

The Sweet Years And The Bitter Years

(4)

[Signature]

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Tuesday 14 November 2000. This is the day we meet with Shajarat-al-Dur.

I went with Saja and Khawlah, and Nur followed us later. Everything was as I had left it the week before. We read the Fatihah [opening chapter of the Koran], I then read the barometer and noted the temperature and humidity on a piece of paper I had taken with me. I did the same thing last week. Prior to that, I had taken down the number of steps on the stairs we had gone down and there were 27 steps. The purpose of taking down all this information is to benefit from it in the design of what we are working on. After that, I stood near Shajarat al-Dur's head, looking at her pretty and calm face. It was as calm as the sea on a clear moon-lit night. I studied her face and wondered to myself before asking her, when will this deep sleep come to an end? I did not wait for her answer or mine but strayed far back to years gone by. These were the years of childhood and youth; then on to living together and the good years, despite the explosions that were taking place around us and near us. These explosions never did extend to our little home because its walls were made of a genuine relationship, and deep and true love. These made the walls impossible to penetrate, no matter how strong the missiles. I felt some comfort during this visit that lasted more than an hour, and while I was near her. When I tried to find out why I had this feeling I could not come up with a reason and could not put my finger on it.

It occurred to me that it is because I can see her, despite her condition. I thought to myself, had things been handled the usual way, 12 November 1998 or the day after would have been the last day I saw her before everything ended and she went away. Perhaps this was the reason. The tragedy, however, comes after coming back from seeing her and getting home and pondering with clear and realistic thinking. It is when I am not sure that what happened two hours ago is a dream and perhaps temporary. I am afraid nature will win and I will be forced, eventually, to deal with the situation realistically in the traditional way. Every week, when I get back I feel pain and feelings I cannot describe. I feel ill, with pain in my stomach, pain in my head, my heart beats irregularly. Everything in my mind and body is irregular. I go to bed but cannot sleep because of how I feel; I feel like it is the last night of my life on this earth. My conscious thoughts go away and I feel some comfort and happiness because I am going to be at her side. But then I say to myself, I should have told Muhammad to put me with Shajarat al-Dur in the same box. Soon I discover, though, that if this were to happen it would be impossible to deal with me as I dealt with Shajarat al-Dur. Muhammad is in Baghdad and Saja and 'Ali cannot handle these kinds of situations like I did with Shajarat al-Dur. Everything would be ruined. At the same time, I wonder how the memorial I am about to begin building will be completed.

And so I return to conscious thinking and say no, it is too early for me to join Shajarat al-Dur, and I need time to erect the memorial and for the children to grow up. Perhaps the girls will settle down and Saja's situation can be resolved in a way that secures her honor and future. And so I pray to God that our dignity is preserved and that I have the strength to finish what I am supposed to do. I go on like this, with no idea when sleep will come.

Wednesday 15 November 2000. Nothing, except I picked up the children from school, read the papers, and finished King Hussein's book "King and Kingdom," that I was unable to finish in France. In the evening Saja asked, "I hope today was better than yesterday." I said briefly, "thank God." I asked her if she had collected the mail from the mailbox and she said no. I asked her to go get it; perhaps there would be something from the Residency Department. She said, "This is worrying you." I said, "No, if the Swiss wanted to be unfriendly, as they are most of the time, they would not have waited this long to respond." The application was submitted a week ago. I added that I have prepared a new letter with a medical report attached. She said, "I would have imagined you sent the report with the application." I replied that no, I kept it for the final stage. At eight in the evening 'Ali called from Fribourg and I chided him for not staying in touch. He said, "I am very busy, dad, and when I finish studying I feel tired because I am not sleeping well."

He said "the students make noise and there is a train that passes near the dorm, I have not gotten used to it yet. God willing we will get together Friday afternoon."

Thursday 16 November 2000. I read the newspapers and took Saja to art school because she missed last week. I picked up Saja from school. In the evening, Nur and her classmates went with the teacher in charge to see a play in a Geneva theater. This is a school activity for Nur's school level. I left at ten to bring Nur home. Before that I watched an interview with former star Shahirah on the Lebanese LBC channel. The interview discussed head covering, religion, and the reasons why Shahirah left show business, which she loves and craves, and turned to religion and wearing the Hijab. The audience was large but they were all women and most of them were not wearing a Hijab. I was drawn in by the interview and Shahirah's logic; she was very touching because she showed utter honesty and faith in what she was doing. She has a strong personality and was committed to her faith in what she was saying and what she has done. She knew what she was talking about religiously and culturally and used very effective and convincing terms. I told Saja that Shahirah was far more effective and more convincing than clerics when they talk about religion and proselytize. I wondered to myself why they do not show these kinds of interviews on television in Iraq.

Not to convince women to wear the Hijab, but because, I think, these interviews keep women from making mistakes.

After that I watched a program on al-Jazeera about the families of Pakistani President Ali Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs who overthrew him. 'Ali Bhutto's Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Zia-ul-Haq overthrew him as well. The interview featured several prominent Pakistani politicians, including prime ministers, presidents, and others who worked in politics in various political eras. In any case, as pertains to the Bhutto family, the program concentrated on two elements that had the most influence on the family's political fortunes leading to familial and political catastrophes. These include the death of Benazir Bhutto's brother; all fingers point to the sister and her husband and say they are behind the death of Ali Bhutto's son who is the prime minister's brother. The first element is the family squabbles between Leader Ali Bhutto's children that resulted in what I have detailed above. The second element, and the one that may be the primary reason behind the familial and political catastrophes that befell that family, has to do with Benazir Bhutto marrying businessman Asif Zardari. It became clear it was a marriage of opportunity and for selfish reasons, just as happened in Iraq when Hussein Kamel married the president's daughter and the ensuing misfortunes of the family and the country.

