The Savior

Nima Shasavari



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Bibliographic Information

Title	The Savior
Author	Nima Shahsavari
Original Language	Persian
Original Publication Year	1399 SH / 2021
English Translation	Translated via AI (Refined & Stylized)
English Edition Year	2026
Publisher / Platform	Open-Access Digital Release (idealistic-world.com)
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A WORD WITH YOU

In the name of Freedom, the sole savior of all living beings,

I consider it my duty that the following words appear at the beginning of my books, so that all who encounter them may become aware of this request.

Nima Shahsavari set out to write books so that, through them, he might call some back to themselves, invite others to the path of freedom, awaken awareness in those willing to see, and thereby disseminate his thoughts.

He regarded it as a disgrace to build a trade upon his struggle and to stain that noble struggle with material gain

My purpose and ideal have never been concealed from anyone, nor do they require extensive inquiry to be understood, for I have always spoken plainly and transparently. Yet for those who remain unaware, let it be stated once again.

I rose to stand against the boundless oppressions imposed in the name of God, Allah, Yahweh, Jesus, Man, or any other title under which power has continually been mistaken for purpose and ultimate truth.

I rose to seek the freedom of all living beings.

A freedom eternal in nature, founded upon a single law: respect for all life and the refusal to inflict harm upon other living beings, whether plant, animal, or human.

I would consider it a disgrace to violate this law of liberation in pursuit of that very ideal, freedom itself, and thereby become the cause of suffering for another living being.

With the aid of modern science and technology, it is no longer necessary to follow the path of previous generations, nor to depend upon paper for the dissemination of books. Paper is taken from the noble bodies of beautiful trees and comes at the cost of their lives, contributing to the destruction of nature.

I have never published my writings upon paper, upon the lives of trees. My sole request of publishers is that these works likewise never be printed on paper, whether for profit or for the purpose of promotion and public awareness.

Today, technology offers us the means to stand against the destruction and death of these noble living beings. Therefore, if you regard yourselves as advocates of freedom, you would surely refrain from participating in the killing of nature even without this appeal. And if profit remains your primary concern and you insist upon pursuing this trade, technology still offers a path free from the slaughter and mass destruction of trees, allowing your actions to appear just and worthy of respect in the eyes of myself and other free thinkers.

In the hope of freedom and liberation for all living beings.



NIMA SHAHSAVARI

AWARENESS

In a village far beyond what we know, people lived together. It was a lush, beautiful village with a pleasant climate encompassing all four seasons: soul-stirring, delightful springs with gentle rains, calm breezes, verdant expanses, and blossoming buds. It was so beautiful that anyone could spend long hours gazing at these landscapes; a warm yet bountiful summer that ripened the trees, nurtured the village's agricultural crops, and brought forth wealth for the inhabitants; a romantic autumn with fallen, yellow leaves scattered across the entire village; and finally, a cold winter that breathed new life into the settlement, compelling everyone to realize they were still alive. These sudden shifts in weather reminded them of their own vitality.

Although this village was small, its climate was full of contrasts and vibrant life. The desire to exist and live within this village lingered in minds, and throughout history, neighbors always longed to conquer this land and dwell within it. For this soil constantly brought wealth to its people, not solely because of its climate and beautiful nature, but because of the gems and jewels hidden within its earth. Thus, many people dreamed of living in this soil and enjoying the riches concealed inside it.

Far away from those parts, the conditions of this village were not like this. Even from the beginning, there were those who used cunning rhetoric to outpace others, thereby dividing society into two strata: a faction that possessed immense wealth and lived in luxury, and a faction that had meager means, continually toiling for sustenance while never attaining any stable home. Yet, in truth, those distant disparities were very minor and intangible, and such class divides kept shrinking. For a long time now, however, the lives of the people in this village had lost their former color and scent.

The differences among the people of this village had become as vast as the earth and sky, and this polarization raged fiercely. Those who in times past were not bound by any rigid system had lived calmly together without any order or uniformity, experiencing a life of ease coupled with

affluence. That is to say, there was no one to rule over them, no one's power exceeded another's, and wealth was distributed more equitably, allowing them to live more peacefully.

They lived without laws, yet not in chaos, because they had continuously learned values from their ancestors and adhered to them. They knew what actions were vile and what actions were noble, and they strived to put these very values into practice. True, occasionally ugly incidents arose even within the bounds of these values, but through the mediation and intervention of village elders, any dispute or problem among the people was resolved, and they lived peacefully side by side. In short, their days passed—not without flaws, but in calm and enduring peace, with no king or sovereign ruling over them, nor any need for such monarchs. The class differences among them were slight and comprehensible, and those minor differences were perhaps due to their own greater personal efforts.

Yet one day, this pleasant era faced a profound transformation—a day that altered their world forever. Far away, where someone raised the cry of monotheism and the worship of God, they too heard it and said to themselves, We also worship God, yet our worship takes various personal forms and expressions within our homes. When oppression

bears down upon us, we retreat to solitude and spend hours confiding in God, falling to the ground to ask for His help, and He soothes us with His tranquility. Occasionally, when our hearts grow heavy, we converse with Him, raise our hands in prayer, and wash the longing from our souls with our tears. How patiently He remains by our side and listens to our words! Yet we never brought this God, who is forever hidden within our hearts, out into the public square of society.

Now, however, a new discourse filled the air. This God was no longer the silent deity residing quietly within the hearts of the villagers; this God was no longer someone who sat peacefully in a corner without a word to utter. This articulate God spoke through the mouth of His representative: He spoke, He listened, He commanded, and He inserted Himself into the personal and social affairs of the villagers. He wished to establish laws, to delineate new values for them, to turn these values into decrees, making obedience to them a mandatory duty for every soul, and to severely punish any violation or transgression against these laws. Now, speaking through His representative, God was proclaiming a new world.

Until those days, the people of the village spoke only of this present day and this present world, and their lives were encapsulated entirely within it. Because of this, they strove

for their existence—though in their hearts they secretly harbored the hope of immortality, finding this mortal life too brief. Perhaps in their subconscious, one of their aspirations was to attain an afterlife, and they believed in eternity and the endlessness of existence, which fundamentally stemmed from their love of the world and a desire for a longer life.

Yet these were perhaps merely wishes and fancies harbored within their hearts; perhaps they never even uttered them aloud, pondering them only occasionally deep within their souls. Therefore, knowing that no other world awaited them, they spent their entire lives devoted solely to this world and to living better, firmly believing that they would reap the consequences of their vile deeds right here in this life. To support this claim, they had countless large and small examples, weaving numerous legends from them to teach one another that the world is a place of retribution and that the consequence of every deed stands right before them in this very existence.

Now, however, God and His articulate representative upon the earth had opened a new window before the people, speaking to them of the Hereafter, of the eternal life that follows this world, and of God and His judgment. They spoke of a distant future wherein God would recompense human beings for both their noble and wicked deeds, declaring:

Your deeds in this world shall not go unanswered; you shall witness their reward or punishment in the world to come. If your provisions for this life consist of virtuous works and obedience to the commands of the Almighty God, you shall attain every comfort you can possibly imagine.

Delicious food, sweet wine, beautiful virgin women for companionship, and should you rebel against God's command, a harsh afterlife awaits you: scorching fire, molten lead, and tormenting angels. All of these things reached the ears of the people from the lips of the representative of the Lord of the heavens and the earth. And those who had lived for long years in this tranquil village in peace and serenity were faced each day with new temptations, fears, delights, and excitement. They would come to God's messenger and ask him:

When will the Hereafter arrive?

How does the Hereafter come to be?

What happens to us after death?

What are the laws of God?

And the messenger answered each and every question with the permission of the Lord. Yet perhaps the greatest question that filled the minds of the villagers was when and how the

Hereafter would come to pass. And the messenger, speaking God’s words in a special, spiritual state, declared:

Know and be aware that ugliness shall engulf the world. Events lie ahead of you whose timing is known to none save the Almighty God; this is a hidden secret for you. But when the world is filled with disbelief and polytheism—that day when the world grows so ugly that believers pray for death every day—that is the day when God will send the Savior (Savior) for you to eradicate all ugliness.

And the people, upon hearing this, felt their entire beings consumed by curiosity: Who is this Savior? Is he a human? Is he a demon or a fairy?

Yet no answers to these questions came from the Messenger; in response, he sufficed only to say that the unseen realm belongs to God alone, and He does not deem it wise to share these matters with mortals. However, he reminded them that the Savior, just like God's Messenger, is a human being with this very same state and condition, serving as the deliverer of all people from ugliness and pain.

Gradually, the people of this village listened to these words and began to believe and have faith in them. In their large and little gatherings, they sat and conversed, debated, and

reasoned, slowly growing eager to leave behind that aimless life of the past and step toward a life tethered to a known future, achieving a grand purpose. They wished to adopt a sacred life and unite with the divine, and this slowly advanced among the people—though there were also those, and not a few, who deemed the Messenger and the God he portrayed to be liars.

Yet perhaps on the day when one of them stepped forward into the square to speak of the Messenger's falsehood, only to be struck by a mysterious illness, lose the power of speech, and die shortly thereafter, many of the remaining opponents spoke no more. The people grew even more convinced of God and His Messenger, and it was not long before the villagers believed in the righteousness of the Creator and His Messenger, marching as one along a path wherein they committed to longevity and loved its way. This was the beginning of a new life for the people of the village.

By God's command, the Messenger established a government to bestow order upon this small human society. He himself took his seat in the seat of power as God's apostle and messenger, becoming their king. To be sure, I do not recall clearly whether they called him Amir, Caliph, King, or Arbab, but he became their king. And God—who sent laws and decrees down to the earth while the Messenger voiced them—prescribed a punishment for every wicked deed,

establishing firm laws for every human action. The Messenger, serving as God's vicar, was responsible for upholding these laws, practiced them throughout his life, and bestowed a new order upon their world.

Now there was a village, possessing laws, a king, and a social order. Throughout his life, the Messenger delivered eloquent orations to the people; he made them fear the Day of Judgment, warned them away from wicked deeds, continually spoke of God’s power and how human beings are servants of God while God is the Arbab of the entire universe. He admonished them: Worship God, fear Him, and perform righteous deeds in His path so that you may triumph. These were the daily tidgivings of the Messenger, both before his kingship and after it, until the end of his blessed life arrived. On a bitter day for the villagers, he surrendered his soul to the Creator and hastened toward divinity.

Following him, successors were chosen one by one, and they assumed the task of governing the people so that the laws of God and His Messenger might forever endure and move forward in the world. These successions carried two new innovations: first, after a time, having this governor and ruler became hereditary, remaining within a single family forever. They passed the duty down from father to son. The

second innovation was that the title of this governor and ruler became fixed; everyone addressed him as Arbab, and Arbab became the definitive title for this king of the village.

Though, in truth, one could hardly call these two developments innovations, for even after the Messenger's death, many had desired from the very beginning to entrust this amirship to the Messenger's lineage and children—though that did not come to pass, and many wars were fought over it. Thus, it was not an innovation; rather, instead of the Messenger's lineage, this form of rule—the retention of leadership within a single family—occurred, albeit a family far removed from the Prophet's kin. The second innovation was perhaps also not entirely new, for even during the time of the Messenger's presence, many addressed him by the title Arbab. The only difference, perhaps, was that henceforth everyone was compelled to address the king as Arbab, replacing the myriad names used during the time of the Messenger.

