain in Alpujarras, Abu Abdullah halted his horse. He looked at Granada for one last time and started crying bitterly.

The brave mother said scornfully, “What is the use now of crying now like a woman, over the destruction of the Sultanate, for which you did not spill your blood to defend it like a man?”

Abu Abdullah’s government did not sustain for more than a few days in limited region of Alpujarras. The Muslim separatists of this area had nothing but hatred in their hearts for him. Instead of ruling over them with the help of the Christian army he immigrated to Morocco and got employed in the army of the Sultan.

Musa bin Abi Ghassan’s reservations proved to be right. The treaty which the people of Granada thought was a message of peace and tranquility was actually a plot of deception and they were trapped in it. The sword had scrapped the writings of the pen. The victor was changing the interpretation of the terms of the treaty according to its wishes. The religious leaders of the victorious nation had given the verdict that religion of the Muslims was a hurdle in the unity of Spain. That the Muslims cannot be loyal to the government. That the people of Granada were waiting for the help of Morocco and other nations of Islam. That they were spies and that their different language, different attire and different civilization were a constant danger for the Christian government. The government could only guarantee their security if they give a proof of a change of heart and formal announcements were not enough to show a change of heart. To become peaceful citizens they would have to adopt the official religion. Not only for a peaceful life in this world but also for the sake of salvation in the hereafter it is important that they leave Islam and take refuge in the fold of Christianity.

The doors of the mosques were closing for the Muslims. They no longer had the permission of praying or giving the Athaan. Speaking Arabic publicly became an unforgiveable crime. Great seminaries of Granada that had imparted the light of knowledge to the countries of Europe for eight centuries were now officially being ordered to close down. Those libraries that were burning with the lanterns of knowledge were now being handed over to the fire. On the outskirts of Granada, the Christians had occupied the fertile lands and gardens. The Muslim merchants were being deprived of their shops. The storm of loot, murder and plunder had begun. The Jewish merchants were quite rich but to save their wealth they were giving the addresses of the homes of the rich Muslims to the looters. They would take a few gifts for the administrators of the city and draw their attention towards the Muslims for the sake of looting.

This was only the beginning!

Every new morning would bring a message of a new calamity for the Muslims in Granada and the last glances of the evening sun would see a new addition in the hopelessness and helplessness on their faces. The people of Granada were saying nonverbally to the state of their condition:

“What will happen now?”

“What will we do now?”

“What can we do now?”

# The Last Arrow in the Quiver of the Nation

In a valley of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, apart from the border army, all those leaders of the mountain tribes were present who had taken the Valley of the Falcons to be their last bastion, after the snatching away of Granada. Standing on a rock, Badr bin Mughira was making a speech in front of them:

"My dear friends and elders! And my comrades! The enemy is charging at us from all sides. To defeat us, the enemy has utilized all its might. The situation we are facing is not hidden from you. In such circumstances, I can only make one promise to you and that is that if you cannot obtain a life of dignity and freedom even then the door of a death of honor is not closed for you. If you have made me your leader, then, my message to you is that your destiny only has a life of liberty or a death of dignity. Not a life of slavery and a death of indignity.

This is the law of nature. Whoever is born in this world eventually has to die one day. If the culmination of life is death, then what difference does it make if we live for a moment or live for a century? The only question the world asks the grave of the deceased is how eminently you lived and how honorable you died. I am proud of the fact that when I see the graves of my ancestors, then, I don’t have to bow my head down in regret. History is a witness that they had never left the hem of honor to grab the hem of a life of humiliation. They never strayed away from the path of a death of dignity to knock on the door of a life of humiliation and like my ancestor, I too, would not stand that the coming generations look at my grave with scorn. On the Day of Judgment, I would like to be raised with that group which gave up its life fighting for truth and humanity. I would dislike to be raised with those people who turned their faces away from truth and fidelity for a life of humiliation for the sake of a few days and left the curse of slavery for their coming generations. A believer can give his life for the truth. He considers it a disgrace to turn his face away from the life of truth.