Those appearing in the interview stated that the Ali Bhutto family is the strongest political family in Pakistan but that its big mistake and what plagues it now is that it has been unable to improve what it inherited from Ali Bhutto. In fact, it actually destroyed its significant political and social inheritance. This excellent inheritance left behind by Ali Bhutto collapsed under family differences. Observers wonder how everyone in Pakistan is talking about the corruption of Asif Zardari while the prime minister says she does not know anything about it. Is this possible? Observers give the following reasons for the fall of Nawaz Sharif and his imprisonment:

- Nawaz Sharif turned the party into a family affair. He would discuss decisions with the family and his entourage and then present them to party conferences as ready-made.
- The role of the party lessened and the family gained prominence at the expense of the party
- He ignored the army's role and its presence and, finally, his attempt to kill the chairman of the joint chiefs, who organized a coup d'etat against Nawaz Sharif and imprisoned him
- He gradually distanced himself from leaders in the party, country, and society.
- He built a city for himself and his family in his hometown that cost the treasury more than twenty million dollars at time when a large percentage of people lived in abject poverty.

This city has good schools, hospitals equipped with the latest technology, gardens, and everything an affluent person needs. The city and its facilities were shown on television in detail with special attention given to the palaces, their amenities, and zoos etc.

Those interviewed for the program said that before taking over as Prime Minister, Nawaz was a nice and friendly person who was close to the people and listened to and understood what they were saying and what their demands were. He had respect for leaders in the party and the country and did not ignore what the people and leaders in society were talking about. They said he was nice and friendly to a point that some thought him shy. Upon becoming prime minister, however, he gradually became hostage to a ring of opportunistic sycophants; even worse, he distanced himself from those who spoke truth to him or gave him honest opinions.

When analysts look at the Ali Bhutto era and the mistakes he made during that time, they note that Ali Bhutto appointed Zia-ul-Haq to Commander of the army despite the fact that he was not a top tier general. He was a third tier general. He appointed him because he thought Zia-ul-Haq would be more loyal to him than the others because Bhutto made him. Bhutto neglected the fact that manufactured men are the ones who usually betray.

And he forgot that loyal men are patriots who are professionally, socially, and culturally groomed before getting to power. Analysts add that Bhutto's daughter made the same mistake as her father when she asked her party to support Farooq Leghari and then got him the presidency. Later, when he was able, he removed her from office after her first difficulty as prime minister.

As I watched the program, I kept thinking about our situation in Iraq and the similarities with what the program was talking about. I thought to myself, God help us. Although, I am sure that in Iraq the reaction would not happen quickly because the people, circumstances, and the situation are different. They will, however, eventually interact, even if after a while, leading to a wave that will, if not harnessed, destroy everything in its path. Party, family, and country have been destroyed and society has become a herd of sheep that are not allowed to think except about their food and drink and only in a prescribed way. They cannot do so in any way that might disturb those in power. What is really odd is that despite all the trials and tribulations, indeed the calamities, those concerned and those followers have yet to wake up. They have not learned anything and did not think that they need time to reflect and change course.

This is because those in charge will never allow anyone to even point out, just point out, that correction or reflection is in order! This is why we can clearly see that the overwhelming majority, particularly among the people in charge, do not even think that there can now be only one outcome. This is regardless of differing leanings, if any, and regardless of whether X has a certain standing or if Y does not hold a government post. They are blinded by greed and it will lead to their ruin and that of others.

After being dormant for so long, he had a heart attack after deciding to overrun Kuwait and then following through on that decision. But that got him into intensive care from where he subsequently died politically after what the Iraqi Army and the military intelligence services did in Kuwait. His political legacy ended when he joined the party then came out of it broken and insistent on staying the same political course. He was killed by the hypocrites and the ignorant, and those new to the vision and power. I have to say that the president made it easy for those people to kill him because he preferred dealing with these kinds of people. He thought that dealing with them was easier than dealing with those who do not cling to position and who are neither hypocrites nor opportunists.

Once, when I was in Baghdad in 1992, I was having dinner with Tariq Aziz at my home and I asked him if he thought President Saddam had died politically following what happened on 02 August 1990. He looked at me horrified, as though to say, what are you trying to do, get me killed? And he changed the subject. The other reason why he [Saddam Hussein] preferred those ignorant opportunists who are politically stupid was because he thought they were easier to lead and control than the others. On this point he was right, but he did not factor in the consequences of relying on such people.

I have been saying since August 1990 that the president was finished politically and I expressed to Tariq Aziz, that the president was finished politically. But I had hopes for a miracle in which the president would restore his life as the political leader of Iraq and the Arab Nation as he had presented himself. But I knew this miracle is hard to come by because I knew what a miracle was. The miracle was the removal of Israel and the liberation of Palestine as was done by the Arab Iraqi commander Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi. This is not probable despite the president's intension and desire for it to happen, because Iraq alone is unable to make it happen, especially as Arab leaders are, without exception, not serious about achieving this.

They are not prepared to pay the price for doing it. This includes the Arafat leadership group that had its own calculations and its own method of using the Arabs mercilessly to meet partial, not all, inclusive targets. The president is prepared to give everything to achieve this because he long ago announced his commitment to it. This goal became part of his personality and existence and without it he cannot justify what has been happening to Iraq and to Arabs all this time. The result is that he cannot continue his political life without achieving this miracle. But the age of miracles is over, as we know, and so it is unlikely and in fact impossible for a miracle to happen no matter the amount of good work and fine intentions by me and others.

