

The journeys of Ibn Khaldoun I

# High Hopes

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# High Hopes





The weather was extremely hot on Andalusia Road, in Tunis, as if the sun was shooting flames at Earth. People, or rather those who were left of them, stayed inside their homes to mourn their dead; the heat only increased their agony.

Suad, a five-year-old girl, sat on the threshold of her house, dressing up her dolls and dusting their bright clothes.

This child had nobody to play with her any longer. The alley was empty of children. They passed away, one by one. The raging plague took them. Some said that this child survived because her mother had collected talismans for her and visited the shrines of the righteous with her.

The only thing Suad knew about death is that it had taken her friends and left her alone. She invoked plague upon all those she did not like. In her isolation, she invented a little trick of her own, which made her feel better. Whenever a friend died, she made a new doll and named the doll after her. She talked to them and imitated the way each dead girl spoke. Thus, she overcame boredom and loneliness.

Her mother Salma, fearing for her daughter from



infection and evil eye, forced her to play inside the house. She even closed the door of the room where she played sometimes. The girl often sought help from her grandfather, who would save her from that prison, and she would escape out to the alley. The grandfather was constantly saying, “There is no escape from fate”.

Her uncle Abdurrahman appeared at the end of the lane that led to the Andalusian Quarter. He was seventeen, tall, handsome, wearing a striped Jubbah, a red cap, and light sandals. He carried a full rucksack in his hand. As soon as Suad saw him, she ran towards him shouting:

“Uncle Abdurrahman, uncle Abdurrahman”

He hugged her and kissed her. He said that he was visiting a friend outside the city. He told her about the gifts and toys he brought for her. She told him about her dolls, her new friends, and mentioned the familiar names she gave to them. His face contracted when he remembered their neighbours whose lives had been claimed by the plague. A few months ago, the area was bustling with activity. He imagined the faces of the departed, their features and movements: the features of some of the young friends or those he



met in different classes and debate sessions.

At the doorstep, Suad said,

“Grandpa and grandma are ill.”

He put her down gently and hurried to enter. She asked him for the gifts he told her about, but he threw the sack in the loft and ran towards his parents’ room. He saw his parents surrounded by his brothers, Muhammad and Yahya, while his sister, Umaima, and his sister-in-law, Salma, were trying to hide their tears. Abdurrahman hugged his father, kissing his cheeks, and embraced his mother, who looked more tired and breathless.

“Why did you come back? I told you that the air of the desert is healthier than here,” his father protested.

Abdurrahman looked at his brothers in anxious despair.

“What happened? I was away for only a few days?” he said.

Muhammad shook his head and pursed his lips, so his father said,

“Abdurrahman, it is the cursed disease. It visited us, your mother and me.”



The two women burst into tears; Yahya turned his head to the wall. Abdurrahman leaned towards his father's and mother's faces and held their hands. His mother cried silently, while his father tried to catch his breath to say, "Stay away Abdurrahman! Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, said: 'Run away from disease, as you flee from a lion'."

Abdurrahman felt suffocated. He held his mother's hand looking into her wilted eyes. She was muttering incoherently.

"Life and death are in the hands of God; we are merely visitors on this earth. The lifetime of each soul is set," said the father.

Muhammad went out and Abdurrahman forced himself into speaking.

"I'll bring you a doctor."

"No medicine will do with this disease. It is a test from God," the father mumbled.

Abdurrahman followed his elder brother Muhammad; he found him sitting on the ridge of the well, the grapevine cast a shadow over him, bunches of grapes hanging from it. Muhammad said, "The Sicilian Hakim came yesterday. As soon



as he saw them, he retreated at the door, and said, ‘This is the plague coming from abroad. It afflicts all body organs and drugs cool before they can heal it’.”

They heard their father’s voice calling for Muhammad, who hurried to him. Abdurrahman stood still looking around aimlessly. Suad came down from the loft, wearing the dress he brought her and holding the ceramic dolls and in her hand.

“Thank you for the dress uncle. It’s gorgeous, but I no longer have friends to show it to them” she said loudly.

He laid his hand on her braids and sighed. She wanted to speak but he asked her to be quiet with a hand signal.

He was listening to his father talking to his brother.

“I would have liked you all to be by my side now, but I do not see the benefit of it. You know what I will say to you in such a situation. So I prefer silence. Our long-established traditions give each one in the family a role.”

Suad escaped Abdurrahman’s hand. He tried to hold her but she rushed forward and stumbled, and her



ceramic doll shattered.

Her mother stood angrily, but Suad jumped onto her grandfather's chest. He smiled and embarrassed her gently. She said, "Grandpa, don't die, she is going to beat me."

He patted her tenderly on the back, while she stuck out her tongue to tease her angry mother behind his back. Light transient smiles spread rapidly over everyone's faces.

It came to Abdurrahman to consult the Andalusian doctor, Abu al-Ma'ali. He went out, his legs hardly supporting him. Thurayya was standing at the door of her house. Unwillingly, his heart started to race. She was his beautiful neighbour, a pleasant and attractive fifteen-year-old. Her looks always showed a special interest in him. She had feelings for Abdurrahman, and so had he. They quietly exchanged feelings of affection and often had conversations that seemed mundane but were loaded with hidden gestures.

"How are they now? Why can't doctors find a cure for this devil of a disease?" she said.

He shook hands with her and she threw him a loving look at him and tried to fix his collar.



“My father said there was no cure against it except by avoiding it”, said Abdurrahman.

He pursed his lips and looked away. He needed to be alone. As he left, she shouted, “The disease is in the earth and in the air. Be careful, stay away from people.”

Her words echoed in his ears as he left. Her voice kept him company most of the day.

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He passed through the scribes’ workshops, and the apothecaries. He was shocked to find them all deserted. At such a time, these places would usually be so crowded and so busy that men and women would be seen in mingled masses. Where are the shouts of street vendors? Where is the hustle and bustle of buyers?

Most shops were closed, and passers-by were muttering prayers. Some were reciting verses from the Quran audibly while walking, taking no heed of whoever came in their way or passed by. He has heard of families leaving the capital to live in the mountains. He remembered what some people said: “This plague is of female nature. That is why it targets men more than women”. But he knew that



men were more vulnerable to infection because of their social roles. He caught some words from passers-by,

“O Lord, we pray Thee not to change that which is ordained, but to bestow Thy mercy upon us”;

“Thieves are breaking into deserted homes and picking up valuables”

“One man’s loss is another man’s gain”.

He saw people saying their farewells as if they had been going to war. The Smell of incense filled the air. Sounds of prayers, weeping and shouting were heard everywhere.

When he arrived at the sea front, he saw the hotels run by Christians. No movement was seen there, although these places used to abound with traders, deals and people speaking a multitude of different languages.

Turning right, he saw a richly-dressed man speaking to the wall in a loud voice. The curious sight made him stop to watch.

“A loaf of bread costs a carat, a dirham for a pound of meat, and half a dinar for a measure of oil,” the man was saying.



“Goods are scarce, prices are surging, and the poor are marching from the desert to the city, begging and plundering. Ten bushels of grain are fifty dinars. The Bedouins’ herds are abandoned. Villages have been deserted. Religious scholars say that reading al-Bukhari’s collection of authentic hadith gives protection and cure—have you got a copy?”

At first, he thought that the man had lost his mind and felt sorry for him. But he heard distant voices coming from behind the wall. Abdurrahman slowed his pace and when the man caught up with him, he stopped him and said, “Excuse me. I heard you speaking to someone behind the wall!”

The man gave him a contemplative look, shook his head, and said, “It was my uncle. He brought all money and family members home and sealed all openings in his house with gypsum”.

“And where will he get food from?”

“He filled his house with all he needed. He had been told that the plague does not dwell in a place for more than a year”.

When he drew near his home again, he saw some neighbours going in and out. Their faces looked grim and he knew something bad had happened.



“They fell sick at the same time, and died on the same day”, he heard someone say.

Abdurrahman’s pace slackened off, and he almost collapsed.

“That is God’s will. Submit to that and forbear your fate”, one of the neighbours said while embracing him.

With tears in his eyes, Abdurrahman replied, “There is no happiness after losing parents”.

The Khalduns’ residence remained open for receiving condolences. It received visits from dignitaries, public figures, some statesmen as well as most of the people of Andalusia. Everyone felt sad for the loss. Abdurrahman’s father was considered both a dignitary and a man of knowledge.

However, disasters feel less painful if they strike everyone. The plague hardly left any house without a funeral. Its impact was so painful, especially for the residents of the city and its suburbs. The country lost some of its most famous scholars and most skilled craftsmen.

Abdurrahman continued to hide his pain, dedicating himself to his sorrow and his books. He became



more inclined towards solitude and silence. His family—all family members—surrounded him with love and care, and tried to get him out of what he was going through, but all their efforts came to nothing.

Muhammad tried to rescue him from solitude. He sat with him frequently counselling him. Then he sought the help of Sheikh Abd al-Muhaymen al-Khadrami and Sheikh Ibrahim al-Abili, who were friends of their father and the family. The two Sheikhs complied and called in every now and then to give Abdurrahman company and console him. They were amongst the most distinguished scholars at al-Zaytuna Mosque, and Abdurrahman was one of their brightest students. They liked him for his quick-wit and keenness on pursuing different lines of inquiry in different disciplines. He also harboured towards them the liking of a disciple towards his master, seeking his appreciation and satisfaction.

Abd al-Muhaymen was well versed in Arabic language and literature, and was noted and respected by both fellows and sheikhs. He was also one of the Marinid Sultan Abu al-Hasan's scribes. That is why his friends always called him "the man with two virtues".



Whenever Abd al-Muhaymen visited the Khalduns' residence, he made sure that his disciple and assistant at the Divan of Scribes Ibrahim al-Malaqi was with him. al-Malaqi was young, but he was an exceedingly articulate and eloquent person, and had a comprehensive knowledge of the scholarship and sciences of the time. All this soon led to a close friendship between him and Ibn Khaldun. They were almost the same age, and they had shared interests.

The new friend succeeded in saving his friend from his melancholy and brought him back to the wide horizons of life. Abdurrahman regained his good spirits, and began to indulge in life and the pursuit of its pleasures. The house of Khaldun residence remained what it had always been known for before—a salon for dignitaries and scholars, a sort of “academy” for the most notable scholars, intellectuals and men of letters. In that salon, however, voices would suddenly go quiet if the condition of the country, now ruled by the invading Marinid State, was brought up. Shouting and loud voices would turn into whispers, and prayers for relief and improvement of the general conditions.





After weeks of absence, Abdurrahman went back to al-Zaytuna Mosque. When he entered, the place was full of life: teaching sessions were under way, and teachers' voices were filling the air. He felt sorry for having been away for all that time. But he found consolation in the warm welcome he was given by his mates, who surrounded him in the spacious courtyard and proceeded in flocks and queues to offer him their condolences. The majority wanted to stand around and talk to him. He was disappointed, however, by the cold reception he received from Ibn Arafa, who, shaking hands with him with the tips of his fingers hardly said anything beyond the usual courtesies. He then carried on to catch up with his companions and get immersed in their clamour again. Taking notice of Abdurrahman's disappointment, a friend said, "Forget about Ibn Arafa. He is, as usual, coarse and harsh, just like all Bedouins."

That might have been true, but Ibn Arafa, Abdurrahman admitted to himself, was favoured and held in high regard by all teachers. The man was well known for his sharp wit and for his perceptiveness and ability to learn things by heart. Fate had it that Ibn Arafa would come to be his rival for both the



teachers' affection and the students' recognition. Ibn Arafa was years older than Abdurrahman, which, together with the fact that he was an accomplished scholar, made him look forward to holding a teaching-position at the Grand Mosque.

Students of knowledge have through the ages been known to be prone to divisions that lead to hostile encounters, cultural differences playing a crucial role in causing disunion. And such was the case here! Students from the countryside rallied around Ibn Arafa, and city-dwellers chose Abdurrahman! The two groups reflected in their formation the deep differences between city life and Bedouin life.

The gap was widened even more by the fact that Abdurrahman was of Andalusian descent, and Andalusians had often been known to look at the local communities with some superiority. Even though it had been more than a century since the first immigrations from Andalusia took place, the differences still held, and probably grew bigger, because rulers always favoured Andalusians over locals, and the Bedouins always felt disadvantaged and underprivileged by this unfair treatment. In their view, this was a form of discrimination. City people, they believed, monopolised authority, leaving them



nothing but trifles. Hence the struggle was fierce between the two parties, a struggle marked by hatred for the poor and the contempt for the rich by both parties.



The Khalduns' house was like a meeting point for dignitaries and public figures of the capital. Since visitors were leading personalities, the news that came in or went out of the place was always important, always holding a lot of facts and expectations concerning the condition of the State and its future. Distress and unease were everywhere. The Marinid invasion of the country damaged relations among people, leading to difference and division. People were unable to reach an agreement on an alternative that would bring all forces together and unite them on a common goal.

What was annoying to the public in general, and the educated class in particular, was that the ruler Abul-Hasan had ruined their country, defaced all its landmarks, and marginalised all those who were in power. He brought with him from his royal court in Morocco new leaders, new judges, and new clerks who were not familiar with the traditions of



the new country. They were strangers, so they did not know who was who, or what was what, when it came to dealing with the community and its different classes. All this incited a wave of hostility and made people blame him for anything that went wrong, including the spread of the plague epidemic. Rumour spread that he was an ominous man, and that wherever he went, misfortune befell. This man, this invader, had also provoked the hostility of the Sheikhs of the Grand Mosque. He bragged about the scholars he had brought with him, which created a general atmosphere of rivalry, antagonism and even conspiracy in the academic atmosphere.