We are very few in numbers. Our resources are limited but turn the pages of your previous history and remember that day when group of a handful of faithfuls, with stones tied to their stomach, obliterated the might of Caesar and Kisra. Recall that day when Tariq bin Ziyad had burned his ship at the shore of Andalus and gave the message to his diehard fighters that the feet of the Muslims are for marching forward not stepping backwards.

Our war is a revolt of humanity against savagery and barbarism. This is a war of principles. Even if we die fighting, our mission will live on. In every period, humanity will raise its voice against savagery and barbarism. In every period one group or another of justice-seekers will be unsheathing their swords for the purpose of this great mission. This mission will remain as long as humanity lives and until this mission lives, we will remain alive. The historians of Andalus will not ignore the names of the torchbearers of humanity. Time cannot wipe away those writings from the face of the earth that the martyrs of a nation write with their blood.

The news coming about Granada are very tragic. Muslims are being forced, at the point of the sword, to leave Islam. Hands of tyranny, savagery and brutality are pursuing them from every direction. The lives of the Muslims are not safe in the markets and the honor of their womenfolk is not safe in their homes. Now the interpretation of the words of the treaty have changed that the people of Granada thought to be a guarantee for their honor and survival. The people who had refused to raise their swords for the sake of a correct principle are now compelled to accept the wrong decision of the enemy. Those people who had hesitated in spending their blood for the sake of their honor and dignity are now writing the last chapter of their history with tears of helplessness. They gave priority to the chains of slavery over the crown of liberty. They had thought that they would be able to gain the hundreds of rewards of life by merely carrying the simple burden of slavery but now the door of the blessings of life have been closed for them and the burden of slavery is increasing by the day. Their bones are being ground under this burden but they cannot protest. Some among them believed that they would rid themselves of these pains and tortures once they became Christians but now they are feeling that there is a huge difference between a slave Christian and a ruling Christian.

My friends! Until I am alive and until you are with me, I promise that the history of Granada will not be repeated in this valley. We will fight. We will fight until our last breath. Instead of witnessing the tears of our helplessness, the dust of Andalus would be watered with our blood."

Seven years had passed since the Christians captured Granada. Apart from a small mountainous region in the south east, the rest of Spain was under their dominance.

When the people of Granada were fighting their war of independence, the Muslims in Cordova, Seville, Toledo and the rest of Andalus thought that they were being subject to the oppression by their Christian rulers because of the war of Granada. They thought that if the Muslims of Granada lay their arms down, the Christians would not oppress them. A new era of peace and religious tolerance would begin in Spain. However, when they got the news that the people of Granada had laid their arms down they took part with the Christians in the celebration of victory. Gathering at the gates of their Christian rulers, they raised slogans of victory. Their religious leaders announced that the victory of Granada was not only a victory for the Christians but a victory for all of us. They accused Badr and his mujāhidīn, who were still fighting a war of independence from the mountains and forests, of being traitors to the country.

But in a span of seven years they found out that in the mill of oppression, Granada was such a hard rock that it was acting as a separator between the two slabs of the mill and once this rock was removed both slabs had joined each other. After removing the last rock in its path, this storm of savagery and brutality that was confined, until this period, to the boundaries of Granada was now moving in every direction in pursuit of the Muslims. Those Muslims of Andalus who could not support the people of Granada for victory, became an equal partner with them in the share of humiliation, disgrace and oppression. Hands of brutality were ripping away the hem of humanity in every town and in every city.

The Christian government made the announcement that now there were only three options for the Muslims of Spain. To leave Islam or leave the country or death. Those who accepted Christianity could not obtain an equal status with the Christians. The rulers used to treat them with scorn. They used to suspect their intentions. They used to be accused of offering the Muslim prayers in secret. And that they spoke Arabic in their homes. That they prayed for the victory of rebels of the mountain tribes. Normally, the one accused of these crimes was punished with lashes. Those Muslims who adamantly stuck to their religion were thought to deserve the worst of punishments. They would be scarred with hot iron bars. They would be pulled on wheels and burned alive at the gates of the mosques. In such circumstances, thousands of Muslims had migrated to Morocco. Convoys from the north would head towards the ports in the south. Those people who would survive the loot and plunder of the journey and reach the shore would have to offer a heavy payment to the ships in order to reach Morocco. Although in the spirit of the treaty the Christian government was responsible of delivering the Muslims, who wished to migrate from Spain, to the shore of Africa at its own expense. And personally, Ferdinand did not want the immigrants to face any harshness but like the rest of the conditions of the treaty, the officers of the government were not ready to give any importance to this condition of the treaty too. The Muslim rulers of northern Africa had dedicated all their ships to evacuate the refugees from Spain but a certain period of time was required to evacuate the thousands of Muslims.