Friday 17 November 2000. Ali arrived from Fribourg and I was alone at home because all the children were at school and college. We kissed each other and we sat down. I asked him about his affairs and his studies. He said, "Thank God." When Ali says thank God it means things are under control. He said, "I was busy all week with exams and did well but not as well as I had hoped." I told him that was alright because it was only the beginning of the school year and he would be able to meet his expectations. He said, "God willing." I asked him about his fellow students and whether he had begun to get along with them.

He said, "Yes, we have students from all over the world and the Third World students are more open than European students. The Europeans, on the other hand, are not unless another European student introduces you to them. They are cautious and do not trust non-Europeans." I told him this is normal because the mentality is different and the culture is also different. He said there is an Iraqi Kurdish student from a town that begins with (S). I said, "Sulaymaniyah?" "Exactly" he replied. He said he was a refugee and was studying at the expense of the Swiss government. I said to him, "It seems that after a while you will find that Iraqis who are educated and who studied in Europe and America are all against the current regime." He asked why and I said, "Because refugees have a far better opportunity to study abroad and get a better education than many young men at home. As the saying goes, 'a bad thing may turn out to be good for you'." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Sometimes you might have a problem but it helps you avoid a bigger problem or you gain something from it. This is why you will find that most young men who have fled Iraq are well educated and are better thinkers than their peers at home and they have a better education." He said, "True." I said to him, "You should know that Hussein Kamil has done you and your sibling a favor." He asked how this came about and what the favor was. I said to him, "If it were not for the difficulty he caused, which continues still, you would not have had the opportunity to live in Europe and attend the finest schools and universities and you would not have learned three languages."

He replied saying, "This is true, but if I were in Iraq I would have been able to make money!" I said, "Maybe, but at the expense of your dignity and reputation, just like the others. At the same time, no matter how much money you make, if you are backward you are going to lose it without even knowing it. If, however, you have a mind full of knowledge, education, and values, you would be able to work and have money that you would not lose easily." He did not respond, because the children always yearn for Baghdad and their wish it to go to Baghdad.

It so happened that last night I was with the children watching a video of Khawlah's birthday and dear Shajarat al-Dur was with us. Khawlah was only six years old at the time and when her mother told her to make a wish before blowing out her candles, Khawlah innocently and immediately said "I hope to God to return to Baghdad." She said it in English, "I wish go back to Baghdad" [sic]. This is how we raise our children, to love their country no matter how much they suffer at the hands of those running it.

Saturday 18 November 2000. Nothing important; it is calm. The weather was nice, the sun shining, and the temperature was comfortable.

We went for a walk with the children and Rex and had a lot of fun. We came back to the house and had lunch. In the evening, Ali went to see his friends. I dropped him off and he later took the bus home.

Sunday 19 November 2000. Everything is normal and I read the newspapers and watched the news on television. I had lunch with the children and we talked about school and about Muhammad and Baghdad. This is the main topic of conversation each time I sit with the children, "Dad, when will planes fly between Baghdad and the world? And when will the blockade be lifted?" So much so that sometimes I get upset and tell them to ask President Saddam or Clinton. As for Ali, he began to ask deeper questions because he is now eighteen years old and in college. He no longer thinks like a child who thinks simply. In fact, it seems he is the kind that delves into things and does not have a shallow approach.

In the evening I dropped Ali off at the train station so he can catch the train to Fribourg where he is studying. We got there at ten minutes after seven and I told Ali we had to hurry because we are losing time. Ali stood in line with others to ask the clerk which platform the Fribourg train was on, three or four people were ahead of him in line.

Because I was worried we would run out of time, I told Ali to cut ahead in the line because you are not there to buy a ticket like the others and you just want to ask a question. He said, "No, dad, that's not right. Besides, we still have nine minutes." Ali got to the window and inquired with the clerk behind the window, who told him it was platform (4). We went there and I told Ali, "I was worried you were going to miss the train." He said, "Dad, the train arrives at seven twenty nine, not before. And another thing; I bought a ticket book good for a year because doing this is cheaper than paying every time I ride the train." I asked him how this worked and he said, "I added it up and it turns out that a one way ticket is 35 francs and that means I would by 70 francs a week, and this does not include riding the busses. If you calculate what I would pay for the nine months between September and June it would be more than two thousand francs during that time period. So, I said to myself why not buy a book for two hundred and fifty francs covering the same period but I can only use these tickets after seven PM." I said that was good but asked him if he was sure about it

"Yes," he said, "because yesterday, Saturday, I went to the train station and inquired about all the details, which is why I bought this book." I asked him why the price of the book is so much lower, from more than two thousand francs to two hundred and fifty! He replied, "Dad, that is because most people travel before seven PM and a few go to work or go back home after seven. That's why they are giving this discount." He added, "And as I cannot use the train or the bus before seven, then I should take advantage of the price difference!" I told him he was right and he continued, "My classes are over at five thirty Friday night and I go to my room after that to prepare things and my suitcase. I may also need to eat something so it is very close to seven and I cannot catch the train before that. It is the same returning back to Fribourg, I cannot travel before that time, and so I bought these tickets." I said to him, "God bless you" and to myself I said, I am beginning not to worry about you and that you will be able to stand your own, and I thanked God for that. Sure enough, the train arrived exactly on time, seven twenty nine. He said, "See dad!" I told him that he was right and that I imagined trains were not like planes and did not care about arrival times.

He said, "No dad, they are the same and everything is on a schedule." He got into the carriage and I told him to call me when he arrives. He said *OK* and sure enough at nine o'clock exactly he called and said, "Dad, I am in my room unpacking my things and I am going to read for an hour or so and then go to sleep." I said, "Alright son, good night."