After the death of the Arbab and the passing of many long years, that was not the only thing that happened. Over the course of those long years, countless small and large events occurred in this village to shape society into this very form.

Today, this ancient village possessed a powerful Arbab who oversaw all the happenings of the era; his decree was the

final word on all matters, he enacted the laws, and the people were obligated to carry them out—laws that aligned with the Sharia and the commands of God and the Arbab. Consequently, from the very earliest years following the death of the Arbab, religious scholars (‘ālims) came into existence. These were scholars whose duty was to guide human beings to the straight path, warn them, make them fear their tomorrow, and remind them time and again of the words of God and the Arbab. Using texts, discourse, and past events, they laid the foundation of the Sharia, sat within magnificent edifices, debated, and advanced a good, divine life.

Inside those magnificent palaces, they welcomed the people who raised their hands in prayer and spoke with God, listening to their griefs and words. Every week on a designated day, they preached to the people, and alongside those perpetual talks on the Sharia and divine religion, they constantly gave the people hope for the Savior, promising that the Savior would appear very soon, eradicate the root of oppression, and that God would judge human beings on the Day of Judgment.

A noteworthy point regarding the lives of these two segments of society—the religious scholars and the Grand Arbab, who ruled over the people of this village—was that this was

precisely their work and profession: the Arbab's job was to act as Arbab, the religious scholars' job was to bring glad tidings, and the people had no other task but obedience. Unlike the others, they did not farm, they did not produce, they did not sell; instead, the people sustained them from the fruits of their own labor under various titles, and this congregation lived in immense palaces and enjoyed a very high level of comfort.

And as for the people of this village—a people who, for long years before the advent of these beliefs, had neither an Arbab nor religious scholars to guide them—they were all living at a roughly equal level, some slightly higher and some lower.

Aside from those two groups, the Arbab and the scholars, two divisions had also formed among the people themselves. Although this did not happen in a year or two, after the emergence of this belief, it reached this point through years of minor and major changes.

Now, deep within its populace, the village comprised two groups: those who had names and owned everything—whose wealth and riches did not quite match those of the religious scholars and the Arbab, yet they possessed the lands, houses, shops, and all the assets of the village. These were called the Sahibs (owners), and they enjoyed a prosperous life. The Sahibs maintained large families; some had countless wives

with numerous children, while others had one wife with several children, all dependent upon them and their wealth. That is to say, some owned a single plot of land, a single house, one wife, and a few children—though among them there were also Sahibs who, despite possessing vast wealth, chose to take only one wife, and that too depended upon their grace.

Overall, the number of Sahibs was greater than that of the religious scholars, but compared to the entirety of society, they were considered a small minority. The majority of society was filled with human beings who owned nothing for themselves in this world: neither property, nor agriculture, nor a shop, having acquired none of the world's goods. As the years passed, this multitude grew larger and larger, while the Sahibs grew more powerful by the day. Such was the order of their world: every day, those Sahibs who possessed less wealth lost even that meager fortune and were added to the countless ranks of the propertyless the propertyless.

Yet this propertyless crowd needed work to make a living and survive, and they were forced to work for the Sahibs to earn a morsel of bread. And thus it came to be that the Sahibs, by virtue of their immense wealth, gradually brought under their control first a single individual, and little by little hundreds and thousands of the propertyless. They made

their lands more flourishing, penned down the destitute weaker and weaker day by day, added to their own wealth, and marched forward within this order.

They drove the propertyless to a point where they were utterly dependent upon the Sahibs—bound by a Sharia that permitted this, and a system defined for them as a hierarchy of power and weakness: the powerful and the weak, God and servant, Arbab and peasant, and finally, Sahib and Slave .

This society ultimately reached a point where a God sat in the heavens with countless servants; an Arbab took upon himself the duty of advancing that God's goals upon the earth, assisted after him by the scholars and leaders of religion to help further these goals; and a society that, through these teachings, had divided itself into two opposing camps.

The community that was wealthy was called the Sahibs, and alongside them were the Slaves who possessed nothing and were dependent upon that group. Slowly, the latter receded and the former advanced until the Sahibs became masters over them, and the Slaves had to hearken to their commands and obey in order to stay alive and avoid punishment—while the God who continually gave the glad tidings of the Savior's coming to restore the world to joyful days...

The Sahibs were truly powerful; all the blessings of this village were at their disposal, all the wealth hidden within its soils, all the agricultural lands, the shops—everything, absolutely everything, was in the hands of these Sahibs. And the Slaves, forced to submit to their desires for the sake of survival, sweated and ventured into the mountains, caves, and mines. How many of them perished along the way, buried beneath the soil within those mines, while the crowd who finally brought out the jewels and presented them to the Sahibs sought a morsel of bread in exchange, just to keep themselves and their little families—who breathed at the mercy and permission of the Sahibs—fed!

And the Sahibs, wallowing ever deeper in comfort each day, sent these precious gems and pearls to other cities and surrounding villages, or sold them to other Arbabs in the city, raking in vast amounts of money. A portion of it they sent with a kiss of the hand to the Grand Arbab of the village, thanking him for forging such a secure, prosperous society for them. Another fraction of this acquired wealth they brought to the religious scholars to help God in the path of bringing glad tidings to humanity, and to have their sins forgiven through this charity and contribution in the way of God.

And the Slaves, sitting in hovels amid dust and rubble with their sun-scorched, chattel children, with scars upon their hands and feet, dipped a morsel of dry bread into water and thanked the Great God for His blessings. Sometimes they wept for hours at His threshold, pleading and whispering to the Almighty:

Lord, when will our Savior arrive? When will he set foot upon this world to eradicate ugliness from it?

They spoke with God and poured out their griefs, seeking the world within those palaces of the religious scholars until the promised day should arrive, so that they might hand in hand walk into the presence of God, fall prostrate before Him, flee this world of vileness, and prepare themselves for a world of beauty and ease.

Every corner of this village belonged to the Sahibs—the masters of power and wealth. Wherever you cast your gaze, Slaves were engaged in grueling labor, and higher up, a little distance away, a Sahib sat counting money, filling his storehouses with grain and wheat, growing wealthier and more powerful with each passing day.

There were many agricultural lands in this village, possessing fertile soil. According to the ancients, whatever you planted there would unfailingly sprout and grow. Hence,

agriculture yielded abundant profits upon this earth. When you reached these fields, you saw tattered people toiling away under the sun, their complexions utterly altered and turning dark as pitch. Because of this, the Sahibs occasionally mocked them as the blackened ones.

With sun-scorched bodies and lean, emaciated frames, they harvested and sowed, labored and plowed. Yet a little higher up, beneath the shade of a tree upon a fine chair, a fat, heavy-set man sat, calmly puffing on a cigarette held between his fingers. Just then, one of the Slaves collapsed to the ground, dropping the sheaf of wheat he held into the mire. Furious and enraged, the Sahib shouted at the Slaves surrounding him, sprang up hastily, ran toward that frail man who had ruined the wheat, and delivered heavy blows to his flank. Afterward, he reached for his belt, pulled it out, and the wretched man suffered agonizingly beneath the lash, while the breath caught in the chests of the other Slaves and they uttered not a word.

Perhaps this was not the first time they had witnessed such a scene, yet perhaps it felt as painful as the first time; and perhaps a short while ago, such a thing would never have happened. But that first time and this silence paved the way so that such acts became a habit for the Sahibs, and enduring this agony became a part of the Slaves' lives.

THE SAVIOR

With his body aching violently and lacking the strength to stand or lift himself from the ground, Mikail had his eyes tightly closed against the glaring sun. Amidst his visions, he saw a beautiful man with a radiant face, glowing features, thick eyebrows, long hair, a small nose, fine and well-proportioned lips, and a uniform salt-and-pepper beard. Mikail fixed his eyes upon him, watching him slowly approach, and murmured under his breath, My master, you...

The handsome man gently pressed his lips together as a sign for Mikail to remain silent, and drew slowly closer to him. As he approached, he said, The day of the end of these pains is near. No sooner had he finished speaking than he reached out a hand to Mikail and raised him from the earth.

With a shudder of his body, Mikail opened his eyes and saw Davood and Danial holding him under the arms and carrying him toward the stable. Of course, this was not the stable of ancient times; it had changed a great deal.

Sahib Es-haq, the master of these lands—the very fat man who had severely beaten Mikail a short while ago—had cleared this stable of animals, painted its interior and exterior, and furnished it with several cots matching the number of slaves, alongside a simple table for them to eat their meals. This, too, was out of the mercy and greatness of Sahib Es-haq.

Of course, this was what the slaves heard most of the time of promise, spoken from within the Palace of God by the scholars of religion; alongside this, Ya'qub, the holy man inside the House of God, would always tell them of the hard lives of other slaves and preach to them about what a kind and good man Sahib Es-haq was. Even though he did not treat them well and beat them from time to time, compared

to the stories they heard about other masters, Sahib Es-haq seemed a good and righteous man.

While Mikail groaned bitterly from bodily pain, Danial and Davood carried him to his cot and laid him down gently.

Davood, highly agitated and furious, shouted, This ingrate has made life a living hell for us!

Danial gestured to him and said, Hush! What kind of things are you saying? He is our master; if he hears these words, a grim fate awaits you.

Amidst these very words, Mikail closed his eyes once more and sat waiting, yearning to see the handsome man. But this time nothing appeared before him, and despite his intense pain, exhaustion carried him into a deep sleep.

He worked terribly hard, toiling in the fields from morning till night, spending his entire day digging, harvesting, plowing, and farming on this estate. He slept little; whenever he finished his work, he would return to their room and spend time with Sara, his wife. Although everyone lived in a single room, the bond between him and his wife in this shared multi-person space remained deeply affectionate.

They treated each other with profound respect, spoke with passionate love, and finally, Mikail would turn to prayer. For

most of the night until morning, he would pray and converse with God, always maintaining that when he communed in solitude with God, he found peace, escaped this earthly soil, and ascended to the heavens—he adored these moments of his life. Now, owing to this sleep deprivation and arduous labor, even despite the severe aches in his body, he gently drifted into a deep sleep, and shortly afterward Danial and Davood stepped out of the room to attend to their daily chores, allowing him to find peace, if only for a brief while.

They knew Sahib Es-haq's temperament well. He was a stern man whose primary priority in life was working and accumulating wealth; he never let slaves shirk their duties, and his patience would snap whenever a slave slacked off or, as with Mikail today, inflicted a financial loss upon him. Because of this, Danial and Davood hurried out of the room, but no sooner had they stepped outside than they were met with Es-haq's twisted visage and heavily furrowed brow, as though he had been waiting for them.

Fear gripped Danial's entire being, and in his heart, he invoked the name of God a hundred times, humbly pleading that Sahib Es-haq might not have overheard Davood's recent words. Conversely, Davood himself remained cool and betrayed nothing, merely clenching his fists as if awaiting an opportunity. At that moment, Danial firmly grabbed his arm;

when Danial's cold hand touched Davood's, Davood turned his head and stared into Danial's blanched face, suddenly remembering why Danial was so terrified. As he gave Danial a reassuring nod to ease his anxiety, Sahib Es-haq struck him—a blow something like a shove, though not strong enough to budge Davood's bulky frame.