Frustrated by the barbaric atrocities of the Christian government, the people of Granada revolted but within a few days, the government massacred thousands of Muslims within a span of a few days and quelled the revolt.

When the banners of freedom were still fluttering in the mountains and forests of the South-east, Ferdinand dispatched many mission for the suppression of Badr bin Mughira but had to face humiliation every time. The number of mujāhidīn in the Valley of the Falcons was diminishing every single day. Dejected, many of his comrades were emigrating but there was no relent in his determination and liberty.

In the third part of the night, Rabia suddenly woke up from her deep sleep. A torch was burning in her room and Badr bin Mughira, clad in armor, was standing and staring at her, standing close by.

While sitting-up, Rabia said, “When did you arrive?”

“I had just arrived and am leaving right away.”

Rabia started looking at her husband with answer-seeking glances. Badr bin Mughira said, “Rabia! God has granted us victory at the northern front. We have pushed the enemy thirty miles away but as soon as I reached here I got news from Mansoor that a legion of the enemy has attacked from the west. I am going there now. God-willing, I will be able to sleep restfully for several nights after this victory. How is Yusuf?”

Rabia replied, “Yusuf is fine now. His fever subsided day before yesterday. I can wake him up if you say so.”

“No, let him sleep. He will insist on coming along with me. How is Zubaida?”

“Zubaida is absolutely fine. For the sake of listening to stories, she just dozes off in Yusuf’s room. Where is Bashir?”

Badr bin Mughira replied, “He’s bringing the wounded ones along with him. Hopefully, he will reach here by tomorrow. This time, two hundred of our men were injured and fifty mujāhidīn were martyred in the battle while more than three thousand enemy soldiers were condemned to death.”

Rabia was looking at her husband silently. The noise of the soldiers gathered outside the fort could be heard. Suddenly, the door of the adjacent room opened and a seven-year old boy appeared wiping his eyes. He ran and embraced Badr bin Mughira.

Badr bin Mughira picked him up and hugged him and said as he kissed his forehead, “Yusuf, my son, you were awake?”

Yusuf replied, “Zubaida woke me up. You are leaving again? I will definitely come along with you.”

“No, son! You are still very small.”

“You always say that. Ask Zubaida. Just today I threw her doll in the air and struck it with an arrow. She said ‘now you have grown up. Now you can go for *jihād*.’”

“No, son! Your little hands are still not capable of handling a sword and lance. You still play with a toy bow. When you will be able to shoot an arrow with a heavy bow, I will take you along with me. At the moment you should stay with your mother.”

“But father, wouldn’t this war end by the time I grow up?”

“The war between Islam and infidelity never ends, son! This war will go on even if one Muslim is alive.”

Zubaida, whose age was six years, was listening to their conversation, standing behind the door. Finally, she reluctantly entered into the room. Badr bin Mughira put Yusuf down and hugged her. Zubaida said, “Why didn’t my dear father come?”

“Daughter! He will be here tomorrow.”

Yusuf was Badr bin Mughira’s son and Zubaida was Bashir bin Hassan’s daughter. After talking to the children for a while, Badr bin Mughira left them in the other room and they reluctantly laid down into their respective beds.

At the time of departure, Rabia and Badr stood in front of each other. The wife of the mujahid had become accustomed to bidding farewell to her husband without tears and sobs.

Badr said farewell but someone knocked the door that opened toward the verandah and cried, “Rabia! Rabia!”

Recognizing the voice, Rabia replied, “Come in, Angela!”