Monday 20 November 2000. After reading the papers, I took Saja to her university and then went to pick her up at four thirty. In the evening, I watched the Iraqi news on the Iraqi channel. It showed a military show of the Karkh organization that is run by Ali Hasan. The president was dressed in military uniform and with him were Taha al-Jazrawi and `Abd-al-Majid al-Rafi'i. After presenting the president with the show, as the staff general and as the one responsible for the Karkh organizational office, Ali Hasan joined them and sat to the president's left with `Abd-al-Majid al-Rafi'i next to him. As for al-Jazrawi, he sat to the president's right. I am not sure why the photographer ignored him except for a few instances! All attention was focused on the area where Ali Hasan was sitting! The show was performed by the liberating Jerusalem Volunteers and all or 70% of them, of course, were party members or independent who wanted to avoid any conflict with the party people.

The reason why they want to appease or avoid any staining of the relationship with party members is fear for personal safety or personal interests, or because the volunteer is an opportunistic hypocrite. The reason why party members [were there] is because they were ordered to be there, as though employees; and because most of them benefit from their partisan cover. The problem is that the president knows all this, and in fact knows more about the details!

I thought to myself, is this really going to liberate Palestine "From the sea to the river" as Ali Hasan told the president when presenting the show? Is this really what will liberate Jerusalem, or is all this just to get out of a bind and to one-up others? I told myself, assuming we take what we are looking at seriously and once they complete their training it will be decided that they go to liberate Palestine, will Jordan allow them passage to the Palestinian border? At the same time, will Arafat allow them in and declare that he invited them, etc? Everyone knows the answer and it is, simply, no. We have been in this vortex and do these things without any results. I have been saying for over thirty years is it not time, upon reflection, we let go of what we know does not work? This is why I said a sane man holds himself accountable; a man who takes account of himself to see what he did right and where he went wrong, and sets a new course accordingly.

Tuesday 21 November 2000. This is a Shajarat al-Dur visit day. I woke up and had breakfast. Over three days ago I began to worry about not hearing back from the Residency Department, I had sent them a letter on 06 November 2000. I have yet to hear from them in all this time, which is not like them. This led me to think about asking someone who knows their mentality and their laws more than I do. I called our Iraqi friend Mr. Runi. I explained the situation and asked for his opinion. He suggested sending them another request, referencing the first one and accompanied by the medical reports. I asked, "Why not first call the person in charge and see what he says and proceed accordingly?" He said OK. I got up and called Ilyas Khuri. He arrived from Baghdad last Saturday; he had gone there to meet with Tariq Aziz along with the rest of the members of the committee formed by the Popular Conference to Aid Iraq. I asked him to call the Residency Department to find out what their response is to our letter that we sent on 06 November 2000. He said okay and a quarter of an hour later Ilyas called to say he had contacted them and they said they had forwarded the request to the capital, Bern and had not heard back.

I said, "Okay, please come over so we can talk about it in person." He said, "Okay, I will get there at one in the afternoon after I finish some things I have to do." I said, "Okay, I will be waiting for you." Ilyas arrived on time. I let him in and we sat down. I asked him about Baghdad, how things went at the meeting, and what his impressions were. He said, "I noticed some optimism and slight smiles on people's faces." I replied, "Yes, they should be because it's becoming clearer that there is the possibility of improvement in people's living conditions. This is what is important to them because the vast majority of Iraqis are no longer concerned with strategic matters, whether psychological or military. To be more precise, they never were interested in these things but were driven to them like animals to the slaughter, who could not even escape. I can now say, and forcefully, that even Iraqi intellectuals no longer think of military, national, and historical perspectives through liberating Arab lands whose people have not been able to liberate themselves. This concept has always been strictly a tribal one based in tribal culture and traditions that see the strong chivalrous man as one who stands up to the enemy and who takes revenge, even if the victim is not his brother or first cousin.

This is the background of the idea of liberating Palestine, Iskenderun, Arabistan [Khuzestan], etc. The idea was then shaped by the narrow local understanding of politics and covered in new colors and new covers, yet it remained removed from the logic of the age and the accurate understanding of politics. But the big talkers and hypocrites continued to escalate the matter until they got it where it is today. This policy and these opportunistic mouth pieces got the person who came up with the idea to a point of no return; and if he were to continue with it his destiny, and that of his country, will be certain destruction. This indeed is what happened and perhaps worse if things continue as they are. That person does not wish to reach that point, indeed he does not wish to be where he is now and the horrific and terrible things that have happened. They happened without him realizing it, which is what happens when the person in power loses concentration, let alone falls asleep. The president has been asleep for a long time; he fell asleep when he isolated himself from the leading members in government, party, and society and from loyal family and friends. He has isolated himself since he developed a circle of hypocritical self-serving friends who have no vested interest in what happens. They got into the ring for prestige and self-interest; and because these are the reasons they came in, they are unable to leave for fear of the backlash.

They cannot speak honestly because the person in charge does not allow it or because their own principles do not require it. The president fell asleep at the wheel when he built the Ridwaniyah Resort and the other resorts in Iraq and stopped using the state's official facilities except for certain events, such as receiving very important guests, etc; and then leaving the location immediately afterwards. He got to point where no one in government or the party could meet with him without much hassle and weeks of waiting. There are ministers who never met the president since assuming their responsibilities and until their departure, with the exception of Council of Ministers meetings. Even the Council of Ministers is only a study group and its decisions and recommendations are non-binding and have no executive or other authority, save for what the president takes an interest in. As for ambassadors, there is not one ambassador who has met the president or had his picture taken with him when selected as ambassador. I am sure of this; this is not a guess or speculation. This is just the opposite of what the country was like before, when an ambassador would meet the head of state before leaving to take up his post and would meet him when he visits the country and his name is entered in the guest book. An ambassador used to also have his name mentioned as part of the negotiating delegation when such a delegation visits the country, or when a delegation from Iraq goes to the country where the ambassador is posted. Now, indeed before, an ambassador's name appears as though he is a junior staffer of not much consequence.