Davood had a massive build. The skin of his face, like that of other slaves, was darkened from working long hours under the sun. He had straight, short hair, large eyes, and perhaps his entire being had turned to pure rage with no endurance left within his soul. He tried to raise his clenched fist, but Danial exerted all his strength to stop him, and at that very moment Sahib Es-haq shouted:

You good-for-nothings, where have you been? Why did you drag your feet so long? Didn't I tell you I despise laziness? You should have dumped that wretch and hurried back! And warn that lazy carcass that he'd better be at work tomorrow morning, otherwise I'll cut off his and his wife's food rations, and there won't be any food for them tonight either! This gruel you gulp down is earned through sweat like this; I don't have money to throw away filling the bellies of you worthless parasites. Get back to your work at once!

While Davood's being was brimming with rage and he wanted to cry out loud, Danial quickly and hastily said, As you command, Master, and immediately grabbed Davood's hand, pulling him toward the fields.

Indeed, they were vast lands. In this large village, the greatest agricultural estates belonged to Sahib Es-haq; he was considered one of the wealthiest men in the village. Throughout spring and and summer, he put slaves to work farming his numerous, sprawling lands, and in autumn and winter, he would store these harvests alongside other commercial goods brought from all corners of the world, selling them through his slaves in the town markets. By doing this, he added to his wealth day by day, and in the eyes of some, he was perhaps reckoned the richest man in the village. He lived with his family amid a vast expanse of property collected in a single tract, and because of this multitude of lands and possessions, that part of the village was known as Es-haq's domain.

He owned countless slaves, providing many small stables and houses for them, and built upon his wealth through the raw strength of these slaves. One of the sayings circulating among the people in the village was that Es-haq owned such a vast number of slaves that he did not even know their numbers, let alone their names. This had become one of his

behavioral traits: never uttering the name of any slave, always addressing them simply as slave, alongside other moniker titles he assigned to each of them based on his own perception of their physical characteristics, addressing them by that specific name. Yet despite this, he was not regarded as the cruelest master in this village; for his slaves, he built houses—even if fashioned from former stables—gave them food on time, tended somewhat to their needs, and beat them only when they shirked work, fell short in their duties, or otherwise caused harm to his profits.

Compared to other slaves of whom tales were told in the village—such as, So-and-so master occasionally brands us for the amusement and entertainment of himself and his family and beats us severely—Sahib Es-haq cut a much better figure in comparison to such accounts.

Right in the middle of this vast, sprawling, open domain, Sahib Es-haq possessed a grand palace overlooking every corner of the territory. It was not quite as splendid as all the city's palaces, nor like the mansions of the religious leaders and, of course, the Grand Arbab of the city, yet his house was reckoned one of the most magnificent palaces in the village. It featured a large, white-painted portico with golden spires on either side, tall, sweeping windows stretching from ceiling to floor, and a flight of stairs leading to the doorway of this aristocratic mansion—a door fitted with a bronze lion-head

sculpture serving as a doorknocker. Upon stepping inside the manor, towering, gilded aristocratic curtains captivated the eye, alongside a floor that perpetually gleamed and shone.

Of the great multitude of slaves, mostly women worked inside his mansion. In his view, women were better suited for housekeeping, and this large contingent was tasked with cleaning and tidying the house from morning till night. Woe to that day when Sahib Es-haq's sharp eyes spotted a speck of dirt in the house; that was when the lives of these wretches turned dark and bleak. Hence, the house always shone with cleanliness.

A grand corridor graced the interior of the house. Most of the lower floor—except for a large kitchen responsible for cooking royal meals for Es-haq and his wife, as well as mass quantities of food for the countless stream of slaves—also housed a spacious and beautiful salon. In one corner of this salon, a large wooden dining table caught the eye, while the rest of the space was filled with royal sofas, tables, and luxurious antique furnishings.

Yet in the corner of this grand salon, pressed against the back wall, a display of various portraits arranged like a large album stood out on the wall. This wall, visible from every part of the salon, featured a large portrait of the Grand Arbab

of the village at its very head; slightly lower down was placed a depiction resembling the ancient Prophet, and beside it hung the portraits of Es-haq's father and forefathers. This grand album on the wall of the mansion lent an extra layer of grandeur to this ancient edifice. The picture frames were made of gold and adorned with carved artistry, lending a hundredfold vibrancy to the portraits within.

Those broad, sweeping stairs led up to the upper floor of the mansion, which was filled throughout with luxurious rooms: one was Es-haq's study, another the bedroom for him and his wife, a guest room, and of course many other chambers. All of these rooms were graced by luxurious antique objects scattered among them that heightened their beauty—sometimes in the form of allegorical statues, sometimes as large, beautiful vases, and sometimes through hand-woven carpets hanging on the walls. Yet another feature that made this mansion even more memorable was the taxidermied heads of animals. These mounted trophies caught the eye in every nook and cranny of the mansion, and whenever guests visited, Es-haq—that plump, sparse-haired man with a thick mustache resting upon his lip—would recount long-winded stories to them about hunting each and every one of those creatures.

And alongside all this was the wife who had made life a shared journey for him: a middle-class woman with nearly white hair—it seemed hard to imagine why it had turned such an unbroken color at that age. Tall in stature and well-proportioned, with a beautiful face, she compelled one to gaze upon her for a while, yet alongside these traits she possessed a depressed and lamenting spirit, speaking very little. Her name was Perens. Perhaps the only time she felt a sense of joy was when her name was called and she responded with arrogance. Throughout the entire day, a multitude of petty and major thoughts would assail her, constantly tormenting her. From the earliest days she had not been this tranquil, and perhaps a long life alongside Es-haq and having no children had grounded and depressed her to this degree. Her persistence in bringing a child from others never satisfied Es-haq, and she withered more and more. Yet Es-haq and Perens lived alongside each other for the span of this lifetime, neither consenting to separation or marriage with another, and Es-haq, with all his wealth and affluence, found life pleasant beside her and enjoyed this togetherness.

When Sara heard the news from the other female servants, she hurried out of the kitchen, dashed down the stairs and then along the path with all her might, quickly making her

way to Mikail. She did not know what had happened; she merely repeated the woman's words in her mind over and over. The woman had said: Sahib Es-haq has beaten Mikail severely; he could not stand on his feet.

As she pondered these words, she murmured the name of the Savior under her breath, pressed forward with all her strength, and finally reached Mikail's bedside.

Mikail was lying on the cot. When Sara saw him in this state, she quickly moved closer and shook him, never even entertaining the thought that he might be asleep. She wanted to speak with him; she wanted to find calm through his breath. Mikail opened his eyes and sent a smile toward his wife, and Sara, finding relief, cast aside all the ugliness and anxiety once more, pressed a kiss to the man's lips, and, while softly chanting into Mikail's ear that she loved him, obliterated the earth and time from her memory.

After another hard day of work, everyone trudged back to their quarters, exhausted. The slaves, who had toiled laboriously all day long, now longed to rest in some quiet corner so they could fulfill all those remaining tasks tomorrow. Upon entering the room, they saw that Mikail had cleaned and tidied the room. Although he still felt pain in his body, truly he lacked the strength to lie down and stay put; he could not remain still. He said that ever since the day he

opened his eyes he had worked, and not working tired him out far more. Today, despite all his pain, he had cleaned and tidied the room of his friends and fellow sufferers.

They entered one by one without paying heed, until Davood said, Wretch, you weren't able to rest today either!

And Mikail replied with a smirk. Sara walked toward Mikail and said, Why did you do this to yourself? We would have done it ourselves. At last, everyone gathered around the table.

By Es-haq's orders, two fewer portions of food had been sent to the room tonight to punish Sara and Mikail, but before others could realize this, Davood added two extra portions, filled them slightly with food from each of the other bowls, and brought them to the table. Everyone gathered around and began to eat. In the meantime, Davood opened his mouth to speak and said, We should have given this bastard what he deserved so he wouldn't treat us like animals! This shameless wretch owes everything he has to the grace of our labor.

Danial kicked him from under the table to make him be quiet. While Davood's expression shifted slightly, he reached his leg under the table to rub the spot where he had been

kicked, and at the same time turned to Danial and said, What are you doing? Why do you shut me up like this every time I speak? What are you afraid of?

And Danial, whose color had once more drained from his face, signaled to Davood with his eyes and eyebrows to make him be silent. Suddenly Mikail spoke: Tell me, who do you think I saw today?

Everyone was astonished. Mikail continued: Today I saw our master. And all eyes turned eagerly toward his lips as Mikail began to speak thus:

Today, while my master was beating me, when I closed my eyes, the innocent and holy visage of our master was before me. He approached me gently, not letting me speak. And Sara asked eagerly, What was he wearing? What did his face look like? And Mikail said to Sara:

He was radiant like the moon, with a beautiful and untouchable face. When he came toward me, he reached out his hand and raised me from the ground, and then softly said, 'The day of deliverance is near, and I shall soon appear.'

The congregation gazed upon his lips with tear-filled eyes, waiting for him—waiting to see him, waiting to speak with him.

Right in the midst of this, Davood rose from the gathering and said, I want to sleep. By the way, Mikail, Es-haq has given orders for you to come to work tomorrow. He said if you are not at work, he will punish you and your wife.

Davood's words disrupted the gathering's thoughts, and following his departure, they rose from the table one by one without finishing their meals and made their way to their cots.

Every week on a specific day, the people of this village would gather in the Palaces of God to speak and pray with Him. In this small village there were many palaces for God, so that the human beings residing in each of the regions might hasten to these palaces on the appointed day to visit God.

Their architecture was uniform in shape, with their only differences being their size, yet they did not differ greatly in beauty, splendor, and grandeur: high ceilings, pendants and figures, numerous lines and patterns upon their walls, and a Mihrab at the front where the religious scholar could preach to the people, bring them glad tidings, and guide them to the right path.

These grand Palaces of God upon the earth were the sole places where owners and slaves sat side by side and

worshipped God. Much opposition was raised by the owners regarding this matter, arguing that the place for these prayers and praises should be changed so that the owners could worship God in a separate house and the slaves in quarters far away from them.

Yet these protests led nowhere, and neither the Grand Arbab nor the religious scholars ever consented to this. Perhaps one of the major reasons causing the owners to attend these ceremonies far less often was precisely this. It could be ventured that all the slaves came to the House of God during these special days and performed their religious rites, but only a small number of the owners appeared alongside them, and a greater number of them had not come for quite some time. Perhaps this very fact sparked a fire in the hearts of the slaves more than ever before, kindling the belief that the owners were not God-fearing and that the Lord was devoid of their ugliness.

Today was one of those very days. Danial, Davood, Sara, Mikail, and the other slaves of Es-haq's domain had advanced and were present in the House of God. Unlike other owners, Es-haq always made his way to the House of God on this special day and spent hours worshipping God alongside the clergy.

The House of God close to his domain was named Goharpās. This house was a place that, on a designated day each week, accommodated all of his slaves. The holy man and great religious leader who served in this House of God was a man named Ya'qub.

He was a man with long, white beard and an ever-pious countenance. When the congregation of slaves beheld Ya'qub before them—how he would stroke their heads and occasionally kiss their hands—they regarded him as the holiest and most noble human being on earth and loved him with all their hearts. Every day they came to the House of God, they would cast aside all their troubles and listen for hours to Ya'qub's words. Ya'qub would listen to the outpouring of their hearts, sympathize with them, and occasionally, at their laments, tears would gather in his eyes as he gave them hope. And when he opened his lips to speak of the Savior, the trouble-laden congregation became all ears.

When Ya'qub spoke of the Savior's figure, of His majesty and greatness, and of His boundless patience—how He had sat waiting throughout all these years for the dawn and God's command—the attendees wept bitterly, and Ya'qub, with tears gathering in his eyes, spoke of the pleasant days ahead.

