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The Quirks of Life

Short Stories and Anecdotes

from imagination, heritage and a life well-lived

Dedication

To my parents, my family, and my grandchildren.

Introduction

We create through our imagination and the outcome appears acceptable to us despite its strangeness, yet we live in a reality which, if we understood it truly, would seem stranger to us than anything produced by our imagination; for the degree of our understanding is linked to our capacity for imagination.

Perhaps the most important thing that distinguishes short stories is that they appear simple, easy to understand, yet they contain profound lessons. Whether the stories derive from the realities of contemporary life, occurred in the documented past, or are inspired by myths and religions dating back thousands of years; the wisdom behind them remains true and valid through all eras and all times.

Visions and Consolation

Paradise

He sat in a comfortable chair, in front of him a wooden table with a cement base, sitting on neatly trimmed green grass. A handsome young man appeared, asked how he could serve him, and took his order. "A cup of coffee, no sugar, but with a spoonful of chocolate powder... please." The young man smiled, nodded in obedience, and left. He contemplated the flow of the river below and watched lovers on the bridge exchanging kisses.

His mind wandered, and perhaps he drifted off for a few seconds, dreaming of beautiful things, then awoke to the young man's soft footsteps, circling and offering him what he had requested, asking if he wanted anything else. He thanked him with a nod of his head and noticed the passage of a flight of houris gliding between his seat and the course of the river. He observed them, followed them with his eyes... and thought he was asleep. He was unwilling to wake up, for he thought he was dreaming of reaching Paradise and residing there.

Approaching the Appointed Time

Everyone who saw him crying with such intensity and emotion, covering his face and wiping his tears, was surprised. They knew him for his sternness, objectivity, and lack of religious faith. They did not know what was going through his mind as he sat before the shrouded body of his friend, awaiting its transfer from the house to the hearse to be taken to the cemetery. The deceased was the last of his older friends, and now he himself was becoming elderly, nearing seventy years old. His good health did not inspire much reassurance as the days passed by in succession.

During the burial, he saw many relatives, some of them his friend's children, and his grandchildren too, and others whom he had seen in their early childhood, and who were now over fifty, and some of them had children who were married and had children in their turn.

In his youth, he wished to live to be fifty. Now, he finds himself thinking and planning for after his death. He visits cemeteries searching for suitable plots to decide where he will be buried, how, and whether or not to make recommendations. He has not yet decided whether to leave the arrangements to the living, or to instruct them not to pray over him and to shroud him in elegant clothes instead of leaving him naked..

The Mermaid

He woke up at dawn feeling short of breath. As he slipped out of his host's house, it occurred to him that the reason might be the fatigue of the journey from his mountain city to the coast, and he also considered some of his ailments, which could all induce similar effects. He quickly forgot his health and moved on to think about his first encounter with the sea. He knew he had to turn west, and he inferred the direction from the coldest breezes. He didn't know how far it was to the shoreline, and he didn't consider the distance or hope for any vehicle or cart to catch up with him to carry him the rest of the way.

He was amazed by the sight when his eyes collided with all this vast blue: He continued his journey in a daze, walking, running, and jumping. He turned right before he reached the waves. He shook his head, looked back and rubbed his eyes: A naked female was emerging from the water; he stopped so as not to draw attention to himself.

"Is she human? It is not likely, what would a human be doing at dawn, naked on the beach, and how can she withstand the relative cold? It might be a mermaid, he answered himself, not yet letting his frozen body stop moving. It occurred to him that he had died in his host's house at dawn and that he was now going through a post-death phase, and he remembered that he had not spoken to or seen anyone that morning.

He took hold of his courage and moved towards her, and his fear increased as he saw that she was not disturbed as he came nearer. "Good morning", he said and asked about the water.

"So good... Do you want to try? He replied that he had not brought his swimsuit; she laughed and pointed to her naked body. He undressed like her and they went down to the sea together. He did not tell her that he could not swim: He dived in and continued beside her on his way to heaven.

Happiness

"Happiness is based on contentment? Not only." He asked and answered himself. Think that a happy day is one free from troubles, and a happy time is one where sadness does not reach beyond a certain limit. When you contemplate a half-full glass, and you see this half always; you have recognized happiness.

He asked his friend: "Can an abundance of money cause unhappiness like its scarcity?"

"This is completely true, but I prefer financial hardship to poverty"... They laughed at this answer that was not related to the question.

"Are you considered happy if you look for a suitable place for your grave while you are in perfect health and status?"

"The happy are the beloved of God..." he answered, then paused as he read his friend's features and continued: "A philosopher may do so, as well as an atheist who is not afraid of death, or the hereafter... The pharaohs and others have done the same in preparation for after their death".

The Pursuit of the Abyss

If every human being adhered to applying the positive elements of their creed; the human march towards the abyss would not have continued. The educated, developed, and wealthy contribute to the destruction of the planet more than the ignorant, poor, and backward, and both, and those in between, fail to apply their supposed moral principles, as if they are in agreement to continue the march towards suicide.

The more science, development, wealth, ignorance, and poverty increase, the faster the danger to humanity increases, and the end approaches... He pondered this and felt loneliness enveloping him and despair seeking to stop his thoughts and contemplations.

How do they all swallow what they know is a plague? What is the use of having a brain and thinking if it does not lead to planning?

How do these humans from all spectrums, classes, and nationalities accept their contradictory lives between logic and fantasy, the assumed and the impossible?

How do they live in a technologically advanced world and deal with all its implements, while retaining a superstitious, mythical, and metaphysical mindset that has been prevalent for thousands of years?

He concluded that the world of the unseen reassures the world of reality.

The Departure

The one who departed had in mind that the majority of the faces he saw at his friend's wake were the same ones he had seen years ago at the friend's wedding... He noticed the conversations, apart from the usual condolence phrases when arriving and leaving; he found them to be similar, revolving around anything and

everything apart from the deceased, his memories, and his deeds... He had truly left life.

In general, his friend was not one of those who believed in the saying: Take what you want and leave me life, take the adornments of life and leave me without them... Rather, he had retired from life a long time ago and was ready for Azrael at any moment, while in full health; so, Azrael came to him in his sleep. and they left with no regrets for what they left behind.

Purity of the Heart

Contemplate the question of whether there are people of pure hearts and deeds... Many, especially among the devout and pious, believe they possess pure hearts and that their actions are righteous.

He said: From a purely religious perspective; the pure-hearted should not engage in deceit towards anyone, nor in envy towards others for the goodness and health God has given them, and this is something no human can fulfill.

He tried to examine his heart but found it impure; he had desired many forbidden things, but his actions overall were good, righteous, and beneficial, if not exactly pure... He affirmed to himself that if there is indeed a paradise, he would end up in one of the middle layers.

The Inferno

His face reflected confusion, disorientation, helplessness, and perhaps despair. He reached his office door to leave and saw young men evacuating the contents of the adjacent office; he turned back inside and looked at the table and its contents, the furniture, and the files: Everything in front of him is important, but he doesn't know what to save and what to carry down the stairs or whether he should risk the rest of his life and ride in the elevator with the young men. The time available to escape with his life is mere minutes before the tower collapses with everyone inside it and those around it, and he doesn't know how much time has passed, and how much is left.

"Come, sir, come with us.

He looked at the source of the voice at the elevator door and turned again to survey the contents of his life's work and investment. He would leave empty-handed, all things are important, and he won't prefer some over others, so what could he actually carry?

"Come on, sir, the strike is not headed for this building, but for the adjacent one, and we're evacuating just in case."

His facial features changed, and life surged through him as a result of this lie from the young man who knew perfectly well that time was running out, and the old man must be saved and given a few seconds to move away from the tower before the American bomb, guided by the Chosen of God, hit.

In the elevator, he felt as if he was being carried on the straight path, would he go to paradise or to hell?

The Bride

He was salvaging the remains of his goods from his shop that had been hit by an American bomb, and when he pulled out the red evening gown, he remembered that beautiful girl and her handsome fiancé: He stopped the salvage operation.

They had visited him before the holiday, looking for economical wedding preparations and things for building their nest. He said to himself aloud: "She was skilled at haggling, and showed immense joy when she managed to halve the price I asked her for the dress."

He remembered her well as he dusted off the dress; she had said to her fiancé: We will struggle together to build our small home at minimal cost, and if the occupation bombs it, we won't be too sad.

She was looking at their future, the possibility of bombing, and the certainty of marriage and happiness on the third day of the Eid holiday.

"She didn't come to collect the dress she had reserved"... the merchant said to those who stopped to listen, and added: "I asked about her, and I wished she had survived the brutal bombing as her dress did, but it seems the dress was luckier, as the crazy bombing didn't leave her even one night to enjoy joy and love".

He addressed her: "This dress is no longer for sale, but it will be displayed for all to remember you by."

Death

"Please, wait for a while." the passport officer said to him.

He was familiar with the routine in this brother country; he had to wait until they finished with the rest of the travelers from all nationalities, then one of them would accompany him to collect his belongings and deposit him in detention until the number of passengers for the convoy of buses was complete. A convoy that would carry them under guard and repeated inspection on the way to the borders of their country, a place sorely tried by all imaginable harm.

Later, friends learned of his safe return from his visit to his son in Europe... they were surprised by his failure to make an appearance at his home for days; so, they decided to visit him, thinking he was ill.

"I'm not ill"... he said to them and continued: "But you and I are dead, and here we are in hell".

They opened their mouths, then asked for forgiveness from God and urged him to do the same.

"If you don't get to see paradise with your own eyes as I did, according to the divine specifications, you can't know, of course, that you are dead and have been judged and are now dwelling in the fire as punishment for what you did, and what your fathers did, and everyone who left their country out of fear or coercion".

The Brotherhood Member

They had heard about each other through a mutual friend, one of them was in his sixties and the other in his eighties, but they were originally from two adjacent villages, and therefore the octogenarian knew the people and most of the relatives of the sexagenarian.

"May God prolong your life, may God have mercy on the Hajjah,"(female of Hajj, i.e. a person who has been on pilgrimage to Mecca) said the sexagenarian, offering condolences after their first meeting in the mourning tent, and approached him, adding in a low voice: "Are you planning to find another one, or is all the ammo gone?"

"There are two or three rounds left, but we made a pact a long time ago to be faithful," came the answer amidst faint laughter.

At their second meeting under an olive tree, the octogenarian began asking about their mutual acquaintances, and the sexagenarian replied; above ground with the minority, or underground with the majority, with added prayers for mercy and some jokes about this or that.

The sexagenarian was a secularist, practically an atheist, while the octogenarian was a local leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, but the bond between them was above ideological considerations, and neither of them tried to influence the other.

At their third meeting, the sexagenarian noticed that his companion was having trouble seeing, then heard the answer to the silent question: "I went to the ophthalmologist; he was analyzing and explaining. I told him I understood, and said 'another blind eye won't make any difference'"

"A one-eyed person is better than a blind one," said the sexagenarian; they laughed and moved on to the tragicomic tales of history.

Fog

They found themselves in a small city, probably in Northern Europe; he didn't know the language, but most of the people, when asked for directions in English, answered in English.

He thought he had been to the city before; he met a group of friends of his own nationality and thought he saw an advertisement for a movie; he took the friends to the theater or they took him there on the public bus. When they got off, he discovered that the movie was romantic and not what he had hoped for, and his wife had been left behind in the city, so, he decided to leave them and run back after telling them to wait for him.

He found her in a clothing outlet; he got a little angry and told her to come with him quickly to where the friends were waiting... she hesitated and slowed down; he got angry and told her it was the end of everything and left her.

He returned running the way he came, remembering that he didn't know where the cinema was or its name... he walked a bit, but time was passing quickly, he asked some people about the location of any nearby cinema; a young man mentioned the name and wrote it down for him on a piece of paper due to the difficulty of pronunciation... he asked others how to get there; one of them directed him to the fastest way, which was to take a taxi that would arrive immediately if he pressed a green button on the wall... he pressed the button, and small taxis kept appearing, seemingly cut in half, but they were occupied with passengers.

A black taxi stopped, driven by a black woman with a white passenger, calling out the name of the place she was heading to... the black woman looked at the address on the paper but spoke something he didn't understand, though he understood her refusal and that of her white passenger to take him with them.

All the while, he was angry and confused, thinking about how he would reach his friends, and remembering that he didn't have their phone numbers, and his phone didn't work in this city, and his greatest anger was towards his wife and his quick temper and faster decision...

He woke up after dawn from the dream to find her beside him, and for a moment, he thought of shaking her, then remembered what was written on the leaflet that came with his new medication about possible side effects: nightmares, and seeing and hearing things that aren't real.

Degrees of Poverty

Is dying of hunger the worst degree of poverty? Perhaps, but there are many and varied degrees.

While listening to the story of a poor scholar who lived during his studies in the university city for three days on water, and three days on what his family saved for him from their scarce food... he remembered from his childhood how the Bedouin children, who lived along his way to school, would snatch his sandwiches filled with red pepper and oil, and when he started carrying plain bread, the snatching continued, and they would eat it with their barley and bran bread...

The Barren Woman

She was a simple-minded woman, and her husband was simpler than her by degrees. They had no children so, the gossip and taunts increased. They moved from the village atmosphere and settled in the city, but visits didn't stop, and whenever they met an acquaintance and did him any favor, he would wish them a child from God.

The reminders came more than once daily, and she thought some people were whispering to her husband to remarry for the sake of having children; so, she decided to continuously waste their monthly income to deprive him of an opportunity he wasn't considering in the first place.

She visited doctors and charlatans, and encouraged her husband buy a car to increase expenses. When they hit upon the idea of adopting a little girl, they didn't succeed in raising her culturally and academically so she grew up almost illiterate and nihilistic, and, after the death of her two simple-minded benefactors, she married a poor man like herself, and they ended up in the worst possible situation.

The Exchange of Bites

It is narrated that a severe drought persisted for years, and a woman had a morsel of bread in her mouth. Before she could chew it, she heard a beggar saying: "Hunger, O servants of God!"

She hesitated but took the morsel out of her mouth and gave it to the beggar.

Hours passed, and she suddenly heard the cry of her little child who had gone out to gather firewood, as a wolf snatched him. The mother followed the wolf and her child until she was exhausted. Before she gave up, an angel descended, took the boy out of the wolf's mouth, and pushed him towards his mother.

"O servant of God," he said, "are you satisfied with a bite for a bite?"

She said: "Yes, I am satisfied, but the child and I are still hungry, and I am tired now. Why didn't you bring a reward of endless food, or at least enough for a month?"

He ignored her and flew away; for he felt she had many more questions.

The Sparrow

The sparrow resisted his thirst and waited until the boy moved away from the spring so he wouldn't throw a stone at him. He fluttered and landed to drink; when an old, dignified-looking man with a beard arrived at the spring... The sparrow felt safe and continued drinking, when a stone hit his eye and blinded it.

He went to the king demanding justice, so the king asked him: "Do you want us to remove his eye in return for blinding yours?"

"No," the sparrow said, and continued: "It is enough to shave his beard so others won't be deceived by his appearance."

Contemplations

Imaginings

He was silent, absorbed in himself; then he smiled for no apparent reason; I said to myself, here she is, visiting him again, and maybe this time she'll comply.

She haunted him when he went to bed, and the imaginings recurred, but his daytime pride restrained him from reaching out to her, asking for union. In the evenings, she would return; she would neither approach him, nor would she leave him.

The Fragrance of Gin

He arrived from Europe and reached his house just before the Friday prayer. He emptied his bag and placed the bottle of gin on the table as the neighborhood sheikh entered to greet him and accompany him to prayer... He tried to make excuses, but the sheikh insisted and opened the bottle with his right hand, pouring some of the content into his left palm. He wiped his face and hair with it, praising the scent... This is how his devils urged him to accompany the sheikh to the mosque and imitate him in prayer.

He hadn't been before and wouldn't go again.

The Bull's Victory

The bull stared at the mirror; the bull saw him staring back, angry at all bulls, his features showing disgust at the situation... he shook his head; the scowling bull

responded with a head shake, he butted him; he was injured and saw the blood of the other bull, which had disappeared... This is victory, the opponent has fled.

As Equal Maidens

They were three, glory be to the Creator, walking in a public street when suddenly, without stopping, they removed their jilbabs in a swift motion, revealing absolutely nothing underneath, and walked for a few seconds under the eyes and in front of the open, silent mouths, and twisted heads of frozen bodies... it seemed some didn't believe their eyes, and others thought God was showing them the houris with ample bosoms and 'equal in age'.

They walked until they reached a turn; they quickly put their jilbabs back on without stopping and continued walking around the corner... it was a social science experiment with numerous implications.

The Union of Memories

The mother went to the market and left him at home, closing the courtyard door.

She came from the window, smelling of scented soap and flowers, they talked, and she allowed some things and refused others, as they were still young and knew what was forbidden and what was allowed... those memories remained eternal for them, a measure of longing, beauty, and happiness.

Years later, after separation, they met, and before parting again, she extended her hand to bid him farewell after a family gathering... she said, pulling him up:

“You've grown up and gotten old;” he stood up straight before her, and said: “I can still carry you on my back...” and only they understood the meaning of what he was saying.

The Genie

He entered the turn leading to his house; he noticed the light was off, and darkness had descended, and he remembered and thought about that day, not far from the end of the fifties, as he readied himself to climb the sewage pipes to reach his little beloved's window and bed.

When he reached the darkest area, the most beautiful creature he had ever seen or imagined in his life appeared to him. She looked like a bride in her white dress and adornments, and he was lost in thought. When she asked him: “Will you marry me?” he came to himself, and a quick film played in his mind, canceling all possible feelings and sensations except fear; he ran until he collided with the door of his house.

He replayed what had happened between doubt and certainty, and deduced she was a genie. He regretted refusing her request and missing the opportunity, comparing the pros and cons of marrying a genie.

Cloning

He remembered the European and American cities he had lived in, or visited over decades, and how they were teeming with all races, skin colors and diverse languages... not to mention the difference in clothing on the streets, from the turban

to the European cap, hairstyles, the hijab and its variants, and on the beaches, he saw almost everything, from the burkini to something less than a bikini, everyone in harmony, considering diversity an enrichment.

What revived those memories was the monochrome coexistence in all Arab cities, towns, and villages, except for the capitals... wherever he went, he found himself replicated, and no one in the alleys and streets was different, even his repetition of the greeting in the language of the people didn't prevent their bewildered looks at his presence as a stranger in his own country outside the capital cities.

Beautiful regions and countryside devoid of any foreigner of any color or race, and without diversity, whether in summer or winter, until he began to crave visiting any European city to remind himself of the difference in type, shape, and temperament of the humans scattered on this beautiful planet.

The Tinker

"You want to solder the lid of the oil can to send it to America?"

He didn't want to clarify the fate of the oil; so, he agreed with the tinker's interpretation and decided to probe him while contemplating his shop filled with the remains of primers and kerosene heaters, and mixed colors and oils; even if he met him in the street, he would immediately guess he's a tinker.

"What do you think of America, huh?"

He poured out his anger with curses and insults on the American government.

"But they act according to their policy and want to spread democracy!" he said to the tinker to provoke him.

"America claims to spread democracy and wants to spread modernity here too, but they're in a hurry, and this needs foundations and principles and time, and probably it won't work."

He liked the tinker's response, so he asked him his opinion of Qais Saied in Tunisia, and he replied: "He's the only decent man among Arab leaders today, but the Muslim Brotherhood won't let him take a chance on change, and he has no Arab or international support."

He asked the tinker if he wanted to run for the upcoming parliamentary elections?

"They're all crooks, and despite my humble situation, thank God; I wouldn't accept any government position!!"

It seems his neighbor, who was unaware of the identity of the oil can owner, had been listening to the conversation; so, he came asking for a light for his cigarette; the tinker asked for a cigarette instead of a light, and the conversation took a different turn.

Alzheimer's

He felt his role in the house and among his family being marginalized before the disease took hold and with its onset, they thought he was malingering to take revenge on them; so, relationships deteriorated, and his mental health worsened, followed by his physical health, and they had to serve him like a child.

Alzheimer's progressed to dementia; he sometimes imagined enemies coming to assassinate him, and other times he would declare that his brother-in-law had killed his father, and even accused his seventy-year-old, almost paralyzed, wife of meeting her lover in the garden.

His family had to study his condition and its manifestations to cope with their own psychological reactions, but some of them never believed he wasn't malingering to take revenge on them.

The Heretic

He questioned things in religion that he considered illogical; so the clerics turned on him, they declared him a heretic, the legitimacy of his marriage was revoked, and he was excluded from the caravan, left alone in the desert; so he was forced, in the end, to leave the country... He was lucky; he had escaped with his life, for the time being, from one of the countries that applies three different laws, civil, military, and religious.

A Whisper

In the crowded city, he lived on the rooftops, and she lived behind the opposite balcony. She didn't hesitate to flirt with him until he responded; they agreed by sign language to meet at night, to escape surveillance, on the rooftop of the building she lived in... They talked, hugged, and before happiness developed any further, her brother appeared before them: Here, every watcher is watched... He quickly claimed that some of his papers had flown from his rooftop to theirs, but he couldn't find them; maybe they had continued falling to the ground, he rushed down to search for them, and she claimed she had come to help him.

They didn't repeat that method, and started meeting after school, in broad daylight.

Azrael's Respite

He noticed how often people wish each other a long life; and how the preferred prayer to God is for the sick to be healed and for people to live longer!! He pondered the possibility that God might answer his servants' prayers and extend their lives by an extra twenty years... Azrael would rest a lot, hospitals and nursing homes would be filled, the treasuries of countries paying pensions to the elderly would go bankrupt, food would become scarce, and prices would rise in proportion to the increase in the population of consumers who don't produce, and of course, divorce rates would skyrocket due to wives' impatience with their mothers-in-law...

He prayed to God not to listen to the people's prayers.

Merging

He caught her staring at his face and he said: You have two paths to choose from, the first is the path to heaven, and the second is the path of love and reproduction. She smiled and said, accommodating him, that God had created her for a specific purpose, and she had to fulfill it. He was sure she was intelligent, besides being beautiful, and considered that she had accepted and merged the two paths.

The Grateful

He said to the contemplative: All this is happening to nations and individuals, and it's said that your Lord is compassionate and merciful...

The answer came: “If He weren't compassionate, merciful, and forgiving, there would be mythical beasts, gnawing and trampling, and the earth and humans would suffer from unceasing volcanoes and earthquakes... my friend, if we come out safe, it's a mercy, and if we perish, it's a just reward.”

Trash

He slowed down so he wouldn't hit the empty can that had been thrown from a car in front of him. On both sides of the highway, diverse trash had accumulated - cardboard, plastic bags, empty cans, and vegetable scraps.

The sight wasn't different on the rural road he had taken earlier, but the trash there was manure and sacks full of construction and demolition debris.

He continued thinking about trash until he reached the capital; he found that the piles of trash thrown next to the containers were higher than what was inside them... a strange question occurred to him: “How can we ask those who can't even put trash in its proper place to appoint deputies, directors, presidents, and leaders to their rightful positions?!”

Thursday

She was like a butterfly, in a green school pinafore with white stripes, black hair flying, and a shiny pink backpack that seemed light and didn't hinder her jumping and running along the side of the road, swinging and swaying from side to side... joy radiating from every aspect of her and her actions.

He guessed her age to be between nine and ten. He alerted her with a light blow on the horn; she turned to him, waving her hand in greeting; he returned the greeting and added a wide smile, continuing on his way in his car.

He remembered his days leaving school every Thursday noon... It was the happiest time, running from school to the main street, searching for the peddling newspaper and magazine vendor; he would pay him his week's savings and get in return the weekly Mickey and Samir magazines, and if there was any money left, he'd ask the vendor for one of the translated Arsène Lupin detective novels.

He would forget everything around him and start reading Mickey on the way home, following up on the adventures, and finish reading all his purchases before Friday evening... that's when the hassle started, the homework he hadn't dealt with, postponing it hour after hour, and then convincing himself he'd wake up early Saturday morning to deal with it.

In the morning, he'd start preparing himself mentally and physically to receive punishment, getting hit on his hands... Having distanced himself from the little girl and retreating decades into his past, he said to himself: "The education system is still repelling minds and forcing kids to hate school."

Saturday

Thanks in part to his innate intelligence, and his mother's insistence that he focus on his studies, he finished his primary and preparatory education, and, later, his university studies.

Saturday was his weakness and fear; every day, he would pay attention to his lessons in class, and do his homework throughout the afternoon and early evening, but on Thursdays and Fridays, he wouldn't deal with anything related to school. He was amazed at the amount of homework teachers assigned to students on Thursdays, making Saturday a day of inevitable punishment by beating.

He was told that the blood of lizards and geckos on the hands would ease the pain of the beating; so, he and his peers would hunt them down on Saturday mornings and smear their hands with their blood. Those who believed the saying would endure the beating stoically... and the skeptics would pull their hands back just before the stick hit, so it would continue on its path to the teacher's leg, making him furious, and he'd start beating them in revenge on their shoulders, arms, and backs.

The Ghost

His movements were restricted; he tried to escape in vain. He was spread in cruciform but on his stomach, unable to see who was riding him, and his hands, feet, and body were completely immobilized.

He turned his head to the left and saw his brother sleeping peacefully on his bed next to him; he tried to call for help, but his tongue wouldn't obey, and the words were trapped in his mouth... his terror intensified, and he asked himself if he was asleep and dreaming? It didn't seem so; he was sure he was awake.

When his bonds were released, he didn't sense the transition from sleep to wakefulness, but everything was over, and he remained alert until sunrise, afraid to go back to sleep.

The Snake

He realized he was pressing against the mountain with his chest. He explored uneasily with his feet, and felt very insecure, doubting the ability of his ten fingers to hold his body, expecting to slip, fall, and roll over the protrusions... He didn't dare to look down, fearing the onset of acrophobia.

He had seen a snake on the ground near the rocks and sand, chased it by instinct; then climbed after it with a facility he wasn't aware of, so that he didn't know how he had reached such a height. He was certain of falling, and maybe succumbing to death, or at least injury, where no one would hear him, and they wouldn't find him until they noticed his absence.

He didn't know what happened next, but he found himself standing on his feet on the ground where the snake chase began, shaking grit from his clothes and checking his body.

For decades afterwards, whenever he remembered the incident, doubts about atheism would creep in.

The Life-lover

He was confident that he was a good and righteous man. God had extended his life and granted him good health. When he turned a century old, he married a twenty-year-old virgin; the angels came to him with incense and perfume on his wedding night.

He was dazzled by them; he left his bride and went with them, and never returned...

Greed and pleasures are only satisfied by death... he loved the world, and the hereafter loved him.

The Sorceress and Her Clique

She considered herself a sorceress! Or wished she was one; she was one of the strongest believers in magic and jinn, and had spent all her money on sorcerers and incense, trying to uncover hidden treasures next to the toilets where the jinn resided... and he hated her and wished for her end.

Whenever she saw him, she'd praise his health and handsomeness, then warn those around her and her visitors about his perfect health, and his complete vitality and youth, even at the age of seventy

He knew she was trying to jinx him; but he didn't care; convinced of his mother's protection from the grave. She used to pray for him: "God bless you with righteous companions, God make people kind to you, God protect you from envy and envious people."

All her prayers were answered perfectly, and life was kind to him.

Iblis

The gray-haired clique, who think they're sorceresses, believe in magic and various types of demons. He wanted to reinforce their ignorance and assert his superiority over them and during a social occasion with some of them, he acknowledged the existence of magic and devils: "They're to be found in most Quranic verses, and whoever understands certain portions of the book can even make a deal with the devil, to provide him with simple services, in return for the devil guaranteeing his health, preventing aging, and providing money and love."

They gaped, some believing, others amazed, and their suspicions about the reasons for his success, health, and continued youth and handsomeness were confirmed.

He didn't answer questions about the verses and the method of communication, and changed the subject; allowing that he had gone too far with that admission... He only said: "One must read tens, even hundreds of books."

The Beloved

The beloved is absent, and years of life pass, but love doesn't fade... he remembers a moment of satisfaction and closeness... his hand caressed her back, and her face lit up with a smile that betrayed her hidden feelings. This memory became everything, and remained in his mind, as it enchanted them both, but family and circumstances suppressed their thoughts and wishes...

She asked to meet him, and he rushed to the appointment early, acquiring a traffic ticket for his pains. When she arrived late, with excuses that showed relief bedeviled with anxiety, and sat eating ice cream, looking round at every newcomer to the shop to make sure it was no one who knew her. he felt a lack of harmony and compatibility, but they talked and agreed on another meeting.

The hidden love continued through speaking eyes; despite her marriage and the production of her exact replica, a decoration for life.

To the world love is a sign of patience and perseverance, linked to the love of beauty and perfection, and obedience and gratitude to the Creator for his understanding and protection...

The Madman

His psychiatrist had confirmed his condition and prescribed medications to keep him calm, but despite that, he sometimes saw them and talked to them. His mother was his closest friend, and sometimes he'd tell her about their visits, and they'd be there while he talked to her about them and spoke to them.

He was confident in the reality of what he saw, even if his mother told him, when they left, that she hadn't seen anything... His condition affected the family and saddened his mother, and he became unemployable.

One morning, he was found in front of the house, and they didn't know if he had jumped from the third floor, where he had an apartment, if he had fallen accidentally, or if 'they' had been angry with him and thrown him down.

During the autopsy, the specialist discovered he had a heart condition, and the psychiatric medications weren't suitable for his physical condition... it was an additional catastrophe for his mother, as she hadn't considered other illnesses besides the psychiatric one.

The Ghoul

When he returned to him less than an hour later, on a sunny autumn afternoon, he found him lying with a broken leg, on a small plot of land with a gate on a busy public street, that was planted with trees and had no adjacent houses.

He had brought his nephew, born and living in the camp, to help him work, then left to get some things.

"What happened to you, and how did you break your leg?"

"A ghoul with messy hair came to the gate, shaking his head quickly, making strange sounds," the twenty-year-old young man said with complete confidence and conviction, adding: "I asked him what he wanted; he ran away, and I ran after him. I found the gate locked with a padlock, I tried to climb it to catch him, but I fell and broke my leg."

The Python

The python harassed him at night, and when he failed to avoid him, he killed him and continued on his way home.

In the morning, the police came and took him to trial for murder. As they passed by the scene, there was a human corpse instead of the python. They opened a door in the ground and went down, where a trial, complete in all respects, was held... The death sentence was hanging over him, but his lawyer proved his ignorance of what he had killed, and that he was in acting in self-defense.

They released him and took him out from the same door... but his hair had turned white, his face was wrinkled, and he began advising people not to kill pythons...

And this has happened to that citizen in every Arab country.

The Jinn

"Hush, don't raise your voices, or they'll escape." She looked at those around her, who fell silent, then looked into the void.

"There they are, they've arrived, do you see them?" she asked in a low voice, addressing her family members who looked at each other, then searched with their eyes for the ones who had arrived. She saw in their eyes that they hadn't seen them:

"You're blind, they're looking at you."

"How are you?" her mother asked the invisible visitors, to reassure the girl, hoping she'd hear an answer or change her perspective. "I don't hear their response, daughter, did they say anything?"

"They haven't spoken to you yet, but they're playing with the ball in the hallway, don't you see them? Don't you hear the sound of the bouncing?"

The faces of some of her relatives turned pale, remembering the sounds they used to hear in their old house, thinking they were sounds of shells, but some saw a strange ball rolling and disappearing; so that they knew it had nothing to do with the war. Most of the family were somewhat superstitious and believed in the existence of jinn and devils, appearing at night, so they increased the lighting wherever possible and sufficient energy was available. But none of them had reached her level of obsession; she sees them, and they see her, and she whispers to them, and fulfills their requests... like emptying all the furniture out of the house to make room for them and secluding herself inside.

They were almost certain that she was possessed by a jinni and agreed to bring Sheikh Shahada, whose mother was said to have been barren, but she had begged God for him; and he answered her prayer, and the boy grew up to be a sheikh with many blessings, including the ability to expel jinn. Sheikh Shahada arrived at the house; he found her in a relatively normal state, and had to diagnose her without the jinni in possession. She agreed to cooperate and lay down on the couch, changing her headscarf to a niqab at the sheikh's request.

The sound of Quran recitation rose, the sheikh lowered his head near her ear... stopped reciting, and started chanting, then demanded the occupant leave. No answer was heard, and no one could assess the reactions of the occupant, as the niqab covered everything, but her body shook.

The sheikh said, "Praise be to God," and her husband thought she was shaking with suppressed laughter. They convinced her the jinni had left her; she asked them to distribute her children among the family, as she was fed up with them and their lack of manners. They explained the absurdity of her idea; in the end, no one

wanted to take on such a responsibility. She calmed down for a while, after several fights with her husband, exchanging blows and insults.

She thought deeply about her situation and decided to escape from the jinn, humans, husband, children, and family... not to heaven, but to any country that would accept her as an immigrant, refugee, or even a defaulting tourist, the main thing was to breathe solitude in a new place...

Celestial Matters

Bragging

Listen to a group of people who consider themselves friends bragging about their origins and lineage; one mentions a famous person and considers him his first grandfather (all ancestors are referred to as grandfather by Arabs) and another recounts tales of a group of unknown heroes from the past to link himself to them while a third traces his origins to the most sacred place in the land...

