

Mahfuz Ali, a worthless fellow. Najab promised that he would be back again to her- this time all alone.

Ever since his return to his village, Najab Hussain had grown restless. He was growing impatient to go to Fatimah. One day Najab set off to cross the desert on his camel, Allaharakha. Before undertaking the journey, he passed his day on the hill-top called Kala Doongar. In the evening he paid homage to the Panchmai Pir. He fed jackals in honour of the Pir. It was considered auspicious if jackals appeared and swallowed the food. He bowed before the flame of the lamp that was lighted in the Pir's honour every night on the hill top. Thus with the name of the Pir on his lips, Najab Hussain set forth to fulfil his promise to cross the Rann and reach his beloved Fatimah. Next morning, it was discovered that he was missing along with his camel, Allaharakha. In those border villages, if a man was absent along with his camel, it was taken for granted that he had crossed into Pakistan to carry on the trade of smuggling. Zamen the Chief of smugglers, was angry because Najab had dared to cross the border without his help. Najab's father, Abtaf also felt angry and disappointed that Najab had gone to Pakistan without taking the bundles of tender leaf.

Aftab went to his wife to break the news of Najab's escapade. He was afraid she might faint. But she received the news calmly. It was clear that she already knew about his son's venture to cross the vast desert. Then Aftab's eye fell on her bare arm. He asked her absent gold bangle that his father had given her. She revealed that she had given it to Najab and that he would soon return with cloves.

Najab had begun his journey in the starlight. His camel, Allaharakha kept a quick pace. Before dawn, he reached Sarbella, twenty miles from Kala Doongar. He had already crossed international boundary. Here he rested. Movement was impossible during the day light. The Indus Rangers would be looking from their bamboo watch-towers. Any movement was sure to be noticed through the binoculars.

Najab drank some water when the sun came up. At noon he had his first meal-dry, stale bread with onion. Then he got lost in his dream of Fatimah. A distant of less than ten miles separated him from her. He felt pained and restless to think that he would have to wait one whole night before meeting her. It was yet daylight when he harnessed his camel to restart the journey. He knew it was madness on his part to move on a day light. He might be noticed by the patrolling parties of the BSF and the Indus Rangers. There was also the danger of the camel dying of the fatigue. The sun was raining flame of heat. But, Najab felt that Fatimah was calling him and he could not deny that call.

Najab crossed the International Boundary Pillar No.1066. He very well knew the track he had to follow. But, as chance would have it, he strayed slightly from his path. The Pakistan Rangers noticed him. They could not tolerate that an Indian should slip into their territory with tender leaf right under their noses and without paying them any hush money. They chased Najab Hussain for a mile and fired

bullets at him. But a dust storm arose between him and his chasers. When the dust settled half an hour later, Najab found himself alone in the Rann.

Najab went on a daze for the next few hours. He feared his camel might die of fatigue. So, to ease him of his burden he started walking beside him. The sand injured his heels. But he hobbled on his toes in the blazing heat of the sun. Then came dusk and Najab waited for the nightfall.

Najab walked for an hour more. At last he was at Fatimah's door. He called out her name softly through the window bars. Fatimah's eyes lit up with joy and excitement to see Najab before her. Two hours before dawn, the beat constable knocked at Kaley Shah's door. He pointed out that a smuggler had come across the Rann. He asked Kaley Shah if he knew anything about him. Kaley Shah assured him that nobody had come to his house.

Next morning when Fatimah took his father's milk to him, she broke to her father the news of Najab's arrival. He had stayed the night in the cattle-shed. Kaley Shah became frightened for a moment. He had a smuggler in his house and the police was looking for him. Kaley Shah then met Najab. He was disappointed to know that Najab had not brought any tender leaf. But Najab showed to him his mother's gold bangle. He said he had come to buy cloves and he would pay in gold. Kaley Shah was satisfied. The next two days he kept himself busy buying cloves.

Najab stayed at Kaley Shah's house for two days. He would go into the cattle-shed in the evening but slip into Fatimah's room late at night. She told him how her people wanted her to marry Mahfuz Ali. He was a stammerer and Fatimah did not like him. Najab suggested that she should elope with him. Fatimah gave her silent consent to his proposal. They carried out their plan next evening. Fatimah left her country for good. She felt excited at the thought that she was eloping with her lover.

Najab drove that camel hard. By the time they reached Sarbella. Fatimah felt exhausted. She felt asleep. She woke up in the afternoon to find that the sky was covered with clouds. They went on and on during the night. The wind blew sand into their faces. As they neared Najab's village, Khavda, the clouds were thundering. When Najab knocked at his door huge isolated drops of rains were falling. Najab's father Aftab opened the door. He was determined not to show any joy at the return of his erring son. He asked him harshly if he had brought anything. Najab introduced Fatimah and said proudly that he had brought her. Meanwhile it began to rain heavily. The drought that had continued for three years came to an end. The coming of Fatimah proved auspicious for the whole village.

WORD NOTES:

1. **Scab** : Dry Crust formed over a wound
2. **Emaciated** : Became lean and thin
3. **Pir** : (Urdu) A Saint
4. **Thali** : (Hindi) metal plate for serving meal etc.
5. **Auspicious** : Favourable sign
6. **Vulpine** : of the fox: foxlike
7. **Trysts** : Meetings
8. **Savannahs** : Treeless Plain

9. **Sere** : Dried
10. **Chagal** : A leather or canvas water container
11. **Squander** : Waste
12. **Harboured** : Sheltered
13. **Tinge** : Colour
14. **Mouthing** : Say; Utter
15. **Hoor** : (Urdu) fairy; as beautiful as fairy
16. **Elicit** : Draw out
17. **Grotesque** : Absurd
18. **Straining** : Worrying and making effort
19. **Sulking** : Resentful silence
20. **Chagrin** : Great irritation
21. **Crouching** : Sitting in fear
22. **Shambling** : Walking, moving unsteadily
23. **Mirage** : Illusory appearance specially of water in desert
24. **Writhe** : Twist and turn in pain
25. **Fatigue** : extreme tiredness
26. **Succumbed** : Surrendered or yielded to a desire
27. **Lumbering** : Moving in clumsy manner
28. **Receding** : going back
29. **Odyssey** : Long journey
30. **Outskirts** : Outer boundary
31. **Sandpapered** : Polished away like sand paper polishes rough surface wood Away
32. **Nimbus** : Rain bearing cloud



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