For the rest of the world and for Iraq in the old days; ministers and ambassadors were the cornerstones of the state.

Ilyas mentioned another thing. He said the people there do not know what to do. He said, "I thought of you." I asked him how and he said, "I remembered what you said about Iraq not being prepared for the post-blockade or for even when the blockade were to ease." Ilyas and I had spoken before about Iraq and the blockade and the possibility of people's living conditions improving because America wanted this to happen in order to lessen the blame and injury resulting from its Iraq policy to this degree. I said that the state is supposed to prepare all its sectors for the lifting of the blockade and each sector should prepare plans and studies of what all needs to be done, by order of importance, in order for everything to be ready when needed. I said that I was sure none of this was taking place, and to mark my words.

I then discussed with Ilyas the matter of extending our residency and that we have yet to receive a response from the Residency Office. We discussed whether it would be appropriate to send another letter and include the medical report. Ilyas was of the opinion that we wait and see until the end of next week because he believes they will send the response and we would then proceed accordingly.

I concurred and also tasked him with contacting the person responsible for Ali's university housing and urging him to move him elsewhere as described in and in accordance with what we signed. I asked Ilyas what has been done regarding gathering information to assess the possibility of transferring Ali from Fribourg University to Geneva University. He said that was possible, either at the beginning of the year, in February or March, or in academic year 2001-2002.

Ilyas told me about the problem he had because of the Iraqi passport he used. He is a Swiss national but also has held an Iraqi passport for the past twenty five years because he is affiliated with the Iraq wing of the Baath Party and because he was close to Michel Aflaq. After that, he acquired a Swiss passport for livelihood reasons and to settle down, but he continued travelling to Iraq using his Iraqi passport. He says, "When I got there, I gave them the passport so they could affix their stamp of approval but nothing happened until the night before I was to leave. So I called the head of the Foreign Ministry's Arab Section, Mundhir Matlak, and told him. He called the passport office but the person in charge there told him he could not do so without receiving a letter or telegram from the Office of the President waiving the four hundred thousand dinars in exit taxes.

Matlak was then able to speak with an employee at the Office of the President who in turn called the passport office to smooth things over. He added that he went to Matlak's department and found a large number of people from the Czech Republic where Mundhir used to work. He said he was trying to do business with them through his brother's son, Muthanna, who studied there when Mundhir was an ambassador to Prague. I thought to myself, gone are the good old days when government officials were pure as snow and honest; some on principle and some out of fear. Mundhir is among the latter, and now that he is secure he is behaving carelessly? He is secure because the head of intelligence was one of his employees, but when Mundhir lessened his shine and Ali Hasan became the rising star, the head of intelligence switched to Ali. I thanked him for his opinion and we agreed to meet next week, or whenever necessary.

At 3:30 in the afternoon we went to visit Shajarat al-Dur, Khawlah came with us and Nur joined us afterwards. As usual, the official opened the door for us at the stairs near Shajarat al-Dur's room. I asked the man, "Everything ok?" He understood what I meant because of the word "OK" which became an international word now after being just an English one, and it means everything is fine. He replied, "We, we [oui oui]." I thanked him and we went in to see Shajarat al-Dur and he went back to his work.

We found everything to be as it was the week before. We read the Fatihah from the Koran and I went to the barometer I had put up two weeks earlier to measure temperature and humidity. We just wanted to be sure and we had asked those in the know and they told us. But just to be sure, I bought the device and I take down the temperature and humidity during every visit to Shajarat al-Dur. I do this in preparation for sharing it with the designer I have commissioned to design a memorial for her. The temperature was 21.6 and humidity 32. We then sat around the bed reading from the Holy Koran. At five thirty I asked Khawlah and Nur to read the Fatihah and leave and when they had I examined Shajarat alDur's upper body. I found the markings of the first surgery that I had never seen before because she would not let me. She did not want to cause me pain; and she always wanted me to see her as pretty in my mind. I made a recent discovery from Saja. She told me that, "When you would call and say you were coming for a visit, mama would ask me to tell you that she was asleep when she really was not because she did not want you to see her in the condition she was in. Once she was ready, mama would ask me to call you and tell you she had woken up and you can come see her."

As much as our relationship is true, beautiful, and full of love, indeed passion; and although we have been married close to twenty seven years, Shajarat al-Dur remained fashionable and would get shy and respectful as though still in our first year or first six months together. How sweet, beautiful, fun, and meaningful those days were, but they ended early, unfortunately. It is however God's will and I do not object to God's will.

Wednesday 22 November 2000. I did nothing but read the papers and follow the news on television. Iraqi television showed military parades in the governorates. The one in Ninawa was attended by Mr. Izzat al-Duri. A section of the participants were older men and women and some were wearing dishdashahs [traditional Arab robe]. I would say that anyone watching the parades is left with the impression their purpose is to establish presence and to prevent others from ignoring the regime in Iraq. If the intention is to liberate Jerusalem using guerilla warfare, then there is no need for these millions of people.

All it takes is several thousand people of a certain age, knowledge, real mental readiness, and grounding in this type of war. New people would have to be sent in as the numbers of the first batch drop, of course. What is first needed, however, is an Arab decision from the countries that share borders with Palestine to contribute and allow the fighters to enter Palestinian lands. A similar decision should simultaneously come from Arafat. Jerusalem cannot be liberated without an Arab decision from countries bordering Palestine and while Arafat has other methods that differ 100% with Iraq's decision. So the parades were only meant to establish presence and embarrass others. However, this is a well-known and exposed policy and so it will not harm anyone and no one will promote it. It will not be given coverage so no one will know about it.