Angela opened the door and entered in the room and started looking at them with frightened glances.

Badr said, “Angela, Bashir will reach here tomorrow. He is bringing the injured men along with him.”

Taking a sigh of relief, Angela said, “I had woken up after hearing the noise of the soldiers downstairs. It seems that you are leaving again somewhere.”

“Yes. I am leaving for the western front. I have asked Bashir to stay here for the sake of taking care of the wounded.”

Badr bin Mughira looked at Rabia, bid her farewell and taking quick steps left the room.

After a while, Rabia and Angela were looking out of the window. The army of the mujāhidīn left the fort and had disappeared into the forest but the galloping of the horses could still be heard. The galloping subsided gradually and finally vanished in thin air. Rabia and Angela were now looking at each other instead of peeping outside.

In the adjacent room their children, Yusuf and Zubaida, also left their beds and stood in front of the window. Since the very early years up until now, the sound that their ears had heard with the utmost interest was the sound of galloping horses either leaving the fort or coming towards it.

Some rooms of the fort were filled with injured soldiers. Angela and Rabia, who had learned to dispense first aid, were helping the physicians and surgeons. They had spent the last few days in extreme discomfort. The number of injured coming from the western front was increasing by the day. Apart from this fort, another fort that was a few miles away from this one, had also been prepared to treat the injured, therefore, Bashir bin Hassan had to go there too once a day. Alarming news was being received everyday about the war. The mujāhidīn had pushed the enemy back several times but with every defeat the enemy was bringing fresh troops into the field. This was the first battle of the Frontier Falcon in which the number of the martyrs had reached to around one thousand.

One day, early in the morning, a messenger coming from the battlefront and gave the good news to Bashir bin Hassan that the mujhahideen are pursuing Ferdinand’s armies after giving them a defeat. Drums of victory were played in the fort. The ears of the people living in nearby settlements and military checkposts were familiar with the meaning of this beat and in reply to this they too began playing the drums in their respective areas. Within moments, the sound of drums could be heard in the Valley of the Falcons, from one end to the other. In every settlement, the slogan of “Allahu Akbar” was on the tongue of every child, elderly and woman. Those people who were apprehensive about the outcome of the battle after hearing the news of the daily increase in the number of the martyrs and injured, were now offering tears of gratitude to the Supreme Lord.

Some of the injured came out of their rooms as soon as they heard the news of the victory and those injured who weren’t able to walk got up and sat down. The blood of life was running on the withered faces. Frightened glances were now being raised towards the sky with pride and arrogance. The guards of the fort were embracing the injured mujāhidīn. Standing in the gallery of the upper story, Rabia and Angela, along with their minor children, were listening to the enthusiastic slogans of the mujāhidīn.

After a while the people from nearby settlements were heading towards this fort to get the details of the victory. The crowd of these people stayed until the evening. The people of the settlement kept waiting for their revered leader for a long time but by nightfall when there was no news of Badr bin Mughira’s arrival, they started heading towards their homes.

After Isha prayers as Bashir bin Hassan was heading towards the room of the injured people after leaving the mosque, he heard the sound of galloping of a few horses outside the fort. Bashir stopped and started looking towards the gate of the fort. The guard opened the gate and four horsemen entered inside. One of the horsemen stopped and addressed the guard, “Where is Bashir bin Hassan?”

Recognizing the voice of the horseman, Bashir bin Hassan stepped forward and said, “Abu Mohsin! I am over here.”

Abu Mohsin said, “I have come to take you along. Please get ready quickly. Badr is injured.”

Bashir worriedly enquired, “Badr is injured? Where is he?”

“He had fallen unconscious at a distance of about eight miles from here. That is why we could not bring him here. He is in the settlement of the Berbers, near the bridge of the river.”

“I will be right back.” Saying this Bashir ran to fetch his bag of medicines and Abu Mohsin asked the soldiers who were gathering around him to put reins on fresh horses.

Badr bin Mughira was lying on a bed in the house of a chief of the settlement. While lying on the bed he had fainted three times. Some of Mansour bin Ahmed’s men were standing close to his bed. Two of them were also the physicians who had come with Badr from the battlefield.