Then they looked at him and listened as he said: "I am the most noble of you in lineage and the highest of you in stature; my grandfather, without a doubt, is the Prophet Noah, and his grandfather is Adam, the father of humanity, who God created with his own hands and made in his image, and thus I am the grandson of one who saw God with his own eyes and imitated him and learned from him directly.. Who is more noble than me?"

Some of them were about to laugh, but they desisted, and the birds hovered over their heads expectantly...

The Flight of the Ancients

The foreigners quoted from the ancients that the king of an island had imprisoned a wise man and his son in a vast labyrinth as punishment for evading the gods' orders. The father decided to leave the labyrinth and the island by making wings and attaching them to their arms with wax. "When we take off, imitating the birds, follow me, and don't rise too high and approach the sun," the father said to his son, who was fascinated by the flying so that his curiosity led him ever upwards, until he approached the heat of the sun.

Instead of cooling, the wax melted and the feathers fell off his arms as he continued to try to control the flight, but without feathers, he failed and fell into the sea and drowned. And that was that...

The Killer

"I won't allow you to marry her no matter what it takes, and she will be my wife," the brother said to his brother, contrary to custom. The discussion continued and developed into a threat of murder. The rightful suitor suggested that they resort to the gods by each offering a sacrifice, and they agreed on that. The rightful suitor, a shepherd, offered a fat piece of meat; his brother, a farmer, was not devout, so he offered some low-quality products. But the surprise was that the gods struck the farmer's sacrifice with lightning; it burned from the intensity of the gods' rejection, according to the rightful suitor's interpretation. Nonetheless, the farmer insisted on marrying the beautiful bride and refused to accept the result of the sacrifice, killed his brother, married the beautiful bride and another sister, and began breeding offspring who killed brothers, fathers, sons, relatives, friends, allies, orphans, and the poor, killing others from among the people of the path, seeking interest, prosperity, and dominance...

The series of killing and inherited strife continues through genes and selfish upbringing.

The Betrayal

It is said that her grandmother caused a disaster for everyone, and she was accused of betraying her husband, not sexually, but by not obeying his unique ideas, and by revealing his secrets to her confidants. He tried to convince her to join him, and warned her of an impending disaster on everyone, she didn't believe him, and her fate and that of some of their offspring was destruction...

In another version, she went along with him, but she wasn't kind to him despite his saving her, rather one of their children mocked his father; he got angry and wished that the gods would darken the color of his offspring. From their children and their bad upbringing, the racial conflict began and deepened.

The story was almost exactly repeated with other women who betrayed their righteous husbands, but some of them were cursed directly, and others were afflicted with shame; every wicked one with a righteous one who refuses to obey will meet the same shameful fate after a torrent of accusations and slander, and they become our first grandmothers among the companions of Satan, and their fate is hell with those who entered it..

And it doesn't seem that those who followed their husbands have necessarily guaranteed paradise for themselves either.

The Barter

As they walked in the desert, he repeated to her that the drought was what drove them to leave. When they approached the first city, he asked her to tell the people that they were siblings, not a couple. She knew what was required by instinct; she beautified herself and arranged her affairs as much as possible, and confirmed that they were siblings on their way to a farther land. The king heard about them and decided to help and proposed to the sister, and paid a lot of sheep and livestock as a dowry; the brother became rich and hired workers and shepherds.

It didn't take long for the king to realize that the siblings did what siblings don't do when they meet. In the angry confrontation, the king said: "You have shamed me and made me go against our values in front of my people; we don't marry another man's wife, why did you lie to me?" The answer came that it was fear of death if strangers knew she was his wife, they might kill him to take her! "Rather, it was your love for her dowry," said the king and ordered him to take his sister and her dowry and leave without returning.

But the story was repeated with more details with another king, mightier than the first, and the husband returned home with more livestock and shepherds.

The Rival

The first wife's order was clear and decisive: "Expel her with her child and throw them in the wilderness." She noticed his hesitation, so she repeated and warned. He didn't ask himself about the reason for his submissiveness to her; she wasn't wealthy or prestigious, maybe she was beautiful when she was young but now, she was old!

"But you were the one who asked me to marry her to have a child for us, and I did and she produced one; why the cruelty and sentencing them to slow death?"

She didn't answer him, and declared through her body and expressions confirmation of the order; so, he submitted and asked the rival to carry his child and supply herself with water and food and walk behind him. They reached the arid land and moved away from human paths; he turned back and returned, leaving the infant and his mother, fulfilling the old woman's request...

Thus, myths and stories were born and waterwheels continued to turn with the power of magical donkeys.

The Bedouin

It is told that a Bedouin man married a lady, and when they waited a long time for a child without success, he married her young servant; she gave birth to a son; the

old woman grew jealous and gave birth to a son as well, and the Bedouin's life began to be troubled instead of being happy with the two sons.

One night, a nightmare came to him showing him that the solution was to kill one of the two boys, but his dilemma was which one would be the victim? Would he kill the firstborn, the son of his beautiful obedient servant, or the spoiled little one, the son of the first wife, who was more refined and annoying? He consulted his firstborn, and he obeyed and volunteered to be sacrificed; so, he dressed him in beautiful clothes, and before they went out, the mother of the spoiled one saw them and asked jealously about the reason for the trip. He said to her: "The revelation told me to kill one of the two boys; this one volunteered, but I can replace him with your son if you wish!" She wished them safety and success.

He was thinking on the way to the mountain about the method of killing, he settled on slaughter, and after he finished preparing and before he drew the knife, a wild boar with tusks and horns attacked and scored the Bedouin in his back; he woke up from the nightmare, and thanked the gods that it was nothing more than that, and after a little thought, he saw in the nightmare divine orders to end the trouble; so he decided to increase the number of his wives and have more sons and daughters, so the problems would melt away from him.

The Uncle

A bad-natured woman, spoiled the relationship between twin brothers, and between her favorite and her husband, and under the pretext of protecting him from paternal and fraternal revenge, she sent him quickly very far away to her brother's tribe, and asked her favorite to marry his uncle's daughter there. He found two daughters. The younger one pleased him, so he proposed to her in exchange for a long-term work contract. On the wedding morning, he found her older sister in his bed. He protested to his uncle about this deception, but traditions required marrying the older one first, and he could marry the other, but with a new long-term work contract. He ended up with both sisters and two servants, and he fled with the four and the sheep and livestock and a dozen children, and returned with

his clan to continue the conflict with his brother and the rest of the neighbors, near and far.

The mother didn't expect any of this, especially the behavior of her favorite.

Grandfathers and Grandchildren

Everyone testified against the mother with fully detailed abominations, and she received severe punishment in the end, and since the two daughters were of the mother's upbringing, they attributed the worst act of evil to them. They had given their father intoxicants to drink, had sex with him, gotten pregnant, and given birth.

The older one gave birth to one who became one of the sacred, and he founded a tribe and kingdom that bore his name in their language: Ibn Ab. And the younger one gave birth to a similar sacred one, and her child was named "son of my people" in that language... He also founded a huge neighboring tribe.

The father of the two daughters is sacred and revered by all, and he is the nephew of the sacred founder. Modern science and research reject the reality of the existence of that founder, and claim that his story and his heirs were fabricated later from stories of other peoples; they turned stories of real kings into fictional prophets and changed the geography; thus, the illusion was established and the truth was obliterated, but, as usual, only for a while.

Ladies and Slaves

She is the daughter of a king, her uncle is another king, and her husband is the minister of a third king. He is a descendant of a poor family that wandered in search of grain, and his grandchildren later claimed that they inherited sanctity from father to son, and passed it on. Both are beautiful in appearance, circumstances led them to meet as a lady and her servant, and the cursed devil tempted them, as usual. He desired her, and she desired him, but the door opened on them by the hand of the minister; so, they accused each other of bad intentions. After all the punishment that befell them, and the effect of the years on their beauty, and despite the age difference, the silent love continued. When the minister died, the captive managed through inherited arts of magic to become a minister; even to rule the country, and he married his lady, and she gave birth to his children, despite her age, two sons, and the first gave birth to a sacred father, and the wife of another sacred one, and the births and blessings did not stop for centuries that followed.

The Intelligent One

She was one of the temple workers; she gave birth to a boy rejected by circumstances and laws, but she loved him; so, what should she do? Killing him was out of the question for the mother who considered him a gift from heaven and therefore supposed to have a purpose, and accusing a man of status of paternity might backfire! Her options: put him in a basket and set him in the river, or put him in front of the temple; but this solution carries risks and would end their relationship and deprive her of him.

She came up with the best solution: put him in the basket in the garden of a man of high status and knowledge with a beautiful wife who is barren. The child became a sacred gift from heaven to his new mother, and the temple worker, his real mother was able to support the 'heavenly gift' and rejoice in it, and contributed to solving his daily problems while he received the best and most glorious education and upbringing of his time, until he became able to speak to the gods and master the sciences of chemistry and magic and create myths.

The Hag

A grey-haired, one-eyed woman came out to them inquiring, and they asked about the righteous man who lived in that house, and said that the sky had withheld rain, and the earth had dried up in their land, and they wanted the man to pray to the gods to improve their situation.

She told them about her husband's inability to make a prayer that is answered, as evidenced by their own drought, but she informed them where to find him. They reached him and told him about their problem; he prayed and supplicated for them, and told them that it had rained in their land now.

Before they left, they asked him about the one-eyed hag in his house, and told him that she had said to them: "If my husband was a prayer-maker, he would have prayed for himself, for his crops have burned." He said to them: "She is my family, and I pray for her long life"; they said: "How is that?!" He said: "Because God does not create a believer except that he has an enemy who harms him, and she is my enemy, so it is better that my enemy be one who I own than one who owns me."

The Goldfinch

"Where is that cursed goldfinch?" None of the gathered animals and birds, and the listening fish, answered. "Whoever among you sees him, let him know that he must appear before me immediately, and if he doesn't have a valid reason for his absence, I will pluck his feathers and make an example of him." When the news reached the goldfinch, he controlled his fears and wondered: How didn't the sorcerer know where he was, while making great claims? The goldfinch decided to

deceive, seeking salvation and truth. The goldfinch appeared before the sorcerer, pretending to be tired and exhausted, and began to tell how he traveled with supernatural speed to distant lands and saw a queen of great beauty, but she had not heard of the sorcerer and his glory, and he exaggerated in describing the beauty of her body and what was under her loose clothes, where the goldfinch lay while addressing the queen and telling her about his master. The sorcerer decided to send for the queen, and thanked the loyal goldfinch, and asked the workers to make reflective floors so that, while sitting on his throne receiving her, he could see what the goldfinch saw under her clothes. He liked the idea and asked the jinn to bring her, and the goldfinch and his feathers were saved.

The Sculptor

It was their custom to compete in caring for orphans after they left the shelters; the girl was given into the sculptor's care. He also worked with wood, was married and had offspring. Days passed, and the girl secretly became pregnant without intention or knowledge, and when she told him, his tongue stuttered and his thoughts scattered, but the days turn fast, and there must be a way out. The options were limited, everyone leaving the country, or her leaving alone until she gave birth, or making it public... all unsuitable solutions, he thought and said to her: "The gods will inspire us with a solution and help us, and until that happens, don't talk to anyone, and look at the sky if a direct question is addressed to you, and wear loose clothes, and before the birth, we will visit the saints, prophets' tombs, and sacred places, and leave it to the gods to guide us."

They traveled as two, accompanied by stars, and arrived as three, with the donkey as their fourth. Divine support appeared, and the journey of miracles began.

The Patient

They were old, and they were wealthy and in good health, with many children, known for their righteousness, especially the husband. The devil intervened with the gods, and things turned against the man, the money was gone, the children died, and diseases of all kinds, internal and external, multiplied; the people abandoned them, and asked the wife to take him out of their midst to the wilderness for fear of contagion. She worked in service to feed him, and when they refused to employ her, disgusted by her and what she did to wash him, care for him, and remove his scabs, she sold her hair to ensure his miserable life.

The husband noticed what she had done; he got angry and growled with the remaining energy he had, and swore to give her a hundred lashes when the gods cured him of his afflictions, and he exerted himself in prayer, and the response came, and it was time for him to fulfill his oath... but he was a little ashamed of himself; so revelation came to him with the solution: tie a hundred thin straws together and hit her with them once. He did, and things returned to how they were, and they were even blessed again with sons and daughters, and lived in stability and prosperity... and he became famous, and the successors disagreed about her name and who she was.

The Brother and the Uncle

The old man went with his tenth son to secure a wife for him; he saw her cousin, and proposed to the first for his son and the second for himself, and they got married together and lay with their wives on the same night. After the three months of honeymoon, the son left with his trade, and got sick and died and was buried before his return...

Months passed, and the father's wife gave birth to a son, and the son's wife also gave birth to a son, who was attributed to his father, and who became, after a while, one of the famous people of his time. The problem created by scholars and

genealogists is that the father's son is considered to be two years older, or more, than the son's son, and scientists still maintain this miraculous age difference. When asked about the contradiction in their position and the suggestion to consider the two of the same age, they claim that the son's wife kept the sperm of her traveling husband, or the fetus dormant in her womb, throughout the disputed period, whether it was two or four years!!

And the farce continues without correcting the references despite the fame of the uncle and his nephew and their status.

The Sheikh and the Little Girl

He was in his fifties, and a leader of his growing group, and she was his friend's daughter, six years old; when he visited them at home, he found her playing with a wooden model of a winged animal. He asked her jokingly and with surprise: “Does a mule have wings to fly with?” “Yes”, she said and explained that her father had bought her this toy from a merchant who came from Babylon... and added: Horses fly there.

He was busy with his friend and forgot about the little girl, but he didn't forget the beauty and innocence of childhood that shone from her face, and his imagination wandered to what a flying horse could do, and how he could benefit from an animal like this in developing his group and faction...

He didn't forget his fantasies and wishes, and this young wife and her toy had a great influence on him.

The Plot

Whenever he married a new wife, he would honor her for a few days, then assign her a day like the others. But this wife was beautiful and noble, and two of the others noticed his inclination towards her, and they weighed the risks and decided to carry out a plot.

"When he comes from her, tell him - there's a stench from your clothing -, where have you been sitting?" And when he came to one of them, she told him that; he said he was coming from so-and-so's place and had been sitting on her bed...

The matter ended until it was repeated in the next round, and the second one sang him the same tune; he answered as before and added that he wouldn't sit on that foul-smelling bed again.

But God inspired him, and revealed the plot to him, and the fathers of the conspirators learned of this, and they got a scolding, were threatened with divorce and the marriage of their husband to someone better than them.

The Will

He said that his wife, who he had been forbidden to replace or set another over her, asked him on her deathbed to marry her niece, as she knew his children and would look after them carefully. And so it was, then the marriages continued until he had thirty-one sons and daughters. There was no social impediment to the marriage of young girls; The role models who preceded him did so, and a friend who married his young daughter later asked to do so, and both of their wives were granddaughters of their deceased friend.

The water in the rivers has been flowing for a long time, and the elders still prefer to marry poor little girls and victims of wars, and they cite the example of their predecessor. If the sheikhs wanted martyrdom, they would have imitated the Prophet and his marriage to Khadija, the most beloved of his heart and the mother of his daughters, who was a quarter of a century older than him and had married

two husbands before him, yet he did not marry anyone else until she died. This example and role model does not occur to them.

The Emir and the Imam

The Imam was certain of his right to the leadership of the caliphate by virtue of kinship and marriage ties to the deceased first leader, but he failed to obtain it, and bore the consequences for a while, including the prince, the heir of the heir, submitting a marriage request to him...

She is too young to marry, Prince; she is under ten!

“I do not want her for the purpose of intercourse, but because of her closeness to our leader and my wish to get closer and gain the Lord's satisfaction.”

The father's attempts to deter the prince failed, so he sent her to him, carrying some cloth to examine. The prince was pleased and told her to praise her father for the good merchandise and the over-bringer and his acceptance of both.

The sixty-year-old Imam married and had a boy and a girl. The prince was stabbed and died. Political conditions changed rapidly, and a later prince feared that they would claim power as heirs; so, he poisoned the mother and son, killing them inside an hour.

The Polygamist

When the first wife died, he embarked on marriages, to widows, virgins, divorcees, and captives; he didn't refuse any of God's blessings. He wanted to expand his lineage and strengthen his back, but God, on the other hand, didn't want him to have offspring.

He wasn't originally a supporter of polygamy, and he had refused and prevented his son-in-law from marrying another woman besides his daughter, and made it a condition that he divorce her before bringing a rival wife.

He considered himself and his marriages an exception for political goals, and he wasn't alone in history; many preceded and followed him on this path, with the difference that most of them had sons and daughters in abundance; they fought over the inheritance of leadership... thus, God loved him and had mercy on his people; he deprived him of sons and gave him a lineage of daughters, which wasn't recognized among the Arabs.

The Sorceress

Men didn't flirt with her, but they desired her, and she didn't know the secret of her attraction for males as she rarely saw her face reflected in the water's surface. The governor asked for her and tempted her, but she refused to yield. "I've heard that girl is a sorceress and stubborn," the governor said to the monk, who understood his intention and replied: "She is indeed a sorceress and works with herbs she gathers under the moonlight. Some told me she hates men and rides a broomstick, flying at night, and we don't know what else she does."

The governor sent someone to accuse her of witchcraft and tell her the only way to save herself, but she mocked them, and they interpreted her stubbornness as seeking the devil's protection. So, they charged her, and she refused to repent, and it was decided to burn her at the stake in the public square, where the devil didn't save her.

What if the monk was telling the truth, and beautiful women do fly on broomsticks under the moonlight?

Ibrahim and Suleiman

The Gods

"There is no nation that has advanced and prospered thanks to its reliance on gods or religion, and no god has saved any religious nation from bankruptcy or hunger, and disasters have not spared poor believers," he said decisively, thinking he had settled the matter with his friend, who always smiled during such discussions.

"Superficially, this is true, gods haven't intervened to support the oppressed, correct situations, or prevent harm to the righteous, or those who claim to be righteous." He looked at his friend, who took a sip of beer, paving the way for a response without interruption "... but you agree with me that upbringing, not divine action, is responsible for people's behavior and thus their well-being or destruction. And religion, of course, plays a fundamental role in educating individuals and societies. I hope you agree with me that there are no genetic differences between human races that cause differences in development among their societies ..."

The friend hinted at agreement, passing the cold beer mug over his face. ".. For example, observation shows that Protestant and Evangelical upbringing have produced advanced countries in Northern Europe like the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and others. Meanwhile, groups of the same race, but of Catholic denomination, were raised on relaxation and dependency, and their countries, like Ireland, Spain, Italy, and Portugal, suffer economically. As for the Orthodox upbringing, it has led its people to parasitism, as happened with Cyprus years ago and then in Greece, they want other people's money without taking responsibility."

"And Muslims?" The friend didn't understand the question and guessed that the beer was taking effect on his friend.

"Yes, Muslims as a whole are less developed than the Christian West, but there are also clear differences in performance and achievements between different Islamic sects, and this reinforces what I'm saying, that religion plays a role in upbringing, which in turn controls the size and direction of development in societies."

"You've digressed, my friend," he said, putting the mug aside and clapping his hands together like Indians do when they give thanks, "and you've also made a mistaken assumption. I was talking about the actions of gods towards their

creations and you're talking about upbringing and linking it to religious instruction. But the truth is, the differences between the peoples you mentioned existed before the emergence of Christianity and its sects. I think climate has something to do with it; the north is active due to the cold, and the south is lethargic due to the heat..."

The friend's eyebrows rose when he noticed that the beer hadn't numbed but had opened his friend's vocal cords, who continued: "The teachings of Islam don't differ from Christian teachings in urging work and dedication, so the problem isn't in religion and its impact on upbringing, activity, or laziness, but the flaws are in the humans themselves."

"Your words are becoming dangerous because you're now acknowledging differences in human design, and that God didn't create them all equally and give them the same opportunities ..."

"Let me assure you, he resumed speaking after emptying the rest of the second bottle into his mug: "if the Quran had appeared in Berlin or Stockholm, not in Abu Jahl's group, the West would have become more active, developed, and richer, even without oil. Because the nature of their country encourages activity. You see Arabs as backward, thinking it's because of their religion, but they're backward because they're Arabs, born and raised in this desert region."

"It can't be that climate is the main factor in growth and prosperity, because the Muslim south surpassed the Christian north in the past when Islam was more associated with justice, and Arabs now excel as individuals in Western societies that give them freedom of thought and work."

The friend extended his hand with the beer mug to stop the discussion, but he gently pushed it away and continued: "I'll summarize and convince you with the example of China. It's an atheist, southern country that was backward for centuries due to colonialism, but after re-educating society away from religions, it became a leading producer... the important thing is societal upbringing and logical, science-based education systems."

He heard no comment from his friend, who raised his eyebrows, an enigmatic smile on his face, as he recalled how Arabs throw trash from cars on the highway, convincing himself that such behavior goes against human nature and instinct.

The Atheist

"Explain to me then how humans were created, and don't repeat the theory of evolution," Suleiman asked his friend after a discussion about creation, the creator, and what Ibrahim considered a contradiction in religious narratives.

"If religions are fabricated, and most prophets don't exist, and humans weren't created by God..."

"You're exaggerating, my friend; there is a creator, of course, but he didn't create humans directly, he created those who created them, and we believed the easy religious narratives and fell into simplification and errors," Ibrahim interrupted his friend and continued after a moment of silence: "Can you tell me how the buildings in Egypt and Latin America from thousands of years ago match, although there was no communication between the continents?" The two friends had discussed repeatedly the similarity of ancient monuments between geographical regions separated by oceans.

Ibrahim believes that humans were created as an experiment by people from outer space, who came to Earth and distributed their human creations in several continents and taught them some basics, including building; hence the pyramids of Egypt are like other pyramids in several regions of South America.

As for Suleiman, he believes in the religious narrative recorded by Judaism and adopted by other religions, that God created Adam and then carved Eve from his rib, a narrative that Ibrahim sees as full of contradictions.

"Honestly, Ibrahim, you're alone among God's creation in adopting this outer space theory."

"I'm not that alone, and let me tell you there are a billion atheists spread across the Earth, but they're a small minority in the most backward and quarrelsome Middle East, where belief in religions is strongest, because this region is the source of religious myths...I mean one in six doesn't believe in the theory of religions, while the others are divided among religions with a single source, yet are at war

with each other, each denying or at least accusing the others of falsification in times of peace."

"You mean religions with a single heavenly source..."

"Don't play with words, Suleiman, you know exactly that I'm referring to, the mythological origin from which Jews took their verses and laws, then Jesus the Jew came with a renewal of the Jewish book, and his followers separated from the Jews and formed the Christian religion, considering the Torah an essential part of their religion, and Islam came to renew these two religions upon the same foundations."

There was no intensity in the conversation between the two friends. They were used to such discussions and were careful not to be reckless in their talks in front of others.

"I understand from you, my atheist friend, that creatures from outer space made us for some purpose, distributed us around this Earth, and left us under observation after teaching us some basics... and, of course, these space creatures have another creator in their turn?"

Ibrahim answered his friend, nodding yes and no at the same time. Suleiman continued: "If you agree with me on that, then explain to me why you believe this theory of yours and disbelieve that God created us directly and sent prophets to guide us?"

"With pleasure," Ibrahim said, smiling as if he had trapped Suleiman where he wanted. "Because what you consider heavenly books are loaded with huge contradictions and clear conflicts, and can be interpreted in several ways, so that they have caused disagreements and destruction among people, including flailing, whipping, burning, impaling, and hanging, and therefore can hardly be revealed books. Our whole situation indicates that we're an experimental field and not rational creatures produced by an omniscient creator."

"What are they testing and observing in us then?"

"Our capacity for belief, for example... and I didn't say they're testing us, I said they're observing us, and that's a much broader thing, of course. They created us equal in intellect and limbs, similar in external appearance, taught us some basics, and then left us for observation."

"And the result, as you see it?"

"One of the results might be that equality and justice can't be applied among nations, or between states, or among followers of the same religion or family, even if humans are equal in their basic conception." Ibrahim paused for a moment, then added: "I mean, if they created us and are testing, for example, if we're fit to serve them, the result would be negative because we're selfish creatures by nature and can't be trusted with anything. But if they made us for entertainment, like we make TV series, they've succeeded, and maybe they've injected us with the idea of religions to activate killing and injustice under the names of love and justice, and this is the peak of the tragicomic plot of the ongoing entertainment series."

The Believer

"Let's agree on the fact that there are six times more believers than atheists in the world, and therefore the majority is right... isn't that so?" Suleiman asked his friend Ibrahim in a new discussion session, sure that Ibrahim would refute his view.

"We're not in an election, my dear friend for you to tell me that the majority wins and the minority must comply. Also, your description of non-atheists as believers is inaccurate, believers are actually a minority among them." Ibrahim paused to sip his tea and continued arguing with his friend: "The majority you're referring to is the sum of followers of several religions that are at war with each other, and divided into conflicting sects so they don't form a homogeneous block. Don't forget that they acquired their religious affiliation by birth, by nature, and not by conviction, and that's why you find that those who practice rituals as adults are in the minority, especially among Christians... and by the way, have you noticed the correlation between regions of religious commitment on one hand and developmental and human backwardness on the other, while the opposite is true for tolerant religious communities that believe in renewed and evolving laws.."

"You mean religiosity produces backwardness, while permissiveness leads to prosperity!" Suleiman interrupted his friend with disdain and continued to

contradict Ibrahim in another area: "Do you know that modern scientific theories suggest that there is no universe without the existence of humans? That God created the universe for us, and if we didn't exist, the universe wouldn't exist either."

Ibrahim raised his eyebrows and smiled, waiting for Suleiman to clarify.

"Three centuries ago, Newton proved that light consists of small particles, then Thomas Young followed and discovered that light consists of waves, and the disagreement continued until science later proved that light consists of both. The important thing here being that light changes from waves to particles when we observe, examine, and measure it, but if we're not there, it returns to waves..."

"So, light recognizes us; when it sees us it changes into something else... this reminds me of the futile debate: Did the tree in the forest actually fall if no one observed it..."

"You're interrupting me and don't even want to listen to scientific theories that might change the view of creation and the creator when proven through scientific examination." Suleiman silenced his friend and continued summarizing what he had read: "If it's hard for you to believe the results of scientific research at reputable universities, let me tell you that they say: what applies to light photons also applies to electrons that make up all materials."

Ibrahim's smile had widened, but he didn't interrupt his friend's explanations.

"Of course, you want to ask me how scientists managed to observe this phenomenon and how they proved it?"

Ibrahim nodded yes to his friend; Suleiman continued: "I won't tell you, but you should review the most famous experiments in this regard, called the Double Slit Experiment, and also the experiments of John Wheeler, the most famous physicist of the 20th century."

"And the result, Suleiman, of this scientific discovery?" Ibrahim didn't show any disdain for his friend's explanations, but he knew that there were attempts by religious scientists to confirm the vision of religions.

"The result, as the experiments confirm, is that the human created by God is not something insignificant in the universe, by his mere existence he changes the nature of the universe, and therefore, if we didn't exist, the universe wouldn't exist, or as Wheeler says: our existence affects the universe's present, future, and past."

"Ah, I've found what Wikipedia says about your American friend Wheeler," Ibrahim said, looking at his smartphone screen: "He's a relic from World War II, and I can see that he participated in developing the atom bomb and its hydrogen sister, so he's a famous physicist indeed, but it seems that what you're referring to was one of the side effects of those experiments. In short, I promise to review the matter, but my mind tells me that if we didn't exist as humans, the universe wouldn't exist indeed because we're not here to perceive it."

"You claim to believe in science and tangible results, so why do you reject any scientific proof of the existence of religion? Suleiman asked with some intensity and said he had reviewed what was written about those experiments.

"My friend, you have a religious vision that dominates your thoughts and surroundings. Religious societies don't create suitable environments for brain development because religion generally provides answers to any question, solves any dilemma, treats any disease, and gives peace to the believer's mind."

The Hormone

Ibrahim was focusing on the plate of hummus fatteh. Every time he ate some fava beans or chickpeas, he would revert to the fatteh that he loved to the point of addiction, and he often went with Suleiman to this popular restaurant that sold the perfect Fattah dish. (An Arab speciality with bread, chickpea, hummus and tahina)

"Has your brain stopped thinking about anything other than food until you're full?"

"On the contrary, Suleiman, I eat; therefore, I think, and the more I indulge, the more my desire for food increases, and the more I eat what I love, the clearer my thoughts become." He stopped talking and took two spoonful's of fatteh, dipping them in olive oil.

"Do you see that boy?" Ibrahim motioned with his eyes to a young boy who had just passed by them, and Suleiman shook his head, indicating no acquaintance with the boy.

"I know his father. This boy is a communist like his father."

"But he doesn't seem to be over ten years old."

"In fact, he's only nine years old, and he's a communist", Ibrahim reaffirmed, biting into a quarter of dried onion.

"Man, he's nine years old, and you describe him as a communist, and by God, if you asked him for some quotes from Marx or Mao Tse-tung, he wouldn't have any answer. At that age, kids are fond of other things, and the communist economic system is very complex..."

Suleiman stopped, noticing a smile on Ibrahim's mouth, while he was chewing some fatteh.

"Do you see that little girl behind her veiled mother?"

Suleiman nodded yes, suspecting that he had fallen into one of his atheist friend's traps.

"She's a Muslim girl."

Ibrahim fell silent, and Suleiman didn't comment, waiting for him to spring the trap.

"You didn't and won't need to describe the girl as a Muslim. Do you think she's grasped anything of religious matters and is convinced, for example, of the story of Adam and Eve, the flood, Moses' magic, Jesus' birth from a breath, his walking on water, and his other miracles, not to mention the miracle of the prophet travelling to heaven and back, and has she been convinced of the unseen, the jinn, and the interpretation of everything in existence and the universe as religion dictates?"

"Every creature is religious by nature from the moment of birth and follows the religion of his fathers. Some of us believe, submit, and are convinced by what their family and society say, and a few like you rebel when they realize and deny all God's gifts." Suleiman ended the conversation and signaled the waiter, asking for a pot of mint tea, expecting a long session with Ibrahim.

"Do you enjoy worship, reciting the Quran, and prayer?"

"Yes," Suleiman confirmed to his friend, who was finishing off the fatteh plate.

"The call to prayer soothes my nerves, and prayer in front of God gives me hope, confidence, and tranquility. The holidays make me happy now as they did in childhood, and whenever I'm in trouble, I call on my Lord; He relieves me, but all my prayers for your guidance have failed, and I still don't understand God's wisdom in not guiding you."

"Forget about guiding me and answer me, after you grew up and learned, didn't you have doubts about the credibility of the mythical stories that require absolute faith?"

"No, of course not," Suleiman replied, pouring tea from the teapot into the cups. "When you believe, it means believing in the unseen, God, and the hereafter, and what you can't understand doesn't mean it's wrong, but rather that you haven't matured enough, and you have to accept the concept with faith. If you knew everything, you'd be a prophet or more."

"So, faith is the secret to the continuity of religions. Let me give you a scientific explanation of why you're a believer who adheres to rituals and worship." Ibrahim picked up a tea spoon and put two spoons of sugar in his friend's tea, reminding him that he's addicted to sweets.

"Just as you're addicted to sugar and I'm addicted to fatteh, your body is also addicted to religious rituals, and your mind resists anyone who tries to dissuade you from your beliefs, which are the same beliefs of your family, tribe, and perhaps your country and other countries that follow the same creed."

"It looks like this lecture is going to be long, so don't drag it out too much. You have time to drink only two cups of tea."

"Just one cup will be enough," he added, smiling at Suleiman, who allowed him to stimulate his thoughts and confronted him with counterarguments.

"The body contains various hormones, which we produce under certain circumstances, so that a pleasurable hormone is in repeated demand. Take, for example, the sex hormone in males and females; it's what makes us fond of repeating that act and not content with what religions require, which is limiting marital relations to preserving the species only."

Suleiman looked around, fearing the presence of females nearby, so Ibrahim reminded him that this was a male-only restaurant and a male-dominated society, and he continued his speech:

"We have serotonin, available to all mammals, which controls the general mood; if you win a Mercedes now, your hormone will rise and make you happy, and if your father kicks you out of the house, the hormone will drop, and your life will become miserable. As for dopamine, it's responsible for pleasure and demands repetition of the act that produced that pleasure, whether it's eating hummus fatteh or having sexual intercourse. You know, of course, adrenaline, which speeds up the heart rate, is usually secreted in dangerous situations to help the body transfer sugar to all cells quickly to deal with the danger. And let's not forget oxytocin, the hormone of love, trust, and empathy, which strengthens bonding, usually secreted by a

breastfeeding mother, which is why it's said indulge the baby and his mother will love you. This hormone is very important when talking about religions because of the issue of trust, empathy, and social bonding. Any ideological system that exploits this hormone is a winning system. And we conclude with morphine, which reduces the feeling of pain."