He spoke to them of the day when the Savior would emerge from a well and banish all ugliness. It was here that the congregation wept anew, more than ever before, weaving their ideals and aspirations with the Savior and His advent.

And once again for many hours Ya'qub gave them glad tidings, admonished them, spoke of vile deeds, of trampling upon the rights of others, of oppressing others—warning them against all these evils—and finally brought his speech to the afterlife. He had spoken of the Savior, and now he had to speak of the great Lord of the worlds: of the day when the afterlife would be established and the rights of the oppressed exacted from the oppressors. He told them:

Gather provisions for tomorrow and the world to come, be among the righteous. This world is fleeting and transient, but the world before us is an everlasting and superior world. Do good deeds, and know that in that world human beings will be judged according to their deeds, not according to wealth and whether one is an owner or a slave, and in this manner he gave them glad tidings of the path of God.

And at the end of this ceremony, each of the believers would take a piece of paper in hand and write upon it their heart's grievances, their wishes, and whatever else they desired to speak of with the Savior. This was one part of the religious rituals, and according to an ancient tradition that the Savior

would emerge from a well in the end times, everyone would step forward in front of the well that each of these Houses of God possessed, holding the unfulfilled desires they had written on paper while Ya'qub's shouts echoed in their ears:

That the Savior is everywhere and sees everything; one can carry one's head wherever one pleases; He is aware of your desires. And with tears ringing in their eyes, they would cast their desires into the well and depart from the courtyard and presence of God with tranquil hearts and soothed pains, ready to begin a fresh week.

When all the slaves had stepped out of the courtyard of the House of God, it was Es-haq who approached old Ya'qub with a pouch in hand, asking him to carry his intercession before God and forgive him. He handed that pouch full of gold to Ya'qub, and as he exited the door of the House of God, he murmured the name of God under his breath and made his way toward his domain.

AWAKENING

Once again, a new week had begun. Danial, Davood, Mikail, and the other men were toiling away hard in the fields, while Sara, alongside the other women, worked grueling hours inside the palace of Sahib Es-haq.

The palace carried its usual cold atmosphere. Es-haq spent most of the day outside the mansion, only stepping inside for brief moments. His daily habit was to head out to the pastures and fields to watch the slaves laboring away. With a glance at them, he would place a cigarette between his lips, light it, and scan the work for any misstep by the crowd. The slaves, catching sight of him, would work even harder and more desperately to avoid making any mistakes that might draw the wrath of Sahib Es-haq.

Today, while all the slaves were hard at work, one of Es-haq's friends had come to visit him. Right beside a field where countless slaves were toiling, they had set up two chairs and a canopy, with slaves fanning them. They sipped tea and talked about village affairs and personal matters.

Es-haq's friend said:

Friend, do you know what the Arbab has done? He has reached an agreement with the surrounding villages to make it easier to send goods back and forth, and this will open up a brand-new window for us.

Nodding in response—though he had not heard a word of what was said—Es-haq kept his eyes fixed on the middle of the field, closely watching the slaves work. His gaze was focused mostly on Davood. True to form, he did not call him by name, but he had marked him well in his mind and always addressed him as the wilderness ogre.

Turning to his friend, he said:

These slaves constantly shirk their work and put no heart into it. Take this wilderness ogre, for instance. He eats enough to feed three milking cows, yet he has not a shred of drive and not an ounce of honor in him. Look at how he works.

His friend replied:

You ought to be kinder to them. Very often, kindness, affection, and rewards yield far better results than the green stick.

Cutting in with a mocking tone, Es-haq said:

Just like the policy you adopted.

His friend lowered his head and lit a cigarette. For some time now, he had fallen into severe debt. He had sold off many of his lands and lost countless slaves, leaving him with nothing except that small house and a tiny plot of land where two slaves labored away with great difficulty.

In the village, people whispered that he had squandered most of his wealth on gambling, though some praised his overflowing affection for the slaves, blaming that very kindness for his downfall.

Turning to Es-haq with a pleading look and a pain-filled tone, his friend said:

Friend, do you have some money to lend me? I've run into trouble with this year's harvest and sales, and—

With an authoritative tone, Es-haq interrupted:

If your problem is harvesting and selling the crop, I can send my slaves over there and sell the harvest for you. But, friend, you must understand from the very beginning that I will demand my share for this work.

Softly, his friend said:

No, the truth is, I've run short on cash and I'm deeply in debt. I need to pay it back, and with this money I want to invest in another venture this year at least, and improve my circumstances.

Es-haq said:

Very well, I will help you. Just leave the deed to your land and house as collateral with me, and pay me back this money within a year.

This was an ancient custom that had taken root among the people of the village. In fact, one of the primary drivers of this system and the slavery existing in this land were occurrences just like this. In the old days, when the terms master and slave did not exist, everyone possessed property and estates. But slowly and surely, people who lost their possessions became destitute, and after a while, the division of slave and master emerged. Perhaps in a few years' time, Sahib Es-haq's friend, too, would join the ranks of the slaves.

After finishing his tea and as he was bidding farewell to Es-haq, suddenly, Sahib Es-haq rushed toward the field, angry and agitated. Carrying the walking stick that rested beside him, he strode straight toward Davood. Davood, his back turned and busy drinking water, was entirely unaware of his approach.

Suddenly, with a heavy blow to the back of Davood's neck, Es-haq knocked him to the ground, shouting at the top of his lungs:

You wilderness ogre! You eat enough for three milking cows, you bastard, yet you can't even work as hard as a donkey! You didn't come here for a picnic or leisure; you came here to work!

As he shouted these words at Davood, all the slaves gathered around them, and Danial and Mikail pushed their way to the front row.

Stunned by the heavy blow to his neck, Davood had little strength left in his body, yet with every ounce of effort, he slowly pulled himself up. Right at that moment, with mounting fury, Es-haq struck a second blow directly across his head, sending Davood crashing back to the dirt. Amidst the chaos, Es-haq screamed:

I've been watching you work since morning! Always slacking off—once on the pretext of getting water, once for the latrine, once for some ache or pain! Get up and work properly, or I'll drag you off to the stable to sleep alongside your fellow beasts! By the greatness of God, I will flog you until you learn some sense or die!

Struck down by that second blow to the head, blood flowing from his temple down onto the earth, Davood lay motionless and limp.

Es-haq struck his body and limbs with the stick a few more times. None of the slaves dared to stop these blows, until finally his friend caught his hand and said:

Calm down, Es-haq. He hasn't done anything.

Furious, Es-haq shouted:

You say no more! It is behavior like yours that has made these bastards insolent. You freed so many slaves that you reduced yourself to this wretched state.

It was unheard of for two masters to speak to one another this way in front of the slaves.

His friend lowered his head, walked away from them, and moved off. As Es-haq was walking away from the pasture, he shouted back:

Wilderness ogre, you will get up right now and get back to work, or by the One and Only God, I will bring upon you exactly what I said!

With that, he walked away.

Danial and Mikail rushed over to Davood. Bleeding from his forehead and aching all over, Davood had little strength left to speak, and amidst it all Danial said:

Look what you've done to yourself, brother. Why must you be so stubborn? You don't know the master; he detests slacking off.

In the middle of speaking, as he tore a piece of his garment and used it to wipe the blood from Davood's face, Mikail said:

God is with us. Our savior, our lord and master, will soon appear and reclaim justice for us from these tyrants.

Cutting into his words, Danial said loudly:

The master is a great and pious man. Don't you see how every time he comes to the House of God, he weeps?

Amidst these very words, Davood regained his senses. He scrambled up from between the two of them and hurried

away, moving a little distance past the field. Just beyond it, he stopped behind a thick tree.

With his massive, manly frame, he wept, sobbing as he gazed up at the sky. Shouting aloud, he cried out to God:

O God, You Most High, O Master of all the worlds, I love You with all my being. I believe in You. My deepest wish is to be with You.

O God, I do not ask You for much. I never wish to become a master; I know that being a master breeds wickedness, and I know how much it would make me resemble these fiends.

Yet, O Lord, I implore You for freedom. I do not wish to be a slave. I long to live free upon Your earth. O God, I wish to labor upon my own land with my own hands and eat the fruit of my own toil.

O Lord, I want freedom!

O God, when will the Savior appear upon the earth?

Does he not hear the sound of my moans? Is he not the one who will gift us freedom?

O God, does He not hear me? He slumbers deep within the well.

Did Ya'qub not say He hears and awaits Your command?

Do You not hear, too? Do You not wish to send us aid?
He awaits Your command, and...

O God, help us!

Weeping bitterly, Davood kept shouting the name of God and the Savior without pause, until suddenly he lost consciousness and collapsed behind that very tree.

Sahib Es-haq made his way toward his mansion with a frayed and frantic mind. It was a rare occurrence indeed for him to return home at this hour of the day. Reaching the hall, he hurried to the wall and dropped to his knees before the portraits, lifting his hands toward the sky and whispering a prayer beneath his breath.

With a shattered disposition, he stared up at the depiction of the Prophet, and a moment later Perens was by his side. She watched him silently, uttering not a single word. Es-haq felt the warmth of her presence beside him; he turned and said to Perens:

Come to my side so we may speak together for a moment.

Perens quietly drew near and sat down beside him. As Es-haq gently reached his hands out toward her, he said:

These people are driving me mad. They will surely kill me in this very mansion. Today, I must go see Ya'qub. I must speak with him and seek a remedy. Even Ya'qub has grown ineffective; today I must give him some money for the absolution of my sins and beg him to speak to them more in his sermons about labor and the merit found in working. These occasional sermons of his about the savior—I simply cannot understand them. Why does he waste so much of his precious time on such matters?

Do we want anything else from this world?

Is our progress achievable without these sermons?

Does the labor of these slaves not build a better life for us in this world?

Did our exalted Prophet not speak endlessly of work and its rewards? Were all these things not the very word of God, and did He not command us:

'Be useful in life and labor'?

Perens merely listened to Es-haq’s words, uttering not a single syllable. When she felt Es-haq’s warm hands press tighter upon hers, she quickly pulled her hand away.

Paying no heed to her gesture, Es-haq continued:

I must ask him to speak with the slaves more about these things. They hold him in greater awe, and his words will carry more weight with them.

I must also lodge a complaint with the Arbab so that he, too, may speak with the religious scholars. Is the yearly tribute we give to the Arbab not derived from the proper toil of these very slaves? If they shirk their work, there will be no harvest left for us to offer a gift of its blessing to the Arbab.

Perens gazed at the picture on the wall depicting Es-haq's ancestor. She compared his face—the lines and features of the mask within the portrait—with Es-haq himself, and ultimately realized, through comparing the two, just how much alike they truly were.

As he rose to his feet, Es-haq glanced at Perens, and seeing that she remained silent, he turned and walked out of the mansion without a word.

Davood was still lying behind the tree. An hour had passed since he left, and Danial and Mikail were consumed with anxiety over where he could be. When they saw that the master was not around, they decided to go search for him. Following the straight path Davood had taken, they walked

until they emerged from the field, where the massive tree caught their attention.

When they spotted Davood behind the tree, Mikail hurried to his side, resting Davood's head upon his lap. He tapped his face gently to bring him to consciousness, but detected no movement.

Panicked, not knowing what misfortune had befallen Davood, Danial suddenly splashed some of the water he was carrying onto Davood's face. As he regained consciousness, he gasped:

God!