The ones who were stopped from entering the room were in the courtyard, weeping and praying for their revered leader.

There were seven wounds on Badr bin Mughira’s body. Even in this injured state he had pursued the fleeing enemy for several miles and had lost a lot of blood.

The people were very anxiously waiting for Bashir bin Hassan. Badr bin Mughira asked for water after gaining consciousness for the fourth time. Mansoor personally supported him with his hand and assisted him in drinking water. After drinking a few drops of water, Badr said in a feeble voice, “Recite the Quran to me.”

Someone with a beautiful voice started the recitation of the Quran Kareem. Being touch by it, the mujahid closed his eyes. A physician stepped forward and tried to feel his pulse but Badr bin Mughira said while smiling, “I am not unconscious now. This sound wakes me up. It doesn’t make me go to sleep.”

Galloping of horses could be heard from a distance and after a while Bashir bin Hassan entered into the room, walking briskly. The people moved here and there. Cheerfulness suddenly appeared on Badr’s withered face as soon as he saw Bashir. Bashir stepped forward and placed his hand on the pulse.

Badr welcomed his physician with a slight smile and after looking towards the door for a while, his searching glances became focused on Bashir’s face.

Comprehending what he meant, Bashir said, “They are coming with Abu Mohsin. They will reach here shortly.”

Badr closed his eyes. Apart from Mansoor and two physicians, Bashir asked the rest to leave the room. When they had left, he turned his attention to the physicians and said, “He is fainting again. It seems that you delayed in stopping the bleeding.”

One of the physicians replied, “Even after being injured he had pursued the enemy for a long distance. Therefore, we could not give him first aid on time.”

Bashir removed a bottle from his bag and looked at Mansoor after pouring out the medicine in a small cup. Mansoor raised Badr’s head with his hands. While groaning, Badr opened his eyes. Placing the cup of medicine near his mouth, Bashir said, “Please drink it.”

Badr closed his eyes after drinking the medicine. Mansoor gently placed his head on the pillow. On Bashir’s cue, a physician placed the candle-stand on Badr’s bedside. After taking a close look at Badr’s face, Bashir said, “He has been injured with some poisoned weapon. I would like to take a look at all the wounds.”

Bashir bin Hassan’s comrades were now opening the bandages of one wound after the other while he was busy in placing fresh swabs over each wound and tying them up with new bandages. He had still not finished doing this when he heard the sound of galloping horses outside. Bashir looked at Mansoor and said, “Maybe Abu Mohsin has arrived with Rabia and Angela. Go out and ask them to wait in the other room. I will call them in after a little while.”

Mansoor went out.

Rabia and Angela were standing in the other room of the house. The women and girls of the settlement were gathered around them. Everyone had tears in their eyes and prayers on their lips.

After a while, the door of the other room opened and while peeping inside, Bashir gestured with his hand to Rabia and Angela and they went into the other room. Bashir closed the door again. Now, apart from Bashir, Rabia and Angela, there was no one else in Badr bin Mughira’ room. The three of them were standing around the bed.

Placing his hand on Badr’s pulse, Bashir said, “I had made him unconscious to put the bandages on his wounds. Now I have already given him the medicine to make him conscious and its effect is taking place.”

Rabia was looking at her husband silently. That sense that is tied to the heart had already informed her of her fate. Despite taking the support of hopes, her heart was sinking.

Badr opened his eyes after groaning a few times and after looking at Rabia and Angela, he said, “Yusuf and Zubaida did not come?”

Rabia said, “I didn’t think it was appropriate to bring them here at this time. May God give you health. They will be here in the morning.”

Bashir was pouring out a medicine in a small cup from another bottle he had taken out of his bag. Badr said in a feeble voice, “Bashir! There is no need for this now. My destination has arrived.”

Bashir said, “You will be fine, God-willing. Here, have it.”

“I know my physician is very stubborn.” Saying this Badr opened his mouth while lying down. After making him drink the medicine, he gestured with his hand to Angela and both of them left to the other room.