Ibrahim looked at the tea cup to confirm to his friend that he was nearing the end. "I know now, my friend, that religious rituals stimulate the brain to secrete positive hormones, which act as sedatives. The rituals of chanting, dancing, or prayer movements, and their weekly or daily repetition, make you cleave to this ritual and resist anyone who threatens your happiness and the cohesion of your family and tribe, because you see dialogue as a threat, not only to your ideas but to your entire social network, and you won't change your view because you've become addicted."

"This is a strange explanation," Suleiman said, standing up with his friend, who paid the bill and began explaining to him as they returned to the car that prayer movements, like exercise, cause the secretion of morphine to deal with pain, while dopamine produces happiness during prayer for spiritual reasons, then the love hormone flows when submitting to God, the friend and beloved in heaven, and that's why there is no religion without rituals that ultimately lead to addiction and fanaticism within the group, "...so I have no plans to distance you from your religion because that would oblige me to provide you with an alternative chemical and social mix."

The Selfish One

"And what's the solution, Ibrahim?"

"I can declare a fatwa that the most effective solution is to abolish all religions and adhere to worldly laws that guarantee rights and develop morals and values in line with human development. Societies seeking modernity can't move forward now with materials, values, and laws that have dominated for thousands of years. But changing and abolishing religions is impossible, so we need to follow the example of those who were backward like us, and found success when they separated

religion from education, laws, and systems. This is the least we can do to get rid of our schizophrenic and confused state."

They had arrived at the university to participate in a graduation ceremony for one of their friends.

"Don't you notice that all the girls are veiled, and I haven't seen a single boy talking to a girl?"

"Let's forget about this," Suleiman said and added, "I understand the importance of updating education systems, but why do you want to isolate religion from worldly affairs and abolish religious education?"

Suleiman nudged his friend with his elbow to make him refocus and ignore a group of giggling female students.

"Religion teaches mercy, develops the spirit of cooperation, supports the concept of justice, and encourages sincerity in work; what's wrong with teaching it positively to children in schools and universities?"

"How will you teach a child a chemistry or science lesson based on experiments, and then give him a religion lesson in the next hour that reinforces his belief in superstitions and provides him with solutions from a perspective that hasn't changed for centuries?" Ibrahim stopped answering and turned to face his friend, continuing:

"Your talk about developing the spirit of cooperation reminds me of a recent study on a group of children from six countries: America, China, Jordan, South Africa, Canada, and Turkey. They were chosen from Christian, Muslim, atheist, and other less strict countries regarding religion. The research experiments, conducted by the University of Chicago, aimed to find out if children from religious societies and families are more tolerant and less selfish than their counterparts from non-religious countries and families." Ibrahim turned around and continued walking beside Suleiman without providing an answer to the research results.

"Of course, you want me to guess who is the least selfish? Since you've brought up this study in our conversation, your atheist friends are probably the least selfish."

"Your conclusion is correct, Mr. Suleiman, and don't forget that this is a scientific test conducted on about 1,200 children under the supervision of a university in a religious country. And don't you see how China has progressed in a few decades, not centuries, from a religious, bankrupt country addicted to opium to the world's leading manufacturer, and its currency is what is driving major countries, including America?"

"Look at Muslim Turkey transforming into an industrial, export-led country."

"I bet it will get involved in a religious or sectarian war or with its neighbors within this decade, and its growth didn't come from Islamic parties," Ibrahim interrupted his friend as they approached the entrance to the graduation hall: "And we're talking about education and the selfishness of children from religious families and countries, which doesn't mean they can't produce some industries."

They entered the hall and saw that females were sitting on the left and males on the right. "Things are still good; at least they didn't separate the sexes with a screen."

Amidst the buzz of the audience, Suleiman asked his friend how the test was conducted in Chicago and if there were other conclusions. "The test involved psychological examinations, including exchanging stickers among children and watching cartoons where some characters collide with others intentionally or accidentally, and then the children answered questions about whether the action was wrong and what punishment the character deserved. The result was that children of religious people worldwide were more negatively affected, vengeful, and antisocial, which raises questions about the claim that religion teaches morals and secularism does the opposite. Religious parents thought their children were the most merciful, cooperative, tolerant, and sensitive, but the results showed that religious children don't like sharing, are quick to judge and punish others, and aren't as kind as other children."

"Even in generosity, China is better than Arabs," Suleiman said neutrally and fell silent as the graduation host began speaking, and he remembered reading recently that Arab countries ranked in the middle and bottom of countries regarding donorship, a listing which was headed by a poor country like Myanmar, and he thought of presenting these results to Ibrahim to prove that religious countries are the most generous and China didn't top the list.

The Generous One

"China is the largest atheist country in the world, and the second-largest economy after the United States, but it doesn't occupy any advanced position in the list of donors."

Ibrahim looked at Suleiman, seeking clarification on what he wanted to prove.

Suleiman continued: "I mean, your atheist friends aren't generous, and generosity is a fundamental part of morals, as you know, and you'll find that non-atheist countries are the ones that top the donor lists."

"Even the person you were named after had treasures collected for him by humans and jinn, and it's not said or written that he distributed them to the poor. What you said about China is true, but don't forget that they have the largest population, and they're newly rich, with the largest number of billionaires in the world, but the needs of the rest of the people are great, and your measure includes donations from individuals to others and helping individuals who are strangers to them."

Ibrahim turned to Suleiman as he drove away from the university gate. "And the ranking you're talking about is old; China has quickly climbed from the bottom to fourth place in the latest donor lists and surpassed all Arab countries." Ibrahim refocused on driving to avoid accidents, leaving his friend an opportunity to speak.

"If I tell you that morals in religious countries are better than in China, what would you say?"

"I'd ask you to ask Google the crime rates in China and any other country you'd like to compare it with, crimes of theft, murder, rape of women and children, the spread of slavery, and the prevalence of corruption and bribery. Let Google guide you, and tell me the result."

Ibrahim waited for a moment, taking advantage of Suleiman's engagement with his smartphone screen, then asked: "Do you really think that Arabs are more moral and generous than others?"

Suleiman murmured yes without looking up from his phone, so Ibrahim continued: "I can reassure you that our people are the most extravagant and wasteful in the world, and if you wanted to hold them accountable, according to Islamic laws and the Quran, they're brothers of the devils."

"Now you're using the Quran to rebuke its people."

"Man, I've told you repeatedly that I have no problem with the Quran, but it's open to contradictory interpretations, and thus can be exploited for good or to indulge in evil, which is what has happened throughout Muslim history."

With this comment from Ibrahim, Suleiman stopped searching the internet and returned to saying that Arabs are more moral and generous than others and asked his friend to focus on the road, where cars were speeding from the right and left and throwing themselves in front of them.

"Are these people generous and moral, Suleiman? Isn't driving like this the peak of selfishness?"

Suleiman didn't answer and Ibrahim continued: "Your people are generous with mansaf, pomp, and nonsense..." (Mansaf is an Arabic specialty from lamb, rice and fermented yoghurt.)

"Honoring guests is the peak of moral behavior; do you want to accuse Al-Ta'i now?" (An Abbasid personality)

"Al-Ta'i is a fool, and your master Abraham, who slaughtered a fat calf for three guests, knowing that Sarah had told him there was half a sheep in the kitchen, is also one of the squanderers, and any hadith or verse you quote now to prove your point, I'll respond to with a hadith or verse that proves the opposite."

Ibrahim didn't give his friend a chance to say anything and continued: "You know what's being published and said these days about waste in some Arab countries, to the point of boasting that they seat each guest alone in front of a whole animal, and the cost of getting rid of food waste is 600 million riyals because each person in that country produces a kilogram of excess food daily. What you don't know, my friend, is that a well-known legal personage and issuer of fatwas objected to punishing people who waste food because extravagance includes other aspects, and you can't punish people for their choices, and most importantly, according to this personality, God's saying: 'Do not be extravagant; indeed, He does not like the extravagant,' means that withdrawal of love is the only punishment for the extravagant, and according to this interpretation, you can't say ('Indeed, the squanderers are brothers of the devils).'"

The Invader

"What's wrong with you, you seem gloomy this morning?"

"I was talking to the farm workers' supervisor before you arrived, and while he was telling me about problems they faced last night, I remembered some of your sayings about morals, or rather, the lack of them."

"And you're upset, Suleiman, because you've confirmed the validity of my words?" Ibrahim tried with this comment to release the valve holding back his friend's anger so he would tell him about the problem at the farm he had bought years ago to be a retreat which he could gradually develop to generate some profit from olives and oil production.

"As you know, we initially faced the problem of shepherds who like to leave their goats to graze and eat the old and new trees, so we installed expensive fences and barriers to deter their goats, and now some people jump over the fences and gates, stealing whole tree branches and transporting them by car. When Sheikh Saleh confronted them, they told him they would take the wood by force, or 'khawa', as they said, even if it meant bloodshed."

"Well, it's cold, Suleiman, and people need to keep warm."

"For God's sake, I can't take jokes now. Thank God Sheikh Saleh didn't escalate the confrontation and went to their families, complaining and reprimanding, and the issue was resolved with their promise not to steal again, but I feel oppressed by these people who don't respect private property and aren't afraid of the police and the law, and they argue with you over your own property."

"Be grateful, Suleiman, that you're not in another country now, there, a militant would put his hand on your car, daughter, or animal and say 'Allahu Akbar' three times; so, it becomes his, and he takes it, reinforced by his Kalashnikov, and goes to pray in the mosque. Here, you can at least shame the Bedouins. If you ask Sheikh Saleh, he'll confirm that he sees the group every Friday prayer. The conflict between agriculture and Bedouinism is still intense in Muslim countries; those of Bedouin origin rely on raiding and covering their needs at the expense of others,

and they think they're religious and that possessing morals is inherent and linked to their Islamic identity, and they don't recognize that the whole world has moved beyond the stage of herding and woodcutting."

Suleiman remained silent, despite his friend giving him opportunities to comment, as he was trying to understand this phenomenon of people who drive cars and use technology but live with the mentality of the pastoral, woodcutting era.

"Religions claim to have created and organized morals, but as you see, at the level of your neighbors at the farm and the surrounding countries, looting, theft, killing, wars, slaughter, flaying, torture, oppression, and more, are happening now in the name of religion and from its perspective, because all religions give their followers the illusion of possessing morals. Also, religions don't offer any opportunities for development to match the times; your neighbors in the farm or the surrounding countries are trying to apply morals that they know prevailed thousands of years ago, and they claim they're suitable for all times and places."

"So, it's all about blaming religion." Suleiman said, expecting his friend to quote some verses that condemn the Bedouins and villagers, but Ibrahim asked him about the delay of the tea and if he was alone in the house.

"My friend, I'm not blaming or accusing you or religions; the thing is, morals are something that evolve with time and place, they're human laws invented out of necessity before religions, and the problem is that the latter borrowed the morals that prevailed at the time of their origin and froze them as divine truths. But they're no longer suitable to match the technical and industrial development that prevails in many societies, and that's why religions create the idea of 'us' and 'them', and lay the foundation for continued hostility and wars, whether between developed and underdeveloped societies, i.e., tolerant and religious ones, or between groups within the same society if their development is uneven, as is the case between you, as a son of a farming community that's keeping up with the times, and your neighbors, the sons of Bedouins and herders."

"But all religions emphasize punishment for murder, lying, theft, rape, and other evils, and it's not the fault of religions that people disobey these recommendations," Suleiman said, after taking the tea tray from his wife at the door of the room.

"These evils existed before religions and were prohibited by societies to protect themselves and their cohesion; anything that threatens the cohesion and security of the group is forbidden and punishable." Ibrahim took his tea cup and continued: "Murder, for example, if committed by a member of the group against another, leads to mutual revenge and the extermination of the group as a whole, so there must be punishment for the first killer to ensure the group's cohesion and safety. But if murder serves the group's interest, like killing an external enemy, it's considered an heroic act that deserves reward. The same applies to other types of crimes, raping enemies, looting, kidnapping, and enslaving them. So, morals are a social product and must be capable of evolving, and that's why you see some religious societies now rejecting new morals in tolerant societies and considering them blasphemy, deserving of punishment, while developed societies are surprised at how people live in countries that apply frozen religious laws and morals from ancient times."

"I wish I hadn't told you about the shepherds' nonsense and the wood thieves."

"Take it easy, my friend, and don't get angry with me or your neighbors; they also cut down forest trees and expensive forests in front of everyone, and they don't care about warnings from the highest levels of the state...their law is 'me and after me, the flood'."

The Society of Charlatans

"In Baghdad, their shops fill the streets and they have armed guards, and in Egypt, they collect 11 billion pounds annually from people, and there's one of them for every 126 Egyptians, while there's a doctor for every 800 citizens, and Jordan isn't devoid of them either, and the most famous are the magicians of Morocco, as it's said, and Gulf residents are regular customers of such people everywhere."

Suleiman listened to his friend, waiting for him to ask the question that, as usual, would put the blame on religion. And so it was: "Can you figure out the reason for this widespread phenomenon of nonsense and sorcery?"

"I thought you'd blame Islam, but since you're asking me, I think poverty, despair, and ignorance, when combined, turn the Charlatans into their most important comfort."

"I'm not accusing Islam haphazardly or singling it out in this case; sorcery and magic originated from ancient religions and were incorporated into Judaism, then spread widely among Christian nations in the Middle Ages, and all believers still believe in the unseen and supernatural, and they're ready to believe in the existence of magic, jinn, demons, and devils, and everything mentioned in the heavenly books, be it negatively or positively."

"So, if the Quran denounces magic and jinn and devils, it's still responsible for spreading the phenomenon now among the Islamic nation in all its spectrums? Is that what you're saying?" Suleiman interrupted his friend Ibrahim's conclusion.

"Don't rush to judge what I intend to say, Suleiman. Religions originally took magic and sorcery from religions and myths that preceded them, in Babylon, Egypt, and Assyria, from there these things reached the heavenly religions." Ibrahim stared into Suleiman's eyes as if he wanted to hypnotize him: "Whether the widespread phenomenon now is due to a connection with the heavenly religion or a continuation of the dominance of the original religions, this isn't in favor of any religion now, especially not in favor of nations that think they're religious, and sorcerers these days are impersonating religion, and their customers believe that religion allows them to behave like this, and most Muslims believe these superstitions."

"How do you confirm that the majority believe that? Do you have statistics?"

"Don't think you've cornered me; there are statistics, actually, but they underestimate the numbers, but ask yourself and you'll know the truth. Is your family free of these people? How many mothers have hung a blue bead on their son's chest to protect him from the evil eye? And how many times did your mother or one of your relatives go to a fortune-teller? And how many times did you read the coffee cup at home? And how many unmarried women have sought them out for a husband or to lift the curse that's preventing their marriage, and what about the groom on his wedding night, and how many people in your family have the courage to walk around at night in the dark?"

Ibrahim was listing the superstitious customs while Suleiman's mind wandered to one of his relatives who spent her husband's money searching for buried gold under their house and buying the most expensive types of Moroccan incense for this purpose, until he was brought back to reality by Ibrahim's voice: "... even you, don't you check your horoscope daily on the internet?"

"I'm sure, my friend, that you have other explanations for this phenomenon, but you're sparing no effort to lash out at religion. You want religions to be nonsensical or to accuse believers of following the oldest religions. I know that in Saddam's era, there was no official or secret practice of this nonsense, and in Egypt, these phenomena grew during Sadat's era, and then Mubarak let them take their course as long as they stayed away from politics and governance. As for the rulers, they adopt a policy of laissez-faire, but this is exactly what leads to corruption, poverty, and despair, i.e., creating the environment in which sorcery grows. I'm sure that creating a law that prohibits this, accompanied by strict government enforcement of the law, will end this phenomenon, but religion won't end because it's above these impurities." Suleiman stopped and a smile appeared on his face as a question appeared in his mind, which he immediately asked: "Your friends in China, aren't they the ones who believe most in the nonsense promoted under the guise of herbal healing, and they're officially atheist?"

Ibrahim raised his hands to the sky, seeking help and implying that Suleiman hadn't understood him, but he made no comment.

The Devil

"Despair, as a result of poverty, ignorance, and the ruler's pressure, is what drives people into the arms of charlatans who impersonate religion falsely and slanderously," Suleiman said to his friend, continuing their conversation from the previous day. "Religion has nothing to do with it, and where the Quran mentions magic, it's to condemn it..."

"But condemning something implies acknowledging its existence," Ibrahim said calmly, and Suleiman was sure his friend was prepared to continue the conversation.

" Can you read me something from the Quran, please?"

"I seek refuge with God from the accursed devil, In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful..."

Ibrahim signaled his friend to stop the recitation and drew his attention to 'seeking refuge from the devil.'

".. Yes, as I said, we mention magic and its helpers from among the devils, demons, and jinn to condemn them, and as you heard, we seek refuge with God from them."

"This is good, and it means you acknowledge their existence, whether as a danger or a benefit to believers who, when they despair due to circumstances, easily resort to magic to solve their problems, and this was the state of humans before the monotheistic religions, and humans created gods to protect them from the evils that frighten and harm them..."

" You're drifting away, Ibrahim, and I don't know what you were reading yesterday to come to these conclusions..."

" Honestly, I was searching the Quran, and I found a whole surah about the jinn, and the word 'jinn' is mentioned twenty-two times, 'jan' seven times, 'shaitan' sixty-eight times, and 'shayatin' seventeen times. As you know, magic needs these, and if you want to deny the existence of magic, you have to deny the existence of jinn and their friends of other types mentioned in the Quran. So, answer me directly, do you believe in their existence or not?"

"I haven't seen any of them, and I don't want to..." Suleiman said, then recited from the Al-Ahqaf sura: "And when We turned to you a group of jinn listening to the Quran" and from Al-An'am: "O company of jinn and humans, did there not come to you messengers from among you, relating to you My verses and warning you of the meeting of this Day of yours?" and from Al-Rahman: "O company of jinn and humans, if you are able to pass beyond the zones of the heavens and the earth, then pass. You will not pass except with authority." and from Al-Jinn: "And there were men from mankind who sought refuge with men from the jinn, and they increased them in transgression."

Suleiman continued: "And there's more in the Quran about that, and that's why it's hard for me to deny their existence frankly."

"Well done, my friend; this is what I like about you, your blind faith, and yet you're trying to delve deeper and learn. Can you explain to me the meaning of 'fa-zadohum rahaqa'?"

"I think the interpretation I read from Ibn Kathir says that humans sought refuge with the jinn out of fear, so the jinn increased their terror and fear, i.e., there's a relationship of fear between the two parties despite the Quran addressing them together," Suleiman said and went back to affirming that the Quran doesn't approve of magic at all; it mentions sorcerers from previous times but shows their weakness; when it talks about Pharaoh's sorcerers, it says: ".. and their ropes and sticks seemed to him, by their magic, as if they were moving..." i.e., an optical illusion, and maybe chemical arts, as Al-Tabarsi said that those people put mercury on the ropes, and when the sun heats it, the mercury expands, and the ropes seem to move like snakes."

"Excellent," Ibrahim said and continued "... The Quran indeed opposes magic and refutes their actions, but it also talks clearly and explicitly about the existence of jinn and devils, and don't forget Iblis, who pilgrims are required to stone, and this group disobeys God and can produce magic, either in exchange for rewards or by doing what they're asked to do as a favor. The reason for this, my friend, is that the Arabs in the pre-Islamic era believed in the existence of these things and sought refuge with their gods from them on every occasion they felt fear, and that's why the Quran had to refer to these things because if it had denied them entirely, as it denied other things, the Arabs wouldn't have joined Islam in groups. So, it acknowledged their existence and denied their effectiveness in magic, and now we have Muslims returning to linking jinn and magic according to the pre-Islamic view..." Ibrahim paused for a moment, then explained to his friend that the link between jinn and magic has never been cut off among Muslims, but sometimes it decreases and sometimes it increases depending on the prevailing social and political situation.

"And don't forget that the early Muslims adopted the story that the Jews had bewitched the Prophet, so for a moment, he became unsure if he had cohabited with his wives or not, until the angels undid this magic."

Fate

The Wretched Man

"You are a generous and wise man and don't need praise," a friend said to him during an evening gathering with family and friends, and your relative Abu Abdullah needs support or a job." Abu Abdullah hadn't arrived yet, and this encouraged the friend to intercede and ask for help for him.

"By your life, I've tried to help him many times, but the man is unlucky, and whatever I do for him, he'll remain in this state."

Some of the people in the gathering, who didn't know what the man had done previously for his unfortunate relative, shifted uncomfortably, so he said to them:

"I don't usually like giving money without a reason, I mean, if he worked or traded or did something, it would be better, but for your sake, I'll give him a sum of money, and we'll watch and see what he does with it."

"The man is chaste, and maybe he'll refuse to accept cash," someone said.

"No problem, you'll see now that I'm right."

That said, he took out his wallet, put some money in it, and asked one of them to place it between the door and where they were sitting, waiting for Abu Abdullah to arrive where he would see it, so he could take it, and in the end, it would be his to keep, because no one else would claim it.

The door opened, and Abu Abdullah stood there, greeting those sitting from afar; they cheered and welcomed him, and invited him to come forward so he would see the wallet in front of him.

"What do you think, friends, I will come to you with my eyes closed?"

Voices rose, rejecting his suggestion, but he insisted, closed his eyes and moved forward, and reached them successfully while the gathering was divided, some of them saying "May God forgive us" and others repeating examples about fate and destiny, yet others laughing, while the owner of the money was looking around at the people and saying: "Once unlucky always, unlucky, even if handled with kid gloves"

The Gold

He noticed from afar that they were engrossed in conversation; so, he approached quietly, greeted them, and sat with them in the shade of an olive tree, the age of which was difficult to estimate.

Ali knew the newcomer but didn't welcome him by name or nickname.

"Welcome, boss," he said, making room for him on the ground so he could lean his back against the tree trunk, while a smile filled his face.

"This is Abu Mujahid, recounting what happened with Abu Lyth," Ali said and fell silent, allowing Abu Mujahid to continue the story, and the visitor understood the purpose of Ali's welcome to him as "boss" rather than by name.

"Abu Lyth pulled out a gun on his partner and gave him a choice between death or accepting a small share..."

"A share of what?" the visitor asked the speaker.

"Ten boxes of gold that Abu Lyth and his partner found, while Abu Mujahid was watching them from a hiding place and heard every word," Ali said, answering and summarizing after noticing the narrator's hesitation, and he said "Don't worry" to Abu Mujahid, "you can trust the boss."

"The partner said to Abu Lyth: 'God is between you and me. I don't want any of the gold, God forgive you, God is rich.' Then he backed away, walking backwards so his eyes didn't leave Abu Lyth's face as he feared to turn his back on him."

"Scared Abu Lyth would shoot him in the back, right?" Ali asked the speaker and got a nod of agreement with the addition that gold is cursed and has no owner.

"I said at the beginning of the story that the time was close to sunset?" Again, Abu Mujahid nodded in agreement.

"I stayed completely quiet, because if he had spotted me, it would have been the end of me," the man said and looked at the boss's face, but he couldn't get a clear impression from observing his features.

".. And then, after a while, the military police came and surrounded the place. They loaded the boxes, took Abu Lyth, and left."

"His partner reported him!" Ali wondered.

"Of course, otherwise how did they know and arrive so quickly," Abu Mujahid commented on Ali's deduction.

"These events are a bit strange; why did Abu Lyth let his partner leave the place safely? And if I were in the partner's shoes, I would have accepted a small share rather than losing everything," the boss said to the narrator, then looked into his eyes and added: "If I were you, I would have called the police and gotten the informer's share and helped the country's budget."

"Brother, the country's budget is being looted, and the state doesn't give rewards for reporting. Besides, I'm staying quiet. If you were Abu Lyth and heard me talking, what would you do? Huh?"

"I saw Abu Lyth yesterday in the market, and I hadn't heard that they had arrested him!" the boss said, looking at Ali, whose suppressed laughter had spread across his face.

"Brother, money can do wonders; maybe they bribed them, or they divided the gold."

"Listen, Abu Mujahid," Ali said, putting his hand on the man's shoulder, "I've been in daily contact with Abu Lyth for years, and I assure you that whoever you saw can't be who you think, and I can prove it whenever you want."

"Man, I'm not wrong about Abu Lyth and his jeep, which is one of a kind in the whole country. The gold was being transported in it, and I saw it up close like I see you now," Abu Mujahid insisted to Ali and the boss.

"I heard a similar story," Ali said, siding with the boss, "someone talked about a truckload of gold that was moved from a construction site, and then work stopped there. After investigation, it turned out that the site was my contract, and construction had stopped for financial reasons..."

Ali laughed and added: "...for lack of money, not because of an abundance of it, work stopped."

Ali shifted his gaze to the horizon behind Abu Mujahid and looked back at the boss, and here Abu Mujahid turned around and saw the jeep, then looked back at the boss and turned again to make sure of the vehicle. He didn't utter a word, but he rose to his knees, then his feet, and turned, brushing the sand off his robe.

The Blessed One

"Build a new house for us, my son, may God be pleased with you," the mother said to her son, who was well-off. He had acquired his wealth through hard work and perseverance, and had inherited nothing from his father except advice and good upbringing. He wished that his father were still alive so he could enjoy a life of comfort with him, and so he was left with nothing but to please his mother always.

That day, he saw a piece of land on a side street that could accommodate several houses, so he asked about the owner, met him, and told him about his desire to buy the land.

"You're welcome, this piece costs ten million riyals," the owner said.

"That's a lot, Sheikh, give me a better price, may God bless you," the son said, knowing that the sheikh had inflated the price, but the latter insisted on his demand, and they parted ways.

"Did you buy the land, my son?" the mother asked her son after two weeks. He told her that the owner had inflated the price, but he would negotiate with him again, maybe he would lower the price since the land hadn't been sold yet.

"God will bring what's good, my son," she said.

After ten days, the son told his mother that he had gone back to the landowner and he asked for a million more.

"That means he's raising the price by ten percent in less than a month - this is greed - " the son said and added that he would look for other land

For another month, the son examined other plots in different locations, but he didn't find anything suitable. He went back to the landowner to negotiate and ask

for a discount, but he demanded another million on top of the price, making the increase twenty percent in two months. They parted ways without an agreement. The mother's questions continued, and with them, the search for another piece of land, but all signs pointed to the sheikh's land being suitable; it was close to the mother's neighborhood and could accommodate more than one house for his brothers, sisters, and relatives.

The son no longer thought about lowering the price, but he started asking himself what if he went to the man and found him demanding another million as usual? Would he give him the price or withdraw again and forget about this land altogether? "This sheikh is a blessed man, blessed by the Lord of the worlds," he muttered, thinking about the matter. "It seems that God has blinded my eyes for a reason that's becoming clear to me now... our Lord wants to bless him with three million more, and God willing, I'll be compensated with more than that amount."

"Will you sell for ten million, Sheikh?" the son asked after finishing his coffee.

"You know the price, my friend," the sheikh said and fell silent.

"Eleven or twelve?"

"No, it's thirteen now."

"So be it, I won't haggle, and I won't give you a chance to increase it," the son said and agreed with the seller on the payment details, and the deal was done. Then he headed to visit his mother to tell her the news; she congratulated him on the purchase.

Within a year, the son finished building five houses and housed his loved ones in them, and after five years, the street transformed from residential to commercial; he bought another piece of land in a residential area and built houses for his loved ones, and the commercial houses were rented and brought in multiplied income, strengthening his faith in God, who blessed the sheikh and blessed him.

The Needy

On his way back from the office to his home, Abu Muhammad's phone rang and he answered reluctantly, as he had intended to take a break after lunch, and usually, calls at this time were loaded with troubles. He was very happy to hear the voice of a friend he hadn't seen in a while.

"I'm heading to the port now, meet me there and choose two boxes of fish," the friend said.

Abu Muhammad responded to the call of his friend, who owned several fishing boats, and turned the car towards the port. He remembered that one of his late father's friends lived on the way, so he decided to take the opportunity to visit him and have a cup of tea at his house, especially since the man had been paralyzed due to a stroke he hadn't recovered from.

He passed by a mosque and remembered that he hadn't prayed the noon prayer, but he decided to continue on his way, as there was still enough time before the afternoon prayer. He passed by another mosque, but something prevented him from stopping there as well, until he reached a third mosque. He left his car on the road in front of the mosque and found the door closed. He walked around the mosque looking for another door. He saw a small café and went in to buy a bottle of water, and there he saw his father's friend sitting on a wheelchair.

They talked about their lives, and Abu Muhammad learned that the friend had left his house for the first time in a month, as his daughter had asked him to let her take him out, and she had brought him there by car, planning to return for him later.

On his way to the port, the boat owner passed by the mosque and recognized Abu Muhammad's car at the side of the road, so he stopped to inquire. He walked around the mosque and found the two men drinking coffee, and Abu Muhammad told him about the coincidences that led to this meeting.

"This man has a share of fish ordained by God," the boat owner said and arranged with Abu Muhammad's father's friend for the delivery of two boxes of fish to him, then the three of them entered the mosque to pray the noon prayer.

The Jackal

The jackal's attacks on his young chickens continued and, in every raid the whole lot, about thirty chickens, were killed, leaving them torn and scattered where they fell. Guards and fences were useless, and the raids and killings continued...so it was decided to make an iron trap, with a roof and a floor, that would close on him if he tried to get inside. The jackal fell into the trap of his own doing, and now the question was what to do with him?

"Let's kill him!" said the first.

"It's wrong!" said the second, "why should we bear his sin? Leave him to our Lord, let him die."

"But he might stay in the trap for days before he dies."

"It's summer, and the iron is hot underneath and above him, he won't last more than a day and a night, he'll dehydrate and die."

"I've heard that the English used to kill their injured or sick animals by shooting them to spare them suffering, so why don't we do the same and kill him?"

"It's wrong to kill him, leave him to our Lord to decide his fate...besides, he's a thief, and he was killing, if he was stealing to eat, we would understand, but he killed the whole flock and left the chickens lying around...leave him to our Lord, we won't kill him, and tomorrow we'll bury him and prepare the trap again for the rest of his family, and we'll bury them next to each other."

Spiritual Musings

The Dream

He woke up disturbed, then quickly closed his eyes, wanting to return to the dream. He saw people he knew and lived with five decades ago in the same place, they were older than him back then, and most likely all of them had passed away... he didn't believe in the afterlife, but this dream renewed his thoughts about the supernatural.

In the dream, he saw himself returning to his childhood home, the place wasn't similar, but he knew it was the same place; he had arrived there after travelling and found himself getting out of a car in the market, carrying a small bag. He headed automatically to a shop that hadn't belonged to his family before, and that his father hadn't frequented, but he saw his deceased father standing at the shop door. His father got angry when he saw him and grabbed a broom that was by the door, waving it angrily, telling him to go back where he came from.

"What brought you here? Leave at once!" his father said, waving the broom.

He was surprised by this reception and felt ashamed and humiliated, as strong mutual love had governed their relationship, and his father had favored him over his thirteen brothers and sisters.

He turned back before getting into the car; he saw his father was still angry, while others he has known in the past were sitting without intervening or commenting.

He woke up from the dream before moving the car; and he closed his eyes again, wanting to go back and verify the reasons for this situation: He returned to the dream but didn't find out anything. He saw some people he knew looking at him, then at his father. He woke up again and opened his eyes, angry at his failure and the content of the dream. The clock showed it was after midnight on Thursday, in the first minutes of the last Friday of Ramadan.

He calmed down gradually and started thinking about his planned program for the day, then he surrendered to sleep again. He had been on vacation for a week at the beach in Cyprus, spending his days lying on the sand, and whenever the sun got intense, he would swim a bit to cool his body. At other times, he would shop or stroll through museums, markets, and castles, searching for Islamic artifacts in this Greek part of the island.

He remembered that he had visited Umm Mulhan's shrine the day before, Wednesday. She was one of the Prophet's relatives, and had participated in the first naval battle on the island where she fell off her mule during the landing and was martyred. Muslims built a shrine for her there, and after centuries, the Turks built a beautiful mosque next to the shrine and placed her body in a shrine in the middle of the mosque, which is considered a Kaaba for the Muslim inhabitants of Cyprus, but gets few visitors now, since the island's division. This Greek Cypriot part also contains many other mosques that are still visited and used for prayer if they are in the city, while Umm Mulhan's mosque is located in a beautiful, remote spot on the shore of the salt lake that was once part of the sea, then separated and became very salty due to evaporation.

On Friday morning, he had a breakfast of watermelon and salty white cheese, packed the small fridge with sandwiches and a water bottle, and set off in the rented car to the beach. He hadn't thought about his father or anything else before that dream; he was enjoying his day and living his hours with complete relaxation, and now he was gradually overcoming the memory of the dream and his mind was only occupied with the coming seconds of his day, whether to lie down, swim, or sneak a look at the beach neighbors. Since arriving on the island, he had been trying to distinguish between the Russian and Greek languages when listening to people around him, and was surprised by the many Russians on the island.

On Friday evening, he received a WhatsApp message from a friend and relative, condoling him on the death of his brother, who lived in a third country. His brother was four years older than him, but he had been suffering from heart problems for at least five years, and everyone had been thanking God for every extra day in his life until he passed away in the hospital in the first minutes of the last Friday morning in Ramadan. The news shocked him; why hadn't anyone told him all day, but he remembered that his phone didn't work on the island, and the only way to communicate was through WhatsApp, which he hadn't checked at all during his vacation. He immediately recalled the details of his dream and later ascertained that the time of death coincided with his dream; his mind was preoccupied, how could this happen? He ruled out coincidence, especially since his mind had not been occupied with anything that could have led to his dream.