Mikail pulled his head into his embrace and said:

Yes, God. Fear nothing, God is with us, and wept into his arms.

A short while later, they carried him into the hut so he could rest and recover. Following that incident and that day, Davood had grown very quiet and still.

He spoke little. Every morning when he arrived at work, he toiled with grueling effort.

Every now and then, Danial and Mikail would approach him to talk or say amusing things to lift his spirits, but Davood

paid them no mind. These repeated slights caused the two of them to focus more on their own work, and gradually things returned to their usual, normal state—

with the difference that Davood was no longer his former self. His fervor and passion had diminished; he was constantly working. Throughout the days, Es-haq watched the slaves labor, and after that incident, his attention was focused primarily on Davood. He kept a closer eye on him, marveling at his output, and finally declared among the slaves:

Who says the green stick isn't the true guide? You saw how the wilderness ogre was brought to heel by this very green stick, learning to value his labor all the more. Now he is one of our finest slaves. As you all know, Sahib Es-haq never lets a good deed go unrewarded.

Beside him stood an ice-filled cooler. Es-haq reached inside, pulled out a bottle of refreshing syrup, and extended it toward Davood, saying:

This is the reward for your fine work. You shall drink from the very same wine that Sahib Es-haq drinks. With that, he handed him the bottle and walked away.

Davood took the bottle in his hand, his face flushed with rage. In that very instant, with a fierce squeeze, the glass bottle shattered in his grip, spilling onto the ground as blood streamed from his hands.

Mikail and Danial saw it and understood that this outward calm was merely fire smoldering beneath Davood's ashes. He was still living in that same mindset, driven by those same thoughts of the past. This incident was all it took for Danial and Mikail to resolve to speak with Davood face-to-face, to question him, and to break his silence of these past months.

On one of those grueling days, when they found a suitable moment to eat and rest, they approached Davood. For a long time, it had been their habit to eat together as a trio, but ever since that incident over the past few months, Davood had distanced himself from them, eating and resting alone in a corner.

How naive they had been to think he had grown peaceful and obedient! They failed to realize that all through these days, he had been thinking and plotting.

Danial and Mikail sat down beside him, and after swallowing a few bites, Mikail said:

Brother, why won't you speak to us? We are your friends. You ought to pour your heart out to us. Share whatever is on

your mind and lighten your sorrows. Tell us of your pain, unburden yourself.

Chewing his morsels with utter indifference, Davood merely shook his head.

Danial cried out:

What is the meaning of all this head-shaking? For a long time now, whenever we speak, all you do is shake your head!

At that moment, Davood set aside his unfinished meal, rose to his feet, and prepared to walk away to a distant spot for rest, but Mikail caught his arm and said:

Davood, I beg of you by God, speak with us.

Davood broke his fast of months-long silence and said:

What is it you want to know? What would you have me tell you? Do you want me to pour my heart out like you, and speak of my sufferings—for instance, of the sting of the stick that day, only for you to preach to me in the end? I have no need to speak with you. Shaking off Mikail's hand, he walked away.

Danial shouted:

Davood, you are like a brother to us! We are a family! You must tell us and share it with us.

Angry and aggressive, Davood turned back toward them and shouted:

You are my brothers and family? Where were you when I needed help that day? Why didn't you come to my rescue the moment I was being beaten and my blood was spilling onto the earth?

Mikail said:

Brother, what are you saying? What could we possibly have done? He is our master! Could we have snatched the stick from his hand, or could we have restrained him from beating you?

Frazzled and frantic, Davood screamed:

He is our master? What is that supposed to mean? Who gave him this right? Why must he be our master and do whatever he pleases with us? You are afraid—yes, you were afraid and you did nothing

!

Danial said:

What is the meaning of this talk? Obviously we were afraid—he is the master of our lives and bodies! If we stand up against him, he will kill us.

Feeling far from well, Davood shouted back with even greater fury:

Master of what in us? Who made him our master? How does he kill us? Do we not have hands and feet? It is this fear of yours that has made him so insolent; otherwise, he is just like us! Why do we not take back our rights from these vultures?

Mikail said:

Calm down. Our rights may have been devoured by him and his kind, but this world is built this way. He is our master, and the Grand Arbab is his master, just as all of us are servants of Almighty God. This is the order of the universe! Did you not hear what Ya'qub always says? He has heard and seen our cries and our pains—yes, the Savior has seen it all, and very soon He will appear and exact justice for the oppressed from the tyrants.

Davood shouted:

Stop it! Why do you weave such utter nonsense? Meaning He acts in accordance with the will of the Creator? Meaning our torment and persecution are perhaps the will of the Creator? No! He oppresses us because we have given him permission to do so. This silence of ours is what has emboldened him to this degree.

Interrupting him in an authoritative tone, Mikail said:

It is not our duty to discipline him; that is the duty of the Savior of the world. He is the one who must reclaim our rights. We have remained and will remain waiting for the Great Savior until the day He takes back our rights.

Filled with intense rage, Davood paced back and forth several times, as if a word were stuck in his throat that he had long wished to utter yet lacked the strength to speak. Frantic and angry, he parted his lips to speak several times, saying:

I— and each time cut himself off, until a few seconds later he tried again: I—

At that moment, Danial said:

Speak! What is it you have done?

Infused with a sudden surge of strength, Davood turned to them and said:

Ever since that day, every single day and night—amidst my work, amidst my meals, amidst my pains, amidst everything—I have been thinking about this. About God and His creed, about the world, about the owners, about the Arbab, about Ya'qub, about the Savior.

Throughout all these days, I thought of the Savior, and at the end of all these thoughts, I asked myself: How many years have passed since the coming of the Prophet? A hundred years? A thousand years? How many years is it? He came, and ever since those days, a Savior has been implored to appear. How many generations of human beings have lived just like us and perished in these agonies?

Were they not also waiting for the Savior?

Did they not squander their lives and ultimately breathe their last breath clutching that very unfulfilled hope?

Will the Savior appear within the span of our mortal lives?

Will He come and wrest our rights from these tyrants?

And if He does not come—what then? We will have burned in pain and torment for the entirety of our days, casting all our

desires down into that very well and walking away from them.

Yes, I have thought on these things. I want to take my rights back from this world. I will not waste my life waiting for a Savior.

I will not fall into this thousand-year sleep.

With those words, Danial and Mikail froze in their places, staring at Davood in utter bewilderment, until Mikail suddenly snapped to his senses and said:

You are speaking blasphemy, Davood! Beg God for forgiveness, for this is pure blasphemy.

Davood walked away from them and, without taking a moment to rest, returned straight to the field to resume his work anew. Toiling with grueling effort, he sweated, poured greater strength into his labor, and immersed himself wholly in work.

ILLUMINATION

Slightly further away, where Danial and Mikail were sitting, both looked at each other in bewilderment and astonishment, lost in thought, absorbed by Davood's words and the thoughts formed by them. It took a while—so long that the other slaves finally told them that working time had arrived and they must rise.

The two of them, dazed and stunned, stood up and went to work, stealing sidelong glances at Davood. It was extremely hard for them. Ever since the day they were born, they had always heard talks of religion, God, the Prophet, and the Savior whispered into their ears. They knew them with every fiber of their being, touched them, took refuge in them amidst all hardships, sought strength from them, and spent their entire lives hoping for the advent of the Savior. The hidden wish for this coming was what had kept them alive. Through all these long years, they had never encountered anyone speaking about the Savior with such bluntness.

Everyone—absolutely everyone—spoke of the presence of the Savior with sincerity and supplication, especially the slaves, whose entire hope and life were the great Savior of the world. The owners too found all their love and life summarized in God and His Messenger, and no one could bear such talk.

They showed immense respect to the Savior, yet many of them uttered very little about him. Overall, the entire village lived within these beliefs; these convictions had become a vast part of their lives, and they lacked the capacity to hear a single word spoken against them.

Nearly the entire village had heard the legend that a long time ago, when one of the owners who was extremely

wealthy and held a high station in the village was shouting loudly on a drunken night, he came out onto the veranda of his palace and shouted continuously, disrespecting God and His Messenger. He yelled so much that everyone in the village heard his voice. When people gathered at his palace and saw him raving and cursing at God, suddenly a bolt of lightning struck from the sky, hitting the master directly, and before long he died in agony and fell to the ground.

Although these legends did not date back to the lifetime of Danial and Mikail, now as they thought about them and connected them to Davood's words, it felt as though they had witnessed this event with their own eyes several times and had been right there beneath the veranda of that palace on that day.

According to the villagers, this legend dated back hundreds of years, but in the minds of the slaves—especially Danial and Mikail—it felt so close and palpable that it seemed even closer and more real than their conversations with Davood just a few hours ago.

The workday had ended, and the slaves were on their way back to their huts. Once again indifferent to the others, Davood made his way straight to his table without speaking to anyone, ate his food hastily, and finally went to his cot to sleep.

After hearing those words from his lips, Danial and Mikail no more exchanged words with him; perhaps they deemed speaking to him a sin. In short, from the noon of that incident onward, neither of them uttered a word—of course, not only with Davood, but even to themselves and between each other, no words were exchanged.

Sara had been talking to Mikail ever since he arrived, taking his hand and gazing into his eyes across the table, yet she received no reaction from him. In response to all her questions, she only saw a nod, and Mikail did not speak a single time.

Sara had grown worried. She tried everything to make Mikail speak, but she did not succeed in this endeavor.

After Davood rose from the table, Danial and Mikail followed the path he had walked, and it was during this that Sara asked:

Has something happened to Davood?

Danial quickly said:

No, nothing has happened, but he is still out of sorts.

After saying this, he bade the others good night and went to his cot. It was not long before Mikail also rose from the table,

and after his departure, Sara quickly hurried to his side to speak with him.

Tired, Mikail lay stretched out on the bed. He felt pain in his chest; his breaths had grown heavy, and he felt the weight of the world pressing upon his chest. In this wretched state, Sara stroked his hands, brow, and cheeks, and without a word, lay down gently beside him.

In his dreams and visions, Mikail once again saw the face of the man whom he this time immediately recognized at first glance.

It was his Lord, the great Savior of the world, approaching softly and saying under his breath:

I know you are suffering, you are enduring hard times. He spoke these words while his eyes grew wet with tears.

The Savior, with a sword in hand, severed the heads of the owners and tyrants, riding a horse past pastures and fields. He smashed the doors of the slaves' huts, unfastened their chains, and ascended toward the heavens.

Mikail shivered violently, his entire body drenched in sweat. Terrified, Sara brought a cup of water and splashed it onto Mikail's face.

The man started out of his dream in a panic and sat up on the bed. Sara gathered him in her arms and said:

What is wrong, my darling? Why are you so distraught? I implore you, talk to me.

Tears streaming from his eyes, Mikail said:

What can I say? The Savior has come to my dreams once again. My Lord is striving for our liberation; he will rescue us very soon.

Sara took Mikail's cold hands in hers and kept saying:

I know, my dearest heart, I know the Savior is with us.

And Mikail said with anger:

They insult my Lord! How dare they rise up against the one whose entire soul is dedicated to our freedom? These madmen have insulted this precious pearl and rare jewel in such a manner!

Trying to calm him, Sara said:

What has happened? Why are you so angry?

And Mikail, as though he had burst, said:

This infidel Davood, this madman, has said whatever he pleased to us about God, His pure Messenger, and the Savior.

Having heard these voices, Davood rose from his place, came among them, and facing all his fellow sufferers, said:

What are you saying, Mikail? Since when have I become an infidel and a madman? Why are you raving?

