

## (12) The Devil's Den

Through the desert of Mesopotamia they marched on  
Falling every few feet, due to sheer exhaustion  
Ali Zainal Abedeen was mercilessly whipped  
Even if he stumbled, even if he tripped.  
Sakina fell down from the camel's bare-back  
Zaynab raised an alarm; she was taken aback  
The soldiers were intoxicated, they paid no heed  
Without any succour, she would perish indeed!  
In desperation, Zaynab turned towards the spear  
"Husayn, fallen down is your daughter dear;  
I am helpless, my feet and hands are bound."  
The spear, with Husayn's head, got planted down!  
Khooli jumped down, to uproot the spear  
The stooges rushed forth, from far and near  
The spear remained stuck as if cemented  
The impact would be great, if soldiers got scent.  
Shimr approached Ali; his anger was boiling  
The Imam looked at the head; tears were trickling  
He turned his gaze, Zaynab caught his weeping eye  
"Sakina has toppled over, the child may die!"  
Shimr picked up the unconscious exhausted child  
Dumping her in Zaynab's arms, rushed the hostile  
Khooli could now lift the spear from the ground  
The caravan proceeded quietly, onwards bound.  
The Syrian desert was strewn with prickly thorns  
Marching bare foot, like on painful corns  
The torture was borne, with patience and calm  
God was the healer, soothing was his balm!  
For few hours they halted, each tiresome night

Feasting, the vulturous soldiers were a sight  
Food and water, for prisoners was rationed  
Barely enough to sustain them, was the caution.  
They reached a mountain top, quite secluded  
A hermitage of a holy and pious recluse  
The heads of the martyrs, Shimr gave  
For safe custody, in his solitary cave.  
The prophets descended to guard the head  
Startled and baffled, he awoke from his bed  
Rushing out of the monastery, Shimr he awoke  
"Whose heads are these?" boldly he spoke.  
"The grandson of Prophet Muhammad had defied  
The authority of Yazid ibn Moawiyah" Shimr cried  
"For refusing to accept his spiritual suzerainty  
He had been butchered at Karbala, ruthlessly."  
The hermit was shocked, beyond any words  
"You cursed people, fie upon you cowards  
Beheading your own Prophet's beloved grandson,  
His helpless family you now hold at ransom!"  
Shimr lost his temper, he was enraged;  
With one sweep of the sword, he chopped his head.  
For Islam's injunctions, he had scant regard  
To grant protection to those dedicated to God.  
The city of Damascus was soon in sight  
Through hurried marches, by day and night  
Near the gate of the fortress, the caravan halted  
In blazing sun, the prisoners sweated.  
The scenes in Kufa, had reached Yazid's ears  
To disclose their identity, he now feared  
He announced, that a rebel had been defeated  
A day of rejoicing, it should be treated.  
The city was assuming a gay and festive look  
Festoons and buntings hung from every nook  
The victims were scorching under the burning sun  
To the onlookers, it was all laughter and fun.  
Sacrificial dates, they threw at them  
To ward off evil from their dear ones  
The hungry children tried to eat them  
Zainab was perplexed and at her wit's end.

"Prophet has forbidden his own family  
To eat sacrificial offerings, O' you ladies,  
Do not throw such offerings at our children;  
Pray, do not increase our pain and burden!"  
Can it be, they are the family of Muhammad?  
Their faces and bodies were smeared with mud  
From some princely family of noble stock  
Their bearings revealed, without any doubt.  
After one full hour, the imperial orders came  
Bring in the prisoners, the followers of Husayn  
An elevated throne, lavishly decorated with gold  
Seven hundred gilded chairs surrounded it, all told.  
In tattered rags, with dirt and mess  
Blood oozing from lash-wounds in the flesh  
Tightly tied in ropes and heavy chains  
Were the daughters and sisters of Husayn.  
On a gold salver, the head of Husayn,  
At the feet of Yazid, was vindictively laid  
He could not for a moment believe his eyes  
These people claimed with Muhammad, blood ties.  
Yazid was fully drunk; he quivered with rage  
"Omar Saad, how dare you cheat me, your sage!  
These are not the ladies of Husayn."  
His eyes displayed a thirst for slaying  
Flinging himself abjectively at Yazid's feet  
"Mercy, O' Commander of Faithful", he pleaded,  
"I have carried out your august command,  
Nay, your every wish, your every demand."  
"The prisoners are Zaynab and Kulthum,  
for any doubt, pray have no room,  
The ailing man is Ali Zainal Abedeen,  
Other members, may also please be seen."  
Raising his eye brows, he watched Yazid's face  
"Ah, there, who is trying to hide from my gaze?"  
faltringly, he replied, afraid of being snubbed  
"The old lady is Fizza; behind her is Zaynab."  
"None, shall protect the prisoners from me;  
Throw aside Fizza, so that Zaynab I can see."  
Fizza turned to the slaves, behind the throne