The next day, the road took him to the airport, and from a distance, he saw Umm Mulhan's shrine, so he greeted her and quickly dismissed the religious thoughts that had crossed his mind.

The Sacrifice

He slept fitfully and in pain, thinking the cause was the effort he had put into the farm that day, loading and transporting olive seedlings, as the pain was in the same spot he usually felt when he exerted himself lifting things, and he thought it was a hernia despite many doctors assuring him he didn't have one. In the morning, he noticed a significant change in his urine, which had turned the color of Coca-Cola. None of the doctor friends he asked were specialists in urology, so he headed to the doctors' quarter looking for a urologist, and having found one; he went to him.

"When was the last time you checked your prostate?"

"I haven't had it checked," was Abdullah's answer to the old doctor, and he didn't tell him he had been avoiding the initial exam that had to be done through the anus. He knew that after the age of fifty, a periodic check-up every six months was necessary for the prostate, but Abdullah had ignored it despite being sixty-three. The doctor asked him about his urination habits: did it come suddenly, how much, and did he feel a burning sensation? "There's nothing like that," he said to the doctor, who asked him to lie down on the bed and remove his pants.

"The prostate is soft and fine, no problems," the doctor said in a neutral tone as he removed his finger from Abdullah's anus and added: "You'll need to do a urine test in the lab, and come back with the result." He learned from the doctor that the lack of symptoms and the healthy prostate meant there was no infection, and therefore there must be another reason for the blood in the urine, maybe a burst blood vessel in the prostate or of course a malignant or benign tumor. So, regardless of the urine test result, a cystoscopy was necessary to remove any tumor and examine it in the lab, and this required general anesthesia and at least a day's stay in the hospital. He didn't like the idea of general anesthesia or not knowing beforehand if there was a tumor in his bladder or not. He remembered his younger brother's death in the hospital during an operation that required general anesthesia, and it was later proven that the anesthesiologist had made a fatal mistake, and the hospital administration had admitted the error, but the young man had died.

He left the clinic after telling the doctor he would think about it, and tried to focus his thoughts on the lab and maybe the urine test results would show a direct cause for the blood in the urine. The sample he had left for testing was the same color as in the morning. After three days, the test result came back with no infection, which meant the cystoscopy was necessary and there was a high probability of a tumor.

Abdullah's fears grew, and his mind had been preoccupied during the waiting period with negative and encouraging thoughts, and he had even made vows to offer sacrifices, being a man who had distanced himself from religions and worship, thinking that if he was diagnosed with cancer, he wouldn't undergo the exhausting treatment and waste time, but would do remarkable deeds that might lead to his martyrdom; maybe there was a paradise and hell, and then he would avoid the torment of the disease and win paradise and houris, and if his view was confirmed and there was no afterlife or torment or reward; he would be content with what he had accomplished in his long life that would soon end, instead of suffering pain and unpleasant treatment effects.

He was encouraging himself with these thoughts, then suddenly remembered that he had seen his brother, the victim of the hospital error, the night before he discovered the blood in his urine in the morning. He hadn't thought about his brother before sleeping, but he recalled in the dream that he was looking for him and found him in a strange student city, he heard someone mention his name; he called him and hugged him before waking up to see the blood mixed with urine. He was disturbed when he remembered the dream and its timing, but he ignored it and dismissed the thoughts.

Abdullah decided to look for a specialist with a cystoscopy device to check his bladder without anesthesia. He found what he was looking for in a university professor who examined him in the clinic, after inserting a lubricating substance into his urethra followed by a tube with smaller tubes, one carrying the camera and the other pumping water into the bladder to expand it and show its walls clearly. Abdullah was lying on the bed, looking with the consultant at a large screen displaying what the camera saw, while the doctor controlled it and moved it quickly around. Abdullah asked his doctor if he had tried this procedure before. "I can't try everything I do in advance; I replace kidneys and bladders for patients if needed, and many other things," the doctor said. Abdullah told him he had only asked because he needed to urinate and he was following the camera and pressing on his penis to stop the flow.

Neither the consultant nor Abdullah found anything on the bladder wall, and thanked God, but while withdrawing the camera, the doctor saw a tumor on the bladder neck and Abdullah saw a smaller one opposite it. Moments of silence followed, confirming the presence of a tumor, then the doctor added it wasn't necessarily malignant.

The immediate concern for Abdullah after removing the tube was how to prevent urinating immediately. There was no time to go to the bathroom, and he could hardly urinate in the sink. He held his penis, and the doctor looked for a bottle with a tube to insert back into the bladder to empty it, but Abdullah saw an empty bottle, grabbed it and emptied his bladder into it.

"We'll need to do a cleaning and curettage of the two tumors and examine them in the lab," the consultant said and convinced Abdullah that at this point it wasn't worth discussing what to do if it was cancer, or telling him about the many types and their branches, and therefore the ways to deal with them.

"When would you like to do the operation?" Abdullah paused; the doctor added: "The day after tomorrow, Wednesday?" Abdullah agreed to the appointment, and the doctor started writing notes for his hospital admission.

"Tell them I'm insisting on a spinal anesthesia, not general," Abdullah said, and the doctor told him that a general anesthesia was easier and the patient recovered faster.

"The time doesn't matter, I want to observe the operation, and I would like you to record it on a CD."

He didn't tell his wife on the phone about the result and the appointment; he wanted to be with her to alleviate her fears. She knew that the probability of a husband and wife getting cancer was one in ten million, so she was reassured that cancer had taken its dues with her three years previously and was unlikely to afflict Abdullah.

She had taken a firm stance when she removed her tumor, accepting direct radiation treatment but refusing to continue hormone and chemotherapy. Her philosophy was that chemotherapy would kill all cells, good and bad, and her body would have to grow new cells, but her age and general health wouldn't help her; these treatments needed a strong body. But she had survived the disease and it hadn't returned, thanks to positive thinking and using an Indian recipe based on turmeric.

He told her about the two tumors and continued talking about the possibility of them being benign "and if not, I'm not feeling pain now, and that means life and health will continue for at least another year, and that's enough in addition to what came before," he said, looking at her tears, and went on to assure her he wasn't concerned at all. She didn't believe him, of course, but he believed himself, and the feeling of disturbance started to fade most of the time, only returning occasionally. He remembered some of what he had done that deserved punishment; he prepared himself for repentance and pledged two sacrifices, the first if the operation was successful, and the second if the tumor analysis showed it wasn't malignant. He didn't tell his wife about his thoughts; she was secular to the core and would be angry if she knew he was resorting to sacrifices.

On Tuesday evening, Abdullah checked Facebook and found that a nephew of his was commemorating the day his uncle died, the one who had been a victim of the anesthesiologist's mistake. He hadn't remembered the date of the death of the brother he had seen in his dream on the first night of this story.

On Wednesday morning, he settled into a hospital room, waiting to be taken to the operating room. The date was the 28th, but the blood pressure device printed the result with the previous day's date, which was the anniversary of his brother's death in a hospital, during an operation, due to falsely administered anesthesia, fourteen years ago. He didn't tell his wife about these psychological accumulations, but he thought of withdrawing from the room and tried to make problems due to the long wait, but his wife wouldn't let him leave the hospital.

He lay down on the operating table as requested by the nurses, and one of them tried to put a mask on his face. "What are you doing? What's this?" Abdullah asked the nurse sharply. He told him he wanted to anesthetize him.

"But I asked for a spinal anesthesia, which means an injection in the back." he said sharply to the nurse, who tried to convince him that his operation was of the general anesthesia type and anything else would cause trouble for the nurse and affect his work.

"Okay, leave the operating room and call the head of the anesthesia department." The consultant doctor arrived to inquire, having heard Abdullah complain and confirmed that an epidural had been booked, and a minute later, the head of the anesthesia department was looking for the injection site in Abdullah's back, joking with him.

It ended with Abdullah in the fetal position, and the doctor started calling for lighting and the rest of the equipment, then ordered the recording to start, looking at the screen while Abdullah followed the camera's path.

"Take an extra tour; maybe we missed something last time,"

"Okay, the doctor answered."

"What's all this stuff you've inserted through my penis?" Abdullah asked.

"A flexible tube with a camera at the front, as you see, and we're pumping water to inflate the bladder, and there's a curette and a cauterizer to remove the tumor and cauterize the spot immediately to stop the bleeding," the consultant explained to Abdullah as he removed the tumor, causing blood to flow, then returned to it and pressed down the cauterizer, stopping the bleeding.

The anesthesiologist interrupted the conversation, asking Abdullah how many wives he had and the secret of the color of his eyes, which was unusual for a Bedouin by origin.

The operating room door was open, and the nurses were coming and going, all looking between Abdullah's legs.

"The old man, may God have mercy on him, after marrying two women from the tribe, thought of renewal; so, he went to London and returned with my mother, who passed on her eye color to me." Chaos erupted with comments, happy about the old man's 'rebellion', and they almost cheered, while the consultant smiled because he knew the truth.

Exactly ten minutes passed, and the consultant asked to stop the recording and informed Abdullah that he would empty his bladder now, and he wouldn't need to urinate until the paralysis in his legs had gone, saying he would send a sample of the tumor to the lab immediately, but the result wouldn't be available before Sunday.

Before sunset, Abdullah regained the feeling in his legs; he left the hospital with his wife, as he hadn't informed anyone else among his family and friends about his operation. The doctor told him that his urine would burn for a while and would be accompanied by blood, and asked him to drink plenty of water, but he didn't warn him about the change in the size of the urethral opening. So, when he tried to urinate standing as usual, the urine flowed in all directions; he decided after that experience to urinate in the sink because he needed to monitor the color.

That night, his temperature started rising, and Abdullah began to hallucinate, and only ice packs on his head and chest, which kept his wife busy all night, served to help him somewhat. The situation didn't improve much until the morning and the next day, and so Abdullah returned to the doctor on Saturday and learned from him that he had developed a so-called super-bug that caused the fever, and he reprimanded him for not calling, and prescribed new medications to deal with the infection. This additional crisis stopped the couple from thinking too much about

the test result, but Abdullah remembered to stop by the hospital lab and give them his phone number, asking them to send him a picture of the test result via WhatsApp when they sent it to the doctor.

On the way home, the wife learned what was going through her husband's mind as he told her how he dreamed of his brother on the first night before discovering the problem, then the coincidence of the death anniversary and the pressure device printing the day of his brother's death, which was different from the actual date. He didn't tell her about his intention to offer a sacrifice for surviving the operation and another after the lab test result, and when he brought the second sheep's liver home, he told his wife that he got it from a friend. It wasn't a complete lie, as he had asked his friend to offer the two sacrifices, and he had ruled that he was entitled to have the liver.

Amm Hamada

She handed over her bags in a chaotic atmosphere that seemed unnecessary, especially since she was at John F. Kennedy Airport in New York, but the flight was headed to Cairo on EgyptAir, where there was forced coexistence between illiteracy, chaos, and selfishness on one hand, and order, secularism, and tolerance on the other.

"Thank you, ma'am, for helping Amm Hamada." Andalib had answered some of Amm Hamada's questions and guided her to the baggage check-in. "May God bless you, ma'am, take Amm Hamada with you," her husband said, who was unable to fill out the form for his traveling wife. "Amm Hamada doesn't know English or Arabic or anything, take care of her, may God enlighten you, ma'am". "Okay, don't worry," Andalib said and started moving along with Amm Hamada, slowly matching her pace, towards the passport barrier while her husband explained the reason for her trip to Cairo, that her daughter was sick and needed her there.

He asked Andalib if she was traveling to Cairo.

"I'm traveling to Cairo, but I'm transiting to Amman," she said.

The husband was skeptical of the answer due to the mention of a place other than Cairo.

"But you're taking the Egyptian plane, right?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied.

"Okay, then take her with you to the plane's door," he said.

"Okay," she said.

"I'm entrusting you with Amm Hamada, she doesn't know anything, ma'am, may God bless you," he said.

She reassured him and sent Amm Hamada ahead of her to the passport window; Amm Hamada looked at the officer and turned to Andalib, gesturing with her hands, asking what to do and what he wanted.

Andalib raised her passport; Amm Hamada understood what was needed and handed over her passport to the officer, who kept talking and asking in English, and Amm Hamada was giving him answers in Arabic that she was going to Cairo to visit her daughter and would return.

The journey began from the passport barrier to the shared waiting lounge for passengers of several different flights, each listening to the microphone for their flight number, destination, and gate. Amm Hamada was waddling along with a duck-like gait, carrying a handbag with food and personal items, and Andalib was keeping pace with her, and doubt was rising in her gradually if they would arrive on time; she wasn't an expert on John F. Kennedy Airport, and she had only taken off from there once before on a French plane to Paris, and she didn't know the distance to this lounge.

"Why didn't your husband ask for assistance from the airline?" she asked.

Amm Hamada looked at Andalib without stopping or slowing down more; Andalib realized that she hadn't understood the question.

"If he had asked for help, you would have been taken in a wheelchair after handing over the bags, straight to the plane gate without walking a single step," she explained.

Amm Hamada asked God to forgive Abu Hamada.

In the lounge, finally, Amm Hamada, holding Andalib's hand, headed towards a gathering of Egyptian women who looked like sisters, as if they were all made in the same mold.

"The lady is Palestinian," Amm Hamada introduced her companion to her sisters, and prayers for Palestine and its people poured out, affirming that everyone in Egypt loved the Palestinian people and wished them salvation.

"Does anyone know where the bathroom is?" one of the sisters asked, looking at Andalib, who pointed it out.

"Please, sweetheart, come with me," the woman said, and Andalib accompanied her.

"How do you use this?" the woman asked, and Andalib explained how to open the door, how to close it from the inside, and then open it again to exit.

This woman was bigger than Amm Hamada; she left her bag at the door outside the cabin, but Andalib told her to take her bag with her; the woman handed her a bunch of paper and asked her to wet it and return it to her; Andalib did as asked and went back to the others.

"Where's the prayer?" Amm Hamada asked Andalib.

"We're in the lounge," Andalib replied.

"No, no, the prayer," Amm Hamada clarified, explaining to Andalib that a woman wanted to pray and was asking what direction the Qibla, was (Muslims pray in the direction of the Qibla in Mecca). Then she told the woman to pray in any direction, it didn't matter as long as her prayers were sincere. The woman wasn't convinced by Amm Hamada's advice and went to ask a man with Arab features, but she returned without an answer.

"Pray, sweetheart, in any direction, I told you from the start, sit on the chair with good intend and pray, sweetheart," Amm Hamada said, and the woman had no choice but to comply.

Finally, the plane boarding time approached, and with it, the final check of hand luggage and, of course, the body, where everything that could contain a speck of metal had to be removed so as not to trigger the hand-held security device's alarm. But Amm Hamada set off the device; the policewoman asked her to raise her hands to search her manually.

"What does she want, ma'am?" Amm Hamada asked before Andalib could answer. The policewoman raised her hands to explain to Amm Hamada what was needed, but she continued waiting to hear from Andalib, who told her to raise her hands for the search.

Suddenly, Amm Hamada laughed and waddled away from the policewoman's hand that had touched her armpit.

The policewoman came back, asking her to raise her hands, and Amm Hamada's laughter grew louder, and she almost burst into laughter every time the policewoman touched her. The policewoman also started laughing with her, and Amm Hamada's companions were telling her to calm down, then the male police officer responsible for searching men came to see what the commotion was about, looked at his colleague's attempts and Amm Hamada's reaction, and started laughing too; they let her pass, although she was still beeping.

Andalib's lot was to sit far from any of her travel companions; she managed to sleep, but Amm Hamada didn't forget her, when they landed in Cairo; she stood at

the plane door before going down the steps, waving at Andalib and sending her air kisses.

Yassin

"Seriously, Yassin, your timing is unique," said one of the passengers who had left their seats and crowded the aisle after the plane stopped, and of course, before the doors opened.

"What do you want me to do?" his mother said, continuing as if she was the only one there: "Do you want to pee in a cloth and abandon it here?"

Yassin didn't like the idea of doing it in front of everyone, and it was impossible for him to break through the crowd waiting in the aisle to get to the bathroom.

This Yassin was a little terrorist who hadn't turned three yet, and his mother seemed clueless.

Six hours before this incident, I had seen her at Frankfurt Airport in the luggage drop-off line. She was sitting on chairs with a cart carrying three bags, with other bags around her and her little son in her lap while Yassin was climbing on top of the bags, falling every few minutes; and she'd put him back in place.

When I arrived, there was a gap between where she was sitting and the end of the line; I thought she was waiting for something and wasn't part of the slow line.

After three or four movements in the line and some progress, Yassin's mother shouted that I had taken her place. I went with those who had lined up behind me, behind her, and after about half an hour of crawling, dragging bags, putting Yassin back every time he fell, and running after his brother, I handed over my bag.

Meanwhile, someone was shouting at others in the line about how the airline had taken an extra hundred euros from him as a ticket price although his granddaughter had bought at a cheaper rate. I hoped his seat on the plane wasn't near mine.

My fears grew when we gathered in the lounge waiting to board the plane; he shouted at someone who asked him to speak quietly; then he stormed the barrier and stood waiting for the rest of his group. When one of the women arrived, he asked her about the others; she said they were cleaning the little girl; he said loudly: "So we're just standing here waiting for her crap."

I entered the plane as the last passenger and was relieved to see our man and his group in the front while my seat was in the middle, and what a coincidence! Yassin was sitting directly behind me, and his mother was with his younger brother on his left, and an unlucky young passenger was sitting on Yassin's right, who didn't waste time and started kicking the seat with his feet.

I turned to his mother so she would understand the silent reproach, and she said to him: "Shut up, Yassin, for God's sake."

Yassin didn't care and his mother told him that after takeoff, he could watch cartoons on the screen he was kicking.

I hoped the child would shut up or sleep or get busy watching movies.

Yassin stopped kicking during takeoff as he sank back into his seat with the plane's forward and upward thrust, and as soon as the plane leveled, the kicking resumed, and his silly mother would occasionally tell him to shut up.

Yassin unbuckled his seatbelt and climbed onto his neighbor while his mother told him not to disturb the man, who kept putting him back in his seat; Yassin would bounce back like a magnet to look out the window.

It was clear Yassin had no discipline and had received no upbringing from his family, and his mother knew it, so she started encouraging him to move away from her to annoy the other passengers.

I went to the bathroom and found Yassin trying to open the door, and the flight attendant was holding his hand away from the handle, saying "no"; he pulled his hand back as soon as she let go, then decided to run and hit passengers on both sides of the aisle. The head flight attendant tried to stop him but he slipped between his legs. A woman came out of the bathroom looking at me angrily, but she didn't say a word and hurried back to her seat before I could apologize or tell her who had disturbed her in the bathroom. On my way back to my seat, I saw the head flight attendant carrying Yassin around the waist and putting him in his seat next to his mother. Less than a minute later, Yassin was standing on his seat and pulling my hair. "Calm down, Yassin," I said quietly, desperate, but his hands reached for my glasses, and I saved them before he grabbed them and turned to him, and his mother said: "Shut up, for God's sake."

"God has nothing to do with this, you can't leave a child with no upbringing from birth and now expect him to listen to you," I said.

Before she could comment on my words, and I was tugging on Yassin's head, pulling out a hair, Yassin's unlucky neighbor asked her when they were returning to Germany, and thanked God after learning the date, saying he would have changed his travel date if it coincided with their return. Before I turned back to my seat, I saw the screen hanging from its place, having being torn off.

Yassin and his brother burst into laughter, and it seemed the first was tickling the second. I felt relieved that the noise and wailing and the mother's comments had turned into laughter, and I regretted pulling Yassin's hair; he's a victim of lack of upbringing.

Their mother told them she was going to the bathroom and would return. The laughter continued for a while, then turned into wailing from the little one.

Yassin tried to run but their neighbor across the aisle grabbed his arm and told him to take care of his brother and calm him down. He pulled away and went to the passenger in front of her, my neighbor across the aisle. Yassin lifted the sleeping man's head with his hand and looked at his face, which was filled with confusion, then let go and went to first class.

When the flight attendant threw him back through the curtain to our side, his neighbor grabbed him and pushed him into his seat; he started playing with his neighbor, unlucky man, who started slapping Yassin on the face, taking advantage of his mother's absence, but Yassin was hitting back at his neighbor's chest.

I looked at my aisle neighbor and started talking to him; the chance of reading or watching a movie or sleeping was gone, I had to ignore Yassin's presence.

He told me his name and added he's from Syria and is going to Amman to meet his family, who gathered from the Gulf and Europe. He seemed worried, then said he was afraid they wouldn't let him in. I reassured him after learning he had a three-year residence permit in Germany and his Syrian passport was valid.

He started telling me about his escape from Daraa city until he reached Germany, but I stopped listening when I felt Yassin's hand on my head, and I started patting his hand so he wouldn't take revenge and pull out more of my already scarce hair. My neighbor said he's the fourteenth son and the only bachelor in the family; I told him his mother had probably prepared a bride for him, but he insisted he wouldn't marry before thirty, meaning in three years. He worked as a lecturer at Damascus University, but his salary wasn't enough to pay rent, he received support from his father who worked in the Emirates, and he was suffering constantly from thugs at checkpoints; so, he decided to leave. He went to Turkey and tried three times to cross the sea in a small boat with others, and each time the Greek coast guard intercepted them, threw the engine into the sea, and left them until it was easy for the Turkish coast guard to catch them and return them.

The fourth attempt succeeded.

My neighbor said he had walked for three months, crossing six European countries until he entered Germany and became safe. They gave him a refugee residence permit and travel document, paid for language lessons, and told him about job opportunities in his field if he mastered the language, or he could work in

any available field in the market, and they would pay rent for those who found a place, but the problem was the difficulty of renting. Arab mafias had formed that found apartments and demanded up to ten thousand euros charge for finding a place and, of course, the German authorities wouldn't pay this amount.

My neighbor didn't go into details about the problems on the road; it seemed he'd forgotten or they were normal for him, but he was angry at the mafias and individuals exploiting the situation in Germany to milk refugees.

Our conversation continued until the plane landed and stopped, and the passengers stood up and crowded the aisle, and Yassin demanded to go to the bathroom.

Waiting for the bags, Yassin climbed onto the moving belt, and I gently took him down and talked to him by name until his mother noticed; she asked me if I knew Yassin. I looked at her with pity and reminded her I was sitting in front of him, and his unlucky neighbor said: Is there anyone on the plane who doesn't know Yassin? We exchanged some child-rearing rules in perfect agreement, and the luggage arrived; I said goodbye to Yassin, and a young man volunteered to help his mother load her bags and watch her children.

On the way to Amman, I thought about the paradox of the self-destruction of generations in wars and sectarian conflicts and the neglect of Yassin and his like in terms of upbringing.

Desires and Oddities

Clinging to Youth

"I swear I'm a little scared."

"Don't be afraid, Hajj. What God has permitted, People cannot forbid."

"I'm not afraid of people, nor of paying them any attention," the seventy-year-old Hajj said to his lifelong companion, who raised his eyes in inquiry. The Hajj continued: "I'm afraid my equipment won't work."

"What are you saying, Hajj? Is it working or not? How can't you know?"

"You know man, may God poison your body, that I can't be sure. Now, everything is working, but that's mainly theoretical with little practice."

His friend looked at him, and all the wrinkles on his face confirmed that he did not fully understand what the Hajj wanted to say: He remained silent to lure the Hajj to speak.

"I mean, when I think about the subject deeply, everything is fine and I am standing and ready, and every now and then when I have doubts, I test it out; and everything's fine."

"Okay, what's the problem, is he just afraid of being shy?"

"Shyness and I are friends, but I am afraid of falling short. The girl is young, too young for me, and if she gets used to it and starts demanding more, I am afraid of falling short. Understand?"

"I understand you, but what matters is the first shot. Are you confident in your ability to aim and unleash? If you control things from the beginning, there is nothing to fear later, because everything happens while she is small and inexperienced, and she will get used to it."

"This is not simple either, the first shot," the Hajj said, closing his eyes, and the image of the girl he had agreed with her family to propose to next Thursday was revealed before him. "Remember that the people of Upper Egypt enter brides with their fingers to confirm virginity, but this is not permissible here." Rather, it would be a scandal if he acted like the Upper Egyptians and the girl informed her family. So where is the benefit, he wants her because his imagination is sexually active.

"It's the first night's terror, Hajj. It affects young and old, and you, thank God, are like a horse. Leave it to me, I'll get you a guarantee of several shots on the first night." His friend was thinking of providing Viagra pills to ensure that the Hajj could get through the night safely so that the memory would remain strong between the newlyweds.

The Hajj felt reassured, completed the engagement, paid the dowry, and married the girl half a century younger than him. He had prepared the house for her and

renovated the bed in which his seven sons and daughters were born. All of them opposed his marriage, but he defied them. He bought new cabinets for the kitchen and mattresses for the living room, as he was well off compared to the poor family of the bride, and all the lands were still in his name, and he had not given his children anything; he only allowed whichever of them he wanted to work the land in exchange for his living and gifts. He was eager for sex and began to wish for the wedding night and to visit the girl's family more often, carrying gifts, to contemplate her body while feeling the Viagra strip in his pocket.

The promised night came and he had no idea how the party went. He was thinking about the hour of the coming together and if Viagra would actually control his shots, he contemplated neither the course of the party nor the looks of the invitees or the whispers of the old women: He wanted to be ready at the right moment, and he remembered his friend's saying that he should only take a pill just before zero hour. The groom was alone with the bride, and some time passed, and suddenly the girl's screams rose, and some of the newlyweds' relatives ululated, but the girl did not stop screaming, her voice rose even more, and the family heard what sounded like a distress call; They knocked on the door and entered to find the groom lying on the ground, not breathing.

In the hospital, the doctors were puzzled by this sudden death until they searched his clothes. They found the rest of the strip, missing two pills, and guessed that the groom had taken them in one dose that had killed him. At his age, Viagra was not suitable for him, and if he used it, he should only take half a pill.

The Vacationer

"What if the vacationers urinate in the sea?" The thought occurred to him as he watched people walking into the sea, shrinking from the shock of the difference between the heat of the sun on the sand and the cold water, then standing and splashing water on themselves, and moving away from that spot and swimming back to the shore, just as he had done when he urinated in the sea instead of walking to the nearby bathroom.

"Probably the sewage from the bathroom drains somewhere into the sea too," he justified his action, but he was annoyed by the thought that he was swimming in other people's urine.

He lay on his stomach on the beach chair and turned his face to the north and couldn't look long at his neighbor lying on her back with her belly rising like twins about to be born.

He turned his face to the right where two girls with fit bodies were lying on their stomachs, their buttocks higher than their backs. They were looking at each other and chatting, and their bodies shook when they laughed; more breast became visible on his neighbor's chest, who had untied her top to let the sun reach every part of her back.

His thoughts and imagination took him far away, and if he had been lying on his back, his secret would have been exposed.

Suddenly, their laughter subsided, and his neighbor's head turned towards him; he was embarrassed, thinking they had discovered his thoughts.

He smiled and started looking for sunscreen; the girl turned to her friend while he started applying cream to his hands and neck, then sat up and applied it to his legs, chest, and stomach, and tried to spread it on his back, lying down and twisting left and right, but to no avail, until his slim neighbor came over, smiled, and gestured with her hands; he understood she wanted to help him cover the hard-to-reach spot on his back; he handed her the cream and smiled widely, turning his face towards the neighbor on the left. Some time passed, and he remained in his position, lying on his stomach, turning his head to the right, where the two girls ignored him completely, and then to the left, while he was still smiling. He remembered he had a book in his beach bag, and reached for it, pulled it out, raised his chest, leaned on his elbows, and started flipping through the pages, looking for where he had stopped the previous week. He read two paragraphs and tried to remember the previous content, but to no avail; he started flipping through the pages towards the beginning when he saw his neighbor on the left trying to stand up, and he got up to help her.

He extended his hand to her; she gave him an angry look. he pointed to her stomach and muttered to make her understand he was helping her because of the baby in her belly. She raised her voice with incomprehensible words that sounded like insults, the vacationers looked at them, she stood up facing him, the site manager hurried over while the neighbor was screaming and pushing him back. She bent down to her sandal, he turned to escape, but her aim was accurate. People started asking her what happened, and she answered them with screams. The situation calmed down as quickly as it had erupted, and the site manager

moved his belongings to another umbrella far away and explained to him in English that the lady wasn't pregnant and thought he was mocking her obesity in front of others when he was trying to explain to her with gestures that he wanted to help her because she was pregnant.

He wondered how he was unable to tell the difference between pregnant and obese, closed his eyes, pursed his lips, and scolded himself for interfering in the first place. but hadn't the slim girl intervened to apply cream to his back? The manager interrupted his thoughts, asking him what he could bring him to drink. "Beer," he said curtly and lay down on the beach chair, turning his back to most of the vacationers.

Naked

She arrived home tired and wet with sweat, the distance she had traveled on foot was not long, perhaps only three hundred meters, as her friend's car had dropped her off at the end of the street. Her parents had been traveling abroad for several weeks, while her brother was at his university in another city and only returned home on vacation. So, everyone agreed to give their driver some time off, and she and her friend arranged for her to come by every day to take her to university and return her home.

She entered the house, and had begun removing her clothes when she passed the garden door. Her thoughts focused on the shower, and within seconds she was completely naked in her room, her bed covered in a pile of black outerwear and floral ensembles. She went to the shower and began to remove the sweat from her body with water, then soap, then shampoo, and she did not calculate the time it took to moisturize her body, or the amount of water she wasted, which was perhaps enough to irrigate a palm tree for an entire year. She wrapped the towel around her lower half and left the bathroom for her room. In the middle of the way, she froze when she heard her brother's voice in the kitchen saying that he was coming.

She thought he had heard her and was talking to her. She thought to resort to the living room closest to her room, so that her brother would not see her like this if he

left the kitchen immediately. She opened the living room door at lightning speed and turned to peep through the door crevice to see if her brother would show up, so she could alert him, or she could cover the rest of the distance if she was sure that he was going to stay in the kitchen. The towel slipped off her waist, so she lifted it to cover her wet hair as she watched the situation through the door crevice. She could no longer hear her brother's voice, so she ran to her room.

After a while, she left her room in her house clothes and found her brother coming out of the living room carrying a tray with two full cups of coffee on it. He greeted her and asked her if she had seen his friend who had been sitting in the living room a few minutes ago while he made him coffee. But now he couldn't find him: The world revolved around her and she fell to the ground from the horror of what had happened.

Within two days after the parents returned from their trip, the friend's family came to propose for the girl. The friend told her brother that people show the girl's face to the groom, "but thanks be to God, you hid nothing from me."

The Postman

He's now approaching ninety, retired from his job a quarter of a century ago, and discovered by chance that he had fathered over 1,300 children, or in other words, the search for yet more of his offspring had been discontinued. He's neither a prince nor a sheikh, who marries a virgin every Thursday, but worked as a postman in Nashville, Tennessee, USA, during the 1960's, and he believed he resembled the famous rock singer Johnny Cash back then, or that's what he heard repeatedly from the ladies in the city. Some even suspected he was Johnny Cash himself, touring the houses disguised as a postman, as he said, justifying what happened.

In 2001, two men from the city, who didn't know each other, hired the same private investigator to find their father. After conducting a DNA test, which has become accessible and affordable to everyone, it turned out the two men had the same father; the investigator's curiosity was piqued. He gathered information about their residence and life circumstances but couldn't find a link between them; he had

to ask others to help by testing their DNA. The ball started rolling, and dozens, then hundreds, were found to share the father's genes. The investigator then moved on to test the DNA of those who were close in age and residence, and to track down potential fathers. After fifteen years of searching, he found 1,300 people who shared the same father, and he identified the father when he decided to test the DNA of milk and mail delivery men.

After the news broke, the old man told local media that contraception wasn't widespread in the 1960's and defended himself, saying he hadn't done anything to be ashamed of, "The 60's were beautiful days, and I used to imitate Johnny Cash's clothes and hairstyle, and that worked perfectly with the ladies." He recalled, smiling: "Some would pretend I was Johnny Cash, and I don't know if they believed it or were trying to convince themselves I was, anyway, I couldn't refuse a quickie while working."

Johnny's lookalike didn't record the number of ladies who responded to him, but the investigator says there are more children and he stopped searching so as not to ruin people's families who have fathers, and originally, many of those identified as his children provided information only after being guaranteed personal confidentiality. Some were relieved to know the truth and don't hold any grudge against the old man; the important thing was they knew their father now, his appearance, and his genes, which helps them avoid diseases or know what they might inherit.

Luckily, the original Johnny wasn't their father; he died in 2003 at seventy-one, suffering from diabetes, Parkinson's and addiction in his later years.

Rulers and Sons

The title of "The Most Prolific Father in the World" is held by an Arab ruler who is said to have fathered over a thousand sons and daughters, namely the Moroccan Sultan Moulay Ismail, the most controversial ruler in history in terms of the number of his offspring, and who entered the Guinness World Records as the most prolific man in the world with documented numbers (888, then 1024 children). His case has been studied in the context of evolutionary psychology.