Thursday 23 November 2000. I read the papers and took Saja to visit her Iraqi friend who is married to Zayd al-Rassam. I returned home and went to pick up Nur from school, but she asked to be taken to town because she needed to buy some school supplies. I then came back and went to get Khawlah from school. On our way home, we had an altercation with an old man in his Jaguar.

We had the right of way and I honked my horn at him to get his attention but he paid me no attention, which is what the Swiss do when they are in the wrong. Khawlah noticed and said he did not even apologize. I thought to myself, not apologizing for such a simple thing is alright. The problem is that in our country there are many people who destroy everything without apologizing for their mistakes even indirectly. It is a known fact that apologizing for making a mistake is the result of education, culture, and upbringing. Like courage, it cannot be acquired. I have objected, and for some time, to the concept of courage as a hereditary trait; that if a father is courageous, his son will most certainly inherit some of that trait. I disagree, and have had many debates about this with colleagues and friends, even some brothers. I told them that courage is not hereditary but is the result of conviction and faith, and an understanding of a matter or issue that must be defended. Training then comes into place to create faith and confidence in the weapon one holds in one's hand. If it is a situation of war between two countries there are, of course, supporting issues generally speaking. There are even on a personal level, backed by the fear of what people will say, etc.

I would use the example of the second Gulf War and how the Iraqi Army was defeated despite it being made up of people from good families, clans and men of faith, but who lacked a cause and conviction. There were other things they lacked, of course, like mobilization and logistics. I used to tell them those clansmen who know their kin folk to the fifteenth level were defeated by people who do now know who their fathers are and who do not have the values of Iraqi soldiers.

Even worse, several of them are homosexuals, and you know what we think of homosexuals, and yet they fight and win. Does this reality warrant that we stop and change, or at least adjust, our thinking? Going back to the matter of admitting one's mistakes, there are many examples from the near and distant past. There is de Gaulle, who decided to withdraw from Algeria and left it to decide its own destiny because he was convinced it would never become French. There is King Henry the Sixth, who abdicated the British crown after realizing his error in deciding to marry a widow in violation of the British constitution. He was unable to satisfy both his heart and his mind, or between the person he loved and the crown, and so abdicated the crown to the current queen's grandfather.

In the recent pass, Ehud Barak withdrew from southern Lebanon after realizing that maintaining a front there will cause him casualties that will create problems for him domestically in Israel. Before that, there was the resignation of Abdel Nasser and his taking responsibility for losing the war with Israel and what took place during the six days because he was the man in charge. He then returned to his duties by the demand of the Egyptian people, or this is what is known although there is doubt about that fact some speak of the security service's role in rounding up people to demonstrate demanding Nasser's return to rule. But in my opinion, even if this was true, it is still a good thing because it shows self-respect and respect for the people's intellect and feelings, albeit limited. If a man cannot apologize to his wife, you cannot expect him to apologize to those more distant or to those close and say he is sorry for what took place. This is an unreasonable request, more like a miracle or wishing for something that cannot happen. These type of people look onto objects and people as part of their own belongings, or that all things have been created for them, and that they would not have been created otherwise. I once heard a brother tell his wife, "God created you for my comfort. You just concentrate on my wellbeing, my needs, and my comfort." Can you imagine the kind of thinking that would lead to such talk?

This is why I believe it is crucial that a father have a reasonable understanding, education, and humanity to handle his family's affairs smoothly and without creating problems or adding to existing problems. Moreover, when a person takes on a public position, no matter how junior, he must have the qualifications to comprehend his responsibilities to the people and to the government that granted him the post.

The reason why the American people elected John Kennedy, in addition to being a prominent figure from a prominent family, is that the people thought he had a happy family life with his wife. His wife was also pretty and expecting a child, and they were young. The forethought of educated and aware people about their personal and national interests is amazing. But then we see that the Americans did not elect his brother for one reason only, he was out late with his girlfriend, and on their way back they had a traffic accident. But instead of saving his girlfriend and taking her to the hospital, he ran away and left her to die, I believe. This behavior made Americans have doubts about him as a trustworthy and responsible man because he did not take responsibility for the consequences of his actions. He ran away and left his girlfriend for fear of the press and what would be said about him; so how can they trust such a person as the president of the United States of America!

They, therefore, did not vote for him. Earlier, Nixon had resigned his position and left the White House after admitting to his wrong doing of eavesdropping on the Democrats' phone calls. He did this to find out their elections plans and strategy and it became known as the Watergate scandal. In the very near past, the president of Peru tendered his resignation because the people of Peru held him responsible for the actions of the head of intelligence in Peru, who was laundering money and who was involved in the drug trade, etc. This made the people angry because he, as the president, was responsible for the actions of the members of his government. We also remember the resignation of Suharto before that. He resigned because of the corruption in his government and his family, who exploited their father's position and made billions in business. As is said in classical Arabic, there are many examples for those who wish to know, but they fall on deaf ears unfortunately. What we see is that the persons in question speak of principles in ways that Christ the Lord could not match. Nor could `Umar Ibn-al-Khattab, famous for being just, impartial and fairness. Not even Imam 'Ali, famous for his simple living and disinterest in things material. You will notice how these people talk about values and impartiality and warn against comfort, riches, money, and the temporal. They, on the other hand, are into these things up to their ears; distastefully and abnormally so.

They speak as though from an altar, removed from what goes on around them and free of any sin. These are scary and dangerous people, both to themselves and others. They are a danger to themselves because they can never have enough of anything and their wants are limitless; they can never have enough money, women, power, or anything else. Because of this greed and because of this way of thinking they also become a danger to others since they are in control of things.