On Badr bin Mughira’s cue, Rabia sat beside him. Taking her hand into his, Badr said, “Rabia! I had seen you smile in front of the stack of fire. But today you are sad. I did not do anything that was below the dignity of your husband. I did not take any wound on my back. You won’t have to be ashamed because of me on the Day of Judgment.”

A voice drenched in pain came out of Rabia’s mouth, “My master! Don’t say that. I am proud of you.” Saying these words, the tears that she was fighting back for so long, eventually flowed over.

Badr said, “I have explained a few things about your future to Mansoor. He will take you to Morocco. The enemy will not sit idle for long after this defeat. They might attack with all their strength after the winters are over. In such circumstances, maybe the mujāhidīn would have to push back and fight a guerrilla war in the difficult terrain of the mountains. In such a war, protecting the women and children becomes quite an issue. Therefore, I have asked Mansoor to take all the women and children to Morocco.”

Rabia said, “No, I will not immigrate. I am sure God will cure you but if God does not desire this then the thorns of this land where your blood has flowed is dearer to me than the flowers of Morocco.”

While groaning, Badr closed his eyes for a while and looked at Rabia and said, "“Rabia! It was for a purpose that I had asked my comrades to sacrifice but after me I realize that the biggest issue for my comrades will be the protection of my wife and son. Instead of fighting in the mountains and forests they will give up their lives in front of the door of my house. They will do that even if you ask them not to but once they are satisfied with your safety, they will be able to continue this war, with total concentration, for the purpose of which I had raised the sword. If you want, you can even do a lot for them once you reach Morocco. To evacuate the women and children from here we need as many ships as they can send from Morocco. Apart from this, you will be able to incline the people of Morocco to help the refugee women and children. I am sure the emirs and Sultans of Morocco will readily answer your call. Rabia, even if you won’t be able to send some army from there for their assistance even then it will be enough from your side if you can take the orphans and wives of those friends of mine, who have been martyred in the past battles, along with you to some safe place. Do their upbringing. Make these orphaned children capable enough so that they grow up and are able to do *jihād*. It is possible that a Tariq or Abdul Rahman would come out of them.”

Rabia said, “I will obey your orders.”

“This is my wish not an order.”

“You wish will be fulfilled.”

“Make Yusuf capable enough so that he can make his ancestors proud.”

Rabia said tearfully, “Yusuf won’t put a stain on your name but…” Badr asked, “But what?”

“Yusuf needs the shade of his father for a few years. I’m sure that God won’t deprive him of your shade. You will be healthy. You will live. The nation needs you.” Rabia was crying terribly.

Bashir bin Hassan and Angela entered into the room. Wiping her tears Rabia stood up and said, “Please forgive me.” Badr closed his eyes after a dejected smile.

Badr fainted several times until morning. Thousands of people from around the vicinity of the settlement were gathered around this house. Yusuf and Zubaida also arrived with the caravan of the soldiers.

A little after sunrise, Badr bin Mughira closed his eyes after having a last look at his well-wishers and said in a feeble voice, “Mansoor, I handover my unfinished work to you. Keep the attention of the enemy diverted towards you until the Muslims in the rest of country do not reach Morocco. If you lay your arms down the enemy will feel secure from all sides and then become busy in finishing the Muslims will all its might. Bashir! I handover you the job of finding a refuge in Morocco for the orphans and widows from this place. You will also be needed over here but that work is very important. Abu Mohsin, I am sure in your friendship, Mansoor will not feel that he has been left all alone after me. My time has arrived. I can see my destination. We belong to Allah and to Him is our return.”

After repeating the last words a few times, Badr bin Mughira recited the Kalima-e-Tayyiba several times. His voice started becoming weaker till a point where his lips were moving but his voice could not be heard. The well-wishers thought that he was sleeping. The physicians thought that he had fainted.

Bashir bin Hassan placed his hands on Badr’s pulse for the last time. Then Badr opened his eyes and took a look and then bowed his head after saying, “We belong to Allah and to Him is our return.”