Students, however, especially those serious about their scholarly attainment, saw a great advantage in having new scholars at their institution, for those scholars were amongst the best of the time. Abul-Hasan was a man of vast knowledge and great learning, who always took pleasure in surrounding himself with scholars of all fields.

He liked to sit with them, listen to their discussions, and sometimes bring up, as befitted his liking and interest, some controversial issues. These discussions and arguments used to reach the students who spread them quickly. Abdurrahman had an



interest—a keen interest, in fact—in what went on in the Sultan’s assemblies, and al-Malaqi was always providing him with all the gossip. Students admired the brightest speakers at those assemblies and attended their classes the Grand Mosque. This state of affairs created rivalry among the teachers and the people of the city often complained that the Sultan was biased in his treatment of scholars.

People had not forgotten that day, a year ago, when Abul-Hasan entered their capital city. He came in riding on a white horse, and was surrounded by masses of leaders, ministers and scholars. He pardoned his Hentati in-laws and let them off, leaving them all the palaces, properties and possessions they had. On that day, he had a meeting with the dignitaries and public figures of the city, where he gave big promises of security, prosperity and stability, saying that Tunis would become a leading centre for knowledge in the Maghrib.

He reiterated these promises in his tours in the North and South. He had a high opinion of himself and of his army. And why not? He was able to bring down two kingdoms at the same time without a fight, which made him the ruler of all Maghribi lands from Gibraltar to the borders of Egypt.



A year ago, giving bright promises was possible and easy for a man who never thought of being challenged. For who would dare challenge him? He even looked down on the tribal leaders when they came in for negotiations. He belittled them and sent them to prison. He was hopeful of founding an empire stretching from East to West, and that was about to become a reality, he thought. His quick, easily-realised victory gave him the impression that all he needed was a little time and a little effort and he would be there. That is why he stripped the Bedouins of Africa of all advantages they had. They had large expanses of land under their control and kept levies in their own possession. He stripped them of these advantages, and all others, and told them that what they used to get by blackmailing the Hafsid State was no longer attainable under his rule.

He used to think that what divided Bedouins was more than what united them. He forgot their innate tendency and readiness to flare out when provoked, especially when it came to something like what he did when he sent their delegates to prison.

It did not take two months for Bedouins to unite and join forces. They put their differences aside, ignored their mutual hostilities and revenge vows, and



united on a common goal. Abul-Hasan, however, did not take them seriously and underestimated their challenge. He went out with his army to face them and put the rebellion down. He was very proud of his strength but when the two parties met, his army suffered huge losses. He was forced to retreat to the capital and think of a new plan that would restore his dignity and his commanding, venerable standing. Then this devastating plague broke out and made things go from bad to worse.



Abdurrahman's family and relations were glad to see his new enthusiasm, and looked optimistically at his friendship with al-Malaqi. This young man combined being a scholar and an aide to the Sultan, which gave his relationship with Abdurrahman a special importance urging Abdurrahman to follow in his friend's footsteps. His high ambitions required doubling his efforts and devotion to study. He stopped going out to visit towns and cities, depriving himself of the pleasure he used to derive from such excursions, especially to Bedouin territories. Every morning, however, he would find alternative pleasure in the gentle, soft breeze of happiness that would come to him when he saw his



neighbour Thurayya. He had such pleasure seeing her waiting outside her house revealing some of her charms.

Every morning, she would go out to sweep the spot of the street in front of her house, cleaning the rubbish, washing the marble steps, and giving the door a wipe. She would do all that on purpose, and the monotonous, unvarying undertaking would continue until Abdurrahman passed by. He used to show up at almost the same time, and whenever he did, both of them would pretend that it was a mere coincidence. But their eyes revealed their inner feelings and exchanged amorous looks.

He smiled to her from a distance and said in a loud voice, “Good day, Thurayya. How are you this morning?”

She returned the smile and said in a whisper, “May your day be better and nicer, Abdurrahman! Fine. We’re all fine—as long as we keep safe from this damned disease!”

“I often see light in your room, even after midnight!” she added.

He chuckled, and tried to lower his gaze. She wiped dust off her chest, raised her body into an upright



position, and said with a shiver, “Staying up until late at night is hurting you! Don’t you see its effects on your eyes and on your face?”

He wanted to stay longer and keep the conversation going, but he was worried about people seeing them in such state, for their society, both were aware, was governed by tradition and gossip, and they were not to forget that.

Seeing him look around, she said, “My grandmother is asking about you”.

“I will visit her this evening. She reminds me of my mother”, he replied.

He hurried away, and she pretended to be busy with her chores. She, however, looked towards the path he was taking and followed his steps until he disappeared. She then sighed and the chores, which were an unnecessary ruse, came to an end.

She was longing for that day when Abdurrahman’s family would ask for her hand in marriage and bring the two famous families together. But she could not just wait, however, and she started to visit the Khalduns’ house. She was attempting to attract attention in a modest, discreet, and carefully thought-out manner. She became good friends with



Umaima, the Family's young girl. She also started to invite young Suad to her home, where she would treat her well, braid her hair, and make sure that she looked beautiful, perfumed, and accompanied by different sorts of fruits and toys when she returned home. The stakes were high, and the end sought was worth the sacrifice. Thurayya believed that she managed to keep everything to herself and that no one knew of what was going on. But nothing could be kept secret from the watching eyes of the neighbourhood's women.

“Beautiful, smart, and very good at the game”, they would whisper.

“They are well-suited for each other: beauty and wealth; education and fame”.

Thurayya announced the good news to her grandmother and made all preparations for welcoming the visitor, whom she expected to say something, something that would revive hope and bring them closer to each other. But none of that was to happen. The news that the Bedouins were about to attack and the unrest that struck the capital spoiled all plans. The tribes lost respect for the King and they created an alliance to inflict a severe loss



on him. How could they forgive him his humiliating stance towards them; he had equated them with city dwellers, depriving them of their privileges and levying taxes upon them.

The confrontation was drawing near, Abul-Hasan thought, for all efforts at reconciliation had failed. The Bedouins would not trust him. His vows and assurances, they thought, were only a manoeuvre aimed at allowing for support from his Crown Prince to arrive, so when that support arrives, he would deny all these vows and pay no heed to them.

Walls were fortified; more men were enlisted in the army; coffers were opened to purchase arms from Genovese dealers; and dignitaries and public figures, often shunned since the King's triumphal entrance into the country, were given much attention now—war was approaching.

In the midst of all those preparations, the Sultan received another blow sending him into a frenzy: the Minister Ibn Tafargine, had defected to Alexandria. "At such a time! In these circumstances!"—the thought was so painful and so provoking. He was one of his biggest allies! It was Ibn Tafargine who had persuaded him to capture the Hafsid capital,



although he was a Hafsid himself. He was first to welcome and serve him—he was always ready for what was asked of him! The man was the supreme Sheikh of the Almohads and had big influence over his followers and his community. His defection under such circumstances was a bad omen. Fears and rumours revived. Experts expected a quick fall for the Marinid Sultan.

People were troubled; he plague had not completely cleared, although its effects were not as strong now as they had been earlier; prices skyrocketed; goods and commodities disappeared; shops closed; the number of beggars in the streets became more than the number of shopkeepers; hunger swept the land; and the city gates began to be locked in the face of the poor.

Classes almost stopped; Bedouins began to return to their villages to seek refuge from the oncoming storm. To complicate things further, news came in that Abu Anan, the Sultan's son, had overthrown and him announced himself Sultan of the Marinid State. "The Sultan must be cursed!" people said.

All the territories he had subjugated to his rule were quick to break off, except the capital of Tunisia,



which made Bedouins scoff at the cowardice of the people of the city, calling them effeminate, unlike the people of Tlemcen, who stood up to the Marinids and kicked them out.

Gaining some courage, dignitaries asked the Sultan to save the country from war, which was an indication that he was no longer welcome among them.

Worries circulated widely, and so did rumours. People began to watch out for Abul-Hasan's next move. The Bedouins, meanwhile, made their conditions stricter and harder demanding that he either surrender and lay down his arms or compensate them for the losses they had suffered because of the war he had waged on them.

Bedouin leaders painted people in the capital a bright, luring picture of the rebellion, and asked them to join in, promising to destroy the Sultan's army and wipe it out if it dared come out of the walls.

A secret movement has arisen in the circles of the Hafsid families; the search for a sultan that will fill the void and lead the Hafsid State on had begun in earnest; and some special, well-known houses



began to host regular meetings for discussions among influential people.

More people than usual were meeting at the Khalduns' house that night. The assembly included a large number of dignitaries, merchants, judges, and scholars, an occurrence which would be seen only in hard times, when the State was in a critical condition.

Meetings continued and the attendees invited tribal chiefs from the Abi al-Lail and the Muhalhel families. They even sent a message to the Sultan himself: the plague had already wiped out the some of the best people of their capital, they said in that message, so avoiding another destruction of the city was something they so much desired and pleaded for.

The Sultan did not reply, however, and the situation was about to explode, so they decided to send him another, more explicit letter. They chose Abdurrahman and his brothers Muhammad and Yahya to work on the wording of the letter.

Heated discussions erupted about the demands to be made and the type of liberties to be sought. Bedouins wanted the affair to be an outcry against tyranny and



oppression, and had a desire to lay all the blame on the Sultan. They wanted to make him pay for all the loss and damage he caused them. The majority, however, were inclined towards peace. Informing the Sultan of the facts on the ground and trying to get him to have the desire and the willingness to help would be a better approach, they thought. Appealing to the Sultan to look sympathetically at the condition of the State, and the people was the choice of the majority.

While the exchange of views was underway, a veiled woman came on the scene. She did not want to reveal her name. She just wanted to get in to the assembly room. The answer was no, but she would not take no for an answer. Muhammad stepped in then and went out to see who that woman was and why she was there. She answered him, but in private, whispering something, through her veil, into his ear. Muhammad responded with a loud “Welcome!” ushered the lady in, and went to announce her presence.

“Princess Lutf is here! She would like to greet people here and give support and encouragement to them”, he announced. The people present stood up respectfully, murmuring and gesturing all the while.



The Princess did not remove the veil off her face, and apologised for her unannounced visit. She sat down, all eyes fixed upon her. “We still remember the last great Hafsids Sultan, the late Abu Bakr, and his high standing, with pride and reverence. We are honoured tonight by having his noble wife, Princess Lutf, with us”, Muhammad said.

Others expressed their pleasure at the visit but, deep down, everyone was asking, “What is the reason behind the visit?”. The Princess thanked them, told them that she was familiar with their noble work for the common good of the people and the State, and went on to pronounce what she came for.

“I’m the wife of the departed great man, and I, like you, want to see peace and prosperity restored to our land. I am here, therefore, to suggest nominating my son Prince al-Fadl to be king. He has more right than any others to his father’s throne”, she said.

The suggestion took the attendees by surprise. They had been familiar with the rumours about rifts inside the Hafsids family. They also knew that the names that were seeking power were too many, and that, given the different interests of the different families, which were no longer as strong and closely united as



they were under the reign of former stronger kings. Thus, a unanimous decision as to who would be the best successor was too difficult to make. Decision-makers in these families had not been able to reach an agreement on the affair. They people present in the Khaldun house did not want to take sides or say anything in public in support of a particular candidate as that might lead to undesirable consequences, and they did not want to cause trouble. They, however, had favourable views on al-Fadl. They knew him to be a generous, brave, and noble person. In addition, he was considered a student of knowledge, and was seen sitting in classes at al-Zaytuna Mosque.

Seeing them look at one another in search of someone to speak for them, Abdurrahman said, “I will be the first one to call for Prince al-Fadl’s candidacy. I know him. I have met him at al-Zaytuna Mosque”.

The Princess turned her eyes towards the young man and gave him a grateful look, which was not to last long, for the arrival of al-Malaqi, the Sultan’s Clerk, disturbed the scene and cause some confusion. The Princess was shocked, and lost all her strength. The attendees, too, looked embarrassed and confused. al-Malaqi took notice of that, and seemed to have had a sense of what was going on, as if he had



known what was on their minds. He gave them a contemplative look, turned to the Princess and smiled at her, then came the announcement: “The Sultan has taken a hard decision: he will sail out; he is leaving the capital”.

A breath of relief came out—what the council had been working on had been achieved effortlessly. They began to wonder, however, about the consequences of the ensuing political vacuum and the possibility of fighting breaking out. al-Malaqi then told them that Abul-Hasan would leave one of his sons in charge, and that as soon as he regained his throne and had his Crown Prince punished and disciplined, he would come back.

He stopped there, and began to look at their faces to see their reactions. Then, smiling, he went on, “The Sultan has found Tunis to be a fine, superior place to live. And he is leaving his wife, Azzuna, here to be with her family.” He then took leave and asked for their permission to have Abdurrahman go with him.

The two young men went out together, each having a different aim. al-Malaqi wanted to go around the city at night to say goodbye to his friends, while Abdurrahman wanted to gain more knowledge of



the mysterious circumstances of the forthcoming trip of the King, and to check if the Sultan really intended to come back after all the misfortunes that had befallen him. Abdurrahman's desire was not to be fulfilled, however. al-Malaqi led the conversation in another direction and asked him, "Abdurrahman, have you happened to think of emigrating?"