One of the reasons that Republican candidate, Mr. Dole, lost the election was his old age. CNN asked an American from Florida, a Republican stronghold, what he thought, and who he was going to vote for. The reporter thought the man was going to vote for Dole because he was a Floridian and pro-Republican. The man said no, because he is younger than Dole and goes to the bathroom four times a night so how many times does Dole have to go? He added that America needed a strong man and one still of a reasonable age that is both strong and intelligent. Imagine how thoughtful this man is! I say that any people who reach this level of personal and public understanding will do fine. I wish the Iraqi people could one day be like the American people.

Friday 24 November 2000. I picked up the children from school with Saja, and when we got home we found Ali there because it is the weekend. He comes Friday afternoon and returns to Fribourg Sunday night. We have been meaning to buy Ali an overcoat since last week because the area where he goes to school is cold and he needs a few things including a jacket. This is especially so now that he has advanced in life and moved on. He is now a college man and as such needs items he did not have before. So, he and I and Saja went to town to buy him the coat and other things. As we were parking the car, we saw that the car next to ours was being towed by a towing truck. We thought this strange because parking violations usually mean a policeman comes and puts a ticket on the windshield under the windshield wiper. We had no idea why the car was being towed away! In the meantime, the owner of the car showed up and began asking the police to give him a fine and leave the car, and so forth.

But they refused his offer and thereafter even refused to talk to him. They told him they are going to take the car to the impound lot and he would have to go to the department in charge and took the car. Once it was gone, it became clear that the car had been parked in a handicapped spot, and the image on the ground indicated that it was for the handicapped. This is what upset them so much. I thought to myself, this is Switzerland that has never fought a war and you can count the handicapped on the fingers of one hand, and they are the result of personal injuries, yet they have handicapped parking spots everywhere, in every parking lot and hospital etc. They even have them along the highways and in public bathrooms. While we, who have fought two destructive wars that left behind hundreds of thousands of injured and handicapped, do not provide the basic things those who were handicapped in defense of their countries need. These are the people who were carrying out orders from those in charge, and this is how they are compensated and rewarded for the youth and health they lost in the service of others!

This problem and this suffering are not new, they are old; and they are not the result of a single visit to Europe or Switzerland. I have been pondering this since I arrived in Switzerland in 1988. Every day I question and wonder why we over there do not have the same things they have here? Why? Why? I have yet to figure this out.

Saturday 25 November 2000. I read the paper and went for a walk with Nur, we took Rex with us. Khawlah went with `Isa to buy some things for the kitchen, while Saja and Nur went to town to buy some things for Nur, and 'Ali went to Mr. Ilyas for help with his French class. Everyone got back at four thirty and we prepared lunch [sic] and ate at five thirty. In the evening we sat in front of the television and I watched the Iraqi satellite channel that was showing a meeting between the president and the patriarch of the Al Thani family of Qatar. I thought to myself, I hope I live long enough to see what the Al Thani family wants from the president. The channel then showed the president meeting with the council of ministers and speaking at length about the Palestinian issue. He said the Arab street has not lived up to its responsibility yet and that the Arab street needs to eliminate American then British interests in the region and everywhere. He said America has a strategic alliance with Zionism and that it will not reconsider this alliance until it knows that its interests in the area will come to an end, including the flow of Arab oil to America.

He said that the area will not calm or settle down so long as Israel continues to exist, and the Jewish immigrants to Palestine must return to their countries of origin. He closed by ordering that a memorandum be prepared, addressed to the United Nations General Secretary, asking that he add the Palestinian people to the memorandum of understanding between Iraq and the United Nations, because the Palestinian people are a part of the Iraqi people. Before this, he insisted that the intifada continue and that people be weary of initiatives aimed at ending it. Such initiatives come at the expense of the Palestinian people and their rights, and therein at the expense of Arabs and their rights. He said some rulers are pursuing this because they know that a continuation of the intifada will give them only two options: go down or get into the ring.

The president's decision is a very intelligent one because it will support the Palestinian street and will make it mutiny against Arafat's command decision if it were to ask the street to stop resisting Israel. At the same time, even if the United Nations does not approve the request, the request itself will score a point for the president and his reputation in the Arab street, especially the Palestinian street.

I wish, though, that the president would have said that the Council of Ministers had discussed the matter of adding the Palestinian people, who are blockaded, to the memorandum of understanding. I wish the Council had decided to include the Palestinians with their Iraqi brothers and sisters, and that the announcement had been made in the name of the Council. The way the announcement was made reinforced the common impression that the president is the sole decision maker and that he does not consult with anyone. I would like to see this impression removed, because it undermines the president's leadership and how he manages things. Another thing, I do not know how the Iraqi people will take this sudden decision; the president always uses the electric shock method in making decisions. There is no introduction or preparation, an indication that one is not interested in other people's opinions or wishes, this is not attractive, not now nor in the past. People like those who respect their feelings and their existence by including them in decisions, not the other way around. I say, may God provide what is in Iraq's best interest first.

Sunday 26 November 2000. It was raining and I did not leave the house. I read the papers and we had lunch with the children; I watched a little television. At exactly seven in the evening, 'Ali went to the train station to go to Fribourg. I offered to take him to the station but he said, "There is no need for that, Dad."

When I insisted, he said, "I do not want you to come to the station because there are all sorts of people there." He insisted that I not go with him to the station. At nine thirty I called him and he told me he had just arrived and was unpacking, "I just put the blanket you gave me on the bed and will go to bed in about half an hour or more when I am done unpacking." I said, "Good, good night and do well in school." He said, "God willing."