With naked swords, as bodyguards they roamed.  
"O brothers, from Abyssinia, my own native land  
with folded hands why do you passively stand?  
Your aged princess demands from you protection  
This tyrant's blood thirst is his obsession!"  
The slaves stepped forward and addressed Yazid  
"Your Majesty, please desist from the foul deed;  
if Shimr proceeds to do anything to her,  
blood will flow right now, like water!"  
Yazid, was flabbergasted at this affront  
He fully realized, they said, what they meant  
In the light of chandeliers, their swords glistened  
The coward in him panicked, as he shiveringly listened.  
"Shimr, withhold your lash; stay where you are  
I will chop off your head, if you harm her;  
My good fellows, your devotion to me, is such  
Your sense of honor, I will not touch.  
The courtiers and others, saw his humiliation  
To display his triumph, was his fascination  
Beating Husayn's head, with a cane of gold knob  
He rejoiced with glee, as the prisoners sobbed.  
Using the cane, on the lips of Husayn  
He chuckled, wickedly, without any shame  
"Were not these lips, receiving kisses from Muhammad  
The same lips, which are now lying in mud."  
"How delighted my fore-fathers must be  
How happy, their souls, must be today, to see  
I have avenged them, for all their defeats  
By butchering Husayn; a daring feat."  
"Whose head is this, may I ask, O' King?  
What crime, had committed, this human being  
To deserve, this treatment, even after death  
Woeful is the punishment, his family has met."  
An ambassador, of a foreign country, Abdul Wahab  
Inquired of Yazid, on seeing the holocaust  
"The head is of Prophet's grandson Husayn;  
He, with his supporters, were all slain."  
"These are the ladies of the house of Prophet  
Watching them in distress is, to me, a treat

Husayn, and his friends, were put to sword  
Opposition to my Caliphate, I can ill-afford."  
"I shall subject them, to such punishment  
To the world, it would be a valuable lesson  
None, shall question my sovereignty, hereafter  
Their punishment, will be, no fun and laughter."  
"You have committed the greatest sin, O' King!  
I have not heard of such tortures and killings;  
My people treat me with highest respect,  
For being a descendent of their Prophet."  
He then turned toward Zainal Abedeen  
"Ali, from what I have heard and seen  
Your father, indeed, was the noblest soul  
To fight this tyrant, was a courageous role."  
"I declare, my faith, in your esteemed religion  
fully aware of the consequences of the decision,  
I denounce the usurper, the incarnation of 'devil';  
He is the fittest epitome of the highest evil."  
Yazid was mad with rage, smarting under insult  
Most unexpected was the rebuke, staggering the result  
"Drag away the Ambassador," Yazid angrily demanded  
"Chop off his head," like a mad cap, he next commanded.  
Pin drop silence prevailed; everyone was reserved  
Gulping down cups of wine, to soothe his nerves  
"You there," he shouted at Imam Zainal Abedeen  
"Your punishment shall be such, the world has not seen."  
"You shall pay dearly for his sins  
for the insults and rebukes, flung by him  
I shall chop off your head, here and now  
To wreak vengeance, I have the know-how."  
On second thought, he added, trying to be tough  
"No, no; killing you will not be enough  
Your life, will be a living death, everyday  
You will pine for death, even while you pray."  
In a feeble, but clear ringing voice,  
Said Zainal Abedeen, "O' tyrant do not rejoice  
Worst torture, is to make our ladies stand,  
Without any veils, in this Islamic land."  
"I am not frightened by your threats

The descendents of Prophet, have no fear of death  
Those who love God, are severely tried by him,  
To display their true faith and heaven win."  
The retort evoked spontaneous whispers of admiration  
Despite his cunning nature, Yazid was visibly shaken  
He feigned loud laughter to cover his embarrassment  
He still tried to justify the unparalleled harassment.  
"God inflicted this punishment on you all  
for your father's obduracy and defiance of my call  
to accept my lawful authority, you are reluctant still  
you got what you deserved, according to his will."  
"O' tyrant, do not distort the words of God  
to act with justice or to ride rough shod,  
he gives opportunities to all women and men;  
punishment ultimately over takes those with evil in them."  
Yazid was speechless; he could not reply  
His mouth was sealed, much as he did try  
A subservient courtier, anxious to curry favor  
Bowed before him, thinking himself too clever.  
"Your Majesty, your indulgence I crave  
Bestow that girl, Sakina, on me as a slave."  
Zaynab standing nearby, with her head bowed  
Was furious, and infuriated as never before.  
"You, wretched soul; no shame you have  
Prophets grandchild, you wish to enslave  
Is there none amongst you, even to protest  
Against the shocking and shameless request."  
A gold embroidered curtain only ruffled in shame  
Hind, Yazid's favorite wife, entered the harem  
Once, she had been a lady-in-waiting, to Zaynab  
A devout lady, a believer in Almighty Rab.  
She still remembered Zaynab, with devotion  
Yazid knowing this had concealed his intention,  
To kill Husayn and his family's enslavement;  
She was unaware, of the tragic development.  
Hearing Zaynab's voice, and talk of enslavement,  
She rushed out, without veil, in a frenzied moment  
"What is all this about, do let me know  
Who can enslave them, except the lowest of the low."

The action of his wife, was a daring feat  
Coming without a veil, was against custom, indeed  
Yazid, hurriedly shouted orders, dismissing the court  
"Carry the captives to the darkest dungeon in the Fort."  
The good lady kept on questioning her husband  
Who the prisoners were, she enquired and so on,  
He gave her evasive replies, to allay her fears  
The prisoners are not the Prophet's near and dear.

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