He is said to have fathered 1171 sons and daughters from four wives and 500 concubines over 32 years (from the age of 25 to 57). Many scientists have doubted the possibility of the late Sultan or anyone fathering such a large number of children due to several factors, including the inability of sperm to fertilize all eggs and the possibility of infertility and low fertility in some women.

However, a 2014 study published in the scientific journal "PLOS ONE" by two researchers from the University of Vienna, relying on computer simulations, found that the Sultan could have fathered 1171 children from fewer women than commonly believed (between 65 and 110 women), with a sexual practice rate ranging from 0.83 to 1.43 times a day, taking into account religious restrictions. The study suggested that the Sultan may have fathered an even larger number of children based on reports that he issued orders to midwives to strangle any newborn female child from his concubines immediately after birth, keeping only the male newborns.

The late King Saud bin Abdulaziz is one of the most prolific rulers of Saudi Arabia, with 115 children. He is alleged to have had around 45 wives, and is the only ruler of the Al Saud family to have been removed from power rather than dying in office. Saud's father, the founder of Saudi Arabia, King Abdulaziz, fathered 36 sons and 27 daughters, including the current Saudi monarch, King Salman bin Abdulaziz, who will be the last of the sons to rule, passing the torch to the grandchildren of Abdulaziz. The founder started his marriages at the age of 17 and is known to have had at least 30 wives.

Sa'id bin Sultan Al-Busaidi (ruled between 1806 and 1856) is considered the strongest and most famous Sultan of Oman and the founder of the Omani state, fathering 120 sons and daughters from his wives and concubines, whose numbers are unknown, and who were of Arab, Iranian, Georgian, and Circassian origins. His sons fought over the throne after his death.

..The ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, is one of the most prolific rulers of the UAE, with six marriages. The number of his sons and daughters is estimated to be around 30.the same number fathered by the founder of the UAE, Sheikh Zayed, from eight wives.

Pursuing Hitler

He couldn't help but smile broadly, and a laugh escaped him, catching the attention of some passengers in the metro carriage. His friend, standing opposite him, looked at him inquiringly and leaned over to see what he was reading in his English newspaper.

"This is a review of a book titled 'The Last Days of Hitler, Moment by Moment'," his friend said, but the mention of Hitler's name and their conversation in Arabic drew the attention of some passengers back to them.

"After seven decades, the Jews are still taking revenge on this man, tarnishing his reputation and humiliating anyone who supported him, Germans and others."

"They're smarter than Arabs or the Bedouin who takes revenge after a quarter of a century and says he was hasty in his judgment," his friend said, ignoring the sideways glances from some passengers. Since the increase in terrorist attacks in European streets, eyes have been focused and ears have been perked up to everything said by a colored person who isn't lily-white or by a veiled woman.

"The review says historians have long suspected that our man's invasion of Europe and attempt to exterminate our cousins was an attempt to compensate for his lack of masculinity and small penis."

The friends burst out laughing, and the newspaper reader continued: "According to the historians who wrote this book, our man had one testicle and the opening of his penis was located underneath, not like us, in the front, so he had to sit down to urinate, and couldn't have sex."

"Allahu Akbar, Hitler was castrated and sexually impotent?" The friend raised his voice, and most passengers in the metro carriage raised their heads to examine him, as he deliberately raised his voice to provoke the English by saying "Allahu Akbar" followed by Hitler's name.

His friend signaled to him with a clear look against this mistake, which could cause them trouble if one of the passengers decided to call the police to pick them up at the next station.

"This is a review in The Telegraph about a book on Hitler saying he was sexually impotent," the seated friend said loudly to his British neighbor, a black man, hoping others would understand why they kept mentioning the Führer's name.

"All racists are effeminate," the black neighbor said.

"But this book says his penis was very short," the standing friend commented.

A white English girl left her seat next to them before the train reached the station; the standing friend sat down beside his friend and added: "Do you think Churchill was effeminate and his weapon was small like his rival's?"

"Let's leave Churchill alone, what else does the review say?"

"Yes, let's leave him," the newspaper reader said to his neighbor and looked back at the review to recall: "It says the Führer was afraid to be seen naked, and because of his condition, he was quick to anger."

"But I saw a film saying Hitler had a mistress and they committed suicide together, and of course he was having intercourse with her, whether short or long; as we say, size doesn't matter."

The train stopped, and the neighbor stood up, announcing as he left: "You Arabs create problems for yourselves and others."

"Maybe it's true?"

"What, the black man's words or the review?" The friend pointed to the newspaper.

"I don't think it's true; the same paper refers to another book on Hitler's biography written by a British historian saying the Austrian-born Nazi leader avoided any sexual activity for fear of infection, meaning he was active but faithful in his relationships. A German historian also wrote that Hitler and Eva Braun enjoyed a happy and healthy sex life. This is also mentioned in the review; so how could the man have one testicle and a lower orifice according to the new book?"

"They really don't forget their grudges, and God knows what they're planning to take revenge on us for, after engineering the New York invasion and blaming it on Arabs. Before, they blackened our faces in every Hollywood film, then they plotted this trick against us, and now we're paying the price everywhere."

He paused, then added as they stood up to leave the carriage: "Whatever they say, they won't accuse us of what they accused our man."

Myths and Facts

Love and Madness

In the beginning, virtues and vices coexisted, even playing together on a planet devoid of humans and animals. To combat boredom, they agreed to play a game of hide-and-seek. Madness, from the vices team, closed his eyes and started counting to a hundred, giving everyone a chance to hide. They had all chosen their hiding spots beforehand, except for Love, who was always indecisive.

Treachery, Tenderness, Passion, Longing, Laziness, and Lies hid, with Lies announcing to Madness that he would hide under the rocks, but he jumped into the river instead. As Madness approached a hundred, Love was still undecided whether to hide or reveal himself. Before Madness opened his eyes, Love threw himself among the rose bushes and thorns.

Laziness was the first to be found, curled up in his spot, thinking Madness would look elsewhere. Then Lies emerged from the river to catch his breath. Madness looked up and saw Tenderness flying towards the moon and called out to her. He stamped his foot, telling Longing to come out, and swept his foot aside, revealing Treachery hiding in the dirt, with Envy in her arms. Quickly, Madness found the rest: Wisdom, Chastity, Courage, and Justice, but he couldn't find Love; he kept searching, jumping and spinning, so Love wouldn't win the game.

Here, Envy whispered Love's hiding spot to Madness; he picked up a sharp stick and started stabbing the rose bushes to drive Love out. A few stabs, and everyone heard Love's cries and moans as he emerged from the roses, announcing he was wounded and blinded by Madness' blows.

"Oh God, what have I done?" Madness exclaimed, remorseful, and started to appease Love, offering to do anything to fix his mistake.

"I'll be blind forever," Love said calmly and meekly, "... so be my guide, that I may continue."

Madness immediately accepted the task, and since then, blind Love has wandered the earth, led by Madness.

Life and Death

With the newborn's first cry, the mother died, and Death met Life, continuing their eternal, branching, and ever-changing dialogue.

"She was a rich man's wife, and she died giving birth to his son and heir. They knew she couldn't handle the pregnancy and childbirth. Now, she'll be buried like a servant, with no belongings, jewelry, or food to prepare her for the afterlife."

"People stopped fearing you and abandoned those customs long ago," Life said to Death, knowing he was teasing her.

"On the contrary, they've become more afraid of me than ever. Before religions, they invented the story of life after death to make it easier for themselves, and religions took the idea, promising paradise and threatening hell, each according to their deeds; thus, both sides' fear of me grew. Have you seen a righteous or wicked person who isn't afraid of death? They all cling to the idea of life after death to make it easier for themselves, but they don't take anything with them to help them in the afterlife, because paradise is paradise if that's their destination, and whatever they might bring won't save them from hell if that's where they're headed."

"True." Life said, trying to deflect Death's jab, and continued: "You're a terrorist, making people live in fear of meeting you."

"You're the one who's coddling them; they cling to you, hoping for more tangible allurements, and it's natural they fear me, because no one returns from me to tell them what they've seen."

"Tell me, what awaits them with you, so I can make it easier for them," Life pleaded with Death.

"If I told you, my beauty, what I have in store for them after hosting them, they'd hate me even more and make your days bitter, clinging to you." Death fell silent, and Life shifted her gaze from the newborn to Death, who continued: "This poor woman will be buried quickly, and worms will be born from her entrails, and her bones will remain there until they too dissolve. No one will speak to her in the grave, and she won't come back to life to be punished or rewarded. That's how it's been for millions of years, and that's how it will remain."

The Friend

"Your friends, are good for nothing," Abu Muhammad said to his son, trying to control his tone so as not to hurt the feelings of his only son. This wasn't the first time he'd made his son feel the worthlessness of his friends, and each time, the son defended his choice, claiming they were loyal companions; so, the father had no choice but to remain silent. But he decided to teach his son a lesson that would benefit him in life.

One morning, Al-Mukhtar (Abu Muhammed- *The Mukhtar is a highly respected local dignitary, selected by the villagers, with official functions similar to a local mayor*) went to the butcher and asked him to slaughter a sheep and put it in a sack before it bled out, then returned with a porter carrying the carcass in the blood-stained sack to his house and leaned it behind the door.

"What's wrong, Father?" Muhammad asked Al-Mukhtar when he returned home before sunset and saw his father sitting on a chair, hand on cheek, looking depressed.

"Everything is wrong," Al-Mukhtar replied, feigning deep sorrow; his son pressed him for the reason, wanting to know the secret and ease his father's mind.

"Today, when I went to the market, a despicable person bumped into me and made me so angry that I pulled out my dagger and stabbed him in the heart; he fell dead, and I had to put him in this sack so no one would discover what I'd done. I brought him here, and he's behind the door."

Muhammad looked where his father pointed and saw the blood-stained sack.

"Don't worry, Father, I'll go to some friends now and bring some to help me carry the sack and bury it after dark, and may no harm come to us."

The son knew that the neighborhood men and some of his father's friends gathered at Al-Mukhtar's every night, so the body had to be moved before they arrived. He set off to the closest friend's house and knocked on the door; Anwer came out, cheerfully greeting Muhammad and asking him in, but Muhammad was in a hurry and told Anwer what had happened and what he needed.

"You're crazy, son of a criminal! How can your father kill someone, and you want to involve me in it! You're my friend, and I won't report your father to the police, but make sure you don't tell anyone I knew," Muhammad understood the message and left Anwer, heading to the next friend, hearing similar words. The third friend said something like: Your father kills, and I'm supposed to bury for you? and slammed the door in his face.

Muhammad returned home, head hung low, afraid to tell the rest of his friends in case no one helped him and his father became vulnerable to informants. He found Al-Mukhtar sitting as he'd left him; he told him what he'd heard from his friends and remembered all the criticism Al-Mukhtar had made about them.

"You know Abu Abdullah's house." "Yes, yes," Muhammad interrupted, anxious about what his father was planning; Abu Abdullah was one of his father's oldest friends and rarely missed the evening gatherings unless absolutely necessary.

".. go to his house and tell him what happened."

Before Al-Mukhtar finished speaking, Muhammad had passed through the door where the body lay and ran to Abu Abdullah's house, breathless, telling him what had happened. The man calmed the boy down and asked him to wait while he changed into suitable clothes for the task ahead.

"Take it easy, Al-Mukhtar, don't worry," Abu Abdullah said to his friend, patting his shoulder, then kissed his head, assuring him everything would be alright.

The friend asked Muhammad to put the body on his back and support it as they walked, heading to a stream some distance from the village. He laid the body down and dug deep enough into the water's edge to bury the sack and its contents, covering it with stones; the water returned to its course, and the two returned to Al-Mukhtar, reporting the task was done.

Muhammad distanced himself from his friends and spent more time with his father, attending evening gatherings. One day, Al-Mukhtar showed anger at something Abu Abdullah was saying about a trivial matter. The friend tried to argue with Al-Mukhtar, who unleashed a torrent of abuse in front of the guests; Muhammad was astonished at his father's behavior, humiliating his friend in public.

"Al-Mukhtar, why this insult? I didn't do anything to deserve it," Abu Abdullah protested in front of the listeners, and Al-Mukhtar just snorted into his hand and slapped his friend's cheek. Abu Abdullah stood up, angry, defending his dignity: "Listen, Al-Mukhtar, you've insulted my honor in front of people for no reason, but by God, no matter how angry you make me, I'll never speak of what waters are running over."

Al-Mukhtar looked at his son, as if saying, this is a true friend, then stood up, kissed Abu Abdullah's head, and asked for forgiveness, whispering he'd explain later.

The Rich Woman

She welcomed her uncle with a bright smile, and her children gathered around him, giving and receiving affection, jumping on the couches, and sprawling on the living room rug. She went into the kitchen and turned on the gas on low heat so the water wouldn't boil too quickly, giving her uncle time to decide whether he wanted tea, coffee, or one of the many herbal teas available in her oak-wood kitchen cabinets. She took mango juice from the fridge, poured some into his crystal glass, placed it on a silver tray, and brought it to him: "I have other juices, but I know you like mango and red guava."

"Indeed, my dear, as you say, mango is delicious despite its thick, sweet juice," he said, looking at her and admiring her vibrant clothes, then glanced around the living room, finding it tidy and organized, with a modern 40" TV in the corner.

"How are you, your health, your husband, your job? The children, God bless them, are radiating health and beauty."

He knew she and her husband had bought this house on monthly installments and were renewing some of the furniture.

"Alhamdulillah, thanks be to God, Uncle, everything's fine," she said, pausing. He knew from experience that something was bothering her. He guessed she was feeling pinched financially, or maybe stressed at work, given she sometimes spent over eight hours there, leaving the kids in daycare, dropping them off in the morning and picking them up in the afternoon when she got back in her car.

"Shall I make you tea or coffee, plain or sweet, or Nescafe with milk?" She smiled at him, and continued: "Insha'Allah, you're not in a rush; stay for lunch with us. everything's in the fridge."

"No food, I have an appointment in an hour, and I wanted to see you on the way. Make me mint tea," he said, standing up with her and heading to the kitchen.

"By God, I hope it's not your husband who's bothering you and making you unhappy?" She smiled, shaking her head that her husband wasn't the cause. An idea occurred to her uncle to restore her contentment, but only after she aired her complaints. She talked about financial struggles with installment payments and expenses, work fatigue, and constant hints at staff reductions.

"But you manage with what God provides, and unhappiness is just a result of psychological buildup and fear of the future," her uncle said. She agreed with him, and they left the kitchen, sitting at the dining table so the children wouldn't cause any accidents with the hot tea.

"You know you're living better than any king, sultan, caliph, or emperor from Adam's time until just a hundred years ago," he said.

"Better than Harun al-Rashid?" she asked, laughing.

"Better than Harun, you mean better than Zubaida, of course. Your situation is better than both; at least you don't share your husband with other women like poor Zubaida."

They laughed together, sipping tea sweetened only with fresh mint.

"Choose any historical figure you want, and I'll prove your life now is better than theirs."

"Better than the kings of Andalus? I've read about the luxury they lived in."

"That was luxury by the standards of their time. The Caliph Al-Nasir, the most famous of Andalus' princes and the most powerful in his time, subjugated the Frankish kings and they came to his court as petitioners. After his death, they found in his memoirs that the happy days in his life, untainted by trouble, numbered fourteen days, recorded in his own hand, with the day, month, and year. The rest of his days were misery, perhaps the worst being when he slaughtered his son and brother for plotting against him. The caliph didn't have the choices of drinks or utensils available in your kitchen. His spoons were wooden; they cooked for him over firewood. In his time, they invented lead pipes and running water channels, but not as clean as your tap water, and he didn't dream of a toilet and water spray like you have in your bathroom. When he visited the city of Zahra, then under construction, he'd have to ride for hours to cover ten kilometers from Cordoba, and you travel through countries in your car in a time he'd consider like the blink of an eye. As for news, it reached him via smoke signals or riders, taking weeks. You get news direct, with sound and picture, across oceans, and instead of one or two jesters in the caliph's court, you have TV."

Her laughter rose as she grasped her uncle's point.

"Do you know that Al-Mansur, the chamberlain who took control of Andalus from the caliph Al Naser's grandson, was carried on a wooden stretcher during campaigns due to his gout-ridden feet, and he wished he could abdicate and become like one of the slaves carrying him in exchange for being cured of gout pain. Nowadays, we take a pill a day and avoid suffering from this disease." He looked at her, her smile widened, and her little ones pounced on him.

The Swindler

The story began when the director of Al-Quds Company called Abu Sabah, praising the taste of his olive oil, which he had tried at a friend's who had bought

some. The director asked if Abu Sabah had more, as he wanted to buy fifty canisters at eighty dinars each, a price agreeable to both parties. Abu Sabah reassured him that the quantity would be prepared in the next pressing and he would keep him updated.

Since a third of Abu Sabah's olives weren't enough to produce fifty canisters, he told the field supervisor, who takes two-thirds of the crop in exchange for a third for Abu Sabah, to harvest the olives with his family and workers. The supervisor tried calling the director several times, but he didn't answer. Abu Sabah then called the number, but there was no response; he decided not to get further involved in the matter.

Hours later, the director called the supervisor, apologizing for not answering, saying his young daughter had gotten hurt and needed to be taken to the hospital, and gave the supervisor his private number, available at all times. He requested thirty canisters of oil from the next pressing, then called again, increasing the quantity to fifty; the employees would take thirty, and they'd distribute the other twenty for charity. In the evening, the quantity was pressed, and the supervisor called the director of Al-Quds Company, agreeing to meet in the south of the capital, at the company's location, for cash payment against the oil at the agreed price.

In the morning, two pickup trucks set off, each carrying half the quantity, to the famous roundabout in the south of the capital, in the car garage area, amidst chaos. The parties communicated, and the director said it was better for them to wait at the roundabout, as the company's location was hard to find despite being near the Mercedes company, and a young man had been sent to the roundabout carrying the required payment, who'd lead them to the company's warehouse. The oil owner was in almost constant contact with the supervisor, getting all the details.

A police patrol passed by the waiting men and told them the pickup's wheels needed changing, as did the shattered glass, then the officer asked about the oil price after licking what was on the canister and they gave the supervisor their phone numbers to arrange for oil, but at a price lower than eighty. Then they left. These details also reached the oil owner, together with the information that the young man carrying the money was a quarter of an hour late. "When the young man arrives, don't follow him until you've communicated with me, and call them now to ask when he'll arrive."

The oil owner had become suspicious, suddenly thinking it was all a swindle, and the goods, trucks, and men were in danger. The young man would lead them where others were waiting; they'd take everything, and the supervisor and his companion would get a beating, maybe even be killed if they resisted.

"The director said traffic had delayed the young man, and he'll be with us in five minutes," the supervisor told the oil owner, who asked him to withdraw immediately. If the director called, he'd say he'd headed back and wanted to meet at the parking lot to transfer the oil to another vehicle after taking payment. The oil owner was certain the director wouldn't call, and likely the two trucks had been under surveillance since arriving at the roundabout. When the police stopped and exchanged phone numbers, the watchers suspected they'd fallen into a security trap.

Indeed, the swindler didn't call, and didn't respond to later calls.

Corrupted Nature

He set off in his car to the capital via a road that cut through two villages, escaping the madness of driving on the highway. Next to a water station, a pothole formed by long-term leakage blocked the road, and it seemed some civic-minded person had filled it with rubble to reduce the shock, but the rubble had turned into mud in the pothole and he had to drive slowly for a long distance so the wheels wouldn't splash mud underneath the car.

He reached the village; children were playing soccer in front of their school. They'd divided into teams across the street, and he guessed they were bad kids. He moved slowly, watching the boy who was trapping the ball under his foot, and at the right moment, the boy kicked the ball, hitting the car. He got out, scolding the kids; some came and wiped off the dirt from the ball, but the door was no longer the same.

He continued driving, cursing schools, teachers, officials, fathers, and mothers. He reached the second village, where people usually walked in the middle of the street. He waited behind one of two side-by-side cars that had stopped while their drivers finished a conversation that seemed like it would take a while. After two minutes, he honked; the driver in front stuck his hand out the window, signaling patience; he waited, remembering farmers' lives in villages decades ago, where people stopped their donkeys and chatted in the middle of the road. The meeting ended, and the car in front moved on; the opposing driver waved thanks, and he returned the gesture. He didn't overtake the car in front and watched the street activity. He noticed many passersby throwing drink cans, papers, and wrappers into the street, while a diligent cleaner swept the roadside with a piece of cardboard and collected the refuse into a container. He stuck his hand out the window and gave the cleaner a warm greeting; the man's smile broadened.

He checked the side mirror to merge from the side road onto the main one when a speeding car on the right gave light and sound warnings, telling him not to continue, but he kept going, forcing the aggressive car to take the left lane, which was clear of cars, the preferred lane for drivers in the country.

He spotted a gas station; he checked his car's gauge and decided to turn right. Before he could tell the attendant what fuel he wanted, a tissue seller stood by the window; he told him the paper pack from last time was still full. He turned off the engine, told the attendant what he wanted, and after a while, got out to pay for the fuel; the attendant put a lit cigarette in his mouth and took the money with both hands.

He drove off, and before reaching the main street, a car in front stopped, the driver's door opened, and a hand dropped a paper coffee cup on the ground, the door closed, and both cars continued.

At the start of a long uphill climb, the lanes went from two to three. He stuck to the right lane, watching a pickup truck occupying the left overtaking lane. A speeding Mercedes on the same lane gave signals for the pickup to move right, but it held its ground, increasing black gas emissions from its rear. An Avanti car overtook both on the middle lane; the Mercedes driver insisted on disciplining the pickup driver and started closing in, honking, but the pickup driver was unfazed. The Mercedes overtook on the right lane quickly and shifted to the left, slowing down to force the pickup behind to move right or slow down in the middle of the climb. Other cars started honking behind the pickup; more overtook on the middle lane. The pickup moved right, having lost its resolve; and the Mercedes sped off.

The northern entrance to the capital led into a dark tunnel where you couldn't tell if traffic was stopped or a car was broken down inside. He trusted in God as usual and entered the tunnel at sixty kilometers per hour. He thanked God when visibility cleared after piercing the darkness. On the other side of the tunnel, a traffic light regulated three lanes: the left for those turning ninety degrees left and making U-turns, the other two for continuing straight.

He found six rows of cars instead of three and thought if only the Chinese made cars with compressed sliding bodies like cockroaches.

He stuck to the left lane and waited for the light. The driver in front got out, went to the middle verge and, picked the last rose on a parched tree, handing it through the back window to a female passenger, then returned to his seat. The rose flew out the window immediately; he got out again, picked it up, checked it, and threw it back by the tree. The municipality apparently hadn't sprayed the trees, and a beetle had nested in the rose, maybe it had touched the beauty's nose.

The light turned green, and he turned ninety degrees left, but someone from the next lane turned with him, wanting to do a hundred-eighty-degree turn. He got furious and stubborn, deciding to keep going, leaving the violator on his right as horns blared from all directions.

He entered the city's congestion where a banana and fruit seller occupied the right lane, a customer left his car by the fruit cart and went shopping, while cars behind were forced to seize opportunities and overtake on the opposite lane to continue. Traffic moved smoothly afterward, reaching about forty kilometers per hour; suddenly, a Pepsi can was thrown from the car in front, bounced, and settled under his wheels. He honked in protest; a hand emerged from the front car, raising the middle finger. He honked twice, then they parted ways peacefully.

From crossing the muddy pothole after leaving home until the middle finger gesture, he'd been trying to translate the term "common sense" that everyone in the West understands and applies, but which means nothing to Arabs, and has no colloquial equivalent.

He reached his destination, stopped and put the term in Google Translate, English to Arabic; the result was: الفطرة السليمة (sound nature).

What if Arabs and Muslims had 'sound nature'? Would they be as civilized as the Westerners who had learned to develop this nature, he wondered, finding no answer. What would have happened to 'sound nature' in the West if his ancestors had succeeded in conquering the northern shore of the Mediterranean as they did the eastern and southern shores? Would Columbus have discovered America, and

would we have reached the industrial level the West enjoys, cars, planes, everything ending with 'ta', or would the world be using beasts of burden and carts? And the poor refugees, victims of civil wars and sectarian conflicts in Arab and Muslim countries, where would they have gone?

He snapped out of his thoughts at a car's horn; the driver wanted to know if he was leaving the spot. He shook his head, thanked God for his safe arrival, and wished for a safe return.

Love

Sex, and Hypocrisy

"Uncle, are all men deceivers like him?" He couldn't find an immediate honest answer when she asked him this in the middle of a phone conversation. She was complaining about her boyfriend who had deceived her and married someone else. She'd met him through a friend, and now she was begging him to do something for her sake, and he was unwilling to accept the impossibility of the task.

He thought of shocking her with the truth, that her boyfriend didn't want her anyway, or confessing he was preparing to get married.

"Is the question hard and needs all this time to consider?" she asked again after his contemplative silence.

"It's harder than you imagine, if you want a truthful answer." He paused, thinking this answer condemned all men, and continued: ". humans are a mystery, and even with those who answer for themselves, the answer is tied to a specific time and circumstance."

"I don't understand, Uncle. Can a man be faithful in one situation and unfaithful in another?"

"You're talking as if all females are faithful and truthful to their friends and husbands, while the prevailing suspicion among men is that you're more inclined to deceit, that's why we lock you up and watch you wherever you go. I know this is a generalization, but many facts and divorce rates and other reasons confirm this." Silence fell between them for seconds until he doubted that they were still connected.

"Hello!" he said.

"I'm here, Uncle. There's infidelity among both veiled and unveiled women, but I think all men are capable of infidelity if given a safe opportunity, and this doesn't apply to females."

"If your view is right, maybe it relates to male nature where the male wants to spread his genes as widely as possible."

He paused, then added: "But females have the same instincts and desire to have children with the best males to ensure quality offspring. What stops both is what we call morals; if they diminish, the male or female will seek to respond. This isn't limited to women or men."

"If we let a handsome young man seduce women, the response won't be a hundred percent, and he'll face a lot of rejection, but if we did the opposite, a beautiful girl can seduce any man, young or old, educated or illiterate, religious or atheist, as long as the man feels safe and sure she won't expose him, blackmail him, or cost him effort or money; he'll have intercourse with her immediately, or do whatever she wants and allows."

He thought about what she said, recalling some supporting and contradictory memories. This girl had fallen into the trap of pursuing her friend, and now she was dealing with the breakup shock and his desire to marry another girl she knew little about, living in another country.

"If what you say is true, and it's by no means proven, it would mean that what's said by the clerics, who repeat their teachings and interpretations, is right: that you are devils seducing the pious, or as the American presidential candidate said about his opponent, she's a devil, allied with devils."

He felt her despair and anger from the experience, regretting her wasted friendship and emotional exploitation, so he didn't tell her that her boyfriend was as good as married. He talked about human emotional relationships in general, so she wouldn't ask him to do something he couldn't.

"You know in the Western world; females consider what you went through an experience every girl should have before marriage. You can have one or five boyfriends, and those who don't and marry the first guy are considered lacking experience. Men there don't require their brides to be virgins, so what you went through is positive in most countries. You gained psychological experience and opinions you'll benefit from.

"What bothers me is he promised to marry me and backed out, saying he didn't want to get married, and now he's set on marrying a girl he knows little about." Her words burst out forcefully; he fell silent until he heard sobbing at the other end.

"Our problem in the Arab and Muslim world is we've regressed in the issue of sex, which is an issue of love, the first requirement of life. We're living in a time like the Europeans, centuries ago, when they accused beautiful, sexually disobedient women of witchcraft because they refused requests from priests and rich men. We Arabs were sexually open before and after Islam, and our problems started with restricting emotional freedom with moral laws and labels."

He noticed she'd calmed down a bit and was interested in the conversation, given her innocence; he continued, asking: "Do you know how many synonyms there are for intercourse in Arabic?"

"No idea, maybe 10?"

"1480 words mean intercourse', showing frequent use and variety, fitting people's nature before they buried love deep down. There are 238 names for the penis and 99 for the equivalent in females, with several names for what's outside the womb,

30 for the behind, and dozens of descriptions for males and females during intercourse, all natural and used in daily language without shame."

"Yes, yes... and Arab men's lust now results from deprivation and various prohibitions, but when did this negative change happen?"

"Probably during the Abbasid state," he said, searching for a passage he'd read by Al-Jahiz, who died in 255 AH/868 AD.

".. here's what Al-Jahiz said: (Some people, when it comes to mentioning sex, restraint, and intercourse, become prudish, showing disgust, using pious words. Most who do this are not men of virtue, generosity, nobility, or dignity, it's just for show. No hypocrite is revealed except with inherent meanness and established baseness. Anyway, if these words didn't have a place in language, and opinion was against uttering them, there'd be no reason for them except by mistake, and it'd be wise to remove the words from our language)."

This indicates the start of rigidity and hypocrisy this writer observed, affecting life's course and controlling people unknowingly.

He noticed she was calmer, and before she could return to complaining about her boyfriend and wanting him to intervene, he told her his phone battery was almost dead, promising to meet soon to discuss things. She didn't object, resigned to waiting.

Sex and Dreams

She was calm, gentle, with a hint of sadness in her eyes. He gazed at her as they prepared to sit in the café and felt hesitant to tell her what he'd decided. He feared she'd burst into tears, and asked if she wanted something with her coffee, encouraging her to have cake, but she settled for cappuccino.

"You're a kind and beautiful person, not like other fierce females, and you deserve all the best." He wanted to encourage her and boost her confidence before telling her what he had to.

"Thanks, Uncle, honestly, I consider myself like your daughter and am ready to listen to you."

He felt reassured by her words, dispelling doubts about their meeting.

"You remember I told you previously my opinion that it's lucky your relationship with him ended before any rushed engagement or marriage; you're safe now, and any sorrow or distress you feel is much less than if you'd separated after marriage.

"But I love him," she whispered, and he interrupted with a hand gesture, and she continued listening.

"I know you love him, and I told him weeks ago a lucky man is one who finds a female who loves him, sees him in her dreams, and he marries her, instead of marrying someone relatively unknown, hoping love grows later."

"I do see him in my dreams, actually, but he doesn't deserve my love and the emotions I wasted on him.

He felt relieved she was speaking of him in the past tense and guessed her female intuition told her it was too late to fix things, making his task easier, but she continued: "I'm ready to sacrifice and bear it."

"You don't need to sacrifice for him; he's already married to the other girl."

Her eyes widened, and her eyelids moistened; he continued to freeze her emotions:

"He doesn't deserve you at all, you are kind and respectable, not like some crazy females that people have to either run from or hit." He wanted his words to ensure a rational reaction, preventing her from going to her former friend's house and telling his parents, who knew nothing about this nearly two-year relationship.

She cried silently and he pushed the tissue box closer.

"He doesn't deserve your tears; you should erase him from your mind gradually and not let him control your daydreams or sleep."

He sighed, patted her hand, and continued, feeling his words were futile:

"Sometimes what's harmful is beneficial, maybe you dislike something that's good for you."

"The selfish bastard..." she pulled another tissue to wipe her nose, looking at him, ignoring others in the café who could easily hear her:

".. I'm angry at myself and regret the time I wasted on him... the selfish opportunist..."

Her eyes reddened, her lips swelled, and her chest had some black stains from her smeared eyeliner.

She seemed to have known beforehand and waited for confirmation to declare hatred and regret; decisions aren't made instantly but go through several brain stages, the last being announcement. Despite feeling a decision is instant, it's actually an illusion; it has been through previous stages, and humans don't control their bodies as they think, they are merely observers.

"I don't want anger to control you, better to erase him from your mind so you don't fall prey to daydreams, nightmares, and hellish revenge plans... it won't be easy, but it's the only way..."

He paused, observing her reaction; she seemed interested, and he thought he'd hit a sensitive nerve:

"If we could erase what we want from our minds quickly, life would be much better."

She nodded, cleaning her eyeliner with tissues.

"But we're actually unable to control our dreams, barely getting rid of daydreams."

"Uncle, I wish, one could control dreams; it'd mean happiness for at least a third of the day and make the other two-thirds bearable." Her expression lightened a bit, she sipped the cold coffee, and continued: "I used to control my nighttime dreams, not their course, but I've lost this ability now."

He smiled, not telling her age has its rules, avoiding reminding her she's thirty.

"In youth, before late adolescence, both genders share specific dream themes, the first is flying, the second is sex, of course."

"True, I'd dream I'd rise above ground, gravity losing its effect, sometimes controlling the flight direction, other times failing, often struggling to land."

She paused, feeling she'd strayed; he asked if she wished for this dream before sleep.

"Actually no, but I'd sometimes think of something else before sleep, then continue it in the dream with some control." She looked at him, her eyes slightly shy, asking why people share dreams of flying in youth.

"Maybe our origins are extraterrestrial, so we carry flying ability in our genes, and the feeling emerges in youth during sleep."

She smiled listening, knowing his ideas were very liberal. ".. do you have another explanation for people everywhere sharing this dream at a certain age?"

She shook her head, having no explanation, and he felt relieved she'd moved beyond her tragedy, and he had succeeded in his task. or so he hoped.

The Power of Love

"Uncle, arrange a meeting for me with his mom or dad."