Abdurrahman was not expecting such a question, so he stopped to see what was going through his friend's mind. al-Malaqi laughed, asked his friend to continue walking, and started again: "Joining us will bring you huge advantages, especially in the field of knowledge and learning. The Sultan does not intend to come back, and he has ordered the scholars to travel with him. With these figures going away, and given that the plague has wiped out many such figures as Chief Judge Muhammad Ibn Abdul-Salam al-Hawwari, erudite scholars left at al-Zaytuna Mosque will be quite few".

The streets were lit with lamps, night watchmen were beginning to make their rounds, and movement around the city was starting to fade away. A small number of passers-by were still out, wishing one another good night and hurrying their steps back home, looking forward to a new day. Little did they



know that the Marinid invaders will leave the city in the early morning. al-Malaqi looked for his friends but found only a small number of them. Most of them had left their workplaces early and went home to have some rest.

The idea of emigrating began to blossom in Abdurrahman's mind, and soon became a firm conviction, for what was the point of staying in the City, Abdurrahman asked himself, if intellectuals and scholars are no longer there. Besides, all signs foretell of another chapter of unrest and turbulence. So, why stay in this place? he asked himself again. Was it his fate to stick to one place and wait for trouble and danger to come to him?

He knew that taking a risky enterprise on the path of knowledge was more worthwhile and more rewarding. Let alone other gains that were to be made too. This was especially exciting because of the opportunity which al-Malaqi told him about—that the royal court in Fez was in need of new professionally qualified personnel. Besides, al-Malaqi enticed him more by promising to be his best friend there.

He passed by the royal headquarters. The barracks



were a scene of hustle and bustle. Agitation, at its highest tide, was everywhere—shouts, calls and cries were buzzing in the air. No one knew the location from which the departing fleet would begin its journey offshore. Even al-Malaqi didn't even though he knew about the Sultan's decision. Some ministers told him, however, that the Sultan was more likely to make his departure from the Port of Sousse. Other delegations, he was told, were to go from the top of the valley.

Everything was pushing Abdurrahman to leave: the death of his parents, the loss of teachers, the dream of reaching the Marinid royal court, and, more importantly for him, the companionship of al-Malaqi. The man, Abdurrahman thought, was a Moroccan and he was the Sultan's Clerk. Huge gains could be made, and many of the expected dilemmas could be avoided—the man would be there for him!

It was late at night when he went to wake up his older brother. Muhammad jumped out of bed and started asking questions about what the issue was. He expected there to be an emergency that could not wait. However, Abdurrahman remained calm and collected. He was not known to drink, nor was he known to take things lightly at such a time of



extreme seriousness.

The older brother repressed his anger and held himself in check. Then he looked at Abdurrahman's face again and sought willpower from God. He was holding his beard and pulling it hard. Abdurrahman, in the meantime, was mentioning the benefits of his travel abroad and describing how it was a rare opportunity. He showed longing for the love of his sheikhs. He did not forget to mention the guarantees which al-Malaqi would secure in return for the warm reception and the friendly atmosphere he found at the Khaldun house.

Abdurrahman was confident that he will get his brother's consent. He never said no to him. His guardian brother, however, began to sigh, and pain began to reflect in his overcast eyes, where the lamp light was struggling against the darkness. Then he spoke. "I would like to ask you about only one thing, Abdurrahman. Given your age, will it be wise and appropriate if I let you go? What will people say if I do and let you, young as you are, go away? Won't I be, in their eyes, someone who abandoned his young brother and thrown him out into the unknown? And if our father were still alive, would he let you go on such an adventure?"



Abdurrahman was struck dumb. Muhammad rose to his feet, staggering, then went to his room and locked himself in. Unable to sleep, he began to wonder, “What have we done to you, Brother?”. He then started to rail against al-Malaqi. He had a flood of speculations to discuss with his wife, but she was sound asleep.

In the morning, Muhammad had a list of excuses. The other family members, however, were surprised by what Abdurrahman wanted to do, and began to ask themselves the same questions that Muhammad was troubled with overnight. Had they really fallen short of filling the gap left by the death of their parents, they wondered.

Muhammad gave directions that his wife and brothers should try to close the subject and that they should, together, make Abdurrahman feel. At the same time, the family began to think of the possible reasons that made him prefer a abroad to the warmth of home and family.

Sighing with relief when the Sultan and his circle departed, Muhammad recalled the proverb “Still waters run deep” as he thought of al-Malaqi, whom he had trusted. He regretted the generous hospitality



he had lavished on him.

Thurayya was shocked when the news was communicated to her. She saw herself as a flower in the midst of wreckage and thought to herself, “When Abdurrahman desires to leave and go away, that means that my dreams have vanished and gone with the wind”. “Was my love a mere fantasy?”, she wondered, choking with pain. Even if he did not directly profess his love to her openly, still “love and a cough cannot be hid” as the saying went. Their mutual love was increasing, proven by the hidden gestures they were exchanging every passing day. She could not imagine herself without him! He was her awaited knight in shining armour.

She kept waiting for him to come out, and she learned that he was confining himself to his room, so she decided to pay a visit to the family, and did. She was not a stranger to the family, but she was not as calm and collected as she would usually be. She looked confused this time for another, new feeling was impressing itself on her and unveiling her inner workings—a feeling of injustice: she felt as if she had been stabbed straight in the heart. She asked about him, with confusion still taking hold of her. Umaima held her hand, and dragged her to



his room. Thurayya showed some hesitation and resistance, but Umaima pushed her in gently and said, whispering in her ear, “We are awaiting your help, because we want him to stay—just as you do”.

Umaima always took notice of Thurayya’s quivers when she met Abdurrahman face to face or when she happened to talk about him. She was fully aware of her deep attachment to him. Whenever Abdurrahman spoke of Thurayya, or met her, something warm, something hearty pervaded his voice and rang passionately in his words. They were the best match for each other—this is what both families used to believe. After the latest developments Muhammad thought that Abdurrahman’s marriage would make him want to settle down. For marriage and children were the best, most beautiful chains for a man or a woman.

The two girls made their way into the room. He was holding a book and immersed in reading. He lifted his head, and there was the surprise. Thurayya had never come into his room—at least she did not when he was there! He stood up and stretched out his hand in welcome. Her hand shivered in his, and both felt a current going through their kindled hearts.



Umaima left, pretending to have forgotten something. Thurayya took a seat opposite to Abdurrahman's. A desk with a mass of paper, files and some folders separated them. He apologised for the mess. She responded with a smile. She was longing and yearning; her looks did not hide it. She blushed, and, caught in the moment, forgot what she wanted to say. The words of reproach that she had prepared slipped away. She plucked up the courage and said, "Had your ventures come to fruition, this meeting would have been beyond us now".

Squirming, Abdurrahman wiggled the fingers of his right-hand, and tried to envelope his feelings in a faint smile. "I miss the great Sheikhs who have left. It's so hard for me to be away from them. It's not every day that you come across people like them", he said.

"That's it? That's all? You leave all of a sudden, as if running away from a ghost", she replied.

"Nothing is dearer to a person than their home. But, at the same time, nothing is nobler than sacrificing for the sake of knowledge".

She looked about her to make sure no one was there, stretched out her hand to him to make her farewells,



and then said, “You know how much pain you might cause to those who love you by going away, don’t you?”.

He held her hand, returned her affectionate looks, and proceeded to pour his heart out to her:

“Leaving all of you is more heart-breaking for me! And here I am, staying among you.”, he said, and a laugh followed.

A sweet smile flickered across her face brought the meeting to its end. She left, less worried now, and more besotted with love.



After Abul-Hasan’s departure, two kings existed in the capital now: one from the Far West (Morocco), and one from Hafsid Africa. One ruled in public and one from behind the scenes. It was confusing state of affairs and many meetings and discussions were being held to get out of it.

The news coming from the Mid-West [Algeria], however, said that the tide was turning in al-Fadl al-Hafsi’s favour. Most of Abul-Hasan’s fleet sank, and most of his men died, but he survived. He had become weaker than before, so he sought shelter



in the mountains along with his supporters. People received the news with pleasure and optimism. They saw what happened as a lesson to be learned. They started to call Abul-Hasan “the ill-starred Sultan”, hoping that the end of his son was near as well.

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A few days later, Ibn Khaldun emerged from his voluntary confinement and made towards al-Zaytuna Mosque. Thurayya saw him when he came out. Her heart beat with joy and passion, and her eyes beamed with bright looks. She wished that she would get to see him every morning, as they used to do in the past.

When he entered into the Mosque courtyard, his friends gathered around him: some to welcome him back, others to ask, light-heartedly, how the “fugitive king” was doing.

They all agreed, however, that his brother was a wise man: keeping him from danger. “God has granted you a new life, thanks to your brother”, they said.

When Ibn Arafah joined the noisy group, he looked at Abdurrahman, smiled, and said, “Were you really seeking to gain knowledge?”.



He was alluding to the history of the Khaldun family in the service of rulers. Abdurrahman was not happy with the allusion, however, so he smiled and nodded disapproval. In the meantime, some were citing the Hadith “Seek knowledge, even in China”, saying that this Hadith was highly authentic and highly authoritative.

“Some claim that there are no great personalities at al-Zaytuna Mosque any more. But God has bestowed His blessings upon this place and made it a home for scholars forever, till the Day of Judgement”, Ibn Arafah said.

No one said anything, although it was obvious, as facts on the ground at the time showed, that most of the Mosque’s scholars had travelled east seeking the science and knowledge that their homeland needed. Some thought that a massive void was left behind which was something to be regretted. They found solace, however, in the fact that books, the genuine sources of wisdom, were there, and always will be.

They moved on to discuss the future of the invader, and came to think that the man would meet an end that fitted his vanity and arrogance. They had not forgotten that day when, riding on his white



horse and engrossed in hateful pride, he entered the city haughtily and looked at people as if they were cattle. They felt sorry, however, for the loss of those scholars who drowned and lost their lives during his fateful journey. Those were good, faithful people who devoted their lives to giving and left a great legacy in books and in people's minds. They were always to be remembered with veneration and gratitude, and they were always to be missed.

Some students said, addressing Ibn Arafah, "There has been some talk that the Scholars Council has asked if you wanted to teach beginner students".

Ibn Arafah nodded, and then turned to give Abdurrahman a look that carried a great deal of meaning. Abdurrahman, however, avoided the misunderstanding and made an announcement.

"If our friend Ibn Arafah becomes a member of the teaching staff, we will have a celebration", he said.

Students cheered at the friendly gesture and hoped that the tension between the best two students at al-Zaytuna University would vanish and pass away.

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A new story was being circulated. The hero of that



story was an obscure dervish. That dervish, the story said, was sleeping on the same road the soldiers took when Abul-Hasan made his way to Tunisia's capital and entered it victoriously. The dervish was affected by the incident. He prayed to God and went to sleep, heart-broken. In his sleep, he saw two holy Sufi magnates, Mehrez Ibn Khalaf and al-Sayyidah al-Manoubiyyah, sitting on a hill on the outskirts of the city, surrounded by flowers, birds, and stretches of green land, talking about the Marinid Sultan and his crimes and suggesting that he should be given proper punishment.

“Let's go and pray, and let's keep praying until the Marinid one runs away and leaves his shoe behind”, Sheikh Mehrez said.

“Let's just punish him in this world and leave the punishment of the after-world to the Lord of heavens”, al-Sayyidah al-Manoubiyyah responded.

Then another Sufi magnate, Abul-Hasan al-Shathily, appeared. It looked like he had been travelling. He asked if they had reached an agreement on the subject. They told him that it was he who he would settle the matter and make the final decision.

“Fair enough. We shall pray to Almighty God to turn



him into a bird, then cut his wings and throw him away into the desert to roam around there for a long time, then gouge his eyes out, then, after all, that he be called to account for the sins and evil acts he committed and receive the punishment he deserves.

People liked the story and retold it in their evening gatherings and workplaces, always passing their hands over their faces as a sign of deference to the Sufi magnates. If someone were to ask about who made up that story or who was to benefit from it after the Sultan had left, he would be accused of blasphemy and infidelity, and would be demanded to ask for forgiveness and pay due deference to the devout people who devoted their lives to the service of God. The story was the subject of much discussion and debate. When anybody expressed doubt about the miracles of the Sufi magnates, some would answer, “Had the poor dervish spoken of his vision when the Sultan came into the city, his thugs would have killed him and torn his body to pieces”.

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After the Sultan fled, his tyranny and heavy hand were no longer there to be dreaded. People were happy, and began to speak of him, and of his son,



humorously. “If defeat was the fate of the father, then disgrace and murder should be the fate of the son”, they said. Bedouins, too, became the subject of contempt and ridicule. People saw that they gathered around the fugitive’s son and supported him not because they had faith in him, but, rather, because they were after his money. When his resources would run out, they would throw him outside city walls like a rat. Another dervish was now reported to say that the Sultan ran away and left his torn-out shoes behind.

Feasts, parties and charitable banquets spread out on a large scale. Tombs of saints swarmed with visitors. Dervishes were now given special treatment. People would kiss their hands and heads and make sure they seek God’s blessings through touching their patched garments and passing their hands over them. “It’s over: the clouds have cleared!”, the dervishes shouted.

“God bless you, Sheikh Mehrez! God bless you!”, the crowds would cry out.

Festivities, dancing, tambourines, incense, songs of praise dedicated to the Virtuous—all filled the town squares.



For many days, people saw a grand convoy in town, preceded by flags, servants and musician. Maids were holding up censers. Strong men were carrying large bowls filled with expensive colourful fabrics. In the middle, a howdah with a silk cover and colourful strips and ribbons was carried on the back of a camel and surrounded by heavily armed men—two men carrying a lot of spears and lances posed themselves on each side, two on the left and two on the right.

