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## Had I But Known

Anfal, a rich young girl, sat waiting impatiently at the doctor's clinic to get the results of a medical test. She was in a hurry to attend a party and feared she might be late for her appointment with the hairdresser. She never thought the result would be anything important. It was just a precaution insisted upon by her family. She had never suffered any serious illness, apart from the odd ache in her never suffered any serious illness, apart from the odd ache in her limbs. Then, it was her turn to see the doctor. She hurried inside to get it over with as quickly as possible. She was surprised to see the doctor look sad and concerned as he asked, "Is this yours?"

She answered, "No, it is my daughter's."

She wanted to know the truth and thought that perhaps he would hide the truth, if she told him it was her own. He asked her to have a seat, so she sat feeling somewhat afraid. She looked at him anxiously, as he said,

"Why did not you send a man to get the results?"

Anfal said, "It was on my way so there was no need to send someone else."

The doctor looked sadly at her and said, "You seem to be an educated girl. You understand the nature of life."

He stopped talking, and she began to tremble.

She asked, "What do you mean doctor?"

The doctor said, "The result indicates that there is a blood disease." He looked down at his papers and remained silent. Anfal had to ask him to give her more information. She cried in fear, "Is it cancer?"

He did not look at her, but a cloud of sadness covered his face. It was as if he was sentencing her to death.

She said in a broken voice, "I am finished then." The doctor knew then that she had lied, but it was too

late to hide the truth. He looked kindly at her and said, "I am sorry for you. Why did you lie? Anyway life and death are matters within Allah's power. Many sick people live long and many healthy ones die."

Anfal felt as if she were drowning, as if a hard fist was cruelly squeezing her heart. She tried hard to regain her strength and said, "I do apologize. Thank you, doctor."

The doctor encouraged her saying, "Be strong and optimistic. Medical science is constantly progressing. Some of today's incurable sicknesses can be cured tomorrow I still have hope. Leave me your telephone number." She repeated the number automatically without knowing what she was saying. Feeling great shock and bitterness, she again thanked the doctor and left.

At home she kept the truth to herself. She did not know how to share it. Anyway, everyone was busy, getting ready for the party. Her mother asked, "Have you been to the doctor? Why did not you go to the hairdresser?" It was just a by-the-way question, needing no answer. She briefly said, "I am not going to the party!"

She went upstairs into her room and locked the door.

She stretched out on her bed fully clothed and listened to her family's voices, as if they were coming from a far away place. The wind seemed to her to be a funeral sad tune, lamenting her approaching death. The bedroom seemed strange to her as she would be leaving it soon. What about the house? It would not remember her. She was just a guest. Others would take her room and soon forget her. She tried to cry but tears did not help. She looked around her in pain. Those curtains that she had tried so hard to get, would stay after her. It would not have mattered if they had been made of the roughest fabric, she would leave them for others. She wished she had not troubled herself for such things. She wished she had saved her time and money for more useful things, which could have been helpful to her in her difficulty.

She wondered, "What is useful to me?" She was young, beautiful and rich with everything her heart could desire. Could anything help her and save her from death? She had always longed for an official job with a good salary. She had it, but could it save her from death?

An idea struck her. She hurried to the phone while everyone was away. She dialed the doctor's number and asked eagerly, "If I travel abroad can I find a cure?"

He said, "There is nothing new abroad. It is a waste of money."

She put the phone down and sat on a nearby chair.

Her salary would not change matters. She walked through the house's rooms as if saying her farewells. She paced the small garden and looked at the trees. She whispered, "I wish these trees knew I am leaving them, those stones, walls...I wish these doors knew my hands will soon no longer open them. I wish those flowers, that I planted and watered knew. How often the thorns and hard stones tore my

hands! How often I watered those dying flowers with my tears when there was no water. I wish they knew the meaning of my departure.

These fruiting trees were tiny when I planted them. I did my best to help them flourish until they grew up healthy and fruitful. Will they know I am soon leaving? Will they remember my days in their company? What about these seats, I used to rest on. Will they miss my presence? Will they be ready for someone else to settle on them? My writing desk felt my writing in tears and in smiles, does it know I am leaving? Will it miss my pen and papers in its drawers? I wish they all knew I am leaving. I wish I had known I was leaving, then I would not have cared so much for this life. I would not have felt proud and arrogant...

Had I known I were a guest in this world I would not have been cheated or tempted by its luxuries...

Had I known this I would have been aware that leaving a simple life is easier than leaving a luxurious one...

Had I lived a simple life, I would not have found it difficult to cross from this world to the next. My family is now enjoying the party...how often I longed for such parties, how much I cared for fashion and hairstyles! Can they help me now?"

Anfal threw herself down on the nearest chair as if she had realized a truth previously unknown to her.

She said, "What shall I take with me... besides a coffin and my deeds. What kind of deeds will go with me on my long journey? Nothing! Yes, nothing!" She remembered her friend Sarah, who used to advise her and guide her to the right path of Allah. She used to remind her of the Qur'anic verse:

## "...and make provision, for the provision is the guarding of oneself." (Al-Bagarah, 2:239)

She had never considered the importance of good deeds. Now she was in need of such deeds to present to Allah. She would stand to give her account, but what would she say? How could she expect Allah's mercy when she disobeyed His orders? How could she ask for forgiveness when she never even thought of obeying Him in her life's affairs? She wished she had read the Holy Qur'an instead of all those cheap novels. She wished she had gained some knowledge of her religion instead of reading film–star magazines. She continued wishing she had done few things, and not done other things. She wished she had not angered this person or that, and had never lied or gossiped about anyone. She wished she had not been proud and despised the poor.

She said, "I wish I could start my life all over again to make-up for my errors and to obey Allah's orders. I worshipped my desires and ignored my Creator. I wish I could live for a while to make up for my sins."

She remembered a Qur'anic verse, her grandfather used to recite:

"Until when death overtakes one of them he says: Send me back, my Lord. Haply I may do good in that which I have left. By no means! It is a mere word that he speaks, and before them is a

## barrier until the day they are raised." (AI-Mominoon, 23:99)

Here she said, "Oh God, I do mean it..." Tears burst from her eyes. She cried bitterly in repentance, not pain. She decided to obey Allah in all His orders if she lived a bit longer. The phone rang and she walked towards it lazily. Tears in her eyes she said, "Yes?"

Someone said, "Can I speak to Miss Anfal?" She knew the speaker. It was her doctor. She said, "Yes, speaking."

The doctor said cheerfully, "Congratulations my daughter! There is nothing wrong with you. Thank God!"

She was stunned with surprise. She did not know what to say. "No disease? How? You are joking, doctor!"

The doctor said, "May Allah protect me I am not joking. I have just got an apology from the analyst. He explained that there was a mix-up with the names. Your name was written instead of someone else. I have your medical report here in front of me. You are quite well. Be thankful to Allah my daughter."

Excitedly she said, "Thanks be to Allah, Thank you doctor."

She put the phone down, feeling as if she was new born. She knew she was safe for a while, but death would certainly come one day. She had no time to waste. However long she lived she was a guest. The first thing she did was to perform her prayer, which she had neglected for a long time. She promised Allah to obey His orders to pray, fast, and stick to wearing decent clothes. She would also give up whatever Allah had forbidden. In order not to forget this, she wrote the Qur'anic verse on a placard and hung it on the wall. On the other side she wrote a wise saying:

"Repent the day before you die. Because you do not know when you will die, then always be repentant."

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