He hesitated to answer the phone when he knew it was her, because her problem had gone beyond solutions, but he felt sympathy for her, and here she was, after greetings and small talk, speaking freely and asking him to do something he didn't want to.

"You've been friends for two years and didn't meet his parents, and now you want me to arrange a meeting, after he's officially married to someone else? He answered with some sternness, distancing himself from her request; it was over, and he'd told her in a previous meeting. Any intervention now would be misunderstood by his relatives and friends, the young man's family.

"Don't you feel sympathy and solidarity with his wife, who knows nothing about your relationship and is innocent, probably ecstatic now, a happiness you've tasted during your friendship?" He wanted to gain her female solidarity with the girl, assuming she wouldn't cause her misery by exposing the affair.

"He always refused to introduce me to his parents or even tell me where his family lived, and I went along to avoid pressuring him to marry. He claimed his parents were conservative and meeting them would ruin our relationship."

"My dear, you're admitting you didn't pressure him to marry and accepted the secrecy of your relationship, so why do you want to meet his parents now, after he's married? They won't side with you, and he won't back down under pressure, likely resulting in hurting the poor bride and exposing your relationship, which won't benefit you either. I don't want revenge to overcome your dreams, forgiveness, and logic." He paused, and she didn't respond; he reminded her of her good qualities, beauty, culture, and that marriage is fate, their friendship was happy, advising her to forget him and watch for future opportunities so she wouldn't waste time in misery and regret.

"A woman's beauty comes from within, so purify your soul to shine in your face, and God will open doors for you and give you someone better."

He softened his tone, repeating it's too late, any attempt would be destructive, and he wouldn't participate in this endeavor.

"Maybe someone else would be better, but we were the happiest lovers, and I never imagined his betrayal; he was so compliant and happy." She stopped, as if not wanting to praise him, and he thought to shift the discussion.

"Maybe he was compliant, or maybe you controlled him, and he complied for his desires, and maybe vice versa. The difference now is he'll fulfill his desires with his wife soon, and you've lost control over your desires and him until you find a future groom and become compliant or dominant with each other."

"Uncle, I understood your words but not your meaning."

"My point is to show you some hidden causes of sorrow. When a relationship between a man and woman ends, besides losing familiarity, support, and pleasure, there's a link between sex and a sense of dominance by one over the other, which will be missed. When the sexual dominance balance is disrupted, the relationship risks splitting. When it's between friends, it can end with each going their way, and in marriage, it can lead to indifference, divorce, constant conflict, or physical abuse to assert sexual dominance, or the woman refusing or performing her role routinely as revenge. Usually, the one with physical, moral, or financial power is dominant."

"But our relationship had no sexual dominance, just harmony and understanding."

"If it was as you say, it wouldn't have ended like this. There are feelings, maybe intangible. This is the difference between a friendship that ends relatively peacefully without courts and losses, and a marriage without prior friendship, which can end with agreement, one dominating, or separation and divorce. The constant is there's no harmony in sex, and the powerful dominate, even if they seem gentle to others. This applies to leaders, politicians, rich people, sheikhs, priests, and all in power, whether male or female."

"Of course, in our Arab society, all those you mentioned are men; we have no female leaders or millionaires, and women are always seen as objects, dominated, sidelined, and beaten."

"Don't dwell on this role; most Arab women rule in one way or another from behind the scenes."

"Maybe you're right, and it means I completely failed to control or guide, and it seems I'll fail at revenge too."

He ended the call after praising her, then sat thinking about what he'd said about sexual dominance. He thought about the link between sex and happiness, misery, crime, terrorism, and dictatorship throughout history. He recalled reports after Osama bin Laden's assassination claiming they'd found sex videos in his quarters. Houris are central to religious terrorism recruitment, and the Nice terrorist who drove over people in Europe had phones full of sexual images.

He remembered old studies he'd read, that the sight of Hitler in the street sexually aroused German women and girls because he had absolute power, and females love

the strong and respond easily, even craving it. Every leader throughout history has exploited their power sexually, legally or illegally, except those with stronger wives or sexual issues.

He thought about what he knew of contemporary Arab leaders, and what he'd read about rulers, kings, sultans, caliphs, and emperors who indulged in sex, dominated, and did what the weaker desired and what preoccupies all animals and humans.

The Marriage Contract

He listened to the groom's friends asking about his readiness for the big night, joined in the joking, and was perhaps the only one who knew the groom had actual experience and didn't need advice. His mind wandered to the groom's heartbroken friend and he thought about the bride and Arab girls in general. He felt some sorrow for girls entering adolescence and getting stuck, especially those who go through this phase without any experience of sex or marriage.

"Arab girls are braver than others and have endurance to resist nature's call, whether due to upbringing, pressure, and threats or other reasons; their resilience is supernatural and no male can handle it." He said to himself, joining the young men's conversation with nods and smiles. A thought flashed that some girls might relieve themselves like unmarried young men through masturbation, but he thought those who do are few, and it doesn't satisfy them like real intercourse filled with love and emotion. From this perspective, the groom's friend had gotten what she wanted during their romance, but now she thinks she's one of the most miserable creatures. If she put herself in the shoes of a girl between twenty and thirty with no sexual experience, she'd feel less miserable.

Elsewhere, in the groom's family house, the bride was listening to women's advice after they'd probed and sensed she wouldn't deter them, as the situation required her to pretend innocence, ignorance, and lack of experience, even if she'd explored details online through voice, words, and images, or heard everything she wanted to know from a previously married friend.

"Hundreds, maybe thousands of relatives, neighbors, and people who saw the wedding procession now know the couple will have sex tonight, and no one's embarrassed; the groom and bride are getting advice, and tomorrow the crowd will congratulate them on their success," he said to himself, lost in thought amidst the young men's chatter, "... all thanks to a word from a sheikh, registrar, or civil official granting them the right to sex and giving them a contract specifying terms, dowry, and conditions if it fails."

This drives girls to seek marriage, making most accept any suitor their family approves, even if they don't know him, let alone love him; the goal is transitioning from family warmth to a husband's embrace, hoping he'll give her what she dreamed of through adolescence and youth, experiencing official sex, fulfilling her physical needs, hopefully developing into an emotional marital life. In her single years, an Arab girl gives affection to relatives' kids, family, and elderly who seem dignified, but if a stranger praises her, she ignores or scolds him. Meanwhile, girls fall for singers or actors, especially handsome and unmarried ones, dreaming of a chance with them, enjoying love songs as if sung for them, crying empathically through their performances. Thus, most Arab girls drain their emotional energy before marriage, officially deprived of real emotional experiences, except secret relationships, because any public friendship between a boy and girl means losing her marriage chance, unlike Western girls who brag about relationships until they find a suitable partner.

An Arab girl's emotional problem is worse due to the long wait for a husband. Muslim men generally prefer young girls like their pious predecessors, making a girl expect marriage from her first period, and as she ages, life gets complicated, becoming almost catastrophic if she's in her mid-twenties with no suitor, breathing a sigh of relief if she gets someone before thirty, because after that she's considered infertile, diminishing her chances, and her goal becomes finding an older man who doesn't want kids.

The groom's girlfriend fell into this Arab trap, secretly dating him for a long time; he left her, and now he's marrying someone younger. She can't even enjoy memories, angry at him and herself, regretting opportunities lost during their friendship.

Infidelity

“A woman had tolerated her husband's infidelity with seven mistresses, then sought revenge by finding a lover of her own, so she wouldn't feel like a servant at home, exhausted from his constant demands. She didn't want to feel naive and suppressed if she continued to submit,” she said.

She was explaining to him about the cases she encountered at work as a social counselor, hoping he would help her understand the psychology of men who cheat, then continued with the story of the wife: "She told me her heart aches when she thinks about his infidelity, and it hurts more since she's become an adulteress too. She says, what should I do? I've turned to our relatives to bring him back to his senses, but they sided with him. Some women say it's okay as long as he comes home and sleeps with you, others say it's just a phase, youthful folly, and maybe his actions compensate for his shortcomings. Don't religion, morality, and customs go against the principle of marital infidelity?"

"Exactly, religion prohibits infidelity to prevent lineage mixing, while morals and customs forbid it so women don't become adulteresses; every cheater creates an adulteress known to him and unknown to others," he replied to her question, adding, "generally, the issue of sexual desire is ancient, dating back to the beginning of creation. Adam's sons killed each other to win the beautiful sister. Before or after Adam, men dragged women by their hair..."

They laughed together, and he gave her space to continue sharing her stories before giving his opinion on the psychology of cheating men.

Another woman confirmed her husband's infidelity, discussed it with him hoping he'd straighten up, and prepared herself sexually to satisfy him, but he continued his ways. She started seeing him only as a source of money for her and the kids, and sought new love, becoming infatuated with someone who praised her, soothing her heart. Sometimes she searches for remaining love and respect for her husband but finds none, even under a microscope. Other times, she sees her new love as reckless attachment and satisfaction of hunger, but it's also something dignified and chaste since it's become love, not just satisfying whims like her husband does.

"Love is one thing, and sex is another. The first binds two people permanently, whether through marriage or sexual friendship, but sex with many is due to innate reasons in those who can do it without fear of material, moral, or legal deterrence," he explained.

Understanding from her look that she hadn't grasped his point, he continued, "Most male cheaters prefer sex, while most female cheaters prefer love."

She listened attentively, and he added, "You know about the cases you receive in your work, but many people have no similar problems or can suppress or hide them. Sexual desire is innate, as I said, and good people can suppress it and be content with little and what's allowed, while others act differently. You know power is seductive for sex, and in the internet era, there are alternatives for enjoying sex, even theoretically, which is an additional reason driving men to constantly seek change and variety. Maybe it's a masculine trait linked to dominance..."

She wanted to interrupt, but he signaled her to wait and continued, "American presidents, despite their political and social status, didn't hesitate to use their power... Johnson, for example, rearranged the White House guest rooms to accommodate one person only and invited beautiful women and their fawning husbands to parties and overnight stays in the White House... at night, he'd choose one and go to her room, telling her to move over for her president. The Kennedys' stories with women are known, and they were accused of killing Marilyn Monroe. Clinton did it, got caught, and it didn't affect his position. Before them, kings, emperors, and caliphs did the same; whoever could do it, did it."

"So, you're saying infidelity is natural for men?" she asked firmly.

"Sexual infidelity, yes, it's innate and becomes natural for those who can't normalize themselves with agreed-upon morals and principles, and it's natural for weak souls if given the chance, and for the powerful with money, status, or leadership if there's no one to stop them," he replied.

"And the solution?" she asked.

"Condemning and criticizing those who oppose, and women satisfying their husbands' sexual needs, but retaliation isn't the solution."

"I'm not sure if your view is correct, maybe it is. In many cases I receive, women apply the theory of equality by imitating their husbands' infidelity, and those who are angry punish their husbands by withholding sexual response, like the one who said she hates her husband so much she anticipates his return home to sleep across the bed, forcing him to the couch."

He nodded in agreement and sympathized with her for failing to find a solution to humanity's oldest problem.

Despair

Divorce

Their first meeting was three decades ago at university, and since then, they had maintained contact and met on several occasions, the latest being the wedding of one of their sons, where they repeated their casual meetings over a few days, exchanging stories and smoking hookah. They were well-informed about each other's lives, and fate had it that they shared a similar destiny as a result of men's inability to grow up, sexual dominance, and cheating. All three of them married, had children, and went through experiences of infidelity by their husbands.

The first one married a businessman living in the largest Gulf country, and God opened the door of sustenance for him, but he closed the door of reproduction. After years of struggle and attempts, God blessed them with a son, and then the door closed again. The husband tolerated this for some additional years, hoping that his life would be blessed with more sons, as his wealth increased; He decided to marry a local woman and prepared a new home for her; God blessed them with a son and a daughter, and he still has opportunities to produce more heirs to his wealth.

The first wife decided to live with her son, who is now in the middle of his university studies, and maintains a social relationship that appears normal with her husband, but she doesn't share a bed with him, as she tells her friends, and doesn't demand a divorce because she doesn't know what she would do as a divorced woman, cut off from sustenance and with weak family support, and she doesn't want to spoil her son's relationship with his father so that he can keep his inheritance opportunities.

The second friend didn't suffer from infertility, and she wasn't lacking in beauty either, but her husband wasn't satisfied with her. She started discovering blonde hair on her bed and comb, then she saw different types of women entering her house as her husband's friends, and the situation escalated until she saw him having sex in the marital bed. She asked, consulted, and sought guidance until she concluded that there was a magical spell in her house. She searched for it and found it on the dressing table; she was told to open it, read it backwards, and throw it into the sea.

She entered the gulf until the water reached her waist and started reading from bottom to top, but the text wasn't coherent even when read the correct way round,

but she deduced from it that someone was cursing her marriage and asking the jinn to tempt her husband. She vented her anger on the paper, tearing it, chewing it, and spitting it into the water.

Days and months passed, and the situation remained the same, with women entering and leaving her house. She tried to scold him, but he told her that he wouldn't change and she could either submit or leave for her family's home. She left him in the smallest Gulf country and returned to her family. At the last meeting of the friends, she was barely holding together, not giving anyone a chance to talk, commenting on others' stories before they finished, heavily made-up and careless about body exposure while smoking her hookah.

The third friend adopted the hijab after university, unlike her friends, and married one of her country's sons, and they lived abroad. They had sons and daughters and established a small company that brought them a reasonable income, and their happiness continued until they agreed to visit the largest Arab country in terms of population. It wasn't their first vacation in the capital of noise, but this time they met a mother and daughter. The relationship with the husband strengthened, and the wife would hear the mother asking God to marry her daughter to the husband, thinking she was joking, especially with the difference in dialect and customs. God answered the mother's prayer, and the husband didn't inform his wife that he wanted to marry the daughter, but she read a message on his phone revealing that the wedding was in two days; so, she declared her anger and her pride pushed her to withdraw and travel, leaving the husband to contract his marriage and return after the honeymoon with his new wife to the old marital home.

That's how she decided to divorce him and didn't respond to any mediation from her family or his family that what he did was halal and his right. The company was ruined, and the source of income was lost, and the wife became active commercially and established a house where she lives with her children, and the husband failed in his new marital life; so he left the second wife to return to her family and married a third one, then failed and returned to live near the first wife's house to be close to his children, but the losses, debts, and courts led him to his fate, and he has no other place to turn to now.

The wife's misery

Her family background still showed whenever she is introduced to others, as she comes from a family that was famous in politics eight decades ago, both for positive and negative reasons, and today only the name and some plots of land remain, some of which the heirs want to sell. Her current appearance is that of a former beauty that has faded due to the many setbacks that led her to resort to giving private tutoring at home to cover her needs.

She married a man from her own country and lived for years in a liberal marital home, in a closed country, and they had a beautiful, intelligent daughter. The mother says she doesn't know why her husband suddenly did what he did, as he told her he was traveling for a few days to visit his family, but he left and didn't go to his family or return home or contact his wife or any acquaintances, until anxiety spread and attempts to find him failed. She had to earn a living and raise her daughter without any previous savings. She didn't think of remarrying despite the passage of years, nor did she ask for a divorce or freedom; the husband's fate was unknown.

The daughter excelled and moved to university studies in a neighboring rich and open country. One day, an acquaintance called the wife and told her that he had seen her husband in that neighboring country. Her feelings were mixed, and she asked old friends to investigate the matter; they confirmed the information and told her that he was married to a local woman and his economic situation was of the best.

She was overwhelmed with sadness, resulting from surprise and disdain, but her economic circumstances ultimately forced her to let her daughter live in his house with her stepmother to save expenses. Less than a year passed after these developments when the father fell ill and died. His wife insisted that the daughter leave her father's house before he was buried, and threatened to resort to the police to expel her.

The mother took over the burden of her daughter's expenses again and ensured her safety. She finished her studies and returned to her mother's residence and started working in her field of specialization, and it didn't take long before she got engaged and is preparing to complete her marriage soon.

The Misery of Ignorance

She doesn't look like she's completed four decades of her life; her features are delicate, her skin is white, she has wide honey-colored eyes, and it's easy to imagine how beautiful she was when she was fifteen and her cousin came to ask for her hand. She didn't object back then and said later that she thought marriage was wearing high heels and beautiful dresses; no one told her otherwise. That's how the judge was convinced that she was not a minor, and she answered yes when asked, and she was happy with the gifts and wedding rituals until the wedding night with her cousin, who was more than a decade older than her.

After the morning congratulations, she was missed, and they searched for her for three days, her aunt thought that was enough to calm the family; so, she returned her by taxi. Before she reached the house, the groom saw her; he grabbed her and started calling her uncle and brothers that he had caught her and brought her back. They responded to the call, not seeing anything but darkness in front of their eyes, and one of them gave her father a loaded shotgun amidst shouts of protecting honor. The aunt screamed that she had been at her house the whole time and no one heard her. The father had no choice but to aim at his daughter, who her husband was holding by the arm, no bullet came out; an enthusiast thought the father's finger was too weak to pull the trigger, he stood beside him, aimed at the captive, and pressed above the father's finger; dozens of small shots tore the girl's arm, broke two ribs, her cousin let go of her other arm and she fell, swimming in her blood.

A quarter of a century later, she was still dealing with the mechanics of her problem. In every conversation, she discusses the cost of a prosthetic hand and the advancements in science in other countries in this field, like implanting skin with a natural texture over the plastic hand, and she's aware of the cost of this modification, saying that maintaining her current hand costs about ten thousand dollars annually.

She hasn't married, of course, after the wedding night experience that drove her to run away so it wouldn't happen again.

"What happened to the perpetrators who caused this?" a companion whispered, asking a mutual friend, not knowing all the details.

"They got three months with suspended sentence," came the answer from mouth to ear.

The recipient thought: what about the registrar who allowed the marriage, the husband who raped, and the enthusiast who pressed the father's finger?

Rich and Miserable

His mind wandered for a moment, and he recalled his life's story in a flash. He was sitting in his office, surrounded by secretarial desks and some of his company managers, when he was drawn to the title of a true story while browsing the internet: A couple donated their wedding expenses and gift money to a village in Djibouti, where they built houses, dug a water well, and secured an electric generator for the village's poverty-stricken school.

He remembered his personal experience as a boy in one of Lebanon's camps, and in his mental flashback, he saw the developments of his life until he became a multi-millionaire, almost a billionaire. He pondered what the cost of his only son's wedding before Ramadan could have done in poor Arab villages or refugee camps that have spread across the Arab world and surrounding countries. He recalled the wedding cost, which exceeded half a million dollars, and he admitted to himself that it was spent on guests most of whom he didn't know, and few of whom respected him for his own sake; he wanted to show off his wealth and son, and they wanted to flatter him. His mind-wandering had become a habit after that wedding, and now the story of the generous couple reminded him of what he wanted to erase from his mind:

When he returned from the wedding to the host country where his company and business were, he was detained and imprisoned throughout Ramadan on bribery charges, until he managed to collect the bail amount of several hundred million in local currency. He returned to work and his office, waiting for the court's verdict or another solution. In prison, he memorized half of the Quran, learned to daydream and meditate, but he didn't decide to change his life's path or set new goals that would give him happiness like those who utilized their wedding expenses to make the world's poorest people happy. He was born Muslim, with a Muslim culture, didn't worship, and didn't refrain from doing some forbidden things, but he thought divine care had preserved his son's life and that God wanted him to marry and didn't guide him to spend money on the poor.

Years ago, his son crashed a \$400,000 car into concrete barriers. The car was destroyed, his son lost an eye, suffered a deep facial wound, two broken ribs, and other fractures. His phone had fallen from his hand, and he bent to pick it up from the car's floor; it was meant to be. After the accident, his son's marriage, and his imprisonment, the same accident happened again, but this time with his sister, who wasn't as lucky as his son, and she passed away to the hereafter while talking on her smartphone.

His secretary entered the office, interrupting his chaotic thoughts. He signed the papers without focusing, as the sea at Beirut and his yacht anchored in the port appeared to him, waiting for his private parties, which his wife hadn't attended once in all those years.

He finished signing, his heart heavy, realizing he was forbidden to travel and what awaited him was unknown.

Misery in Gaza

She sat in front of her notebook, pen in hand, but she wasn't writing, and seemed lost in thought to him. He asked her why she didn't bring her laptop from Gaza. She sighed, saying she barely managed to leave for the visit, and if she had brought the laptop, Hamas and Israel would have wanted to inspect it for days.

He smiled at her, knowing the difficulties, but he wanted to distract her from her silence and asked her what she would write with the pen.

"Stories of calamities I'm afraid to reveal, and sometimes I feel disgusted just thinking about them," she said.

He thought she meant the wars on Gaza and the hardships its inhabitants faced. He calmed her down a bit and started talking about people's experiences in war; she interrupted him: "I'm not afraid to write about that."

She fell silent, and he thought about what she was thinking.

"I want to write about the injustice to women in Gaza," she said.

He asked her to tell him what she wanted, and they would agree on the appropriate approach.

"I'll tell you straight and briefly, and see your reaction," she said.

He agreed and opened his smartphone to take some notes.

"I listened to our dear neighbor, but we won't mention him as a neighbor so he doesn't know who told...", she said.

He nodded in agreement, and she continued: "... He told a friend he wants to marry the martyr So-and-so's wife, she's really beautiful, and he wants to propose before they marry her off to the martyr's younger brother. The friend reminded him he's already married to four women, three of them martyrs' wives, and added: 'Isn't that enough good deeds and noble acts to help the wives?'

She looked at the listener to gauge his first reaction to what she had said so far; he pretended calmness.

She continued: "The two laughed at that comment, and the neighbor said to his friend "the dilemma is which one of the four wives to divorce now in order to propose again", and they laughed again. The neighbor advised him to divorce the oldest one; he replied it's impossible because she's the mother of his children, and they are grown up, and he doesn't want to clash with them. In the end, they agreed he would divorce the least beautiful of the other three."

"Who is this neighbor?" he asked, then changed his question after looking at her.

"What is his position in society, and why didn't anyone notice what he's doing?"

"A field commander and a sheikh in Hamas...", she said, looking at the notebook in front of her. "... As for your other question, it's actually laughable... everyone noticed, and he's not the only leader and official who does this, but there are rumors they intentionally send young husbands with beautiful wives on suicide missions to gain the good deeds of looking after their wives."

"Assuming most women in Gaza are beautiful, and this is just a coincidence, can you tell me what happens to the wives if officials don't propose?"

"It would be better if they found them jobs and positions so they can work and earn money to support their families, and maybe they'd have a chance for a humane and respectable marriage, not this way...", she said, looking at him with some reproach, then told him: "When an official doesn't propose, they force the younger brother to marry his brother's widow, and that's not fair to either of them."

He thought about what he had read about revolutions, wars, and the fact that females are always the victims. In revolutions, they become prey, in invasions, they are raped and enslaved, and in poverty and hunger resulting from wars, they are forced to sell their bodies...Did Islam allow polygamy as a solution to the shortage of men in times of war? He didn't like this thought as it was demeaning to women's humanity. Before Islam, an Arab man would marry only one woman, but he was free to visit the houses of the owners of the flags, (the bordels) until Islam came to forbid adultery to prevent lineage mixing, but it allowed marriage to four women and divorce so men wouldn't be repelled from the new religion.

Mother of Khuisa

She sat screaming and throwing sand in the air, letting it fall on her head. They tried to restrain her with words and hold her hands, but to no avail, until the village elder asked them to let her deal with her grief as she saw fit.

Five months ago, her son had drowned in the sea, and today she had bid farewell to her remaining son in a revenge case that could have been easily avoided, leaving her with only a daughter.

Mohammed had gone with a flock of sheep and a camel to the sea to wash his animals. He had carried sacks of grass and straw on the camel's back to the shore to lure the sheep to stay in one spot while he caught them one by one and dragged them into the water, dunking and scrubbing them, then releasing them to run back to the food.

He finished with the sheep and was exhausted from the work, but he decided to wash the camel too. He grabbed its bridle and the camel walked calmly behind him until the water reached Mohammed's shoulder and the camel's belly. Mohammed moved to the back to push the beast forward to make it easier to clean, but the camel raised its neck and refused to advance into the open sea in front of it.

Mohammed went back to the front and tried to make the camel lie down so the water would cover it, but it refused to obey. Mohammed decided to drag the beast forward; he turned his back to the sea to keep facing the desert ship (i.e. the camel) eye to eye, fearing its treachery.

His young son, who had been watching from a safe spot on the shore, said a wave had surprised his father from behind and thrown him under the camel's feet, which seemed to have panicked and trampled Mohammed, who didn't get up after the fall.

Four months later, a relative of the family was driving his truck through a neighboring village and he ran over one of its inhabitants. The driver didn't stop, convinced the victim was killed under the wheels. He feared immediate retaliation and continued driving until he reached the village and went to the family elder to report what had happened.

In the evening, the people consulted, but their leader refused the idea of admitting the crime and sending a delegation to the victim's family to make a truce and prepare for a solution after emotions had cooled.

Trucks weren't common then, and the victim's family easily identified the culprit, who had naturally taken precautions and was being careful in his movements. For a whole month, a relative of the victim watched the culprit's village and neighborhood until the ominous night came for Mahmoud, the brother of the drowned Mohammed.

He was returning from the field after sunset; he heard someone calling him by his family name; he automatically responded, yes, and didn't realize what was happening until a few fatal blows from a dagger had pierced his body. When the news reached his mother, her tragic grief erupted again, and her eyes sank further into her skull; her nickname, Mother of Khuisa, became more apt.

When her husband heard what had happened to his son, he set out armed with a club to the family elder's house to take revenge for his poor management, but the elder had already fled when he heard about the killing and deduced that his relative would take revenge on him for his son's death.

The Barber

The barber fell silent, and the scissors stopped clicking around his head; he opened his eyes and looked in front to see a reflection of what was happening in the street as a woman's voice rose: "What's wrong with you guys?" He saw people moving away from the sidewalk and continuing their way on the street, and car horns started blowing, then a woman passed by the shop, lifting her skirt and showing her behind, without stopping her insults towards the people. A bearded man standing on the opposite side of the street took courage: "Shame on you, girl, fear God." She pulled down her skirt, covering her behind, then raised it with both hands from the front to face the bearded man with what was underneath.

"There's no power or strength except with God," the barber said.

"Why does everyone run away from her path and only look at her if they're safe?" the customer asked himself aloud; the barber replied that people are afraid of crazy people and prostitutes, and she's both. She continued walking away from the shop, lifting her skirt and exchanging insults with the only brave man on the other side.

"By God, this man is no coward, he tried to scold her and then started cursing her back," said another customer.

"No, sir, this man is stupid, because he's provoking her," the barber replied.

The barber fell silent, and the customer looked at his face in the mirror, urging him to explain; he continued: "Does he think she's normal and will respond to his sermons?"

"He's trying to do the minimum to prevent evil, using his tongue," the customer said.

"The minimum, sir, is with his heart, not by provoking her, he could call the police, and he should lower his gaze from what she's showing him."

The barber noticed signs of disapproval on the customer's features.

"If she were small, he and his kind would attack and beat her, but she's huge, aggressive, and crazy, so they taunt her from a distance... they're cowards and stupid too."

The barber and the customer had a long acquaintance, and they often discussed life's matters.

"Okay, I understand from what you said that they're cowards, but why do you call them stupid?" he asked, bending his head for the barber to clean the hair from his neck.

"I found a good study on the internet today about the stupidity of religious people," the barber said, turning to the left side of the customer's face with the razor in his right hand, while holding the customer's head with his left.

"The study's summary is that the percentage of faith among most people reaches 85%, they all believe in God, the hereafter, accountability, and reward, and that God created Adam, the father of humanity..."

Nothing new here, the customer thought, staying silent while the barber moved to the right side of his face. "... but a survey of 3000 American and British scientists, the most prominent of all, showed that less than 5% of them believe in the idea of Adam's creation, and the rest believe in the theory of evolution."

"You mean that the more knowledge a person has, the more doubts and questions they have, and the less faith they have!" the customer said, his head now free from the barber's hand, who started spraying cologne on his neck and face, nodding in agreement with the conclusion.

Before he could ask where he found this study, people ran on the sidewalks in one direction, pursued by stones and insults.

"I wish we had one of those smart scientists now to save us from this crazy woman," said another customer waiting for his turn, standing up to sit under the barber's hand.

"Intelligence has limits in dealing with things, but stupidity has no limits," the first customer said, as he paid the barber his fee, and studied the situation to see if he could go out onto the street without getting hit by a stray stone.

The Bedouin and the Wise Mukhtar

The Night-time Milk Delivery

The war and its accompanying disasters crept from country to country, city to city, and house to house, in an unprecedented continuity, and for long years, it affected people's psychology and revealed the actual level of culture and humanity of some, and the degradation and selfishness of the majority, as is the case in all wars.

The village of Al-Masara, which was more like a city in size, was one of the areas that God protected from direct calamities, unlike the surrounding cities and villages, and its inhabitants were known for their mercy and were appreciated for their advice day after day.

A plague befell the nearby village of Al-Mudira, as it was strongly besieged because it had armed men opposing those in power, who insisted on their surrender and blocked their means of life, no water, electricity, fuel, or food: Famine ensued, and the inhabitants ate rats, then cats, and dogs fled their village seeking salvation. Some residents of Al-Mudira tried to convince the armed men to surrender or sneak out of the village to spare its inhabitants, who had resorted to eating leaves from the trees, but the armed men, their sheikhs, the mufti, and others who showed no signs of hunger, kept preaching to people about paradise and condemning those who wanted to live.

Since the siege of Al-Mudira, the residents of Al-Masara had been stockpiling what they had and economizing on food, storing all the butter produced from their livestock's milk and using salted milk that could be preserved, but the tragedy of Al-Mudira forced them to think of ways to help their besieged neighbors. Thus, at a gathering of Al-Masara's residents, the mukhtar proposed that people donate some milk, pouring it into a large container placed in the middle of the village on Thursday evening, saying he would find someone to deliver it to the besieged neighbors, explaining that donating at night would conceal the donor's identity, fearing what the future might hold.

On Friday morning, the container was taken to the mukhtar's house to be inspected before finding someone to carry its contents. The mukhtar removed the lid and sought refuge in God, as he saw the container filled with clear water: Every donor had decided to keep their milk and thought others would truly donate, so if they put water in, it wouldn't affect the overall quality of the milk.

The mukhtar informed the imam what had happened and asked for his advice. The imam said, "You should replace the water with milk from your own pocket and complete the task to gain good deeds, as for the others, leave them to me."

When it was time for the Friday sermon, the imam asked the worshipers who had donated milk the night before; hands were raised, and here the imam swore by God

that none of them had donated milk; the people were perplexed by what they heard, and some muttered that the imam had lost his mind, while others said he was taking the burden of the oath to spare them potential responsibility and accountability in the future if someone considered the support of Al-Mudira's hungry people treason that deserved punishment.

None of them thought the imam was telling the truth or admitted to themselves they hadn't donated.

Humiliation

"The peak of humiliation is when we leave our homes and seek refuge in distant lands inhabited by people who are not of our kind or religion, yet some of them welcome us, unlike our brother countries in ethnicity and religion..." the imam said to the mukhtar, then recalled part of his statement, correcting himself, conceding that some neighboring and poor countries were doing their best, and one neighbor had absorbed half as many again as its own population.

" Ask God in every prayer to spare us the evil of our rich brothers. They're the ones who incited strife, supported the dissenters, and dragged the country into civil war, then left us bleeding and exposed to humiliation and degradation of all kinds."

"Don't despair of God's mercy, O mukhtar, you're educated, cultured, and believe in God," the imam said.

After a period of silence and seeking forgiveness, the imam tried to distract the mukhtar's mind and asked him about the most difficult periods of humiliation and loss that humanity has gone through.

"Perhaps the humiliation of faith before science is the most embarrassing and painful for the pride of believers..." the mukhtar said, while the imam's mouth stood agape, as he had expected the mukhtar to talk about wars, defeat, and their effects on people, looting, rape, and displacement, but the mukhtar delved deeper into his answer and continued: "It was a great humiliation when science said the

Earth is spherical, not flat, which at the time meant the speaker was an infidel, to be tried and killed, but in the end, everyone acknowledged that science was right and they were wrong.

"Then science humiliated the faithful again when it proved that the Earth is not the center of the universe and that it and others revolve around the sun, not the other way around. And let's not forget that Christianity considered Jerusalem the geographical center of the world, which is nonsense, of course, that has been abandoned, and there are those who claim now that Mecca is the magnetic center of the world, and they haven't learned from all those defeats.

Or let's say the Western world, which has been convinced for centuries of the correctness of scientific discoveries, is leaping forward in all aspects and is now watching us crawl through the stage they overcame... that's why they've become more humane towards others, while our neighbor slaughters his neighbor with the support and approval of their two other neighbors..."

"But we and they are all creations of our Lord, and there must be wisdom in this state," the imam intervened, interrupting the mukhtar, who narrowed his eyes listening to the imam.

"What you said now, Sheikh, is the essence of the other humiliation that the West accepted and quickly responded to dealing with in order to get rid of it. You still believe what they used to believe in the past, that the origin of humanity is heavenly, descended from above less than four thousand years ago. While the West was convinced and acknowledged, due to its faith in science, that the origin of humanity is animalistic, earthly, and evolved over millions of years, and the people interacted practically and psychologically within this change; thus, they approached the human concept, while we behave within the heavenly concept like a wild animal... do you see the difference between what you think is the truth and the truth itself?"