After two months some boats which had women and children riding on them was heading from the shore of Andalus to Morocco. Angela, Rabia, Zubaida and Yusuf were with Bashir bin Hassan on one of the boats.

The sun was appearing from the eastern horizon. This was that very sun that had witnessed the first ship of the Conquerors of Islam at the shores of Andalus. This is that very sun had seen, with wonder and amazement, the spectacular rise of Muslim Andalus for close to eight hundred years. This was that very sky on whose wide chest the legends of prestige and majesty of the successors of Tariq and Abdul Rahman were carved. This was that very sea whose waves served as a whip for mujhadeen’s passion of the sea but today this sea, this sky and this sun were seeing tears of helplessness in the eyes of this nation’s daughters and children whose martyrs had granted charm and gracefulness to the specks of the dusty earth of Andalus with the splashes of their blood. These silent spectators of the ups and downs of the ages were grabbing the hem of time and enquiring, “Is this that very nation whose blood glimmers from the red stones of Al-Hamra?”

Standing at a corner of the boat, Rabia was having a last glimpse of the shore of Andalus. Curtains of tears were falling in front of her eyes.

Yusuf stepped forward and said, “Mother! Zubaida says that Uncle Bashir will leave us in Morocco and return.”

“Yes, son!” Rabia replied without looking at him.

After pondering for a while, Yusuf replied, “Mother dear! I will also return back with him.”

Placing her hand over her son’s head, Rabia said, “No, son! You are still very little. When you grow up, I won’t forbid you from going.”

“Mother! I will grow up really fast. I will become a navigator. You used to say that everyone in Morocco is a Muslim. I will make all of them board a ship and take them to Andalus and we will take the enemies out of our country. Mother! You say that when Tariq came here he did not have many men with him despite that they were victorious. When one Muslim can fight ten infidels then why have thousands of Muslims from Granada left this country and gone. You say that thousands of Muslims from Cordova, Seville and other cities have also gone to Morocco. Why didn’t they get together and fight?”

“Son! Tariq’s companions had faith but the faith of these people is weak. They took death to be a game and these people are afraid of death. In those times, even an ordinary Muslim would not betray his nation and now even the affluent people are traitors.”

A little away from Rabia, Zubaida was saying to Angela, “Mother! Yusuf says that he wants to be a captain of a ship and take a large army from Morocco to Andalus.”

“Yes, my daughter. What Yusuf says is correct.”

“Then, I will also go with him, mother dear.”

“What will you do if you go along with him?”

“I will provide first aid to the wounded. Mother dear! I will also learn to shoot an arrow.”

“Okay, my daughter.”

On the other side of the boat, the Moroccan captain of this fleet was having a conversation with Bashir bin Hassan. After asking a few questions regarding Badr bin Mughira’s latest victory and martyrdom, the captain asked, “Until when will you continue this war?”

Bashir bin Hassan replied, “Until blood keeps running in our veins, the desire for martyrdom will remain in our hearts.”

The captain said, “I respect your feelings but don’t you think that your war will increase the problems for the remainder of the Muslims in Andalus.”

“No, on the contrary we think that when our swords will go back in the scabbards, the hands of tyranny will be raised on them with more severity.”

“But what will be the outcome of the war by a handful of mujāhidīn?”

“There can only be two outcomes of a war by the mujāhidīn. Victory or martyrdom.”

“I think, in your case, there are more chances of martyrdom than of a victory.”

“Even then we won’t be at a loss. The chapter of history of the Muslims in Andalus that will be written with our blood will be different from the chapter that the people of Granada are writing with their tears of helplessness. The coming generations won’t bow their heads in shame after reading it. Our fate would not have a life of humiliation and disgrace.”

The captain said, “If nature intended our betterment then a glorious mujahid like Musa would not have had to face defeat in Granada and after him the remainder of the mujāhidīn wouldn’t have been deprived of Badr bin Mughira’s leadership.”