Filled with anger, Mikail said:

It is obvious that you have become an infidel. You insulted our Lord, the one who is the liberator of all human beings. He is the Savior and master of all us slaves.

As he spoke, tears gathered in his eyes.

Davood said softly:

Friends, my point is this: we must take our rights with our own hands. We must not sit back for thousands of years and endure oppression and wickedness while waiting for a savior. Have you not suffered enough in this life? Have you not agonized your entire lives? Have you not wished for death time and time again? Is your desire and dream not freedom? Do you not wish to walk freely amidst the green meadows, embrace your children, eat food from your own labor, and not be dependent on another? Why do you not do something

for yourselves? Why do you not strive yourselves? Why have you consigned everything to the unseen realm in distant places? Yes, I spoke heresy; I told Mikail and Danial: generations before us lived—did they not also spend their entire lives waiting for the Savior? What sign, what proof is there that we will not waste our lives just like them? We must attain this freedom ourselves. Our savior is our own endeavor.

Taking on a frantic demeanor, Mikail stood up from his cot, rushed aggressively toward Davood, and shouted:

You are an infidel! You have become an infidel!

In the midst of his words, before his hand could reach Davood, he collapsed to the ground and lost consciousness.

Screaming and running toward Mikail in a panic, Sara gathered him in her arms and wept.

Davood and Danial hurried back and forth to do something to revive Mikail, and finally, this stormy night also gave way to morning.

From the morning of that day onward, the conversations in this hut and Davood's shouts spread among the other huts,

and gradually, after a few days had passed, among all the slaves of Es-haq's domain.

Their main discussion was precisely about this: about the Savior, about his advent, about their own pains and troubles, and about this overwhelming agony they had wrestled with for their entire lives.

They spoke of rebellion and shouts, of freedom—gatherings where, during rest and meals, they spoke together of the sweet taste of freedom, a taste they had never experienced yet had sketched in their minds over and over again throughout all these years.

But for Davood, living solely among these dreams was not enough; he was constantly plotting to escape bondage and slavery.

Most of his time, amidst work, rest, and sleep, was spent nurturing his plans.

Sometimes he thought of slipping out through the fences of the domain by night and taking a path toward distant lands. He had news that a bit further away from their own village there was a place where people were not slaves and everyone could live freely.

He thought over and over again of reaching the other side of the borders soon. He knew that if he went and got caught, there would be no turning back for him, and he also knew that the village was run by the Arbab, who treated runaway slaves with savage cruelty.

Slaves who had fled afar and were killed in the city after severe torture, their corpses hanging in the city square for days.

He knew that the Arbab had stationed agents all over the city to keep watch day and night so that if any slave wished to flee, they would capture him; and the Arbab respected this established system so much that whenever a slave fled, he would pay his value to his master and have him killed.

Davood was searching for a way that once taken, would leave no room for return. Many times plans came to his mind, and by reviewing them in his mind, he realized their shortcomings, and ultimately, by discarding many, sought the right path.

He believed in this path with all his being and was certain that this method would lead him to freedom, but two issues made him never wish to put this plan into practice.

One was the presence of Sahib Es-haq, whom he had harbored a grudge against for his entire life—from the very childhood pains and sufferings, from witnessing the death of other slaves, and knowing well that at the time of his own purchase, Sahib Es-haq had taken him in lieu of a debt from his mother and father, whose names he never even knew.

Davood could not leave this domain without taking revenge on Es-haq; he had to repay him for his wickedness.

And the second reason that greatly preoccupied his mind and bound his hands and feet was the mass of others, that countless flood of slaves.

When he saw them suffering, his heart broke into pieces; when he saw slave children living in misery, his heart grew cold to leaving, and he wanted to save them too from this wretchedness.

The thought of Danial, Sara, and Mikail—who were closer to him than family—and thinking of them nailed him even more firmly to his place. And that was why, despite having a grand plan in mind and attaining freedom, Davood could not leave; he stayed in the fields, kept to his work, and once again embraced the agony.

Mikail had grown even more depressed than before; he spoke rarely and with difficulty, and only at night beside Sara—and even then, only at her insistence—would he utter a few words. He would close his eyes and stay awake for hours in his dreams, hoping to catch a glimpse of the Savior, whispering prayers under his breath.

Danial, too, was busy with his work as before, though he occasionally thought of Mikail. Seeing his wretched state, he would go to visit him at work and try to converse with him, but Mikail was too distressed and troubled to speak casually with anyone. After a while, Danial grew tired of these visits and tried to get on with his own life.

In his solitude, however, he also thought of Davood and his words, yet he lacked the courage to approach him or engage in conversation. He feared the judgment of others, the wrath of fate, the Almighty God, and the great Savior. He feared the informants who might report Davood—and subsequently their friendship—to the masters. Alongside all this, he feared Mikail, who was desperately waiting for someone to vent his accumulated frustrations upon.

Davood had truly been left alone. After that incident and those outcries, he found himself in genuine isolation. Everyone cleared a path around him; no one was even willing

to face him, and some even cursed and damned him. Yet Davood, indifferent to their words, continued pursuing his goals. Perhaps many, upon seeing him, thought he had forgotten everything and cared for nothing beyond life within Es-haq's domain, but one night and a single event changed everything.

Davood had plotted his plan long ago, and that accidental night compelled him to put it into action this very evening.

When everyone was asleep, he quietly and silently shut the door of the hut and slipped out. He made his way through the bushes and reached the field. Once past the field, he came to the great pasture. Barbed wire surrounded the entire domain of Es-haq, along with a massive gate secured by multiple locks that was nearly impossible to open. Consequently, Davood was forced to pass through the barbed wire.

With every fiber of his being, he focused on the grand objective in his mind, and with steadfast determination, he squeezed through the wire. A portion of his body caught on the barbs and tore his skin, but the wound was not deep enough to be dangerous. Moving quietly and with utmost vigilance, he pressed forward from behind the village haystacks.

At any moment, one of the masters or the Arbab's soldiers might spot him, which would certainly spell the end of his life, but he pushed onward with unwavering determination. With great effort, he made his way toward Goharpās—that very palace of the religious scholar,

that same House of God where a vast multitude of the region's slaves and masters went every week to worship God.

Now, through strenuous effort, Davood brought himself close to Goharpās and slipped quietly inside. This colossal structure had a guard to protect the House of God and the holy man residing within,

yet Davood, by whatever hardship and trickery necessary, managed to slip inside the House of God.

That very afternoon, while working in the fields, he had heard Sahib Es-haq telling his friend that he would certainly go to Goharpās tonight and reminding him that he needed to speak with old Ya'qub.

When Davood overheard this, a spark ignited within him, and he told himself: Tonight I must surely go. And now that he had succeeded,

he was inside the House of God. He hid himself in a corner closest to the altar and, from a short distance away, beheld the faces of Sahib Es-haq and Ya'qub together.

A smile of satisfaction touched Davood's lips as he slowly crept closer to the two of them, trying to catch their words.

Sahib Es-haq was angry, saying to Ya'qub:

You do not do anything for us! What kind of sermons are these? What kind of talk is this? You only speak of God and the Savior. What about our demands?

Old Ya'qub replied:

I understand, my son. I understand your words, but we have a duty that the Arbab assigns to us every year, and he dictates what words should be spoken, when, and where.

Es-haq shouted:

Does that mean the Arbab says nothing of our concerns? Father, is it not true that we must raise funds so the Arbab can administer the village, bring about the progress we desire, and give a portion of this money to you men of religion so you may uphold the path and way of God?

Yet how is this possible? Day and night you speak of the afterlife and the Savior so that the slaves will work, but with

these words of yours, they simply become dazed and fail to work. And if they do not work, how are we to acquire the money to satiate you and the Arbab?

Ya'qub, seated in his chair, said:

My son, we cannot refrain from speaking of divine commandments.

Es-haq said:

Father, my point is this: encourage them to work. Our trouble is that they do not work.

Ya'qub said:

Yes, I know, but the structure of our words is determined by the Arbab. We cannot take such a step on our own. Next week, the Arbab himself, along with all the religious scholars, elders, and masters of the village, is scheduled to attend a meeting and offer proposals for improving the situation. You can come here next week and state your words.

His heart pounding, after hearing their words, Davood quietly made his way to the window behind him, slipped through it to the outside, and quickly hurried away from Goharpās.

He ran at full speed, soaring across the meadows; his heart was full of excitement and fervor, as though he had attained all his desires. As he ran swiftly,

a short distance away, he spotted a soldier, threw himself to the ground, and hid among the tall grass, gasping for breath.

Not far away inside the hut, Danial had discovered that Davood was missing. Filled with anxiety, he wanted to wake everyone and cry out, but he knew that doing so would be tantamount to signing Davood’s death warrant.

Slowly and crawling through the grass, Davood changed his direction. When he raised his head slightly, he saw that while he was crawling, the soldier had also moved in the opposite direction, and thus they had drifted apart from one another.

He pressed forward and finally reached Es-haq's domain, cautiously squeezing through the barbed wire.

Having surely gained experience, this time he did not lacerate his body. He quickly made his way to the back of the hut's door. When he opened it, Danial said:

Where did you go, you madman?—and his eyes fell upon Davood's wounds and bloodstained body.

Staring at the wound in terror, he said:

Davood, what have you done to yourself? What disaster have you brought upon your own body?

As Davood gently lay down with a satisfied smile on his lips, he said:

Danial, I have found the truth.

Standing over him, Danial stared in bewilderment at the wound. A moment later, he brought a piece of cloth with some water to wash the injury. After cleaning the wound, when he wanted to speak with him, he saw that Davood had fallen soundly asleep with a smile lingering at the corner of his lips.

REVOLT

The next morning, throughout the entire work period, Danial kept a close eye on Davood, observing how he worked and with what eagerness he was passing his time.

As usual, he came over to Mikail and said:

Have you paid attention to Davood? How cheerful and full of life he is!

Ignoring him, Mikail went back to his work and muttered under his breath.

No matter how hard Danial tried to focus and understand what Mikail was saying to himself, he heard nothing from his words except the name of God.

At that moment, one of the slaves announced that it was time for lunch and rest.

Mikail crept off to a corner and settled quietly. To everyone's astonishment, Davood approached Danial and said:

Come, I need a word with you. He led him toward Mikail and sat down beside him.

With his brows tightly knit, Mikail raised his head and cast a furious glare at Davood. Davood said:

Peace be upon you, brother. Today I wish to speak with you; I have important words to say.

Lashing out, Mikail got up from among them and walked away muttering.

Danial said:

He is no longer even willing to utter your name—what do you expect? Tell me, where did you go last night?

Somewhat deflated, Davood replied:

Nothing, I just went out for some fresh air, and getting up from beside Danial, he walked away.

The slaves worked all day just as before, gathered the crops, and finally, at night, everyone went inside the hut and sat around the table.

Davood, Danial, Mikail, Sara, and the rest of the slaves were gathered around the table, and out of habit, before the meal, Mikail recited a prayer and thanked God for all His blessings. His prayer was not yet finished when Davood stood up from his chair and, addressing all the slaves, began to speak thus:

Brothers and sisters, we have been held in bondage by the masters and tyrants for our entire lives—

Breaking into his speech, Mikail said:

Put an end to these words! You are looking for chaos and rebellion, and we have no interest in listening to your sermons. We know everything we need to know in life, and every week on a designated day, we hear the sermons from the lips of old Ya'qub inside the House of God. We have no need for your words.

