

The Stranger

Tired and exhausted with the water-skin on her back, she was gasping and going towards her house where innocent children, their eyes fixed at the door, were eagerly waiting for the arrival of their mother. On her way, an unknown man approached her. He took the water-skin from her and placed it on his back. The door opened and the children saw their mother entering the house with a stranger. He placed the water-skin on the ground and said:

"Well, it seems you don't have anyone to fetch water for you; how come you are so forlorn?" "My husband was a soldier; Ali sent him to the frontier where he was killed. Now I am alone with these little children."

The stranger said no more. Bowing down his head he went away. But the thought of the help- less widow and orphans remained in his mind. He could hardly sleep in the night. Early in the morning he picked up a basket; put some meat, flour and dates in it; went straight to her house and knocked at the door.

"Who are you?"

"I am the man who brought your water yesterday. Now I have brought some food for the children"

"May God bless you and judge between us and Ali"

She opened the door. Entering the house he said:

"I wish to do some good acts. Either let me knead the flour and bake the bread or allow me to look after the children."

"Very well, but I can do the job of kneading and cooking better than you. You take care of the children till I finish cooking"

She went to knead the flour. Immediately he grilled some meat which he had brought and fed the children saying to each child while putting morsel in his mouth:

"My son, forgive Ali if he has failed in his duty towards you"

The flour got ready; she called: "Gentlemen! Put fire in the oven:" He went and put fire in the oven. When flames rose up, he brought his face near the fire and said, "Taste the heat of fire. It is the punishment for those who fail in their duty towards orphans and widows."

By chance, a woman from the neighboring house came in. Recognizing the stranger, she cried: "Woe, don't you recognize the man who is helping you? He is Amirul-Muumineen (commander of the faithful) Ali bin Abi-Talib."

The widow came forward and shamefacedly cried: "Curse and shame to me. I beg your pardon:" "No, I beg your pardon for I failed in my duty towards you."

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