The convoy set off on a journey to visit the tombs of the saints. When the convoy reached one of the sites, a white hand adorned with henna and bracelets would come out of the howdah to deal out a handful of dirhams. loafers and busybodies would burst forth, shoving and shouting, to snatch the coins, at any cost, even if that was to involve, as was often the case, bloody fighting. Amidst all that, however, a servant would shout out, “Come on! Here is your tea, for the sake of God, and for that of the saints! Long live our Lord al-Fadl!”.

That was how Princess Lutf ran a very successful campaign to make her son popular. But that was not all she did for she sent gifts to dignitaries and scholars alike.



The remnants of the Marinid army were finally convinced that they had no choice except to surrender, which they did. They helped the young prince join his defeated father. Then they enlisted themselves, with their weapons, in the service of the new Sultan, who was born and raised in the city, and belonged to its people. He was of Hafsid descent, young, amiable, and brave, and he had a fair share of learning and education, so his reign was to be a new beginning in the history of what was left of the Hafsid Almohad dynasty.

The young Sultan came out in a grand procession, toured the quarters and neighbourhoods of the city, visited the religious corners and shrines, and then, at the end, prayed at al-Zaytuna Mosque. He was fair-haired, like his European mother; dark-complexioned, like his father. He was only eighteen, but he was tall, so he looked older. He had a majestic and charming air about him. His red caftan was lined with gold, and his crown shined on his head. This gave people a feeling of trust and confidence, so they loved him from the start, at first sight.

Greetings and prayers filled the air. He waved to the crowd, and returned the greetings with a wide smile. His mother was beside him and the people greeted



her, too, and applauded her faithfulness, wisdom and political acumen.



Every evening, the large family house brought the Khalduns together. And every evening, young Suad would be the life of the party. She would run around untroubled by what they might do or say. She held her little doll friends and tell them to be silent if she was asked to stop talking.

The women indulged in gossiping. They would talk about new births and quarrels in their area. Sometimes they would bring up some embarrassing matters and speak in whispers in order for Suad not to know what they were saying, for the little girl was always on the look-out, and would not hold any secrets. So whenever she came near, whispering prevailed. She was often pushed away, and the conversation often became full of allusions and ambiguous references.

“Who is the bad woman in our area?” she shouted when she heard one of their stories.

Salma and Umaima, who were involved in the conversation, jumped. Salma covered her daughter’s mouth with her hand, then she pinched



her. The child cried in pain and began to throw dolls at her mother. Seeing this, her father bid her come over. She did. He sat her on his lap, and Salma and Umaima continued their conversation.

Umaima said that some merchants were coming to al-Sabbagh's to ask for Thurayya's hand, and looked worried and confused, and so did Salma. They liked the girl and wanted Abdurrahman to marry her. They sneaked a glance at Abdurrahman who was discussing some intellectual issues with his brothers. He went out to fetch a book that contained a clarification of some controversial issues in comparative jurisprudence. Salma seized the opportunity and turned to speak to her husband.

"Some people are asking for Thurayya's hand in marriage", she said.

Muhammad looked uncomfortable. He looked at his brother Yahya, and said, "And what do you want from me? Do you want me to talk to him myself?"

Salma turned to his brother and said, "Talk to him, Yahya. Marriage is the best guarantee that Abdurrahman will not leave."

"I have talked to him", Yahya said. "But I did not understand what he was insinuating. Sometimes



he seems undecided as if he was thinking about something else”.

“A woman?” , Muhammad asked.

“He does not like talking about anything except travel. He keeps talking about people who went on an adventure and ended up with fame and fortune”.

Muhammad, who always kept an eye on his brother and on the pursuits he took interest in, took a deep breath and knit his brows. He then put his hand on Suad’s head. “So convince him, Yahya. Let this be your utmost priority”, he said.

Abdurrahman entered carrying two books and a piece of parchment. At that very moment, Suad burst out taking all by surprise. “Will you marry Thurayya, Uncle? She is beautiful, and I like her”.

Yahya chortled and gave his niece an admiring look, Umaima laughed uncontrollably, but Salma was not pleased. She gave her daughter a reproachful look and said, “Naughty girl!”.

Muhammad nudged his daughter and said, “Don’t you want to go to bed? Children like you should be sleeping by now”.

Salma issued forth and grabbed the child’s hand to



take her and put her to sleep. The child resisted and clung on to her father's lap. "Time for bed!" the mother yelled.

Trying to change the subject, Abdurrahman said, "I have received a letter from al-Malaqi today. He says that he has faced a great deal of danger. He almost drowned and lost his life when the fleet sank. But thankfully he clung on to a floating board from the wreckage of the ship".

Muhammad looked uneasy and turned his head in another direction.

"And where is he now?", Yahya asked.

"Settled in Fez. He says that he has lost all hope in the return of the ousted Sultan".

Muhammad was annoyed, for he did not like the mere mention of the guy. In fact, he held feelings of hatred towards him, so much so that he wished he was one of those who drowned and died in the fleet incident. Unhappy as he was with the attention being turned to al-Malaqi and wanting to change the subject and, Muhammad said,

"Minister Ibn Tafargine has come back from Alexandria and he went to meet the Bedouins in the



coastal area”, he said.

They took the news with interest, and had different, contradicting feelings about the affair, for the minister was not inclined towards living in peace. Rather, he was skilled at hatching plots and creating conflict among his enemies in order to take them one by one and destroy them.

“Has this minister no sense of shame? Doesn’t he feel ashamed of himself? He is a traitor! He sold us to the Marinids and persuaded them to come and invade our land! Why is he back now?”, Yahya exclaimed.

“The Hafsids have already chose a king, so what can he do?” Abdurrahman wondered.

“This man is a skilled manipulator. He will not settle until his interests are guaranteed. And let’s not forget that has considerable influence on the elders among the Almohads”.



News spread out, and the return of the Minister became the talk of the town. Most people did not trust him, but he had some supporter amongst the elite who believed that he was the right man to be



in charge; he combined power and resourcefulness, the two necessary requirements for any ruler.

Those supporters argued that Ibn Tafargine was Minister under the last Sultan, who was one of the last powerful Hafsids, and that when he enlisted himself in the service of the Marinid invaders, his motive was to tip the scales, for he knew for sure that the Marinids were destined to invade the land. He had no choice: he had to either surrender or be part of the game. So, under the circumstances, he went for what he thought was in the best interest of the State and its people. It was he who saved the lives of the defeated Hafsids when Abul-Hasan took over. And it was thanks to his efforts that several lives and properties were spared. But this did not convince his detractors. For they could not forget that when the Marinid Sultan conquered their land he was riding to his right. Nor could they ignore the fact that he was an advisor to the Hafsids, and that it was he who convinced him to ally himself with the Marinids, enabling them, thus, to set foot in Tunisia and gain influence and authority over its body politic even before the conquest.





Abdurrahman received an offer for a job at Abul Fadl's royal court, and he did not know whether it was Muhammad and his efforts or the family and its good standing and reputation that brought him that offer. He came to think, however, that the Princess' visit on that memorable night had something to do with the matter. The Princess, he thought, looked at him more than she looked at the others who were there. Did she think he was the best choice there because he was the youngest? Did she take his reserved participation in the event that night as sign of wisdom and fortitude? Did she see her son—al-Fadl—in him? He was sure that she had not forgotten that night and that she considered it a promising beginning.

He had some confused feelings about the new job, however. He and the Sultan were of the same age, he thought, so he could appoint him an advisor. But what did he know about politics, government and their inner workings? What did he know about palace intrigues? The job was highly sensitive and things were not back to normal yet, Abdurrahman thought. Ibn Tafargine's return and alliance with the Bedouins was certainly a bad omen in the current circumstances.



Muhammad and Yahya had the same misgivings. The position was lucrative, they thought, and it could have been a rare opportunity not to be missed. The offer was still open; the Palace was waiting for Abdurrahman to show up. All that was good, but the family was considering all options, all possibilities. Muhammad's main concern was his brother's safety, for if things changed, Abdurrahman's escape from repercussions could not be guaranteed. He decided, therefore, to go and see Princess Lutf himself.

He met the Princess. He began by expressing gratitude to her for the trust and faithfulness she had shown. Then he said that Abdurrahman did not show up because he had been unwell, but he would be at their service as soon as he recovered.

Abdurrahman confined himself within the walls of his home once again. Everyone in town was on the look-out for what is to come. He was following the news of Ibn Tafargine's manoeuvres in the Middle Maghrib and the south. It was not long, however, before everyone came to see him assemble his supporters and lead them towards the city. They realised, with certainty now, how dangerous the man was.



Rumours spread, warning of the incomers. The Minister promised to give them free reign over people's livelihoods and women, rumours had it. People retired to their homes. The town became lifeless. No one was seen around except military units and patrols. The young Sultan, filled with fervour, urged people to fight and warned them of the barbarity of the Bedouins. He was seen everywhere, helping in all tasks. Seeing that, people remembered the great, brave sultans and realised, with certainty, that this young man deserved admiration. War-drummers began to roam around, shouting war cries, asking men to defend their homes and their king. Blacksmiths busied themselves with making and sharpening swords and spears. Arms dealers made quick deals, for no one haggled over a weapon that would save his life and keep his family and money safe.

Markets closed, and prices soared. Food and water became scarce. Anyone in possession of any money spent it on securing subsistence. Everything was pointing towards months of siege and terror. People stayed indoors, and men climbed onto the roofs, armed with spears, bows and arrows. The poor approached the houses of the rich, offering service



in exchange for food. It was going to be a decisive battle between a brave king trying to protect his throne, and a cunning minister hell-bent on dethroning the sultan and serving his own interests and ambitions.

The residents believed that the Bedouins would not be able to wait longer than a month outside the city walls before they lost patience, and then they would negotiate for some money. The Sultan had indeed sent a delegation to negotiate a secret settlement with them, sparing no lure or promise in that regard.

Ibn Tafargine, however, had an unwavering feeling that the residents would not be able to withstand a long siege. Hunger and fear would wear them out, and in that case they would have to either open the gates or seek to get rid of the Sultan.

The Minister sent a delegation to negotiate. He pretended to be concerned about people's lives and livelihoods, and about saving the city from destruction. He sent to one of the public figures in the city to carry out the secret mission. The man notified the Sultan, saying, in the form of advice, "Do not rely too much on people pretending to be your ardent supporters, Your majesty. For it has



long been said about the residents of the capital ‘a drum gathers them, and a whip scatters them’; they are easily stirred and just as easily dispersed”.

“And what do you suggest, sheikh?”

“Hunger and disease are your real enemies, so seize the opportunity and go for negotiation. This minister is very good at hatching plots. If you use the same weapon he uses, you will win the battle with him.”

“And war?”

“Costly and disastrous.”

Ibn Tafargine then wrote a letter to King al-Fadl, telling him that he did not desire to be king, nor even a minister, but that he was concerned about the integrity and prosperity of the State. He claimed that he would like to see the Hafsid Kingdom regain its glory, so they had better go for negotiation; and that if he agreed to some necessary conditions, the minister would endorse his accession to the throne. He was hoping that the Sultan would go and talk to the tribal leaders of the Bedouins. King al-Fadl had limited options. He had learned that the residents did not care who ruled over them as long as they were left to take care of their own lives in an atmosphere of stability and security. Anyone who



gave them these conditions would be their preferred choice. Since he was still at the beginning of his reign, with almost empty coffers, with his kingdom amid a sea of threats, the king decided to negotiate with the minister and his powerful followers.

The meeting place was a subject of contention. The Sultan wanted it to be inside the city markets. The Minister, however, wanted the King to come outside. The question was who would guarantee the safety of the King once he was amongst robbers and murderers?

The King's advisors and Princess Lutf were occupied by this issue. As for the King, he did not care much where the meeting was going to take place as long as it led to stability. The Minister would not fall so low as to stab him in the back, he thought. He also had a good opinion of Bedouin and their chivalrous commitment of their promises. So, he decided to go outside the city walls and meet the Minister. His mother warned him. He hugged her, and told her of assurances he had received. "I have no choice, mother. One who wears this crown must be prepared to sacrifice for it", he said.

He chose some scholars, judges and public figures



in the city for his delegation. They agreed to give ministership to Ibn Tafargine and to give money to Bedouin leaders in addition to an annual levy. Everyone thought that such agreement was possible, even though it would overburden the Treasury.

The Minister and the tribal leaders waited for the King on the outskirts of the city. Among the shops of Far and Jullaz region, tents were set up, smoke billowed, the smell of roast wafted in the air, and flags fluttered over a big tent decorated with ribbons and furnished with carpets and soft cushions. Dark-skinned men surrounded the tent; they were bare-chested and they belted their waists with their robes. Their hands were dripping blood from slaughtering sheep—some did the slaughtering, while others took charge of skinning and grilling.

The atmosphere was promising. The banquet was prepared in honour of the Sultan. The Minister and the leaders ate and waited. When the Sultan's convoy approached, cheers poured out, and the hosts burst forth to welcome the guest, filled with joy.

Behind the tent, two young men were eating meat and drinking wine. Their heads were shaven and their arms were bare. When the convoy arrived,



they took two gulps of their drink, wiped out traces of food and drink off their mouths, and stood in an outside corner of the tent, looking like guards trained to carry out special operations.

King al-Fadl looked tall, handsome and royal, giving the impression that he was one of the great emperor of old, surrounded by his guards.

Those present were dazzled by his majestic and graceful look. They bowed their heads in reverence and submission. He was smiling with confidence and when the Minister approached him to shake hands with him. Then, two shouts came out from two different sides. Everyone felt confused. The Minister fell down, with his hand stretched forward to shake the Sultan's hand. al-Fadl received two stabs. He staggered and fell over in his guards' hands.