Davood shouted:

Friends, I am not looking for rebellion and chaos. I am saying that we must break free from the clutches of this oppression! I have never uttered a word of heresy.

Mikail said:

Your words are nothing but heresy! You have insulted the Savior.

Stepping into their exchange, Danial said:

Mikail, let Davood speak.

Mikail glanced around the gathering and saw that everyone was waiting to hear Davood's words. When his eyes fell upon Sara, who was waiting with a stunned expression for Davood to speak, the heart was knocked right out of him. He rose from the table to go to his cot.

Davood said:

My kind and righteous brother, Mikail, my words are addressed to all of you, and most of all to you yourself. Brother, freedom is a right that we must seize ourselves. Have you never even in your fantasies thought of living freely with your wife? Did you not tell me yourself many times that the reason you and Sara brought no children into the world was because Sara fears the destiny of your child? Was it not

you yourself who said that we are never willing to gift the destiny we have experienced to our own child?

When Davood's gaze fell upon Sara's face, he saw tears streaming from her eyes.

Davood continued:

Friends, my point is one: let us strive for this sacred goal ourselves, and let us know that no one will ever gift this great right to us.

Furious, Mikail tried several times to shout, but amidst this internal struggle of his, Davood continued:

My friends, last night I passed beyond the walls of the domain. I made my way to Goharpās, and the proof of my words is the wound left on my body by the barbed wire. Danial, you saw me bleeding in the room last night.

Everyone turned their eyes toward Danial, and with a nod of his head, he confirmed the truth of Davood's words.

Davood continued:

Perhaps it might interest you to know what I saw when I was inside the House of God. Es-haq had gone to see Ya'qub; they were talking together. I heard them repeatedly: Es-haq was

urging Ya'qub to speak more of the benefits of labor for the slaves, to exhort them to hard work. I heard these things while I was hiding in a corner, and Ya'qub spoke of how the words of the great Arbab of the city and the doctrines we hear every week inside the House of God were among the commands issued by him to Ya'qub. Perhaps none of you will believe my words, but I tell you that the only path to freedom is our own endeavor.

Mikail shouted:

What is this you are saying? What are you trying to prove? Why on earth should we believe your nonsense?

Quietly and deliberately, Davood said:

Next week, all the masters, the religious scholars, and the grand Arbab will gather in the House of God. We must choose representatives from among ourselves, go, and listen to their words—and gesturing with his hand toward Mikail, he said—one of these representatives must be Mikail.

A wave of excitement stirred among the slaves. After a short while, they also chose Davood as the other representative, while Mikail, struck dumb, was unable to utter a word.

Happy and jubilant, Davood went to his cot, and shortly thereafter, everyone either fell asleep or pretended to sleep,

pondering everything in this world within the labyrinthine storehouse of their thoughts: their servitude, God, the Savior, and all the rest.

From the very next day, a renewed fervor took root among the slaves. They gathered together, talking about the meeting between Ya'qub and Es-haq. Everyone knew that within a few days, two representatives from their ranks would be tasked with preparing to attend the meeting of the masters, the religious scholars, and the grand Arbab.

Their names had not been spoken aloud among them yet, but everyone knew this event would soon take place. Gradually, these conversations spilled out from within Sahib Es-haq's domain, and the other slaves of the village also learned, more or less, of these events.

The raising of this issue had caused the slaves to feel greater courage, to break that long silence of yesterday, and to harbor hope.

Fresh news reached their ears: in such-and-such a field, when a master was beating his slave, he was confronted by a throng of slaves who pushed him aside.

Or in another part of the village, when an Arbab ordered one slave to whip another, the man refused, declining to strike his fellow sufferer.

It was during these exact days that news of the escape of many slaves also spread through the village. Amidst this news, the slaves heard of the slaughter of a vast number of them, and countless corpses of runaways adorned the corners of the village as a warning to others.

Whenever slaves were led outside for any reason, they were required to pass through that very square, and running parallel to the grim tale of these slaves' deaths, elaborate legends took shape:

Of the many slaves who had fled this hell and were now living in freedom in a village far away from here—a place that had been the ultimate beacon of hope for all slaves throughout their entire lives.

Together, for hours, they would gaze upon the images of those runaways in the open air of that beautiful village, whose every detail they loved, and sigh with longing. And Davood—who throughout all this time in Sahib Es-haq's domain listened to every piece of news, big and small—thought and thought yet again. Throughout all this time, not for a single moment did the thought of fleeing and reaching

freedom cross his mind; instead, he thought mostly of the appointed day, of the day when he would make Mikail and the other slaves understand all his words.

During this period, Mikail and Danial had not spoken a single word to one another, but Danial always made his way to these two, engaging them warmly in conversation—well, not so much warm conversation with them as talking to himself, and it was unclear whether they heard a word at all. Yet it was evident that everyone perceived a new world unfolding before them, and the anxiety of that appointed day was greater for Mikail and Davood than for anyone else.

It was on one of these anxious nights that Sara came to Mikail's bedside and spoke to him:

Mikail, do you not believe Davood's words? Do you not think he is telling the truth?

Feigning sleep, Mikail said nothing.

Sara continued:

Do you not think we must do something for ourselves? Has all this silence not made them this brazen? Do you remember, Mikail, what hard days we spent together in this prison? What sights we witnessed? All those cruelties

inflicted upon us? Do you remember Elizabeth and what a beautiful child she had? Do you remember how they tore her child away from her? Do you remember how she went mad, weeping incessantly and saying nothing, how she quietly and silently died without a ripple disturbing the water? Do you remember Helen—how, for that tiny mistake, because her food was a little too salty, she was beaten for hours under Sahib Es-haq's boots, and the sound of her screams still echoes in my ears? Those whippings by Sahib Es-haq I still see in my nightmares.

Sara finished her words, turned her back gently against Mikail, and closed her eyes. Lost in his thoughts, Mikail remembered Ebrahim.

Ebrahim was his childhood friend. What days and nights they had spent together, swearing oaths to be together for all their lives, exchanging vows of brotherhood, and spending their days side by side. And on that day when they went hunting with Sahib Es-haq, how Sahib Es-haq had sent him toward fallen game like a hound, and amid that very scramble, how he had plunged down into the ravine.

Weeping softly so that no one would hear his voice, he whispered the name of God a few times and quietly closed his eyes, searching for the allegory of the Savior, only to be confronted shortly after by the face of Elizabeth—that

weeping woman who beat her head against the wall while they tore her child away from her.

When he gazed upon the face of the child, he saw that it was Ebrahim looking at him and crying out for help.

And Mikail, sweating and weeping silently amidst these very nightmares, finally saw the appointed day arrive. In the midst of his work, Mikail's hands and limbs trembled a few times; he could scarcely keep on his feet, would sit down, and after taking a sip of water, would go back to his work. These very actions caused Es-haq to shout angrily:

Lethargic carcass, get to your work!

These shouts only hardened him, and he tried to cope with his anxiety however he could.

Davood was very resolute, though perhaps a bit anxious, yet he did not show it for even a single second. He counted the seconds until nightfall so he could put his heavy task into action. At last, the moment for this event to be fulfilled arrived.

The two of them, still very aloof toward one another, prepared to go without exchanging a word. The rest of the slaves in the hut lay down in their places, full of tension yet

quiet, so as not to arouse anyone's suspicion, though their entire being rested with Mikail and Davood.

The only ones standing beside the two of them were Danial and Sara, who embraced them and wished them well.

After embracing and bidding them farewell, they reached the edge of Es-haq's domain. When they drew near the barbed wire, Davood, who had the experience of crossing it, said to Mikail:

Wait until I pull it apart just a bit so you can slip through.

Mikail waited, and after this assistance, both of them crossed and pressed forward. Davood led the way, and Mikail followed close behind. After they had been on the path for a while, Mikail said:

Do you even know where we are going? Have you any idea what lies at the end of this road?

Davood said in a calm tone:

Yes, I know where we are going, and I know the path well. But the House of God where they are gathering tonight is farther away from here. Just follow quietly behind me; a little more walking and we will arrive. And he set off once more. Mikail continued to follow him.

Back in the hut within Es-haq's domain, a profound dread gripped the hearts of Danial and Sara. Sara wept unceasingly, murmuring the name of God, while Danial kept rising from his bed and sitting back down, not knowing what to do with his restlessness.

Davood and Mikail finally reached the House of God and took shelter behind its walls, searching for an opening through which they could slip inside. After a brief search, Davood managed to find a way: a wall where some bricks had fallen away, opening a small passage inward.

When they entered, they saw what a vast multitude of masters and religious scholars had gathered inside the House of God. They had come to the House of God without the company of a single slave, and now they seemed to be waiting.

Mikail and Davood took up positions in a corner that afforded them a clear view and allowed them to overhear their words. Only a few minutes had passed amid this concealment and suspense when everyone rose to their feet and bowed in respect before a man.

From among the portraits, Mikail and Davood had seen him a few times, but he appeared taller than their mental image

of him: that same thin, lanky man, wearing a tall cap upon his head, entered, and everyone bowed before him, sending salutations to the Arbab.

The Arbab took his seat at the head of the assembly, and after a brief exchange of pleasantries with some of them, awaited the start of the discussion. Amidst this gathering, Davood searched for Sahib Es-haq and, after a little probing, found him sitting in a corner, while Mikail managed to spot old Ya'qub in the crowd as well.

After the Arbab seated himself, a murmur arose among the guests as each spoke with another, until a slight gesture from the Arbab silenced them all. With his deep voice, the Arbab said:

What is the reason for all this turmoil in the village? Why have these slaves caused us so much trouble?

One of the masters spoke up, saying, My Lord, this stems from the shortcomings of the men of religion. They are the ones who allowed such turmoil to arise.

One of the religious scholars said: Why do you cast your own blundering onto our shoulders?

In the midst of this, another master said: What shortcomings were ours?

And the religious scholar replied: It is you who, through negligence, senseless anger, and unwarranted punishments, have driven these slaves to such a pitch of agitation and rebellion.

Es-haq stepped forward from the corner where he was seated, and after asking permission of the Arbab, said:

This is all the fault of you men of religion. You who, instead of preaching to the slaves for their better labor, preach to them about the Savior—you are the cause of this turmoil. What is the meaning of this Savior? Does it not imply that we are tyrants, that the Savior will come and eradicate us? By saying these things, you feed the slaves a future filled with hope.

One of the religious scholars cut off Sahib Es-haq's words and said:

Through our words, we transport the slaves to another realm and detach them from this mortal world. It is through these discourses of ours that they turn their hearts away from this world and the afflictions in which they are imprisoned, and turn their thoughts toward a world far loftier than this one.

Was this not your own exact demand? Was it not you, the owners, who wanted us to steer them away from this world with such talk, ensuring that the presence of the Savior would keep them from ever harboring thoughts of rebellion?

One of the owners shouted:

Yes, we wanted that, but we also believe that the Lord considers labor to be one of the pillars of the religion, and that this labor and its reward draw them closer to God, granting them a pure abode in another world, which in turn makes them work harder so we can sell more produce, allowing us to use the proceeds both to pay tribute to the Arbab and to help you, the clerics of the religion, advance the faith. Yet you have shirked this duty, failing to encourage the slaves to work, and instead speaking endlessly in the house of God about the Savior and a future free from oppression, which has only made them more defiant.