The imam didn't seem to understand anything, and his heart felt relieved when he looked at his watch, telling him the time for the afternoon prayer was near; he excused himself from the mukhtar and left without daring to invite his interlocutor to accompany him to the mosque.

The Schemer

The imam was convinced that Mohammad should divorce his wife, Safiya, and since she was a distant relative of the mukhtar, they agreed to inform him of the matter.

The imam explained on behalf of Mohammad that Safiya had been spending his money so that he couldn't save or marry another, citing the Quran, "Indeed, women's cunning is great."

"Who are they, and who said that?" the mukhtar asked, surprising the attendees with his knowledge of the Quran and Sunnah.

The imam replied that it was a statement from the Wise, the Almighty, in the Quran.

"It may be a statement from the Almighty, but it wasn't God who said this," the mukhtar said.

The attendees' mouths were agape; the mukhtar asked the imam to recite the relevant verse from Surah Yusuf.

The imam sought refuge in God from Satan, named God, and recited until he reached, "When the Aziz saw his shirt torn from the back, he said, 'Indeed, it is from the cunning of you women. Indeed, your cunning is great.'"

The mukhtar signaled him to stop and asked who said, "Indeed, your cunning is great," And he continued, "It was the Aziz of Egypt, the Pharaoh, who said that, as God tells us here in the Quran", looking at the raised eyebrows on the attendees' faces and he went on, "The Aziz's wife was inflamed with love and passion for Yusuf and tempted him; he fled towards the door; she grabbed his shirt and tore it. At that moment, the door opened, and the Aziz saw and heard his wife accusing Yusuf, and when he examined the matter, he said, 'Indeed, your cunning is great.' Is his statement a ruling, a prohibition, or legislation? The Quran is full of stories and quotes from others; does that make it God's word and legislation? The story happened thousands of years ago; how can its ruling be applied to this era?"

Mohammad thought the mukhtar was philosophizing to thwart the plan to divorce his relative; he took courage and said, "But, O mukhtar, what Safiya is doing is very cunning, spending my money so I can't marry..."

"God has allowed you to marry others, and divorce is the most detestable of permissible things," the mukhtar interrupted Mohammad with a hand gesture and continued, "... In reality, you are the one scheming against her. Where did you get the money for your wife to spend? Why do you give her the money? You've

tricked the imam and plotted against the poor woman, just like the sons of Jacob plotted against their brother Yusuf: 'O my son, do not relate your vision to your brothers, lest they devise a scheme against you. Indeed, Satan is to man an open enemy.' That is the cunning of men driven by envy to throw their brother into the well without food or water and lie to their father... Which cunning is more evil? The cunning of love or the cunning of murder?

I advise you, Mohammad, to stop scheming and go with your wife to a doctor to determine which of you is unable to have children, or be patient like Job, or at least like Jacob."

The Mind First

The mukhtar decided not to pray the afternoon and sunset prayers but to combine them with the evening prayer before sleeping, and he began to recall and search the Quran for words that do not express God's viewpoint.

He thought that the Quran was revealed to the Prophet, and everything in it is true in the sense that it happened, but not everything in it should be considered legislation. The stories of the ancients, for example, cannot be considered legislation, and everything attributed to others in the Quran shouldn't be considered God's word, and whatever we can't understand should be interpreted and understood without declaring the interpreter an infidel, as it's better to try to understand than to believe in an ambiguous text.

He recalled God's saying, "As for the thief, male and female, cut off their hands." This is a clear text, not open to interpretation, equating male and female in the same punishment for the same crime. God is just and never errs, and the Quran is revealed from Him; therefore, the Quran's statement that two women's testimonies equal one man's testimony must have a logical reason related to the testimony itself, not the value of a woman compared to a man, and to know the reason, we must take the clear text that equates male and female.

The mukhtar felt relieved by this idea, which he would throw at the imam and the rest of the village's men when they came to his gathering to drink coffee, as they did every night, and he began to search for verses containing the word "said," hoping most of them would be attributed to others, not God.

He found the word "said" repeated on every page, thinking it was repeated over a thousand times; God says, Satan says, Pharaoh says, Jacob, Noah, Jesus, and others say, and the disbelievers and dozens of other groups also have their say.

He closed the Quran and opened it randomly: "He said, 'Indeed, it saddens me that you should take him, and I fear that a wolf might eat him while you are heedless of him.'" The mukhtar thought this statement could be interpreted as preventing the brothers from going out together.

He closed the book and opened it again: "Moses said to his people, 'Seek help from God and be patient. Indeed, the earth belongs to God; He causes to inherit it whom He wills of His servants, and the outcome is for the righteous.'"

The mukhtar repeated his action, closing and opening the Quran's pages randomly, thinking what if all this was considered legislation: "Pharaoh said, 'Have you believed in him before I give you permission? Indeed, this is a plot you have devised in the city to drive out its people. You will come to know.'" "Those who were arrogant said, 'We disbelieve in what you believe.'"

The coffee cups circulated among the many attendees gathered by the approaching sound of artillery fire. The imam hoped the mukhtar wasn't still angry with him after accusing him of scheming with Mohammad to divorce Safiya.

"The important thing, Sheikh, is that you understand that men's cunning is greater than women's, and the most important thing is to understand the Quran according to reason, not just the text, even if we don't understand how to interpret it."

"You're right, mukhtar, and that's why when we find it hard to understand the Quran, we resort to hadith and Sunnah to guide us..."

The mukhtar controlled his anger, listening to the imam. "The hadith was written three hundred years after the Prophet's death, and hundreds of hadiths are illogical, and many others are doubtful. Why do you leave the original and the mind and resort to the branch?"

The mukhtar fell silent for a moment, then asked the attendees, "If we find a hadith's ruling contradicts what is in the Quran, do we believe the hadith that suits us and leave the Quran?"

Everyone denied that and sided with the Quran.

"Most crimes committed by gangs claiming jihad are based on fatwas citing unauthenticated hadiths," the mukhtar said, looking at the attendees' faces, and continued, "Does the Quran justify any of the crimes they commit daily?"

Heads shook in denial, and the imam fell silent.

"Will anything you say help us if, God forbid, they approach our village?" was the old man's question, expressing what was on the men's minds, who didn't want to ask the question or even listen to any answer about what would happen if the locusts invaded them.

"If we'd understood our religion through reason hundreds of years ago, we wouldn't have reached our current state," the mukhtar said, and none of them commented, as the conversation shifted to the approaching artillery fire and what to do if the worst happened.

The Donkey

"I seek refuge in God from the accursed Satan," the imam interrupted the villagers' discussion in the village council when he heard the sound of a donkey braying. They were discussing the types of shelling sounds reaching their ears and guessing how close the battles had come.

"Do you think they're advancing with the devils?" a young man asked the imam.

"Maybe," the imam said without hesitation, "as long as donkeys are braying, it means they're seeing devils, and I don't know who's with them now."

"Are there devils in ISIS? Of course, donkeys will bray if they see them..." the mukhtar said, then looked at the imam: "We're here under the protection of our army, thanks to God, and if any devils approach, you'll see the Sukhoi angels mangle them like eaten straw; so, calm down if you're afraid."

The mukhtar was hinting at the hidden intentions he thought the imam had, and continued: "If anyone other than the army approaches our village, we'll become slaves or refugees, and don't think they'll respect your religious status; you're an infidel and apostate to those hashish-eaters, despite them believing, like you, that donkeys see devils and roosters see angels."

"All Muslims believe that prophetic hadith..." The mukhtar interrupted the imam with a hand gesture and asked him not to generalize. "... But this is a hadith from Abu Huraira (When you hear the braying of donkeys, seek refuge in God from Satan, for they have seen a devil; and when you hear the crowing of roosters, ask God for His bounty, for they have seen an angel), and I didn't invent it."

"It's true you didn't invent it, but you should use your mind; all roosters crow at dawn, and all donkeys bray for some reason. Why does the donkey see the devil and not the human or the horse, despite that...?"

"This is God's wisdom," the imam said confidently in response to the mukhtar.

"Your friend Abu Huraira was indeed fond of animals, and his cat wouldn't leave him, but he says he was the Prophet's companion for only three years, and we now have over 5,300 hadiths attributed to him, and some say his hadiths exceeded 30,000, and he obviously didn't sleep in the Prophet's lap all that time; do you think everything attributed to him is true?" The mukhtar fell silent, then told the attendees that Aisha had doubted Abu Huraira's statements when he attributed actions to the Prophet that he said he did with his wives; Aisha denied that.

"The mukhtar means the Quran is the source of rulings and the decisive word, and there's nothing in it about braying and the presence of Satan, but it says his voice is abominable," said the young man who had caused this debate, then read from his phone: "And the livestock – He created them for you; in them is warmth and benefits, and from them you eat. And there is beauty in them for you, when you bring them home and when you take them out to pasture. And they carry your burdens to a land you could not reach except with great hardship. Indeed, your Lord is Kind and Merciful. And [He created] horses, mules, and donkeys for you to ride and as decoration. And He creates what you do not know. And upon God is the guidance of the way, and some of them are deviant. And if He willed, He could guide you all."

Voices rose, some saying God is Kind and Merciful, others noting God's equality between donkeys and horses, and a third saying it's unreasonable to attribute to the Prophet a statement contradicting the Quran.

The imam was silent, listening until he signaled them to listen; they quieted down.

"God says: The example of those who were given the Torah and then did not bear it is like that of a donkey carrying books. Wretched is the example of the people who deny God's signs. And God does not guide the wrongdoers."

"So what?" the mukhtar asked the imam and the attendees: "God compares the ignorance of the Jews to the ignorance of the donkey that doesn't read or write, and this doesn't mean the donkey sees the devil and brays."

The mukhtar added with a smile, amid clear approval from the attendees: "Rather, God used the donkey as a sign, as it says in Al-Baqarah: 'And look at your donkey, and We will make you a sign to the people. And look at the bones, how We arrange them, then cover them with flesh.' When he realized, he said, 'I know that God is capable of everything.'"

Obama the Muslim

"Maybe there's an American-Russian agreement on NATO and Arab forces entering from Tabuk into Syria to station on the Palestinian borders from southern Lebanon to southern Jordan..."

"Your mind is playing tricks on you, Sheikh," the mukhtar said, interrupting amidst laughter from some attendees and interest from others, who asked the mukhtar to let the sheikh continue.

"...I'm saying maybe, and that means Saudi Arabia has arranged the matter, and it's capable of instructing ISIS to shut up, attack, or do whatever fits their plans..."

"What's the goal of this plan, Sheikh? Harassing Israel or attacking it?"

"Let me finish, mukhtar," the sheikh said, and the attendees echoed the request. The sheikh shifted slightly, adjusted his legs under his thighs, puffed out his chest, and said, adjusting his turban: "President Obama is now in the final stage of his administration, and the Israelis and their supporters have hindered him a lot before. Maybe, I say maybe, he wants to gather forces on the borders and ask Israel to withdraw to the 1967 borders, ensuring their security, which they claim is threatened."

The sheikh paused, and the mukhtar restrained himself, waiting for him to finish. The sheikh added, "You know Obama is actually a Muslim, but he claimed to be a Christian to win the elections, and he often forgets himself and shows he's actually a Muslim. His chance now is to pretend to attack ISIS in Syria to achieve a solution to the Middle East issue."

The listeners' gazes turned to the mukhtar, awaiting his comment.

"Obama is a Muslim!!!" the mukhtar said, paused, and continued: "Maybe he was a Muslim, maybe, as the sheikh says. But tell me, is he a Sunni or Shia Muslim?" He didn't receive answers, only conflicting murmurs.

"If he's a Muslim, he's definitely a Shia, judging by his pampering of Iran in the nuclear deal and defying Israel's wishes and the Sunni Arab countries' desires, led by Saudi Arabia..."

The listeners' heads nodded in agreement, so the mukhtar continued: "And if this view is true, the American president is betraying Saudi Arabia and the Sunni Arab countries, deceiving them into intervening to clash with Russia's forces waiting for them if they approach Syria. This, of course, means supporting Syria and Iran,

expanding the Shia crescent from Iran to Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, weakening and destroying, or even defeating, the Sunni Arab forces..."

"Hey, mukhtar..." the sheikh interrupted the narrative: "America is participating with its forces alongside NATO and the Arabs in the advance, and if Russia attacks them, it means a third world war and nuclear bombing..."

"True, your words make sense, but I assume Obama is a Shia Muslim, and the conventional or nuclear destruction will be in Sunni Arab countries, and if the nuclear bombing escalates and reaches the United States, that's also in Iran's interest, and Obama would have taken revenge on the Sunnis and the Great Satan, paving the way for Iranian dominance, supported by nuclear Russia, in the entire Middle East, hitting three or four birds with one stone."

Voices rose in outrage, seeking forgiveness, and declaring enough damage, praying to God to fix their situation; their condition was hurting them, and the war was devouring them; they let their imaginations run wild.

What next?

The Revenge`

He walked through the middle of the train carriage, looking at the passengers' faces, then occupied a seat, and the train departed from Saarbrücken, Germany, to Strasbourg, France, on its way to Paris.

He opened his book to continue the novel, but a conversation between two Arabs, whom he hadn't noticed were behind him, caught his attention. They had apparently stopped talking during the train's stop at the station and then resumed:

"Is it possible that personal motives are causing this chaos in the region?"

"As I told you earlier, women also play a major role in what happened," the second replied, trying to convince the first, adding without emotion: "The Syrian-Saudi dispute began with the disagreement between Hafez al-Assad and his brother Rifaat, who moved to Paris... You know, of course, that one of the late King Abdullah's wives is the sister of Rifaat al-Assad's wife..."

"And you're saying that Rifaat's wife incited her sister to push King Abdullah to oppose Hafez al-Assad's regime and his son Bashar after him?"

The tone of scorn was dominant in the man's question, who seemed older to judge by his voice.

"Yes, exactly, but there are other personal reasons; Bashar al-Assad was imitating Qaddafi, humiliating King Abdullah and Arab princes during Arab summits."

The speaker received no response, so he continued: "You can review those meetings on YouTube to see, hear and understand the reason for the hatred that led to recruiting English mercenaries who accompanied media teams that broadcast live from Egypt's borders to the Aziziyah Gate in Tripoli and hunted Qaddafi until they accomplished what they did to him."

The new passenger closed his book so that neither of them would see that he is an Arab if they looked back or moved to the dining car. He wanted to eavesdrop on them because of the strangeness of what they were arguing about.

"And what came after Qaddafi?"

"Chaos, originally, their plan wasn't to fix Libya's situation, but to destroy Qaddafi's rule. As for Syria, their aim was to install Rifaat instead of his nephew, but things got out of hand, and they're still funding and arming the opposition, causing destruction in Syria, turning it into a sectarian conflict..."

"The plan backfired."

"That's true, because their plan was short-sighted..."

The listener thought their plan was foolish and continued listening.

"Iran joined Syria and strengthened Assad's regime, opening a front for Saudi Arabia to get entangled in Yemen, while Saudi Arabia continued to lower oil prices to harm Iran, but with increased spending, it depleted its savings and resorted to austerity, borrowing, and imposing taxes on its people and pilgrims."

"What's more important is that Tehran reached an agreement with Washington and European countries, and Russia joined Iran in supporting Syria, and now disasters are befalling the countries that opposed Syria."

The listener understood that the speaker meant the bombings in Saudi Arabia, France, and Turkey; the first funded and armed, while the second encouraged mercenaries to travel to Syria to join the opposition, and Turkey's Erdogan spared no effort in exacerbating the situation, and he expected this situation and alliances wouldn't last.

"Have you noticed that the destruction of the Arab Spring only affected Arab republics?"

"It also impacted on the French and Turkish republics, and every country that intervened negatively will have its tricks turned back on it in one way or another."

Silence fell for a moment as the train entered a dense forest, and the listener noticed that the carriage lights had been on throughout the journey. He instinctively put his hand in his pocket where his ticket was that he had prepared with his passport, but they had crossed the German-French border, and no one had asked him for a ticket or passport yet.

Suddenly, the carriage light dimmed, and natural light flooded in from outside as wheat fields stretched as far as the eye could see.

"You said their trick turned back on them; do you think the Syrian state's agencies have any role in what's happening in Saudi Arabia, France, and Turkey?"

"Either that, or God takes revenge for the oppressed and orphans..."

He heard a short laugh from the two, followed by silence as the ticket inspector entered the carriage. The listener's mind jumped to the reason for the Saudi-Qatari dispute in supporting the regimes of Mohamed Morsi and Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, despite the agreement between Doha and Riyadh on the Libyan and Syrian issues. Things were getting mixed up in his mind again; Saudi Arabia and Qatar didn't agree against Qaddafi, but each sought to overthrow him. Similarly, regarding Syria, despite both countries supporting the opposition, each supported an

opposition hostile to the other, which hindered the opposition's overall agreement on an alternative to confront the regime. As for Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood under Morsi weren't Wahhabis; Qatar supported them, and Saudi Arabia supported Sisi against them...

The listener snapped out of his thoughts as the train stopped; he took his bag and disembarked in one of the world's most beautiful cities, his mind buzzing with issues that had been repeating themselves for 1500 years.

A Phenomenon of Sound

"How do I know who's going to win? They're both trash, one is a racist idiot and the other has been selling herself to Israel for decades, participating in the disasters that have befallen us."

"If you have an opinion, follow what's happening in Washington," he said to his veteran journalist friend, who had withdrawn from politics and debates in protest at the apathy of the Arab citizen and official, who doesn't read, and if they read, they don't understand, and if they understand, they don't act according to that understanding, as he says about them.

"While flipping through my selected TV channels, I hear, of course, about the discussion between the candidates, but I'm not following closely enough to qualify me to give an opinion on who will win, and frankly, I don't care; both are harmful to us as Arabs and Muslims. As for looking at the story from the angle of the American people, I envy them as much as I grieve for our situation."

His friend smiled, encouraging him to drop his distaste for political commentary. He picked up the coffee cup to entice his friend to continue voicing his opinion.

"Some might see the debates as trivial, and the campaign propaganda as clownish, but these methods clarify the nature of the candidate to the voter, and thus they choose who suits them, and everyone commits to the results after the elections."

"But we have elections..."

"For God's sake, eat grapes and don't bother us with your nonsense," his friend interrupted, pointing to the grape bowl between them.

"Our elections, if they exist, are without programs or debates, and at best, there are some empty, repetitive promises. If it's a presidential election, there is one candidate and a guaranteed, rigged result, and if it's a parliamentary election, it's tribal, familial, or based on cash payment for each vote, and despite that, we sometimes have candidates, even lists of candidates, who don't get a single vote. And you're talking about elections, or you want to compare our elections to theirs... Drink your coffee."

"What do we lack to conduct election campaigns; we have dozens of satellite channels, and our constructive and oratory capabilities are unmatched..."

"True, we're a phenomenon of sound, and God blessed us with many channels..." He fell silent, considering if he should continue engaging in this topic or change the subject to something else. He feared hurting his friend's feelings if he thought he was being condescending, so he continued:

"There are many channels, but most are barely holding on, and the few that viewers accept are politicized and serve the interests of regimes built on corruption. The important thing, my friend, is not the ability to give speeches, and we no longer lack access to any information we want. In the recent past, we used to think that our problems were due to the world's misunderstanding of us, and the lack of those who speak about us skillfully, and that if we explained our issues, we'd win them over, and everything would change for the better. This is how we drowned in a sea of information, but we're unable to solve any issue; instead, our affairs are getting more complicated due to a lack of awareness and, of course, our inability to make any positive decisions, except for self-destructive decisions that harm ourselves, our neighbors, our families, our neighborhoods, and our country. Do you consider the Syrian negotiators from all sides to be normal human beings, as they chew over trivialities while the people are escaping from torment and the country is dissolving? Can the Palestinian leadership be described as human, as they sit, more helpless than the helpless, impaled on their seats... and take, for example, Libya, Iraq, and happy Yemen. What good does it do us, this continuous display of analyses, news, images, and films of what's happening in our country, if it doesn't push us to make decisions that change the course of events..."

"For example?"

"For example, a continuous popular movement in every country demanding the election of new leaders, as happened in Tunisia. How long will the Palestinians wait to hold elections that put them on the right path? They have intense problems, and there's no solution except through elections, while other countries need

immediate reform and change before their situations explode, too. The problem is that the tyrants don't care about destroying the country and its people if the solution means sending them into retirement.

Do you know that most Arab leaders, presidents, and kings are between sixty and ninety years old, meaning when they meet, they talk mostly about the different types of medicine they take?"

"But every attempt at change has led to disaster so far..."

"Yes, and the reason is the long periods of tyranny and the lack of opportunities for experimentation and progress. If the situation explodes, worse things are looming on the horizon. We need continuous change through democratic means, and we urgently need open educational systems with a scientific and logical approach and tolerant upbringing, but what's available, unfortunately, is the opposite..."

He stopped for a moment, sipping the remains of his coffee, and ended his speech without looking at his friend:

"Between our sheikhs and the evil of Trump or Clinton; we're screwed, we're screwed... The Americans have a vendetta against Arabs and Muslims because of the September 11 attack in New York, and despite everything they've done to us, they haven't finished settling their accounts yet."

Stupidity and Intelligence

All the information is available in his mind, but he's unable to organize his thoughts, where should he start, and how deep would he go in his weekly article, which he usually writes in two hours. He looked away from the computer and jotted down notes with his pen: Merkel's desire to reduce production costs, negative behavior by immigrants, European protests fueled by economic reasons, the growth of racism and advancement of racist parties in elections, disintegration of the European Union, wherever Muslims go problems arise, terrorism recruits criminals, decline in child population, increase in demographic concerns...

He paused for a moment, sipped from a cup of hot milk and cinnamon, and wrote: The experiment of the five monkeys to create idiots.

"After the old men of England decided to take their country out of the market and deprive the young generation of a shared European future, a decision that was also against the will of Scotland and Northern Ireland, France is now rebuking Germany for receiving millions of refugees produced by the war in Syria and Iraq. What Europeans forget is that their current situation is the result of an historically repeated British plan for corruption. Margaret Thatcher's government entered the European Union to blow it up from within; she insisted at the time on adding Eastern European countries to the market, without preparation or opening the way for movement of labor and thus Poles and their neighbors invaded market countries, especially Britain, whose current government is demanding that companies draw up lists with the names of their non-British foreign workers. This government, of course, is the product of the British separation from Europe, which was achieved under the slogans of expelling foreigners from the country, fearing the movement of refugees to Europe, and 'regaining sovereignty' from Brussels."

He stopped writing and reviewed his notes, establishing that the article would be too long if he didn't summarize and shorten the topics.

"The French president and government are afraid of the progress of Le Pen's racist party and his daughter, so they refuse to take refugees and rebuke Germany for its economically driven actions. It's well-known that Germany is an industrial exporting country, but workers' wages are high, and thus its exports are declining, being expensive compared to Chinese and overall European production. This is why Chancellor Merkel and her party decided to exploit the Syrian crisis by opening the borders to a million Syrians annually, supposedly for humanitarian reasons. People who were raised and educated in their country for decades are now being put to work as soon as they learn German within a few months. Production wages are dropping, export and income tax intake is rising, making tax money available for insurance, health, and pension funds, and the country gets rid of the problem of decreasing population and production and low taxes, and solves the problem of who will pay the high pensions of the retirees."

He wanted the next paragraph to refer to the Arabs' responsibility for the increase in racism in the West, but he had to phrase it in a subtle way that doesn't link the presence of Arabs and Muslims anywhere with problems in general

"When different civilizations meet, problems naturally arise, especially if one is fleeing a brutal war to a country not inhabited just by angels. A few events here and there, harassment, terrorism, theft... were exploited by opportunistic racists who brandished the weapon of protecting German women, culture, and

Christianity, and exaggerated every terrorist event in Europe. An extremist party grew and began to sweep seats in local elections, and pressure on the chancellor increased from within her own party to retreat from the policy of absorbing refugees.

Despite the chancellor's bravery, she can't frankly admit to her people that these educated refugee workers are a gift from God to meet their needs for population, labor, and money, and to pay the pensions of the old, the unemployed and the racists... Such frankness would mean the end of her and her party."

He's convinced that Merkel won't be frank with her people and the world about the truth of her policy, so he wanted the second-to-last paragraph of his article to reflect the probabilities of what will happen, given the current circumstances.

"If events continue, and another people, besides the English, decide to withdraw from the European Union, and the extremists in France and Holland succeed in the next elections, with the chancellor Merkel's position shaky or defeated; this will lead to the dominance of the stupid majority, easily led, seeking to return to the past they imagine was happy before the Arab-Islamic foreign invasion of their country. This is how they'll easily return to European divisions and conflicts that lasted for centuries before the European Union, and return to economic decline, and of course, the Islamic conquest by immigrants to Europe will have achieved the beginning of its goals on the way to eliminating the differences between Muslim countries and Europe."

There are two days left until the American elections, and he's now witnessing the ongoing brawl between the candidates on empty topics, prostitution, sexual accusations, harassment stories of the candidates, and xenophobia. What worries him is the high percentage of Americans who actually support the Republican candidate Trump, and this brought back to his mind the story of the five monkeys; he decided to end his article with it, as it reflects the subjects' adherence to inherited and illogical slogans and habits.

"Five monkeys were placed in a cage, and a bunch of bananas was hung up, with a ladder under it. When the first monkey climbed the ladder to take a banana, he and all the others were hit with a stream of cold water; he retreated from his goal. Later, another monkey tried to take a banana; the unpleasant cold water was repeated, and thus the monkeys stopped looking at the bananas. The experimenters took out one monkey and replaced it with a new one. The new monkey immediately headed for the ladder, seeking the bananas, but the four monkeys stopped him and beat him. This was followed by replacing another of the four monkeys who had experienced the cold water. The second new monkey headed for

the ladder and immediately received a severe beating from all four, including the monkey who hadn't experienced the cold water. The experiment continued until all the monkeys who had been punished with cold water were replaced, but the new monkeys continued to prevent any new arrival from approaching the bananas, not knowing the reason that drove them to beat any newcomer who dared to violate the prevailing customs."

He reviewed his article five years later; he found that Trump had succeeded once, annoyed his people and the world, and then failed in the next elections, racism had advanced in Europe and its parties had infiltrated parliaments; even the fascist party had reformed and headed the government in Italy, Britain continued its economic decline after leaving the European Union, and there were successive resignations of prime ministers, and what helped in this transformation was the entry of Russian forces into Ukraine and the outbreak of war, and the provision of expensive economic and military aid from America and Europe. Then followed a boycott of Russia and the deprivation of the West of Russian gas and the disruption to comfortable heating as well as the disruption to production in Western factories... and other European disasters were waiting round the corner...

He felt some relief, especially at what had befallen Britain.

Destruction

Donkeys and Humans

During a lull in the bombing, he insulated himself from fear, panic, and other emotions and began to ponder: Why do we get used to things and surrender to repeated events without thinking about the consequences or striving for change? Isn't this the behavior of donkeys and waterwheel turners, and the argument of the sheikhs that we should rely on the sacred which, being sacred, is not open to discussion, and thus there's no room for criticism, development, or harm to the interests of the sanctifiers?

But doesn't ruin, corruption, poverty, and war prevail repeatedly wherever they dominate?

"I'm in the wrong, I'm guilty, and a partner to creating this disaster and its continuation; I didn't stand up to them enough during peaceful times, I didn't demand change, and I didn't fight to raise demands for elections," he said to himself, remembering that he lived on their scraps and had been safe from their evil until he reached here... to the gates of Hell itself.

The One Ton-Bomb

He refused to go to where the building he had invested all his savings in and borrowed to complete was located, where he had taken one of its apartments as his own residence and rented out the rest. He refused to go after he had been informed of its destruction and the remaining crater where its foundations were... he wanted it to remain standing in his imagination.

He thanked God who inspired him to save himself and the neighbors. He had deduced that the enemy knew all the members of the resistance movement and tracked their movements through their phones, and he remembered that two of his tenants belonged to the resistance. He woke up at dawn, and driven by instinct, knocked on all the apartment doors, warning the residents that he had received

warning of the building being bombed, but they hadn't determined the hour of the bombing... Leave.

And he himself fled to his son-in-law's house, where, before the noon prayer, he received news of the American bomb and the crater that remained for him.

The Trap

Who set it up for us? The enemy's cleverness, or our own stupidity? He said aloud, sitting alone: It has become clear to me that it was a well-planned trap since the Western world's leaders rushed to Tel Aviv and gave them the green light to defend themselves as they saw fit.

He said, after a pause: The question is puzzling; personally, I was happy on October 7th, thinking it was time to pack my bags and return to Jaffa... I believed for a moment that there was planning and execution capability, and that we had caught them... Yes, I had doubts about believing that the sheikhs had planning capabilities, but reality said yes in the first three days, then in the weeks of resistance, and what was said about the 700-kilometer reach!! I thought it was impossible not to have some of it extend to Jaffa, Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem. So, the young fighters were prepared and would rise from under the ground to deliver blows, and create an effective deterrent against the potential aggression of an enemy that was facing fears of annihilation.

Days passed, months went by, and we started counting civilian martyrs by the hundreds, then thousands, then tens of thousands of victims and wounded, and the destruction of everything, and no deterrent emerged from underground, nor any other from above... Oh, my absolute stupidity when I believed for a moment in the ability of the unseen sheikhs to prepare a trap, and if it was due to their preparation, then they must have conceded they trapped us, and it doesn't matter why and how, but the result cannot be disputed.

The Manhattan Invasion

He closed his eyes and focused his mind to make an historical connection between what had happened and what he knew from reading, and what was happening and what he was experiencing, running from the whip and trying to escape from its fangs.

On September 11, 2001, the extremists invaded Manhattan and demolished the twin towers through a live broadcast of the plane crashes, and people jumped from the heights to escape the fire... three thousand victims, and what seemed like a rape of the American home, the lord of the world, and the joy of Arabs and Muslims, both public and silent; patience having reached its limit before that due to the unjust bias with no positive result.

The second scene followed the first in his imagination - the American revenge - these are not like Bedouins who take revenge after a quarter of a century and say, we were too hasty. Americans are always in a hurry if it concerns them.

They bombed and invaded Afghanistan, because it harbored Bin Laden and his group, and then they pinned the blame on President Saddam; they destroyed Iraq, occupied it, and hanged the president on the eve of Eid al-Adha as a message to everyone, and caused the killing of more than a million Iraqis.

His mind was about to start comparing and contrasting what was happening in the Gaza Strip around him and what happened in Iraq, but he restrained himself and delved into a third, older historical scene: eyewitness accounts from both sides of Crusaders behavior, they ate Arab children after roasting them, slaughtered tens of thousands daily with swords, ripped open bellies and pulled out intestines, and their horses walked among the corpses with blood up to their knees.

The fourth scene: the Crusaders' descendants created the Zionists and support them in their absorption of blood. Is what is happening now as brutal as what happened then? Maybe more brutal, he said to himself; there are corpses in all the streets, under the rubble, and all the people are displaced, fleeing in terror, with no place to return to if the war stops, and this is intense psychological terror leading to feelings of loss...

He opened his eyes, muttering that the whole world knows and sees what's happening, the official Crusaders support the genocide, international committees

and institutions are delaying a decision, and increasing segments of people are sympathizing with the victims, but the genocide continues...

He decided to get up and review the major massacres in the region and whether they led to revenge and reactions, or if they continue and are forgotten for a millennium or more, and whether Arabs are governed by the rules and customs of Bedouins, or have they turned into sheep and camels?

Sheep and Camels

"Why do we focus on accusing others of violence, stupidity, and baseness... what about Arabs and Muslims, and even the earlier ones?"

He thought that if he started listing the massacres before Islam, he wouldn't finish the narration...

"So, let's focus on the battles after Islam, which is supposed to have refined and organized Arabs and made them the best nation."

He began to recall and review, striving for accuracy.

(The Battle of the Camel) in Basra in 36 AH between the forces of the fourth righteous caliph Ali ibn Abi Talib and the army led by the companions Talha ibn Ubayd Allah and Zubair ibn al-Awwam, in addition to the Mother of the Believers Aisha, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad, who was said to have gone with the army in a howdah of iron on the back of a camel, and the battle was named after that camel... all of them were companions, and each of them wanted leadership and was willing to kill others... On this occasion, Imam Ali won.

In the following year, after Muawiyah ibn Hind (who ate Hamza's liver) and Abu Sufyan, refused to pledge allegiance to Imam Ali, the Battle of Siffin occurred, in which half of the Muslim armies from both sides were killed, most of them companions.

Some years of discord passed for two states, and the struggle continued until Hasan ibn Ali, the son and heir of Imam Ali, renounced his claim to Muawiyah under certain conditions, and after Muawiyah's death, Husayn was killed in Karbala in 61 AH, and the Prophet's own grandchildren were humiliated.

In 131 AH, the Umayyad rule in Damascus ended through a bloody revolution by the Abbasids led by al-Saffah, which started in Persia and Iraq... here begins the typical cycle of revenge and killing... it was a massacre that didn't end there, but is being repeated to this day in similar form and with varying numbers.