Some people shouted, "The two drunkards! They are assassins!"

The Minister rose to his feet, unsheathed his sword and chopped off the head of one of the murderers. The second assassin looked at him with surprise and ran away, shouting "The Minister is a traitor, a murderer, a liar!".



“Arrest him. He must be punished”, The Minister called out.

“You have sacrificed your life to save mine, my Lord!” the Minister cried out, turning towards the Sultan. “I wish the stabs pierced my heart instead of you, my Lord!”

The assassin who ran away jumped onto the back of a horse and rode off. “The Minister! The Minister! A murderer! A murderer!” he shouted.

Everyone ran to the Sultan and surrounded him. He was breathing his last, with the shade of a smile on his lips. “God is great!”, his aides exclaimed. Bedouin tribal leaders exchanged looks of guilt and pain, as if what happened was a blow to their pride and honour, and went back to their tents in silence.

Had it not been for the second murderer, who escaped, shouting as he did, people would have thought that Minister was the target of the assassination.



News spread out. Hafsid palaces buzzed with activity, and dignitaries found the solution quickly. Ibn Tafargine entered the city in a battalion of Bedouin fighters. He ordered the heralds to go out



and reassure people of peace and security, and then made his way to Princess Lutf's palace. He was surrounded by Bedouin guards. He showed deep grief over the late King and offered his condolences to the Princess. She looked at him furiously, almost exploding with anger, but she suppressed her feelings. The Minister went on to talk about the drunk assassin he had beheaded in retribution for murder. About his accomplice, he was "being hunted down, and will receive his due punishment too", the Minister said.

The Princess was looking at this unrepentant villain, wishing that she could spit in his face, but, as long as she was unable to tear him limb from limb, the only thing she could do was to keep silent and show contempt. In the meantime, the Minister was proclaiming, "I shall not rest until I bring you the murderer to receive his punishment, as you deem appropriate, but that must be nothing less than spilling his blood".

He was showing signs of sadness and regret over the fact that the two drunkards fooled him and smeared his reputation, wondering how they managed to sneak among the guards. He blamed it all on the chaotic circumstances, and vowed to put an end to



all transgressions. Then he appointed a new king who was a half-brother of the deceased King and named him al-Mustanser. The new Sultan was only thirteen, so the Minister appointed himself Prince Regent until the King came of age. It was then that the whole plan became clear.

Ibn Tafargine sent alms to the poor, religious hospices, student houses, and to the city dignitaries. Then he ordered that a grand reception for the departed be held. Quran reciters and imams of religious institutions were brought in. Public figures met the obligation and joined in too. They came and offered their condolences to Ibn Tafargine and sat to talk to him about public affairs.

Muhammad Ibn Khaldun was sitting by the Prince Regent's side when the latter said in low voice, "I happened to hear of your young brother, and I wish to see him".

"Abdurrahman is awaiting your signal to be at your service whenever you have the time to see him", Muhammad continued—thinking that a new opportunity was opening up.

Servants were going around giving water infused with orange blossom to guests. Verses of the Quran



are being recited. Suddenly, distant echoes of music were heard. The music grew louder and louder. The people thought that a wedding celebration was underway. As the racket became closer, it turned clearer. Necks stretched out to look over. The Minister inquired of some servants about what was happening. A parade with a red flag in front emerged. Women were beating tambourines and singing wedding songs. Princess Lutf, stunning in every aspect from her looks to her attire, walked in, signalled to her maids to stop, and walked until she came face-to-face with the Minister. People started to contemplate the anomaly. The Princess greeted them: confident, smiling, and with a face speaking of radiant European beauty, she nodded her head and waved her hands in salutation.

People looked at one another in surprise. Lutf cried out, “You all grieve for my son on his wedding day? He is with us now! He can see us even though we can’t! He was the last knight of the Hafsid family. He would have lived if he had not been brave. In this kingdom, only cowards live. As for you, dignitaries, remember that he who helps a tyrant, will suffer at the hands of that same tyrant. That is God’s will and law”.



The Minister jumped up and cried out, “The Princess has gone mad! Lord have mercy. Take her to the asylum”.

“Come here, you despicable villain!” the Princess shouted.

The servants jumped on her, gagged her mouth, tied her hands and carried her away. Those present were shocked. They did nothing, however. They only bowed their heads, feeling sad and sorry.

The Minister sat down, pale-faced, and, in a seemingly innocent tone, said, “You have seen what burdens are in store for us in this position we have taken. May God be with us!”.

Then he gave orders for the wake to be resumed, even if, as he came to realise, it was going to be much different after what had just happened.

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Abdurrahman stayed up late that night. He was preparing himself for the next day when he was going to meet the terrible man. He thought about the right words to say and the right allusions to make. His sister Umaima checked on him every now and then, and every time she did, she checked on what



kind of clothes and perfume he was to wear. She was, like him, eager to see what would come of the meeting.

In the early morning, he looked elegant and fully prepared. His older brother thought the event was a test and an invitation to work. But Abdurrahman thought that even if his brother turned out to be right, there was not much to expect or hope for.

“You are mature enough to know what to do, and you do not need my advice.” Muhammad said on their way to the palace. “But I will only remind you of an advice that our father narrated to me from his father, May God bless both their souls! When he became a minister, our grandfather said, ‘My father once said to me by way of advice: Be serious and honest, and keep a stiff upper lip. Do not concern yourself with trifles and arguments. Beware of the gossip and plots of your employees. Be faithful to those who confide a secret in you, or entrust you with money. Do not give knowledge to those who do not deserve it, and do not show it off, for there lies the road to arrogance, which many people, especially your superiors, will not like. Always bear in mind that those in power are less knowledgeable than you, and that what they want is the sort of



knowledge that serves their ends and makes them feel superior, at the same time. Do not volunteer advice, and if you are asked to give an opinion, ascribe your opinion to the virtuous forefathers of Islam, and even then do not become too defensive of this opinion”.

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Abdurrahman entered into the Divan square, and began to contemplate the large buildings and the marble fountains. The floor was tiled with mosaic patterns that assimilated pictures of horsemen, seamen, sails, sea birds and mermaids.

There were flower beds filled with bright, variously coloured, finely arranged, fully-blooming flowers. Arches were radiant with blue marble, which looked like a sheet of glass. Towers, encircled by ceramic tiling and golden domes, stood gracefully in the morning light. At every door, there were two guards armed with spears. The doors were plated with brass. The ornamental inscriptions spoke a great deal of poetry, history and wisdom. Gypsum-made lacework and drawings revealed the work of gifted craftsmen.

Ibn Khaldun had not had the opportunity to visit



these buildings before. He remembered that when he was a child, he used to come near the doors of these buildings, and that whenever he made an attempt to get close, the guards would push him away, sometimes gently, often harshly. They always gave boys passing by a scolding and told them to walk away. But he heard terrible, horrifying stories about these quarters. These beautiful buildings, lying around like mermaids—how innocent, lively and graceful they looked! Flowers were fragrant, birds were singing, fountains were gushing water, and the colourful fort looked like shining crystals of carnelian. Everything emanated joy and happiness. Where, then, were the sighs of the oppressed, and the tortured, and where was the weeping of the knights? So many stories were told about these things! If some of these were true and not mere fiction, then he would be treading on the remains of the dead and sailing over a sea of blood! He remembered a story that his father had once told him. The story says that a Sufi saint used to walk around barefooted and dishevelled and cry out: “Prayers in a land crowded with souls are not acceptable. Those who are living here should move away from the cemetery. Those passing by should roll up their long robes to keep



them clean from blood. Don't you hear the screams of the bereaved, the cries of those suffering, and the roaring of murderers? O Lord, purify this land by earthquakes and volcanoes!"

The voice of one of the guards awoke him from his daydream. He was ushered in to the chamberlain's room, who welcomed him, offered his congratulations on the new job, and went on to examine him and check his elegant attire. He then asked him some questions about the weather, the harvest season and the impact of the plague. Ibn Khaldun could not see a connection between these questions, but he regarded them as attempts at small talk. The chamberlain then led him through some corridors and passageways. Along the way, servants wearing wide garments greeted them and bowed in deference.

The steward knocked on an imposing, silver-stripped-ebony door that was decorated and had drawings on it. Then they walked through a corridor that was tiled with layers of marble, which was so finely polished that it looked like a mirror, reflecting faces and feet, and made one fear slipping. Porcelain covered the walls. Light inlets took on interlaced forms of parallel, white designs, and from them, blue pigeons



could sometimes be seen sending their coos in to resound among the walls in sad, melodious tunes.

At the door of Minister's office stood two guards. The Minister was sitting in his soft, luxurious seat, and the Quran, verse-coloured and written in fine Maghribi calligraphy laid open in front of him. Stamps, pens and writing-books, were placed in an organised manner in front of him. As soon as the Chief Clerk announced the visitor, the Minister, who was absorbed in reciting verses from the Quran, lifted his head up and smiled.

For the first time, Ibn Khaldun saw the Minister at close quarters. He was short, well-built and had a wide, freckled face.

“Peace be upon my lord, the Minister.” Ibn Khaldun raised his hand and put it on his head and then on his chest. The Minister pretended to be busy with some unnecessary arrangements. He was eminent in form, wide-chested, broad-shouldered, and about forty years of age.

“A genuine and handsome Berber”, Abdurrahman thought. The Chief Clerk took two steps backwards, turned round, and left. The Minister signalled to the young man to sit down. He did. A servant moved



quickly to put a cup of orange juice and a perfumed, embroidered handkerchief in front of him.

He took a stealthy look at the Minister, who was looking at him with a welcoming-smile, and, from unknown direction, he detected the fragrance of agarwood and amber. Behind the Minister, he noticed, there was a frame work carrying the inscription “He who seek glory from anyone but God shall be humiliated”.

He listened again to the intermittent melodious tunes of the pigeons. The Minister looked at him again, and smiled. The young man did not know what to do or say, and, caught in the moment, made an impulsive, involuntary move of his hands.

“We, Hafside, hold special respect for the Khaldun family. They have always been on our side, and their men have always been known for their honesty, loyalty and the service of our sultans”, the Minister declared.

Abdurrahman bowed his head gratefully.

“Your father—May God have mercy on him—was one of our best friends. He never forgot the history our two families had in common. He chose the path of knowledge. He visited us on many occasions. He



was always keen to give advice to our sheikhs”, the Minister continued.

Ibn Khaldun then said, in a faint voice, “We are all at the service of the Hafsids Throne”.

“I have been informed that you have chosen to follow in the footsteps of your father, so I wanted to see you”, the Minister then said.

“And is there indeed any difference between science and politics? Both are meant to benefit people and the state”, he added.

Ibn Khaldun nodded his head in agreement with every word. The Minister smiled a lot, and the young man, out of discomfort, agreed with all he had to say.

“That is why I have chosen you for the job of Introduction Marker”, the Minister continued.

The Introduction Marker position was an old one, and the holder’s responsibility was to write introductions for letters and choose the appropriate place for the “In the Name of God” header.

The Minister headed towards the throne hall. Ibn Khaldun walked behind, thinking about the new job.

He saw a gold-plated, three-stepped throne. There



were two lines of chairs, set in parallel, and in between lay Berber and Persian carpets. Lamps lit every corner. Curtains were colourfully transparent. And perfumes filled the air.

Ibn Khaldun glimpsed a fat boy entertaining himself by sliding on the white marble and laughing loudly.

“Greetings, my lord al-Mustanser”, the Minister said, taking the initiative. The boy collected himself, ran to the royal seat, and put the crown on his head, reiterating “Father, great Father!”.

Abdurrahman remembered then the rumours that had been spreading around about the new King making him an object of ridicule. According to these rumours, he was fond of eating, excessively fat, and did not know his alphabet. But he bowed in reverence to the King, and hurried and kissed his hand, saying, “My lord, Your Majesty! God bless you with His divine support! I am at your service and at the service of this sacrosanct throne”.

The Minister introduced Ibn Khaldun to the Child-King and gave him an idea about his family. The only thing Ibn Khaldun heard from the boy was “Thank you”, however, which was repeated and even misplaced, which led Ibn Khaldun to realise



that this was one the things the boy was told to memorise.

“Our young King is the son of the last great sultan of the Hafsids family, Abu Bakr—May he rest in peace!” the Minister said. “And the royal family has nominated a person who can restore peace and prosperity to the kingdom. We are all at the service of our ancestors’ homeland”.



From the first day at work, it was clear for the young man that new horizons opened up for him, and that by the end of his first day, he would be someone different from what he was the day before. Something like mysterious magic flashed inside him showing him a flowery path ahead. And from the first day, he sensed different smells. He was working in a court that is like an underground world of bandits. The Minister was an unscrupulous pirate who would do anything to achieve his goals. He had thought of everything. He had the obstacles and the solutions ready all eventualities. He chose a boy who met his needs, and convinced his mother to be the First Lady, just as he was the Prince Regent. He was ready to rule for another twenty years, until



the titular Sultan came of age. This was the picture Ibn Khaldun saw. He realised that what he saw first-hand from the Minister was more than what he had heard about him. “He is more cunning than the Devil and more slippery than a serpent”, he thought.

All the leaders, dignitaries and clerks he saw in the Divan were waxing lyrical about the Minister and what he did. “He has saved the Kingdom, restored things to normal, and revived hope”, they said.

The man had placed his followers in all places, and his spies inside the markets and outside urban areas to bring him intelligence and watch people’s movements. Nothing was left to chance.