Bashir annoyingly said, “Who says that Musa has been unsuccessful in his mission? The people of Granada’s defeat was not Musa’s defeat. This was the defeat of the traitors and the nation-sellers who gave priority to a life of slavery and humiliation compared to a death of dignity. This was Abu Abdullah’s defeat. This was the defeat of those emirs and religious scholars who have accepted perpetual humiliation and disgrace for the sake of being alive for a few more days in this world. Musa was a true believer. He lived a life of a true believer and died a death of a true believer. If you think that nature doesn’t require our betterment, even then you are wrong. Nature has showered us with gifts for centuries for the sake of a few people. We defeated the mightiest powers of the world. Isn’t it a gift of nature that a handful of mujāhidīn in the Valley of the Falcons have been stopping the storm of savagery and barbarism for years? Isn’t it a gift of nature that it gave another chance to a nation, whose social ethics and character had perished, leaders like Badr and Musa so that it comes onto the straight path? If the nation betrays even such people, then why is nature to be blamed? Even today those people are present in the nation who don’t want to be discouraged and become hopeless. These people are commanding the last entrenchment of the nation in Andalus. These people are giving a message not only to the Muslims of Andalus but to the Muslims of the world to come and join them in the war between infidelity and Islam. Until the last breath, the voices of these people will keep convulsing the Muslims of Morocco, Egypt, Turkey and other countries. These people will keep fighting with the hope that one day their brothers will wake up from their deep sleep. That someday a mujahid might come to their aid and if the world of Islam doesn’t wake up, even then, the responsibility for the total destruction of the Muslims of Andalus will not rest on these mujāhidīn, who would have written, with their blood, on the pages of world history that when the Muslims of the whole world were sleeping, then, in a corner of Andalus, some diehard people were guarding the sanctity of the Sacred Mosque.”

After pondering for a while, the captain said, “Can I join your group?”

Bashir bin Hassan replied, “You don’t need my permission. Seek advice from your heart.”

“I have already taken the advice from my heart.”

The mujāhidīn kept fighting for several years under the leadership of their new leader Mansoor bin Ahmed. For ages, the Valley of the Falcons kept being beautified with their blood. Several times their swords proved to be Alexander’s blow in front of the flood of savagery and barbarism. At times they would have to retreat due to the intensity of this flood and at times the waves of the storm would collide with these rocks of determination and courage and recede but the world of Islam kept sleeping. The Muslim of Morocco was happy in his desert. The Muslim of Egypt was sleeping at the banks of the Nile. The Turk had dozed off in the shades of the walls of Constantinople. The Arabs were elated in their oasis and the Muslim monarchs of India were busy in building luxurious palaces for themselves.

These people remained with their unsheathed swords for several years but no Yusuf bin Tashfeen from Morocco, no Salahuddin Al-Ayyoubi from Egypt, no Malek Shah from Turkey, no Mohammad bin Qasim from the Arabs and no Mahmood Ghaznavi from Afghanistan came to their aid. The dust of Andalus kept being watered with the blood of the martyrs while the rocks of Gibraltar kept waiting for the ships from the south and east. Until Mansoor and his comrades kept fighting the way for the Muslims to migrate remained somewhat open. Gradually, the number of mujāhidīn kept dwindling. However, they kept the war on for another three generations. This war stopped with the last drop of blood in the veins of the mujāhidīn. The sword admitted it helplessness when the hands that held it were eventually cut. Then the flood of savagery and barbarism came with its rejuvenated power and renewed intentions. For the remainder of the Muslims in Andalus, there was nothing but fire, blood, tears and sighs left for them.

What did the Muslims of Andalus go through? How many of them were of those thousands whose minor children were snatched away from them before they were expelled from the country? How many thousands of them were burned alive? How many of them were killed after being severely tortured? What was the number of women that were whipped to death?

History does give us the answers to all these questions but we will have to turn the pages of history to find the details to these painful events. We can see the image of the past in the mirror of the present. After the ruling for eight hundred years in Andalus not a single Muslim can be seen there today. The mosques of Cordova, Granada and Seville are present there even today but the tongue that gave the Athaan have been silenced forever.

The blunder of the elders of Granada did not become limited to a few people. This proved to be a collective sin of a nation. And today, the walls of Al-Hamra are proclaiming that nature does not forgive the collective sin of a nation.