Old Ya'qub rose and said:

Are you saying we should turn our back on this truth, that we should not proclaim the righteousness of God or the great Savior of the world to them, and speak only of work? I have nothing more to say, and our master and lord has always admonished us to teach the commandments of God and proclaim His righteousness.

Right then, the Arbab rose from his seat and said:

My friends, we all prostrate before one God, we adhere to a single commandment, and our Prophet is one and sacred. This exalted one and our master has forged a path for us—a way that guides both this world and the next.

He has taught us throughout our lives to seek a way to build a better life and overcome the challenges before us.

Our religion is the religion of living, and the great God has shown us a path to live better. This village owes all its progress and all its power to the grace of the great Lord of the worlds and His true messenger.

The great prophet taught us a great lesson: that for the advancement of any goal, the primary requirement is obedience. Just as we are servants of the great Lord, just as the Prophet himself is a servant of God, the slaves must also obey our commands, and the clerics of the religion must, above all else, call the slaves to obedience.

Just as the Almighty God has decreed, and His greatest path for the world is obedience and submission to His way.

My friends, you know that being the Arbab has been hereditary in our family; this grueling duty was inherited by me from my father, and my father from his.

Today, as the conditions of the village have grown this perilous and the scent of slave rebellion is in the air, I have a duty to reveal this hidden secret among our family. Do you know what my father's final words were when he lay on his deathbed, wishing to pass the Arbabship on to me?

He told me that his father, and his father before him, and so on through each of our ancestors at the end of their days, had said that the religion of the great God is the religion of life. God and His Messenger have said: To build a better world, every day must be different from the yesterday that passed you by, and you must adopt a path anew.

He said that long ago, when my ancestor was enduring hardships much like today, he drew upon a myth. When all the slaves rose in rebellion just as they are today and prepared themselves to change the world, he drew upon that myth, which was more or less prevalent among the people, and gifted the Savior to the world.

Mikail stood frozen in place, and Davood was in no better state. Amidst this, the Arbab continued:

Yes, my ancestor thus gifted the Savior to the world.

Those wells, those prayers, those expectations—

Not that this was merely a myth spun by my ancestor's tongue; not that these things are far from reality; no, none of these—for the world belongs to the great God, and every deed is by His leave and will, and these are the very truth of the universe—yet our religion is not a religion of superstition; it is a religion of progress, a religion of labor. And in those days my ancestor deemed it wise, and now we must realize that this story will untie none of our troubles.

We must seek a new path; our religion is a dynamic religion; we must not stand still and keep ourselves confined.

Even as the Arbab was speaking, Davood turned his head to look at Mikail. Mikail's face had gone as white as wall plaster, and he did not stir. Davood gently tapped his face a few times and still received no reaction.

He grew frantic and alarmed, softly calling his name over and over. His body was cold. Slowly, he guided him toward that very hatch—the open hatch through which they had entered.

The owners and clerics were so swallowed in thought after hearing the Arbab's words that no one paid them any mind.

Davood dragged Mikail toward the opening. Finally, Mikail came to his senses.

Davood looked into his eyes and said with an uncontainable fervor:

Did you see, brother? You heard it yourself!

Is freedom not our right? Must we not seize our rights with our own hands?

Even as he spoke to Mikail with such fierce hope, a contradictory surge rose within him. His heartbeat quickened; he heard footsteps. In that same instant, with a violent shove, he pushed Mikail out through the opening and cried, Go and tell everyone what you have heard! His words were not yet fully spoken when one of the owners grabbed him by the collar.

He hoisted him off the ground. Davood struck a heavy blow against the man's massive frame. The man shouted loudly:

Come here! One of the slaves is right here!

At his cry, everyone rushed forward.

Mikail, fallen on the other side of the hatch, was terrified, not knowing what to do.

He remembered the words of the Arbab, and Davood's sentences echoed in his ears. Meanwhile, he rose, ran swiftly, and made his way at speed toward Es-haq's domain.

The gathering of clerics and owners had surrounded Davood. Sahib Es-haq stepped forward from among them to see the individual in question. When his eyes fell upon Davood, he shouted:

This is Davood, this is the subversive bastard, and he beat him with repeated blows to his face.

Mikail had flown swiftly through the air, propelling himself onward. The faces of all his friends and slaves were before him. Along the way, he caught sight of the Savior's visage a few times,

but this time it was neither beautiful nor did it have an even beard; his face was scorched, and he appeared to his eyes like any other slave. He rushed forward and reached the domain.

After the savage beating they inflicted upon Davood, they searched for the hatch. Es-haq shouted:

A conspiracy is taking place within my domain! and hurried out to reach his territory.

The Grand Arbab said:

Hang this slave and string up his corpse in the square. He is even worse than the runaways.

Davood looked out from the hatch with a bloody face, a turmoil raging in his heart.

Mikail cleared the barbed wire and reached the cabin. He pushed the door open and stepped inside. To everyone's astonishment, they all rose from their places—everyone was awake and waiting.

All eyes were fixed on Mikail's lips. Sara rushed over to Mikail, but before she could speak, Mikail shouted:

The Savior is freedom!

A wave of excitement and commotion stirred in the cabin. Danial, deeply alarmed, asked:

Mikail, where is Davood?

Mikail said:

He sacrificed himself for our freedom. For the sake of his blood alone, we must achieve our freedom.

Sara asked with an anxious expression:

You mean we should run away?

Mikail said with a confident look:

No, right here we will be free; we will claim our right.

Meanwhile, Es-haq was heading toward the domain. A short distance behind, the Arbab had ordered a contingent of soldiers to be sent to his territory to prevent any potential rebellion, and he himself accompanied them along the path to Es-haq's domain.

The slaves inside the cabin asked anxiously:

What should we do?

Mikail said:

Go outside. Everyone must come out of the cabins. All the slaves must stand together.

As Sara, Danial, Mikail, and the other slaves of the cabin stepped outside, each of them made their way toward the cabins and stables, waking all the slaves and urging them to come out. Meanwhile, just as almost all of them had gathered, Es-haq entered the domain.

When he saw this countless multitude of slaves, he headed desperately toward his mansion, while the slaves who saw him—

Mikail, who was ahead of them, said:

We are moving toward the mansion!

Es-haq entered the mansion, took the stairs two at a time, and reached his study. He picked up his double-barreled shotgun, loaded it, and put a few extra bullets in his pockets. Right then, Perens entered and asked:

What is happening?

Es-haq said hastily and angrily:

The bastards have revolted! The moment I go out there and drop a few of these scoundrels, they'll learn their lesson, and he hurried past Perens toward the door.

He had not gone far when his foot caught the edge of a table, and his head struck the floor with tremendous force. He tried to get back up, but the blow was so fatal that he collapsed to the floor once more.

Perens sat quietly beside him, gazing at the wrinkles on his face.

Outside the mansion, utter chaos reigned. The slaves at the front reached the doors of the mansion, forced them open with a blow, and rushed inside. Before all of them had even entered the mansion, the Arbab's gang arrived at Es-haq's

domain and beheld the countless throng of slaves entering the manor.

They made their way around the mansion. The Arbab and the others dismounted, and the soldiers with muzzle-loading rifles awaited the Arbab's command.

The flood of slaves pressing inside the mansion headed upstairs, where they caught sight of Perens at the top of the stairs. Some had gone mad and wanted to rush toward her—perhaps to soothe the burning in their hearts, to exact retribution upon this mistress of the Arbab for all their suffering and their dead wives and children.

Mikail calmed everyone down and, turning to Perens, said:

Where is Es-haq?

Without a word, Perens walked toward the room where Es-haq had fallen and locked the door behind herself and her husband.

Outside the mansion, the Arbab paced and thought, while the soldiers awaited his order to storm the castle and smash the slaves to pieces.

The Arbab commanded:

Set fire to the castle, station yourselves all around it, and shoot any slave who comes out. Not a single one of these rebels must leave this ordeal alive. Letting them live will spark further rebellions in the village.

One of the soldiers turned to the Arbab and said:

My lord, but I believe Sahib Es-haq and his wife are also inside the fortress.

Gazing up at the sky, the Arbab said:

Establishing the divine law of the great Lord always demands martyrs, and God will grant them a great reward.

With these words of his, the soldiers set fire to the entire mansion.

The tongues of flame leaped inside the mansion. At first, some grew terrified and, upon seeing the fire, rushed toward the windows and doors, only to become targets for the soldiers' bullets.

Mikail stood in despair, but after a moment he shouted:

Stay calm! Wait! and managed to quiet the slaves somewhat.

Danial sat in a corner, anxious and stripped of all hope, looking this way and that as he pictured his own consumption by fire second by second.

Sara stood beside Mikail, gazing at him while visualizing a life lived freely by her husband's side.

Amidst this turmoil, the voice of a slave from within the hall brought everyone back to themselves. He shouted:

I have found the way! I have found the way!

At the sound of his voice, everyone rushed toward him and saw that right beneath the taxidermy animal heads and mounted hunting trophies of Es-haq's family portrait wall—beneath the Prophet's portrait and the family gallery he had found a hatch, and joyously and ecstatically he gazed into the eyes of the others.

Mikail quickly set about gathering all the slaves together, moving in every direction to assemble them, while Sara, now accompanying him, worked to unite their fellow sufferers.

Perens looked down at Es-haq by his side. Fire had consumed everything, and Perens gazed into the wrinkles of Es-haq's face, spanning a lifetime, searching for resemblances between him and his forebears.

The flames leaped, drawing closer and closer. Heat enveloped Perens's entire being, though the fire was still a short distance away.

A bit further off, the Arbab stared at the blazing mansion, continuously murmuring a litany beneath his breath. Nothing besides the name of God reached the ear from his tongue; although his prayer was long and loud, amid all his utterances only the name of God remained tangible and comprehensible. In his mind, he reflected several times upon various tales, ultimately reducing this rebellion to conflagration, and prayed for tomorrow, the days after, his own future life, the slaves, and all creation, continuing his litany without pause.

Davood's lifeless body hung in the village square, and for the length of a thousand years the village burned in anguish and torment while no one uttered a word, made a sound, or cast a glance upon the wrinkles of this ancient village.

It was burning; his body was turning to ash, yet not for a second did he look around, sitting with hands raised to the sky, waiting for the Savior.

The Savior rose from his place, now running this way and that. Fire surrounded him on all sides, along with countless

human beings burning in the blaze without opening their lips.

Among them, a woman fixed her gaze upon the wrinkles buried in the scorched earth, not even rising from her place, and when the Savior reached out and touched her hands several times, she made no movement, as though she trusted this burning and her destiny, having grown accustomed to it.

And at last, the Savior leaped out through the window, fell to the ground from a height, and became prey to the soldiers' gunfire.

A short time later, a man with a long, drawn face—his features appearing like a multi-millennial icon—came to the Savior's side, whispered the very same previous discourse anew, and continuously murmured prayers beneath his breath.

A little ways off, someone watched all these battles, cries, and conflagrations without parting his lips, alongside a crowd who, through their own toil, cleared away pebbles, moved stone walls with bare hands, and—relying upon their own strength—forged a path out of the wasteland.

They pressed forward, and far beyond this era, through great exertion, they sought a path, found a way, and saw a light breaking through the darkness.

Once more they joined hands, pushed the stone walls aside, and through tremendous effort made the new path wider and more traversable.

One stepped forward and took the hands of the others so that, one by one, through their own labor and by locking hands, they emerged from the hardships, the fires of oppression, and captivity.

And when all stood upon a safe shore, they cried out loudly to the world: We are free; freedom belongs to ourselves alone.

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