Ibn Khaldun realised after a while that he was chosen for the Divan work not on account of the friendship between the Minister and his father, nor in recognition of the services his family had provided to the Throne. These factors were important but they were not the real reasons. The Minister’s aim was to bring the smart young man to his service and make him one of his faithful, devoted men. He wanted to nurture him just as he was doing with the Child-King. Thus, every word he said was crucial and any gesture was to have its significance. And because he



did not come from the countryside, and therefore did not have the recklessness and talkativeness countrymen were known for, he held his tongue and kept strict watch over his manners and actions. He also cut down his contacts both inside and outside the Divan and turned to be known among his fellows for mysteriousness, seclusion and devotion to reading.

His job was simple and limited. All he had to do was to adjoin his good appearance to a chair and smile at distinguished visitors. Smart, good-looking, clear-skinned, well-spoken, and congenial—that is how he saw himself. As for the writing tasks he was given charge of, they involved repeating some rhymed expressions and fixed, memorised phrases that were meant to start off or conclude letters, requiring no great feat of ingenuity. His fellows, who only saw the arrogant side of his character, soon needed his help. There were some rare issues to be dealt with and the correct phrases needed to be found. He answered their inquiries spontaneously and without hesitation. Some of them wondered how a young man under twenty could have such a huge linguistic repertoire.

Thus he found himself in new uncharted territory,



gaining more confidence. As for al-Zaytuna Mosque classes, he never missed a class.

His fellow students were to learn of his new career, however, and soon started to avoid him and whisper in his presence. Even his old friends started to give him a cold shoulder. They saw him now as an agent of the State who reported everything back to the Divan. Muhammad Ibn Arafa al-Warghammi was one of his harshest critics. He had always viewed him as a rival in class, and this was his chance to call his intentions into question. “I have told you that this pretentious little kid seeks knowledge only to become a servant of rulers”, he would say.

“Watch out what you say in front of him! This ambitious young man might decide our future in the State!”, a fellow exclaimed.

“That is right! Most of those who made their way to the Divan in such devious manner became rulers of the State!”, said another.

“If Ibn Khaldun is following the steps of his fathers, then so be it; I am taking the path of knowledge”, Ibn Arafa insisted.

“Ibn Arafa, in governments at all times and in all places, loyalty comes first; qualification, second!”,



a third one said.

Some, laughing and looking around, to detect any eavesdroppers, said, “O Lord, save us from palace conspiracies and false testimonies!”.

Others remembered the sheikh who refused to give instruction to Ibn Khaldun because he thought he was not seeking knowledge for its own sake, as a divine pursuit, but rather to use it as a means to get to the royal court. “It looks as if that sheikh could foretell the future!”, someone said.

The only one who encouraged him and left a good impression on him was Sheikh Ibrahim al-Abili, who had an inclination towards logical and philosophical fields of knowledge. Some accused him of being a mutazilite; while others thought that he was a Shiite. But even his enemies did not dispute his high scholarly status and his authority on metaphysics and transcendental sciences. This grand Sheikh saw in Abdurrahman a clever and dedicated disciple, and expected a bright future for him. Moreover, he had some ties with the Khaldun family, so he never stopped visiting them, always showing high regard for Abdurrahman’s genius, and always thinking that such a young man should not



be thrust into palace intrigues.

Muhammad, the elder brother and family guardian, however, responded to al-Abili's speculation: "I am aware of what you are thinking about, Sheikh. But I saw some worries in Abdurrahman's eyes, and I wanted to divert him from these worries by getting him engaged in this work and keeping him busy until he grows up and gains strength".



Abdurrahman had some reservations about governmental clerks, but that did not stop him from being friends with some of them. A translator named Paulo was probably one of the few he trusted.

Paulo was ten years Abdurrahman's senior, and always dressed in the Genoan fashion. He was as an interpreter for foreign delegates and consuls, and a translator of incoming correspondence. He often accompanied delegations to European kingdoms. He was known amongst his fellows for his spontaneity and cheerfulness. Some sort of anxiety worked him up, however; he could not bear staying in one place for long, and hated books and ideas. In spite of this, he had a liking for Abdurrahman.

Abdurrahman, for his part, took a liking to the other



side of this friendly Christian. He, Abdurrahman thought, was noisy and talkative, given to idle amusement by looking into people's faults and shortcomings, and was always inclined to look on the bright side of life. Sometimes, he needed Abdurrahman to help him translate some expressions into Arabic.

Paulo made every effort to get this young man out of solitude. He would always try to lure him into going out for a stroll to cheer him up. He visited the family home once, and was surprised by the family library. Books were everywhere, reaching up to the ceiling. "Have you read all these books, my poor friend?" he asked.

Ibn Khaldun laughed indicated that he had indeed, while Poalo laughed uncontrollably.

"You are, then, given to asceticism before your time. a Muslim priest, so to speak".

"This complex life and it disasters can be overcome only by laughter. Life is only a moment in the time span of the universe, and to waste a portion of this moment on sighs is a waste of time. All we have is the present, so let us celebrate it before we are gone, or it is gone", he added, in a serious tone.



Abdurrahman laughed and said, “You are Epicurean, aren’t you?”

“And who is that?”

“The philosopher of pleasure—a Greek who came before us, thousands of years ago”.

The Christian quarter lay north of the sheep market. It was known for its active community. Some of its men took charge of training the Hafsid army, and others were mercenaries who joined the army in exchange for handsome wages. In this neighbourhood lived small traders and many craftsmen. Because it assembled people from almost all Euro-Mediterranean countries, it was densely populated. A great deal of freedom was there, and women walked in streets in full makeup with their hair uncovered. It was home to the most beautiful blond women. That was the reason why the area was the target of ne’er-do-wells as well as rich young men, especially at night. The place was famed for its abundance of wines, restaurants, and the tempting services of its women.

Abdurrahman frequented the place as a young boy. He and his gang would often get into fights with local boys. Fierce battles which involved pushing



shoving, projectiles, and even rock slings would break out. Abdurrahman and his friends were kicked out of the neighbourhood every time that happened.

This evening, however, he was visiting his single friend Paulo, who knew the secrets of the region and was highly respected by the community for being one of the Sultan's scribes. He helped members of his community in getting their government business sorted and spared them paying heavy bribes on many occasions; and they, in return, held him in high esteem.

Because his young guest was a dignitary and one of the Sultan's scribes, Paulo wanted to make sure to tantalise his attention, so he walked him by the taverns, inns and places of fun. Leading him on to the square, he left him among a group of girls. He introduced him and the girls surrounded him and started asking him questions about Arab women, the head-cover, polygamy and harem palaces. The most beautiful woman in the group, and the one that caught his attention, then came forward. "Why can a Muslim man marry a Christian woman, while a Muslim woman cannot marry a Christian man?" she asked.



He realised that it would have been difficult to engage in arguments about religious jurisprudence with them. So he ascribed these issues to Islamic customs and to the concern for the well-being of women, as the weaker party in the family. The debate carried on for a long time and he started to look around with some apprehension. Seeing that, Paulo assured him that everything was fine.

At the end, when they were leaving, the girls asked Ibn Khaldun to visit again. Smiling and giving them prolonged, attentive looks, he promised he would.

Paulo then took him to a spacious house that was bustling with activity—the smell of cooking wafted everywhere, and maids went to and fro carrying food plates and wine bottles. “You are my guest today, Abdurrahman!” he said in a friendly tone.

Abdurrahman looked embarrassed as he thought that he recognised some of the faces. Paulo chose a secluded place for him. As they sat, he pointed to a dark corner, and whispered, “Look at that man there. It is Abu Abdulnafe’ al-Muwahhedi”.

Abdurrahman was not familiar with the name, so Paulo added, “Abu Abdulnafe’ is the chief Treasurer, and he is the one commissioned by the State to



collect the wine tax. As for the person sitting with him, that is Bisho, the sales contractor. The third person is the pastor of the Genoese”.

“They are making a commercial transaction then”, Ibn Khaldun whispered.

Nodding, Paulo said, “The Hafsid treasurer has taken hold of legume, food stocks, clay, soap, salt, even tobacco. He gives stocks out only to those who pay bribes, openly or behind closed doors”.

“In the western Maghrib, trading in wine is prohibited”, said Ibn Khaldun.

“Your kingdom is known to have a greater degree of tolerance,” explained Paulo. “And the European community might have made it easier to have proscribed commodities here. Besides, wine brings in thousands of gold dinars to the Treasury”.

“It is gold that matters, my friend—gold, which legitimises what is illegitimate and makes what is legitimate unlawful!”, Paulo added, laughing.

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The atmosphere was agreeable, and the air was refreshing. As for Paulo’s stories, they were endless. He had visited a lot of places: Naples, Genoa,



Venice and Malta. But the stories he told were only about romantic adventures or things of similar kind. He had a wide experience in this field. His memory only held tales of women's scandals, adultery, and indecent, funny jokes.

The serious mood Ibn Khaldun had taken on vanished. He took to the atmosphere and began to laugh loudly. Things went on very well, until a fight in the place spoiled the mood. Two drunk men gripped their weapons and engaged in a duel in the square, which was full of seats and visitors. People retreated and took shelter under the tables. The combatants began to throw plates and glassware at each other. Cries burst forth. The fighting went unabated until four private guards interfered. Their large muscles and the blue tattoos on their chests told of their daunting power and violence. They quickly disarmed the two drunk men, and threw them out.

This incident alerted Ibn Khaldun to the fact that it was late at night. He asked for permission to leave and said, humorously:

“Remind me next time to bring all sorts of weapons, including arrows and shields!”



Outside, they found the two drunk men still fighting, but without weapons this time. They continued to fight until they were completely exhausted. They were severely wounded and bled badly. Loiterers and curious busybodies were there, however. They had a chance to kill time, so they went shouting and cheering, urging them to fight “to the last drops of sweat and blood”.

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The city regained its stability after years of chaos, and people were optimistic that peace would continue. Even the Bedouins calmed down and stopped to cause trouble. The Minister had indulged them with money and land; hence, they took full control of the lands they had and the fruits they produced.

As for those who looked at the Minister’s intentions with suspicion, they stopped their smear campaign: Ibnu Tafargine has achieved peace and rid the State of threats and internal troubles.

Yet, something simple still disturbed peace in the new atmosphere namely, the struggle between the city and the desert, which imposed itself on the ongoing social changes.



The plague had had drastic effects even after it vanished: thousands died, populated areas were swept away, and a good many of the city's population died. Its impact on men was more severe. Villages were affected too and many villagers died. Survivors deserted their villages and emigrated to the city to seek a living. After a few months, the capital was surrounded by slums made up of tents, huts and stables everywhere. As soon as one went out of the city walls, one came to confront a wretched, miserable landscape. Sick children were seen everywhere, crushed by poverty. Their bellies swelled, their muscles withered, their heads were carried by skeleton-like bodies, their skin was dehydrated, and their eyes sunk into their skulls.

Every morning, a crowd of beggars would stand in front of the city walls and wait for the gates to open. Villagers, with stinking odours and wearing patched rags, would push about, jostle, struggle and stampede each other on their way to the gates. As soon as the guards gave permission to get in, an enormous mass of people would flood in, making the city look like an occupied territory. Quarrels, swearing and beggary were rampant, and so were prostitution, plundering and theft.



The impact of the plague on the city was severe and painful: it left behind thousands of widows and unmarried women, let alone the mental and emotional problems it caused. Head-covered women used to live in peace and prosperity, but now they had lost their men and, with them, their livelihoods. They were facing poverty, humiliation and disgrace, but they could do nothing about that. Thus, prostitution became rife. Villagers ran after city women, and the results were seen quickly: many an illegitimate child was left behind, and many were to be picked up every morning by garbage collectors. The situation confused judges, so they ordered heralds and religious orators to urge people to seek legal marriage, and to encourage city women to be married to villagers. Polygamy became an urgent need necessitated by the difficult state of affairs. Problems of a different sort emerged from these relationships, however: the delicacy of city women collided with the rough, coarse manners of the Bedouins. Villagers inhibited women from wearing ornate, flashy clothes and perfumes. The criterion of beauty for them came to be what they used to see in the desert—the hardworking woman with cracked heels, rough hands and dishevelled



hair. Marital rows, divorce and domestic violence spread and became common phenomena, which impelled religious orators, once again, to call for intimacy between couples and encourage them to seek a peaceful life based on mutual affection, patience and tolerance.



Ibn Khaldun's family was satisfied with his career prospects. In the two years that followed his employment, the country's conditions improved, and people regained their peace of mind. The Minister proved to be competent at steering government. He kept watch on everything and never slept before reports came to him from all directions. Dissenting voices waned for what else would they want other than peace, security and being left to mind to their own affairs? Things went on in a normal manner. Even the Hafsids who were against the Minister retreated and took to silence and waiting.

The Minister gave generously to the Bedouins. Offerings, gifts and landed property were lavished on them, and they were given a free rein over the areas they settled in. Some counsellors said to the Minister: "Why don't you treat the Bedouins as you



treat the State itself? They are getting more levies than the State.”

“Are we, in effect, stronger than the Marinid State and its prospective sultan? Don’t you remember how the Bedouins defeated him three years ago?” the Minister replied.

As for the Child King, he reached the age of fifteen, having grown more obese and more gluttonous. Seeing this, the Minister did fall short of attending to his needs, providing him with a special kitchen, staffed by the most famous chefs cooking the most delicious dishes. The King, for his part, would always invite children of his age to join him at the dining-table. This being the case, some of the city’s cynics exclaimed, “Have you ever happened to see a Sultan give himself up to his stomach?”.