The first Abbasid caliph, Abu al-Abbas al-Saffah,(the Butcher) gathered the remaining Umayyad princes and ordered them to be slaughtered in front of him, then covered their bodies with a carpet and offered food and drink while his victims were still at their last breath, and some were hit on the head when they moved, and they also exhumed the graves of all Umayyads wherever they were found, and some corpses were put on trial and burned.

In 131 AH, Marwan ibn Muhammad was defeated in the Battle of the Zab by Abd Allah ibn Ali, the uncle of the first Abbasid caliph Abu al-Abbas al-Saffah, and the Abbasid army continued its march from northern Iraq towards Damascus, which Marwan ibn Muhammad had fortified, but the people of Damascus, especially the Qaysi tribes, refused to support him and even stood against him, due to many conflicts that had arisen since the weakening of the Umayyad state, including Marwan ibn Muhammad's transfer of the capital of the state from Damascus to Harran.

Damascus withstood a siege of a month and a half, as most accounts say, then the Abbasids managed to breach the wall at the Small Gate, and as a result of the battle, Walid ibn Muawiyah, the leader of the Umayyad army stationed there, was killed, and from there the gates were opened, and the Abbasids committed a great deal of looting and destruction when they entered the capital of the Umayyad caliphate, and al-Maqdisi reported that Abd Allah ibn Ali ordered the wall to be demolished stone by stone, and ibn Asakir said that the Abbasid soldiers were cutting off heads in the streets and looting whatever money they could get, and they killed most of the Umayyad family and crucified some of them, such as Abd Allah ibn Abd al-Jabbar ibn Yazid, and the Umayyad women were not spared; for example, the wife of Hisham ibn Abd al-Malik was led to the desert bareheaded and barefoot and then killed there, and the daughter of Marwan ibn Muhammad committed suicide, and even the dead Umayyads were exhumed and their remains burned.

Suddenly, the ongoing Shia-Sunni conflict since that time came to his mind, and the struggle between Fatah and Hamas for power in Gaza in 2007 and the subsequent loss, and the stubbornness and refusal to reconcile and agree until now despite the ongoing genocide; each of them refusing to reconcile and unite with the other!

"This is just a glimpse of what we do to each other as Muslims, as Arabs, and as Palestinians, let's see some examples of what others do to us..."

The Crusaders

Ibn al-Athir , in his history about the Crusaders' entry into Jerusalem during the Crusades, narrated: "The Franks captured Jerusalem on Friday, the seventh of Sha'ban, and the people took up swords, and the Franks remained in the city for a week, killing Muslims, and a group of Muslims took refuge in the Mihrab of David; they fortified themselves there and fought for three days, and the Franks killed more than seventy thousand in the Al-Aqsa Mosque, including a large group of Muslim imams, scholars, worshipers, and ascetics who had left their homelands and lived in that noble place."

From the other side, Steven Runciman described in his book "A History of the Crusades" what happened in Jerusalem on the day the Crusaders entered; he said: "Early in the morning of the next day, a group of Crusaders stormed the gate of the mosque; they killed all the refugees inside, and when the leader of the force, Raymond Agil, visited the Temple Square in the morning, he had to make his way through the bodies and blood that reached his knees, and the massacre of the people of Jerusalem left a deep impact on the whole world, and it's not exactly known how many victims there were, but it led to the city being emptied of its Muslim and Jewish inhabitants; many Christians were also distressed by what happened..."

Oh, the horror of the similarity, the difference is only in the type of weapons, he thought and continued to compare.

Many historians described the events of the massacre that occurred in Jerusalem on the day the Crusaders entered, and how they were proud of themselves; their horses' hooves were wading in the blood of Muslims that flowed in the streets, and it was one of the Crusaders' means of entertainment to roast Muslim children like sheep...

He said to himself: the religious Jews didn't reach the level of roasting children, but they buried them under houses knowingly and intentionally, and the rabbis of the

soldiers encouraged them to destroy and kill, then blew the horn before the soldiers moved to their machines and cannons to kill Gazans.

Returning to the Christian zealots, many mention what Richard the Lionheart did to the Muslim prisoners during the Third Crusade, when he occupied Acre. He slaughtered 2700 Muslim prisoners who were in the garrison of Acre, and their wives and children met their deaths next to them.

Gustav Le Bon mentioned in his book "The Arab Civilization" - quoting from accounts of monks and historians who accompanied the Crusade to Jerusalem - what happened when the Crusaders entered the holy city, massacres that indicate only a deep-seated black religious hatred in the hearts and minds of the Crusaders. An eyewitness, the monk Robert, said: "Our people were roaming the streets, squares, and rooftops, quenching their thirst for killing, like lionesses whose cubs had been taken! They were slaughtering children and young men, cutting them to pieces, and hanging many people on a single rope for speed, and our people were seizing everything they found; they were ripping open the bellies of the dead to extract gold pieces! Oh, the greed and love of gold, and the blood was flowing like rivers in the streets of the city covered with corpses."

He smiled as he remembered the actions of the Israeli soldiers and the human attitude to looting in wartime; Jewish soldiers also, after every wave of destruction and terror in Gaza in 2024, entered houses and looted what was inside, and of course, they looted bank vaults, and then returned to destroy every trace.

The priest Raymond Dagmil reported joyfully: "Something wonderful happened among the Arabs when our people took control of the walls and towers of Jerusalem; some of them had their heads cut off; this was the least that happened to them, some had their bellies ripped open; they were forced to throw themselves from the top of the walls, and some were burned in the fire; this was after long torture, and nothing was seen in the streets and squares of Jerusalem except piles of Arab heads, hands, and feet, and one couldn't pass except over the bodies of the dead, but all this was only some of what they deserved..."

What a history, repeating itself with different names and in diverse geography, but with the same events stemming from deep religious hatred... all religions and their gods are the ones that deserve what's happened to the poor, misled people throughout history.

Here's a description from the past of what's being repeated in the present in the Gaza Strip... the same priest said: "Our people went too far in shedding blood in the Temple of Suleiman, and the bodies of the dead were floating in the square here and there, and the severed hands were swimming as if trying to connect with

strange bodies. The pious Crusader knights (!) didn't stop there; they held a conference in which they agreed to exterminate all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Muslims, Jews, and Christian heretics - who numbered sixty thousand - and they annihilated them all in eight days, not sparing a woman, a child, or an old man... and they did the same in the Muslim cities they invaded: In Ma'arrat al-Nu'man, they killed all the Muslims who were there, refugees in mosques and people hiding in cellars; they killed more than a hundred thousand people, and Ma'arrat al-Nu'man was one of the largest cities in Syria in terms of population after people fled to it following the fall of Antioch and other cities to the Crusaders." The conclusion of the story...

and only the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip will understand the comparison, despite what TV channels are broadcasting in terms of images, explanations, and films... that is one thing, while the lived reality is another entirely.

Human Flesh

In the first half of the millennium, the region of Armenia was contested between the Roman Empire and the Parthian Empire, which preceded the formation of the Persian Empire, and when the Parthians appointed a king of Armenia, the Romans decided to invade.

The Jews took advantage of the movement of armies eastward and revolted against Roman rule in the Mediterranean basin, specifically in Cyprus, Cyrene (Libya), and Alexandria. The Jews lived like others under Roman rule, but they considered them infidels... and this was before the spread of Christianity, which also faced hostility from the Jews.

In Cyprus, the Jewish conspiracy began to expand rapidly in 117 AD while the Roman forces were on their way east under the command of Emperor Trajan. The Jews looted their Greek and Roman neighbors, looted and destroyed the city of Salamis in Cyprus, and the historian Cassius Dio reported that the Jewish rebels slaughtered 240,000 Greek Cypriots.

As Trajan's army advanced victoriously in Mesopotamia, the Jewish rebels began to attack the small garrisons left behind. The Jewish chaos before the Salamis massacre had spread to Cyrene (Libya), Alexandria in Egypt, and then Cyprus.

The Jews incited a revolution in Palestine, and the Jewish armed rebellion spread quickly to the provinces that had recently been invaded in the east and Mesopotamia.

The cities with a significant Jewish population - Nisibis, Edessa, Seleucia, and Arbela (now Arbil in Iraq) - joined the revolution and killed the small Roman garrisons there.

The important thing is not the principle of revolution against the empire, but the fanatical and vengeful religious nature against other prevailing religions in the empire.

In Cyrene, the Jews destroyed many temples, including those of Hecate, Jupiter, Apollo, Artemis, and Isis, as well as civil structures that were symbols of Rome, including temples, the Caesareum, basilica, and public baths.

The violence in Cyrene was so severe that it emptied the province of its inhabitants, prompting the next emperor, Hadrian, to establish new colonies: "The Jews... waged war against the inhabitants of Libya in the most brutal ways; the destruction was so great that the land would have remained uninhabited if the emperor Hadrian had not gathered settlers from other places and sent them there, because the inhabitants had been wiped out."

The historian Cassius Dio added, speaking of the Jewish rebellions: "At the same time, the Jews in the region of Cyrene (Libya) appointed a leader named Andreas and began to destroy the Romans and Greeks together. They cooked their flesh, made belts for themselves from their intestines, anointed themselves with their blood, and wore their skin like clothing. They cut many of them in half from head to toe, and threw others to wild beasts, forcing others to fight like gladiators. In total, 220,000 people perished. In Egypt, they also committed many similar acts, and in Cyprus under the leadership of Artemion. There, in the same way, 240,000 people were killed. For this reason, no Jew is allowed to set foot on that island; even if the wind blows them there, they will be put to death."

Of course - the rebellions were violently suppressed, and the Jews only earned hatred within the Roman Empire, but they continued to ally with the Persians in their wars against the Romans... today they ally with the Crusaders to exterminate the Palestinian people and seize their land.

It's true they no longer cook their victims, but they starve them and leave the bodies of the dead in the streets for predators to devour.

Other Criminals

In 1291 AD, a hundred years after the Crusader massacres, which had no end, the Mamluks succeeded in finally expelling the Crusaders from the coasts of the Levant after they had occupied them for two centuries, and led seven Crusades on Anatolia, the Levant, and Egypt, in which hundreds of thousands of innocent people fell victim to completely barbaric methods, and the Islamic East clashed with waves of European Crusaders with their different languages, religious affiliations, and intellectual sickness.

33 years before that, the last Abbasid caliph had fallen, and Baghdad fell with him, on the 14th of Safar, 656 AH, and nearly a million Muslims were killed in forty days, but this time at the hands of the Mongol Bedouins, who destroyed the Baghdad Library, and threw books into the Tigris River so that its waters turned black from the ink, and Hulegu's soldiers poured into the streets, killing Muslims, blood flowed abundantly, and men, old men, women, and infants were killed. The Mongolian historian "Rashid al-Din al-Hamadhani" says that the casualties of that massacre were 800,000 killed, including the best men, women, scholars, and writers, and some people even hid in wells and died there. The massacres were wholesale; families were killed together, and the elderly were not spared, and their focus was also on killing children... what's the secret of the savages' hatred for children in every era?

Historians note that the Mongols used all brutal methods to kill, torture, and humiliate the people of Baghdad, and their main goal was to rob people of their jewelry and steal from them.

One of the strangest things reported is that a Mongol soldier saw a veiled woman swallow a pearl to hide it; he cut open her stomach to extract the pearl, and this spread among their soldiers; the lives of women, especially pregnant ones, were lost, as they were thought to be full of jewels, and people even thought that the hour had come, to the point that the historian Ibn al-Athir says: "If someone said that the world since God created Adam until now has not been afflicted with such a thing, he would be telling the truth."

A Time Leap

Centuries pass, one after another, none of them free from wars, killings, injustice, and exploitation... injustice and slavery for one group, matched by profits and dominance for other groups.

In the year following the start of World War I, which was known at the time as the Great War that would end all wars, massacres of Armenians occurred in Turkey, where hundreds of thousands were killed by orders of the Ottoman governor, starting in April 1915. The Ottoman Empire was then part of the Axis powers fighting against the Allies.

The number of victims of the Armenian massacre exceeded one million killed, a Christian group killed by the Ottoman state, where hundreds of thousands of Armenians were forced to march hundreds of miles into the desert, deprived of food and water during the march, and children and women were brutalized.

The Armenians were one of the ethnic groups living within the Ottoman Empire, and when Western powers like Russia and Britain began to impose treaties on Turkey demanding freedoms and recognition of minority rights, the Armenians encouraged and demanded the implementation of what was in the agreements, which Sultan Abdul Hamid had no intention of implementing... the result was two small massacres before the war, then killing and deporting Armenians to neighboring countries, like Greece, Cyprus, the Levant, and Egypt.

This crime was committed during World War I, which occupied everyone and ended in November 1918 with the defeat of Turkey and the Axis powers, after unprecedented destruction.

The total number of casualties and deaths among military and civilians in that war was more than 37 million people, divided into 16 million deaths and 20 million injuries.

The Weapon of Starvation

A famine occurred in Ukraine between the two World Wars, between 1932 and 1933, and it left about 10 million dead (a third of Ukraine's population at the time),

and it's said that it led to the growth of the phenomenon of cannibalism. Most Western and American observers agree that this famine was deliberately caused by the Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin, but Russia refuses to pay any compensation to its victims.

In the 19th century, specifically from 1845 to 1849, Ireland - which was then under British administration - was hit by a great famine known as the "Potato Famine", caused and engineered by the British colonizer.

During the "Potato Famine", more than a million Irish people were forced to emigrate to the United States, while the poorest class had no choice but to stay in their homes, in a scene resembling surrender to death... and indeed, half of the Irish population died.

At the peak of the famine, the Irish people received aid from an unexpected source, the Ottomans, who were thousands of kilometers away, as well as the United States on the other side of the ocean, sent dozens of relief ships loaded with food supplies.

Ireland was then one of Britain's colonies, and the London government refused to allow Ottoman aid ships to dock at Dublin port, so they docked at Drogheda port, 30 miles from Dublin, and unloaded their cargo there... to avoid British authority control and distribution Ottoman sailors began unloading cargo in various areas on Ireland's shores...

His mind quickly recalled the words of an Irish parliamentarian justifying Dublin's recognition of the Palestinian state, along with Norway and Spain, saying: We share with Palestine the tragedy of colonization and starvation... he checked his memory; he found that Norway had also been occupied by neighboring Sweden, and Spain suffered from fascist rule, an ally of the Nazis, until the early 1970s... these are people who know what the Palestinian people are going through, and they have the courage to take a stand.

The Nanking Massacre and "Rape"

In 1937, Japanese forces committed a brutal massacre against the inhabitants of Nanking, China, during the Sino-Japanese War, leaving between tens to hundreds of thousands of dead and around 20,000 documented cases of rape. Of course -

successive Japanese governments have tried to downplay the significance of these massacres, and some even attempt to deny them entirely, to this day

London Berlin Gaza

He heard the explosions, and his feelings confirmed the shaking of the earth beneath him, but the destruction didn't return to him again as it had a week ago when a rocket destroyed the house opposite, ten meters away, and the doors and windows of the entire neighborhood blew out, the neighbor's house was destroyed, and the world turned gray.

That didn't happen again, and he's still searching through the internet for the world's tragedies and refreshing his information, to alleviate his misery and that of those around him... Does humanity really develop from within, or is what changes and is termed development no more than an external shell, he asked himself, then pondered how people who had suffered from destruction and extermination can accept what's happening to his people now, the extermination? Oh God, my soul!

He answered himself: I'm not sad about the death or destruction of others, and maybe I feel some schadenfreude when disasters hit them... but there are now people around the world who care about Palestinians and put themselves at risk to support them... these human beings are more humane than me.

Between 1944-1945, London suffered significant damage, being extensively bombed by the German Air Force. Before the bombing, hundreds of thousands of children in London were evacuated to the countryside, and civilians took shelter in metro stations during the initial bombing period, with 18,000 tons of explosives dropped on London. By the end of the war, at least 30,000 Londoners were killed due to bombing, and over 50,000 were seriously injured, tens of thousands of buildings were destroyed, and hundreds of thousands were left homeless.

When the tables turned on Germany, and until the end of the war, Berlin was subjected to 363 air raids by the British Air Force between 1940 and 1945, the US Eighth Air Force between 1943 and 1945, and French forces between 1944 and 1945 as part of the campaign against Germany, and it was also attacked by Soviet

aircraft, especially in 1945 when Soviet forces besieged the city. British bombers dropped 45,517 tons of bombs, and Americans dropped 23,000 tons. More and more people fled as the bombing continued. 1.7 million people (40% of the population) had fled by May 1945.

London and Berlin were the most heavily bombed cities in the Western world until the bombing of Gaza after October 7th, 2023. The bombs dropped by the Israeli army, supported by the US, Britain, and Germany, in the first four months of the aggression exceed those used by Russia in its war on Ukraine over two years. According to estimates by the Israeli newspaper "Kol Ha'ir", the number of bombs used by the Israeli army in Gaza exceeds those used by former German leader Adolf Hitler during World War II.

The head of the Euro-Mediterranean Observatory said that according to Israeli admissions, "estimates indicate no less than 70,000 tons of explosives, equivalent to 3 nuclear bombs, were dropped on Gaza in the first months, an unprecedented number in the history of wars considering Gaza's area." He noted that "about 70% of infrastructure, roads, and buildings in the sector were destroyed", pointing out that "neighborhoods and towns were completely wiped out, as happened in Beit Hanoun. This can only happen with intense firepower that hasn't stopped to this moment."

All this in the first four months only of an aggression that hasn't stopped, and the intensity of destruction and ongoing extermination hasn't decreased, making it easy to calculate the amount of explosives and killing with each additional month. In the fifth month of the aggression, the weight of bombs dropped on the Strip's inhabitants was equivalent to everything dropped on Berlin and London throughout World War II, 87,000 tons of explosives... this is practically equivalent to the destructive power of four Hiroshima-like bombs.

The Holocaust

Those exterminating Gaza and its inhabitants are those who were subjected to extermination during World War II, and they're supported by those who participated in that extermination, and those who refused to accept Jewish refugees

to save them from the Holocaust. They're also the ones who pushed them into Palestine as part of a colonial settlement project and are now supporting their project with everything they can against a poor, practically unarmed people, besieged and collectively punished for crimes committed by the aggressors themselves... in other words, the Jews have been upgraded from the category of the oppressed to the category of the oppressors, and they've been replaced by Palestinians.

He thought again... how can this be? How can the children and grandchildren of the Holocaust do this without considering the balance of power? He searched and found that after World War II, many psychological experiments and research were conducted to find convincing answers about how humans follow orders that may be considered immoral or inhumane.

One of the most famous experiments is that of an American psychologist who recruited culturally and socially acceptable volunteers and assigned roles to them without them knowing the main purpose of the experiment. The psychologist put one person in a closed room where no one could see him and instructed him to intentionally misspell some words. On the other side of the room, there was a person with a list of words who was supposed to ask the person in the room to spell them correctly, and if he made a mistake, the questioner was to press a button that would shock the person with increasing doses of electricity each time he made another mistake. There was no actual electric shock, but the questioner didn't know this, and the person in the room was pretending to scream in pain each time the button was pressed.

None of the participants had any objection to carrying out this order, leading to the conclusion that humans have a tendency to follow orders if they believe they're coming from responsible people, even if those orders are illogical... "If this is the case with humans following orders from other humans, what about divine orders or interpretations of them as killing, enslavement, etc.?" he asked himself and found no answer.

He searched for other experiments and found the Stanford Prison Experiment. In this experiment, university students were given fictional roles as guards and prisoners to understand the natural response to captivity and the behavioral effects on all involved. The experiment showed that those who played the role of guards began to exhibit increased violent and anti-social behavior. One in three guards showed real sadistic tendencies, to the point of intimidating and humiliating the prisoners they were guarding during the experiment.

He also found experiments on animals leading to similar results.

What is the Holocaust? Is the Holocaust a result of the dehumanization of humans in a certain period and era? Can any collective punishment or extermination of a human group, or human groups, be justified; the Holocaust wasn't directed only against Jews, but also targeted Gypsies, disabled people, homosexuals, and non-Aryan human races?

How can European nations that remained silent about the extermination of the Jewish people now support and arm them to exterminate the Palestinian people?

Many questions came to his mind; he had to respond to them without denying the Holocaust; those who deny it might deny the ongoing extermination of Palestinians in a decade.

Holocaust isn't a German or Hebrew term; it comes from Greek like many other terms... "holos" means whole, and "kaustos" means burned... in Hebrew, they call that massacre "Shoah" or "HaShoah", meaning catastrophe or calamity... it was not a barbecue like the Crusaders' grilling of Arab children and eating them, because the Germans didn't eat Jews, and they didn't burn them; they killed many of them intentionally by putting them in shower rooms to wash, and there they were suffocated with carbon dioxide gas, and the bodies were taken to crematoria to reduce the process of burial and disposal... whatever; the whole thing is horrific because the reason for killing is illogical, racist, stemming from a German ideology of Aryan superiority, making it desirable to get rid of other races, starting with those in Germany or countries occupied by Germans, or those who would be next in line for extermination when the Nazi army completed its occupation of the world.

11 million people were killed due to this German policy, including 6 million European Jews and 5 million others, including Gypsies, disabled people, communists, and homosexuals. The idea of extermination began long before Hitler; in 1904, a German doctor published his ideas for creating a pure, intelligent society, and thus the necessity of getting rid of those who don't deserve to live, according to his view. That doctor didn't specify any social or religious group that should be eliminated. But the Nazi ideology after Hitler's rise targeted Jews as an enemy, along with other races, and scientists developed theories that they were inferior humans, and the Nazis had already started the idea of euthanasia for patients and disabled people.

In early April 1933, the Nazi party declared a day for boycotting Jewish businesses and goods in Germany as revenge against Jews and foreigners criticizing the Nazi party in their newspapers. Nazi stormtroopers confronted stores, put signs on them,

and threatened their owners... violent acts occurred, and the following week, the Nazi party issued decrees expelling Jews from government institutions, banning Jews from marrying non-Jews, and preventing Jewish students from attending government schools, and it was decided to intensify the encouragement of Jews to emigrate by a coercive approach, then things developed to putting them in camps spread across countries occupied by Germans one after another.

The Nazi philosophy justified this approach by the Germans' right, as a pure race, to rule the world and get rid of those considered subhuman, or what Israeli ministers today call "human animals"... at the time, Germans considered Jews, Gypsies, Poles, Slavs, and Africans as human animals.

In the aggression on Gaza, a large number of people were lost, shipped to Israel, and it's a fact that Israel has the largest stockpile of human organs and is the largest exporter of these parts globally... no one knows what experiments Zionist scientists are conducting on prisoners and abductees who are, of course, not released, and no one knows their fate.

It's said that investigations with Nazis and survivors of the camps confirm that Nazi scientists used Jews and others as test animals to develop killing methods... like testing how many people one bullet can kill, the effect of a hand grenade on bodies, and experiments with poisons and gases, or putting them in closed containers with high pressure, freezing and rewarming experiments, and the Nazis were interested in experiments on twins.

Other experiments included attempts to change eye color in children, operations to transfer or transplant organs in the body, experiments to prevent pregnancy and reproduction, and other experiments.

Decades have passed since the end of Nazism and the Holocaust, international laws have changed, international human rights and humanitarian organizations have emerged, a Jewish entity has been established at the expense of Palestine and its people, and we've reached an organized extermination process by Jews, their army, and government against Palestinians... everything in this massacre, from Israeli statements and actions, images and practices, and the frenzy of the Jewish right, prisons and experiments, organ theft, and more... all remind us of the Nazis' actions, which have been preserved, recounted, and taught by Jews to the world. Even the October 7th operation by Palestinian resistance resembles, in its circumstances and results, the Jewish uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943, which Jews consider an heroic act, while they consider this Palestinian resistance operation against occupation and siege as terrorism, justifying the extermination of all Gaza Strip inhabitants, or at least expelling them from their land and seizing it.

Just as Hitler refused to consider and respect the rest of the world's concerns about his treatment of Jews and occupied populations in general, Netanyahu and his right-wing religious government refuse to respect any law or international demand to stop the extermination, starvation, and attempts at expulsion.

The Ghetto, Victims of Victims

The ghetto is a famous term promoted by Jews worldwide and attributed to the Nazis... but it's actually proof of anti-Semitism in Europe centuries before the rise of Nazism... and it seems that, from their deep-rooted Jewish identity, the Jews now see its application to Palestinians as natural?

The "ghetto" is the name of the Jewish quarter in Venice, established in 1516, where the city's Jewish population was forced to live by the Venetian authorities. Many European leaders, local authorities, or Emperor Charles V ordered the establishment of Jewish ghettos in Frankfurt, Rome, Prague, and other cities in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Then came Hitler and Nazism in the 1930s, occupying countries neighboring Germany, and began establishing ghettos for Jews to isolate them from the rest of society, either to kill them when circumstances allowed or to deport them outside Germany and its surroundings... does this remind us of anything after the occupation of Palestine and what's happening in the Gaza War 2024?

The Gaza Strip has been besieged for decades by Israel, which controls the amount of food and calories for the population. During the war, after October 7th, the use of starvation, thirst, genocidal killing, burial with bulldozers, and preventing the rescue of wounded and dead from under the rubble, and of course, the blatant destruction of hospitals ... have all been proven by the International Court of Justice, and arrest warrants for the Israeli Prime Minister, Defense Minister, and Chief of Staff have been issued by the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, a decision that has no precedent in Western history.

As for the ghettos in the West Bank, also occupied by Israel since 1967, they number hundreds of Palestinian villages and cities, and the number of checkpoints has risen to 707 after October 7, 2024. These checkpoints prevent free

communication between Arab cities themselves, and all Arabs are prevented from reaching the part of Palestine occupied in 1948. Where Jewish settlers live... a permit is required for anyone crossing checkpoints, and Arabs are prevented from using Israeli streets or any public transportation or planes, of course... these are Palestinian ghettos established by order and guarded by the Israeli military, with open-fire permits for violators... anyone watching images from Gaza and the West Bank and reading news will see a complete match with images and news published and displayed in Western museums about what Jewish ghettos suffered.

Difference in Concepts

The foreign colonizer comes and insists on applying his concepts, and whoever doesn't understand or comply is considered stupid and backward, and it's okay to remove them one way or another. This deductive thought occurred to him when he asked himself why this Israeli attack on the Palestinian people has lasted so long... he tried to ask Google questions, but found the internet absent, as it usually is during this aggression, so he decided to activate his memory and search for answers.

It's known that the Israelis came to us as refugees, fleeing from the West, so their culture, convictions, and experiences are Western. Their first generation, which raised the next generations, lived through defeats, victories, and exterminations in the Western world.

There, in the West, for thousands of years, there's a concept of winner and loser, and clear divisions reflect these concepts, which are definitely not our concepts of victory, defeat, and surrender; these values aren't unified across the world.

He felt relieved by this start, which explained the continuation of aggression and extermination despite the difference in power and weapons used by both sides. The Israeli publicly declared that their goal is to exterminate the Islamic Resistance Movement or make it surrender and hand over its leaders and fighters for imprisonment and trials, thus attributing all crimes to them as long as they admit defeat and surrender. Since this hasn't happened, despite all the killing and destruction they've caused for civilians, the extermination won't stop until they're defeated, either through international pressure and intervention, heavy losses

among their soldiers, or the people rising up and changing the government... then, any Palestinian survivor, even if injured, will declare personal victory and Israel's defeat because they didn't win, and the Palestinian people will believe it.

Jews have always surrendered to their enemy in the West and fled... in all Western wars, from the era of swords and horses to the era of missiles and nuclear bombs, the loser in the West throws down his arms before his enemy, declares surrender and readiness for trial, or commits suicide, leaving military leaders to surrender... there must be an end and a declaration of loser and winner, and the loser submits to the winner's laws, treaties, and conditions.

Arabs, before and after Islam, don't understand the concept of surrender... as long as there's any capacity to fight, they fight, as in the Basus War, which lasted 40 years, for trivial reasons by today's standards, but related to honor and dignity. The weak flee from battle before it happens or in the night: The sun rises, and they've evaporated, and as long as they've distanced themselves and taken refuge with another people, the reasons for continuing the war disappear... war for Arabs is invasion, plundering, looting, captivity, and killing those who defend, then a quick return with spoils; there's no civilization or buildings to be politically seized... but after Islamic expansions outside the Arab peninsula, all this became part of war, along with geographical occupation and political, religious, and social dominance.

So, he deduced; Islam absorbed Arab war customs, rephrased them in rules, proverbs, and verses, and there's nothing like the phrase "surrender when you're weak to save your life".

Islam reinforced the matter with the promise of paradise for those who stand firm and are martyred, a unique trait not found in other cultures, especially Western ones... Thus, no matter the destruction and starvation in Gaza, as long as a fighter appears and launches a rocket whenever possible, there's no Israeli victory and no Palestinian defeat, and even when they were at the peak of their control and occupation of all Palestine and its Arab surroundings, Palestinians didn't acknowledge their weakness and declare surrender.

This, in particular, drives the Zionist colonizer and his Western supporters crazy, a people who won't surrender and declare victory when a surviving child emerges from under the rubble.

Difference in concepts, yes, he deduced, and couldn't decide if this is positive or negative... he knows for sure that the majority of Gaza Strip inhabitants wish for the war to stop, and he knows that most of them weren't supporters of the Islamic Resistance Movement before October 7th...but even among these civilians of all types, no-one has been shown raising the white flag.

Marginalia

He thought of females and remembered that the most attractive thing he had experienced was the sight of those girls sitting around the wash basin by the canal.

They were in their early youth, and they slept naked on the first day they met in a narrow bed... and since nothing else happened, she thought it was a good start to a friendship; so, she traveled the next morning to end her relationship with her first boyfriend... when she returned, she regretted it, as he had already moved on to someone else.

If he wakes up without dreaming, his mind becomes active in recalling yesterday's tasks and today's work plan... if he wakes up in the middle of a beautiful dream, he ignores everything and tries to return to complete the scene and continue it; he fails; he drifts off a bit, then gets up... waking up from a nightmare is followed by immediate departure from bed without any attempts at revenge or adjustment... just escape.

He occupied the scientific corner in his mind with figuring out the secret of the special status of females among males, especially until the age of forty! He concluded that the fertility of her eggs declines at that age, while a man keeps producing until his last hour, so she's fragile, short-lived, necessary for human continuity, and must be given special care by everyone, especially when she's healthy, beautiful, and intelligent.

My grandfather, grandmother, father, mother, uncles, aunts, and cousins died... and I don't feel like I'm replacing any of them.

If we could stop and freeze moments of happiness, no matter what kind or cause, life would improve...

The consequences of fear are worse and more severe than seeking salvation through subservience.

An angel is one who patiently tolerates his friend until he loses patience, and tolerates his friend's repeated mistakes.

Feeding the self starves it, and ability lies in controlling it.

A person doesn't understand their chains until others break them for them. In my mind, there are things formed by inheritance, experience, and practice, and you'll never find your ideas in me.

Excessive awareness may not have a good outcome.

The convoys have ended; the dogs have spread.

Educated women are the spirit of time and place, its flowers, and the basis for happiness.

She didn't ask herself before marriage if being single was better than his braying.

A moment of madness passed through the wise man's mind, and the madman showed a moment of sanity.

The desert filled with the shadows of men, but there was no one there.

The earth's cavity filled with corpses, but only a handful of souls embraced the sky.

The goal of religions is salvation from futility and waste in this world, and from final annihilation after death.

A foolish believer competes with a foolish disbeliever.

A small oasis is the hope of the lost in the desert.

Peace of mind turns any place into a paradise.

Ignorance is unintentional betrayal.

Freedom, democracy, and culture are the foundations of a successful state, as proven by reality and history.

Culture paves the way for democracy and freedom, and that's how respectable states are built, and there's no shorter path to get out of the cycle.

Colonization comes from outside, and stupidity comes from within.

A citizen said to an official, thanking him: You've overwhelmed us with your favors and your waste.

Ibn Hazm said: In the early days (Umayyad era), only the last 3 (out of 14) caliphs had mothers who were slaves, and in the Abbasid state, only al-Saffah, al-Mahdi, and al-Amin had mothers who were free women (out of 26 caliphs until Ibn Hazm's death), and in the Umayyad state in Andalusia, no caliph had a mother who was a free woman!

A people will never stand tall as long as there are those who accuse others of disbelief, and as long as they have rulers who seek refuge in religion.

Religious, political, and security surveillance turns people into hollow palm trunks.

Fools generally understand religion through their own perspective and want to preserve it within their concepts, so they fiercely fight any other concepts and vision of religion and incite a return to the past... where they abound, ignorance, backwardness, poverty, and destruction prevail.

A short note on dates:

Although the current Western calendar, dating from the birth of Christ is widely used in the Muslim world, the Muslims have their own calendar, dating from the Hijara when the Prophet Muhammed moved to Mecca. It starts with the equivalent of 632 AD, i.e. year 1 AH (after Hijara) and is a lunar calendar so that dates shift by approximately 10 days every year when compared to the Gregorian calendar. The abbreviation BC (before Christ) and AD (after death) are gradually being replaced by BCE (before the Common Era) and CE (the Common Era).