Some indignant voices wrote on a wall two lines of poetry that were once produced by one of the weak Abbasid caliphs, whose case was similar to that of the Hafsids Sultan’s:

What a wondrous time this is, that someone like me cannot get hold of the meanest things!

Yet in my name, the whole world is owned, though none of it is in my hands.



As soon as the royal aides took notice of the writing, they covered it with gypsum and set special guards to keep an eye on walls and watch al-Zaytuna Mosque students. Their plan was to ask any suspect to write something and then catch the culprit by recognising his handwriting.

The Minister used students, whom he had lured with gifts, to watch their fellow-students and report what people were talking about.

Abdurrahman was given the task of making summaries of the incoming reports sent by spies, so that Ibn Tafargine could get informed of the most important stories. He was displeased. He found the new job difficult, even though the Minister promised him to find someone else to do the task instead.

“Is this the dream I have devoted my life to?” he wondered bitterly.

He held several licences from grand religious figures. He had read hundreds of books. Had he done all that to be a pawn on the Minister’s chessboard? Did he do all that to be a writer for a child-sultan and work for a minister who cares about nothing but his own image?

He expressed his dismay and disgust at a family



gathering, and spoke so much of the loathsome situation. He was frustrated and dispirited, but he had to do what he was doing to avoid being blacklisted.

Muhammad always tried to console his brother, laying the blame on the change of circumstances and the loss of ethics.

Muhammad thought marriage was the remedy, so he started to press it on his brother, and, being of the opinion that women can do what men cannot, he suggested the idea to Thurayya, so as to try to bring him round to it.

Thurayya began to call on them frequently, and whenever she did, she would have a prolonged talk with Abdurrahman, who liked her company, but ignored her allusions. She borrowed books from him, discussed their content with him, and, on many occasions, asked him to decipher some intricate ideas for her, which would give the sitting a special flavour.

“A gold merchant has asked for my hand,” she said one day.

He stared at her, and then said, “And do you like him?”



She moved her head in disapproval and said, “He has a lot of money, but a little learning”.

Grasping the point, he laughed.

“Are you looking for someone who has devoted his life to books and trouble?”

“If I like someone, I would not worry about any trouble.”

“Even if he turns out to be the sort of man that cares more about books than he does about his wife, and more about ink than about his children?”

“His books would be a treasure, and his ink a perfume.”

“He might go far away! He might not bear living in one place.”

“I will follow him like his shadow, and as long as I am with him, he will be my family and my home.”

He said nothing, and gave her a contemplative look. Her cheeks blushed.

“Given his conditions, do you have any on your part?” he then said.

“That there be no other spouse to share him with me”, she said.



When he uttered the magical words, she had a fervent desire to hug him, and was on the verge of doing so, but she held herself in check and rushed home.

Muhammad was not less happy when he received the news. “Women hold the keys to men’s hearts”, he said to his wife and gave orders for wedding arrangements to be made.



Abdurrahman received a letter from his friend al-Malaqi containing a description of the Marinid Sultan that read thus:

“Abu Anan is keener than his father on having poets, men of letters, and scholars around. His salon has all that is grand and beautiful. He is the bravest, most ambitious of the Marinid rulers—he says to his advisers that he will achieve what his father could not.”

One after the other, the three brothers pondered over what that letter could mean. In conclusion, they all agreed that al-Malaqi was warning them of another invasion, one that will be the most dangerous and most threatening to their country. “If such news went around, the State would be thrown into panic.



Prices would soar, and the Minister would be forced to hasten in collecting taxes and even increasing the forthcoming ones”, Muhammad said. Abdurrahman and his brothers wanted to seek counsel from Ibrahim al-Abili, who used to visit them every now and then when the occasion arose.

Every Thursday evening, the Khalduns’ salon would be a meeting place for the elite who would discuss scientific and social issues and exchange views on the latest developments in the State. The Bedouins were always a subject of discussion. Visitors told stories of the Bedouins’ life, wars, and influence they had on the regions of North-West Africa since the Hilali Invasion three centuries ago.

There was a unanimous agreement that the Bedouins were the major obstacle to stability in Africa. As long as they had the final say in deciding matters and as long as they were allowed to blackmail, vandalise, and renege on their promises, there will be no stability, no prosperity, no farming, no trade, nor even science.

As soon as Sheikh Ibrahim arrived at the Khalduns’ salon, everyone jumped to welcome him. But he was not in his usual mood. He looked heavyhearted and



slow-moving. It looked as if he was carrying some news that he was unwilling to announce. He praised the assembly and thanked the hosts, with whom, as he said, he spent the most beautiful years of his life, the years that bear his most pleasant memories.

People began to look at each other, for such things were rarely said on such occasions; they were usually said only as openings to something else that is to follow. And that was the case indeed. Ibrahim al-Abili had received an invitation from Sultan Abu Anan and he was to say his farewell and leave soon.

Everyone was deeply touched, and it showed on their faces, especially Abdurrahman, who was most painfully affected. Sheikh al-Abili was his spiritual teacher and the only remaining respectable man at al-Zaytuna University for him. Once again, he faced shattering grief and loss. He remembered the sheikhs who died in the plague, the ones who drowned in the sea, and those who survived and settled in the City Fez. For the Marinid State was the strongest and wealthiest. And it was the most feared and most stable. Even if there were some differences between members of the royal family, these differences were dealt with and settled immediately. All these thoughts came to Abdurrahman's mind—it was as if



he was swimming against a strong tide.

His brother Muhammad had a feeling of the agony he was going through, so he asked Sheikh al-Abili to return to them. The Sheikh moved his head doubtfully, however, as if he were saying, “How long do I have left?”



The Minister considered al-Malaqi’s letter carefully. He had asked to see it himself to take a look at the hidden warning it contained. He held an urgent meeting with military leaders. Then he sent his messengers to Bedouin leaders to let them know that he wanted to hold a meeting with them. The messages were sent to the Ku’oubs, Abi el-Leils, Muhalhels and Hakims. He wanted to renew the coalition that defeated Abul-Hasan, so he told them about the evil intentions and evil designs Abu Anan, the son of the former king, had for them. They vowed to make him meet the same fate as his father.

The Minister knew the Bedouins very well, and he was not deceived by such oaths and promises, nor even by the coalition. Nothing was unexpected of those people: they united and broke off without a clear reason. But he lavished his presents and



promises on them excessively. He gave them stretches of fertile land and other, new expanses of property and gave them free rein over their revenues.

Cautious as ever, he also made arrangements for hosting Sheikh Ibrahim al-Abili. He welcomed him, made him a close companion, praised him, paid his travel expenses, and gave him a purebred horse as a gift. He made sure Abdurrahman was there too, for he knew how close Abdurrahman and his family were for the Sheikh. The Sheikh praised the Minister's generosity with total sincerity. "My lord, you are the pillar of this State, and your favours over our people cannot be denied", he said.

"Not at all.", the Minister said. "You are worthy of honour and hospitable reception. We are at the service of scholars. We can never forget the enlightenment you created at al-Zaytuna Mosque! You students are our children and they are the apple of our eye! We are all indebted to you. May God reward you! And if it weren't for my love and respect for Sultan Abu Anan, I would have asked you to stay with us, but an invitation from a Sultan is an honour and prestige not to be missed".

The Minister went on to talk elaborately about what



he had done in order to tend the State and give peace and security to people. Then he mentioned in passing that he was planning to send Abdurrahman as a messenger to the Sultan of Morocco, and that the reason he chose him was that he was young, like the Sultan, and had sheikhs that respected him, and friends such as al-Malaqi.

Ibn Tafargine then said, “This is a happy coincidence! As soon as I knew of your departure, I said, ‘The Sheikh would be the best ambassador. I would not find a better, more knowledgeable, or more respectable person to carry my message’”.

In this way, Ibn Tafargine was trying to hit several birds with one stone. Ibn Khaldun was surprised with the suggestion. The Minister had been thinking about it, but he did not give him the chance to take notice. “He probably took this decision on the spur of the moment,” he thought “for this man is so more cunning than a devil”. A great table of delicious, exquisite food was laid. The Sultan busied himself with food and nothing else. He did not speak of anything. All he was busy with was trying the different dishes. The others’ concern, in contrast, was to make him happy. Abdurrahman, for his part, would every now and then take a stealthy look at



his teacher, and they both would exchange a quick signal that would suffice to say everything they wanted to share.

When it was time to leave, the Minister said, “I will have the letter ready a day before you set off on your journey. Abdurrahman will compose it, and I will discuss its contents with my advisors. Whatever happens, however, you, our virtuous Sheikh, will be a permanent representative of this good land, and I am sure that you will spare no effort at the Sultan’s court to defend your people and work to drive threats away from them. Let our friend Sultan Abu Anan know that the coalition that brought the Marinids and the Hafsids together is still in force”.

He then turned to Abdurrahman and said, “You must be going to send a letter with the Sheikh to your friend al-Malaqi. Give him my thanks and regards. One day, God willing, you must visit them to convey my gifts and messages to them. All those friends who have served the State will be rewarded”.



al-Abili and Abdurrahman left the royal quarters in the afternoon. It was January, so they wrapped themselves in two camel-hair burnouses, for the



cold of the month was hard to bear if accompanied by rain and wind.

The Sheikh looked no different from a traditional teacher, except with regard to the great extent of knowledge he had. Putting on a burnouse, a jubbah and a mantle, he looked huge, fat, pot-bellied, and big-headed. In spite of all that, however, he was thin-haired as many Andalusian people were known to be.

They descended from the lane leading to the royal quarters. Students and public figures stopped them every now and then to ask about the journey, and were all sad and upset, but in the end, there was nothing for them to do except say their farewells and wish the Sheikh good health, safety and a long life.

Walking beside his teacher, Abdurrahman, who was the most shaken, felt so sad. This could be the last time he saw this man who had devoted his life to enlightening minds and spreading knowledge. “How horrible that would be!”, he thought. The idea was so scary and so menacing that he wondered: “Am I now walking in the funeral of this man? Is the noblest, wisest, and most modest man of his age



leaving for good?”. The idea was so painful that he was close to tears as he pondered it. For even if he were to live long, he thought, it would be difficult for them to see each other again. Soon the great teacher would be only a dear memory. In a few days’ time, he would be gone forever. Who would fill his place, with his majestic, overflowing air of greatness, nobility, and scholarship? Such peerless individuals were rarely seen in this world, in which true scholars are too few; pretenders, too many!

In the book market, where books filled the shops and the smell of ink filled the air, book fans were coming and going asking about the new books and about what was available for sale. Abdurrahman and his teacher came to see the chief of papermakers, who, wanting to see off the Sheikh in his own special way, gave him as a gift a copy of the latest book from Egypt and another of a book from Andalusia.

When they were in the private chamber, Abdurrahman said, “Sheikh, you are an astrologist. What do the celestial bodies tell you?”.

“Star casts foretell of a great rebel in the East who will overthrow all thrones and fill lands with blood and bodies”, he replied.



“Is this his due time, sir?”

“No, he is expected appear in fifty years’ time. But only God knows”.

“Will he come to our territory?”

The Sheikh looked at Abdurrahman, smiled, and then said, “He will, and you will get to meet him yourself, Abdurrahman”.

“Here?”

“Your horoscope says that you are of a fiery nature and that you will travel far and never be able to settle on in one place. God knows best, though.”



A few days after the grand teacher left, Abdurrahman headed towards al-Zaytuna Mosque, and attended some classes, but he did not find what he was looking for. There were a lot of teachers shouting, but all they said was boring, old ideas. There he remembered the great scholars and felt nostalgic for the old days, when classes would be crowded with attendees from all ages: old and young. All were students, and all were there to listen and take notes. Those classes, at the grand mosque, attracted all people, regardless of their age. There was no



age check, and attendance was not compulsory. Knowledge and learning were open to all. The mosque was a free, open university. Students could attend the classes they liked, and if someone wanted to get a certificate from a particular sheikh, he could, but he had to attend all his classes and then sit an exam that would be especially designed for him. If he proved that he had good knowledge in the field and passed the exam, he would get the certificate, which would enable him to teach in any country he chose.

All these thoughts came to his mind as he listened to the loud, mingled voices of teachers, none of whom, he thought, could match Sheikh Ibrahim nor those who were wiped out by the plague.

He was surprised to see Ibn Arafat taking a teacher's seat. The mosque's board has commissioned some distinguished students to fill in the vacant positions. "This young man," he thought, "is more qualified than all the others, especially in the fields of narration-based sciences".

When he went out to the mosque's courtyard, he found many of his fellows talking about the same things that preoccupied him. Like him, they were



expressing their dismay at the way the teaching was being carried out. Some were optimistic about the future of the new teachers, however. One of those optimists was al-Ghafiqi, who said, “Don’t you agree that those high-achievers deserve a celebration?”.

The idea was met with general approval, and the majority greeted it with enthusiasm. At the beginning, most wanted the ceremony to be held in the mosque courtyard in order to tell the sheikhs there that a new generation was taking over. Some others saw in that an act of ingratitude. al-Ghafiqi, however, and for reasons known to only himself, wanted the event to take place in the open air, away from the noise and commotion of the city. Ibn Khaldun then came forward and expressed his desire to welcome them to the family country estate in Mirnaq. They liked the idea, especially because it was spring time. Abdurrahman shocked them when he told them that he had already invited some of the Divan clerks to celebrate the advent of spring in the estate, which left the students with a hard choice: they had to accept the company of the Divan people or agree on another, different day.

Students, throughout time, often hold idealised ideas about rulers. Realities, however, are often



disappointing. That is why students often view those close to the centre of power with suspicion and consider them spies who can never be trusted. This was the view held by Ibn Arafa because Bedouins had for so long suffered oppression and injustice at the hands of rulers. Abdulbaqi, whose views were respected among his friends, showed enthusiasm for the celebration. He thought that that was an opportunity to meet the clerks and establish good connections with them, for, as all knew, getting a job after graduating was in the hands of these people, who were the closest to decision-makers.

In March, nature takes a most beautiful form, and the fields wear a green, colourful dress. This year spring was no different. Rain had been abundant, and the meadows were filled with bounties. The weather was mild. But something else distinguished the season this year. The stability the country was blessed with—after years of unrest—yielded its own bliss, so people ventured outside the city walls to enjoy this opportunity, which was not within reach before these years of stability and peace.

In the silt-enriched plains of Mirnaq, the meadows were filled with fragrance, the crops were ripe, and trees wore their blossom proudly like crowns. At



the beginning of these plains, on the western side of Mount Bou Kornine, the twin-peaked mountain, lay a spacious estate that sat in the mount's shadow in the morning and took fresh air from the sea in the evening. That was the Khalduns estate.

Bou Kornine was strange in its structure. Its peaks were unlike any other mountain summits. That was why it was a landmark for the capital, which was known for this mountain in the same way that the mountain was known for the capital. That being the case, it was not strange to hear some fairy-tales told about it. What was still strange about it, nonetheless, was that, alongside the other peculiarities, it sat next to a mountain that was completely bare. Djebel Ressay, the mountain of lead, stood in complete contrast to Bou Kornine, with its everlasting dark green foliage.

The distance was not long, no more than five leagues, and walking it on a calm spring day was good exercise and a chance to have a good time. Thus, the students chose to go on foot. On the way, their loud, heated, non-stop debates were to be heard. Many a time, however, someone would break into a song, and echoes went reverberating among the hills and valleys. Oftentimes, poetry quizzes



and contests were taking place, opening the door to more light-hearted squabbles.

Farmers in nearby farms stood to watch the passing group and greet them, for students of the Grand Mosque were held in high esteem by all people. It was a common belief that being hospitable and respectful towards students led to divine reward and blessing. Hence, it was not uncommon for women to ask students to pray for a sick child or ask for advice for an ailing old man. al-Ghafiqi in particular was absorbed in giving advice and writing prayers and prescriptions. He was carrying with him *Zad al-Musafir*, or Provisions for the Traveller, a handy medical book by the famous physician Ibn al-Jazzar.

Riding their animals, the Divan clerks shouted their greetings whenever they caught up with the students, and whenever that happened, voices went quiet and compliments broke out. Upon arrival at the village, the different groups dispersed and made their way into shade or went for lying on the grass. Grills were set up quickly, and fire was lit in preparation for the roast. Abdurrahman took on the role of host and set out to oversee the cooking, give advice and recommendations, and make small talk with people. In the meantime, those students who had



the experience for such occasions set out to carry out chores, while some others preferred reading and solitude. The majority, however, thought that that was an unmissable chance and set, on that account, to make the most of it and have fun, and they did. Paulo, for his part, had been trying from the beginning to make the atmosphere less serious. He hated talking about the sheiks and their classes, so he started asking some questions that were meant to steer the conversation away from such issues.

al-Ghafiqi and Abdulbaqi made their way to the foot of the mountain. Abdulbaqi was carrying a bow and arrows. He was fond of hunting. al-Ghafiqi was looking for medical herbs.

Ibn Arafa was listening from a distance to the clamour of the students who were preparing food while others were playing the flute or singing. Paulo, for his part, was talking about his adventures in European lands. When he finished, he said, “Who knows the story of these two mountains? Don’t you see how the Mountain of Lead has taken off its clothing in the face of Twin Peaks?”

The smell of food started to waft throughout the area. Someone then said, “We have heard the story



from our mothers. It was the story we preferred when we were children”.

The noise faded away and attention was drawn to what the speaker was saying. Even Ibn Arafa listened attentively from a distance. The speaker went on to say, “Only God knows what lies beyond—and more. It has been claimed, however, that the plains of Mirnaq were once covered with sea water, and only mountain peaks were left to be seen above water surface. At that time, the story says, there lived a strong, well-built fisherman with his beautiful wife who used to take care of him and sometimes help him in his fishing. One day, pulling out his fishing net, the man found a woman of unmatched beauty. She told him that she was a mermaid, that she was married with a baby that was awaiting her return. She begged him to let her go, but he did not. He was smitten by her beauty. He did not reveal that to his wife, however. Rather, he told her that the mermaid knew about treasures in the sea and in land, and that he would not set her free until she had revealed these treasures to them”.

“His wife was a woman of good nature, and it could be said that she was rather naïve, for she believed everything her husband said. She thought that he



was looking for the treasure for the sake of their unborn children, and, on that account, helped him build a pond at the top of the mountain to keep the mermaid in it, as the mermaid would die if she went out of water. The man asked the mermaid to convert the mountain summit into gold, but that was not within the range of her powers, so the mermaid suggested instead that she make him and his wife the happiest couple in that part of the world. His response was, however, ‘My real happiness lies in having you with me for the rest of my life’.

“The fisherman lured his wife into eating sleep-inducing herbs so that whenever she fell asleep at night, he would sneak out to see the captive and try to seduce her. One day, his wife could not sleep, so when he left, she followed him and heard his attempts. The mermaid said, ‘Your wife is a good, faithful woman, and she deserves better treatment from you.

“If you agree to marry me, I will make her your servant’, he said.”

“Horrified by what she heard, the woman went back. She was so sad, so distressed, and so offended that she came to have a strong feeling of hatred for her



husband. She set the mermaid free and apologised to her. Finally, she confronted her treacherous husband and took an oath not to allow him to touch her ever again. He was infuriated by the response, and beat her violently. He then chained her and tortured her, sparing nothing that would inflict pain on her. She lost the will to live and managed to rolled over, with her chains, to the sea side seeking to commit suicide. The mermaid came over, however, and asked her if she wanted to take revenge on her disloyal husband. ‘I want him to stay away from me, naked, and always begging for my forgiveness’, was her reply, and she was granted her wish. The mermaid took the treacherous husband and cast him onto the top of the Mountain of Lead, where he was left naked, begging for his wife’s mercy. She, on the other hand, would only look at him from this place—this mountain—and rest her back on the bank of the pond. Time passed on, but faithfulness did not desert her. Her breasts remained as a sign of her faithfulness. Her husband, together with that Mountain of Lead, remained naked. At the end, the trees, answering to her faithfulness, acted in sympathy and covered her”.

The students laughed at the tale, and the narrator



went on to say that if they looked carefully, they would see a stone that was like a statue on Djebel Ressay, and that it looked as if the figure was still begging for the unattainable pardon! Someone then said jokingly, “Twin Peaks, then, was known as the Twin Breasts!”.

Ibn Arafah then came forward. “The myth is a remnant from pagan times, and these mountains are no more than pegs without which the earth would always be shaking with earthquakes and volcanoes”, he objected.

Suddenly, shouts and calls for help were heard in the distance. Everyone looked towards the woods and remembered their two friends who went in. They ran towards the foot of the mountain shouting until they found al-Ghafiqi carrying Abdulbaqi, who was suffering from some wounds. They learned that Abdulbaqi was aiming an arrow at a stag, but hit a wild boar instead. The animal went mad, and ran towards the source of danger. Abdulbaqi, shot another arrow at the boar which helped slow it down. Had he not done so, the beast would have torn through his waist. The animal, only managed to bite his thigh. An atmosphere of confusion and worry spread among the students. They joined hands and



carried the injured man away. al-Ghafiqi set to dress the wounds. They had high hopes for a nice day out, but that incident spoiled it.



Preparations for Abdurrahman's wedding day, which was desired to come as soon as possible, were underway. As for Abdurrahman himself, he was never so open about marriage as he was now. His family, for its part, was looking forward to the day with much enthusiasm, and so were the people of the Andalusian quarter. All were looking forward to a wedding party that would bring joy and happiness back to the hearts of women and children after the years of tragedy and pain.

Even the bride was kept out of sight, and had, as customs in the capital had it, to be fattened up. Hence she had to stick to her room, wherein she would have her skin coated with special pastes to polish it and make it soft and radiant; be fed on honey, fruits and rusk. Old women prepared her for the wedding day, and encouraged her to keep out of sight and to eat as much sweet and fatty food as possible.

The awaited event was getting closer day by day.



Some bad news, however, has reached the capital. Abu Zeid al-Hafsi, Governor of Constantine, sent a threatening letter to Minister Ibn Tafargine. In the letter, the Minister and his “puppet sultan” were asked to leave town, for the “serpent’s game was over”, as the letter had it.

The Minister, his aides, allies, supporters—all were on the move. The letter put them on high alert. The letter was scrutinised carefully, and different views and expectations came out. At the end, people realised that the Minister would fight Abu Zeid and. Thus, he moved on to meet as many people as he could in order to know who was on his side and who was against him.

Signs of life soon disappeared, and people set out to look for what would give them and their families and livelihoods the best means of protection and security. Secret messages came in to some dignitaries and public figures from Abu Zeid asking them to pave the way for him and convince the Minister to surrender. The situation was confusing, and rumours began to spread.

In their private discussions, people wished that the Minister would give in and leave peacefully. For



them, there was no difference between one ruler and another. The sense of panic and alarm intensified, for Constantine was a strong emirate, and its ruler, Abu Zeid al-Hafsi, was an impeccable, powerful, unwavering ruler who had never went wrong in his political moves. What's more, people accused Ibn Tafargine of cheating and deception, so it was not strange or unexpected to see in Abu Zeid a true legitimacy that was not to be compared with the mischievous tricks and plots of the Minister.

Muhammad Ibn Khaldun, like any other dignitary, was asked to give an opinion on the ongoing developments. He was an influential person but the situation did not concern him as much as the future of his brother, Abdurrahman, did. He was thinking about what it would be like when Abu Zeid conquered the city triumphantly. What would become of his brother then? he wondered, and what were people going to say about the Khalduns if he were to be sent to prison?

The family began to think of what was to be done after they learned that some dignitaries and public figures had fled the town and joined the invading army. News continued to come with specific information about the preparations of the new



army. The conqueror's messengers, coming to town stealthily, spread rumours designed to cause despair and hopelessness in the hearts of the inhabitants. The Minister's men, in their turn, tracked down those agents and arrested them. They hanged them outside city gates. Everything spoke of a saddening situation. There were going to be victims there. That is the nature of things. Every change has its victims.

The Divan turned into a crowded place, full of visitors and volunteers. The Minister enlisted the poor people who lived outside the city in his army, and some personnel were commissioned to train them for battlefield fighting. Arms dealers came from Europe to offer their merchandise at excessive prices.

Taxes were raised, and confiscation increased. Anyone who happened to show a sign of grievance or criticism, would be asked, "Which is better, to pay a small amount to soldiers to protect you and your money, or to have it all taken by force by the invaders?"

Everyone knew that this was an exaggeration. For he who sacrificed money and blood for the sake of conquering a country would not treat its people as



enemies, and would not provoke hostilities. Rather, they would want to live with them and establish a stable, peaceful rule over their land.

News came in that the new conqueror and his army had started towards the city. Exaggerated reports about the army and its power came in too. People in the know said to the Minister, “It would be better to meet the invaders outside the city, where an army will be facing an army. That is better than waiting here, inside urban and inhabited areas, under siege, with all the possibilities of chaos and plots involved.

Abdurrahman was on the list of those who were to go with the Minister, which added to his family’s confusion and embarrassed his in-laws. The bride getting ready, and her friends were around her singing and enjoying the occasion; the bridegroom was going to a war of unknown, unforeseen consequences! What will people say other than that she was a bad omen? A solution that would be satisfactory to both parties was not expected—there was only a dim hope of finding such a solution.

Abdurrahman deliberated on the strange situation he was in: the war was spoiling his wedding plans,



a tyrant Minister was playing with people's lives and futures, the war was to be fought without the experience and skills needed, he might be killed by a stray arrow or in a raid by blood-thirsty horsemen seeking loots. He thought about the wickedness and vulgarity of the Bedouins, about the intentions of other states to subdue the capital and take control of it, and about the fat child-Sultan and the deceitful Minister. As for the war, he thought that it was decided in favour of Abu Zeid, a view that was held by most people, regardless of the noisy pretences and deceptive appearances. He went on to wonder about what kind of fate was awaiting him. What would become of him if the capital was taken by Abu Zeid? he wondered, and would the new people in power forgive him and overlook his services to the tyrant Minister? He imagined himself on trial as if he had been a perjurer.

All possibilities were painful.

He finally glimpsed a light at the end of the tunnel. He asked himself what tied him to this town, against whom were allied all evil powers, from fatal epidemics to rulers' lusts. What was the attraction? He should get out of this dilemma, he thought. He was still in the prime of his life, his store of



knowledge was large, and the God's earth was wide and spacious. Probably this war was a chance for freedom, liberty and setting things in motion?

Bidding his farewells to Abdurrahman, Muhammad, who was deeply touched, said, "Brother, this war cannot be won, so take care of yourself. All signs say that the Minister will lose his head, and that would be a just reward for the wicked acts he committed".

Abdurrahman, meanwhile, was thinking, "I will throw myself into the unknown. I will learn how to be the maker of my own destiny. I will not wait for fate to happen. The current situation has broken the wall of fear. No more fear, and no more hesitation! Every cloud has a silver lining!".