Monday 27 November 2000. It is the first day of Ramadan. I read the papers and there was nothing important there except the story about a share of Iraqi oil going to Palestinians, what he [Saddam Hussein] said at the Council of Ministers, and his calling on the Arab street to evict American and British interests. I received a letter from Mr. Ilyas Khuri saying he had contacted the Residency Department who told him they have yet to receive a response from the capital but will contact Bern about a decision. He also says he gave them his phone numbers so they can get back to him.

At dusk I began to feel restless, sad, and pained; a sense of calm and self-examination came over me. I did not want to talk to anyone and did not feel like talking. I just wanted to sit still and soundless and uninterested with what was happening around me, whether noise, raised voices or anything else.

At the beginning I did not know the reason why, I thought it was just a continuation of each day, an hour of sadness, an hour of pain and an hour of calm to go back to my memories with Shajarat al-Dur and our twenty seven years of friendship, companionship, love and passion together. We became inseparable. I remember when she would go to Baghdad on urgent matters I would feel restless and it showed in my behavior toward the children and house staff. But she knew why and it did not bother her. She would go to her room or to the kitchen pretending that she needs to get something or other, but she did it to give me some room to let off steam. I respected her and cannot behave the way I want to when she is around. Saja would go after her and then I would ask Saja if her mother was upset and she would say no, "Because she knows the reason." I would ask her, "What's the reason?" And she would say, "He is upset and tense because he does not want me to go." Saja told me that "When I told her to talk to you, she said, 'no, leave him alone, because if he is not like this he'll become like the rest of them.' She would add, 'He is just chiding you'." As breakfast neared and I heard the Koran recited on television, I remembered what Shajarat al-Dur would be like on such a day in Ramadan.

She would sit down in her white [prayer] clothes with the Koran in hand reading from it. She would usually read the entire book during Ramadan. She is a great and truly perfect lady, a conscious believer of true conviction. She fears God and asks his forgiveness, and avoids anything contrary to her religion. She thanks God for everything; I caught her thanking Him from her good health, strength and youth; then thanking Him when she was ill and her fate unknown and in God's hands. That is the mark of a true believer. A true believer, in my opinion, is one who always remembers God, in good times and bad. This was a special day during this period. Special because it felt special and was an extension of the old days when Shajarat al-Dur was with me during Ramadan. This feeling is mixed with something odd I cannot describe. An hour and fifteen minutes after it was time to break the fast, I did so with Nur. She insisted on fasting despite my talking to her and telling her it was too difficult because she studies for long stretches and that requires concentration to comprehend her studies. But she insisted, which is why I waited until she got home at about six in the evening and broke fast together.

Later, Muhammad called from Baghdad to wish us happy Ramadan and ask about his brother and sisters. I called 'Ali and asked him how his studies and day had gone. He said everything was going well. I asked if he had slept well the night before and he said he had slept better than any night since his arrival, "Because the blanket you gave me was very useful. So I slept well." I told him that was good and that all he has to do is to listen to me in anything I ask him.

Tuesday 28 November 2000. Today is the day to visit Shajarat al-Dur. At three thirty I went to the children's school to pick up Khawlah and Nur would follow us because her school lets out at four. Saja did not come with me this time because one of the teachers was out last week and decided to make it up for the students and she could not come with us to visit her mother. She said, "Unfortunately, I will not be going with you to visit mama." She said it in English.

We arrived there on time and the man opened the door for us and we went in. In the stairwell I asked the man, "Do you have anyone else?" He said, "No, only Mrs. Tikriti." I asked Khawlah to wait at the door and I went in alone to cover Shajarat al-Dur's face with the sheet.

I read the Fatihah and checked the temperature and humidity displayed by the device; humidity was 45 and temperature 20.3 I went back to Khawlah and asked her to come in, and she also read the Fatihah. We sat around the bed, reciting Koran like we do every time. Nur arrived at four thirty and joined us; we stayed until five thirty. I asked the children to read the Fatihah and leave the room, and they did. I uncovered Shajarat al-Dur's face like it was before the children came in and I read the Fatihah. I told her everyone at home misses her, including the Koran she used to read from. "The house is lonely without you, my heart is broken and my mind cannot think nor do anything." We arrived back home at about six and Saja had prepared food and we broke our fast.

`Ali called to say hello and Saja spoke with him. He asked her about everything and about Muhammad and she told him he had called the day before to wish a happy Ramadan, and that he is going ahead with the arrangements for his wedding on Friday. She told him that when he comes on Friday, God willing, we will call Muhammad and congratulate him. He asked if he would have to talk to Muhammad's wife Isra' and Saja told him, "Of course you do, and welcome her to the family."

He said it was early to say that because prominent families do not let people in that quickly. Saja told 'Ali this was the last step and there was no return, "If anything is wrong we will have step up our guidance and advice to correct them." He replied, "You mean Dad's way? Like when he enrolled me in the intensive French course?" She told him, "Exactly." She then bid him farewell and he told her to say hello to dad, Nur, and Khawlah and that he will see everyone on Friday, God willing.

Wednesday 29 November 2000. I read the papers and took Saja to college and then collected her again at four thirty. On our way home, we bought some food we needed and when we got home it was time to break our fast. We ate together and at six I went to pick up Nur from school because the driver, Rafi', was fasting and his home is a bit far from the school. I told him to stay home and I would pick up Nur from school. I watched the news on television and they were showing an interview with the Arab intellectual Dr. Edward Said. The topic was Palestine and the struggle with Israel, the Oslo Accord and the events since then. He spoke with a national and patriotic spirit and I wished Arafat had four like him in his command, which he had fired.

Qualifications for Arafat's choices for command were that the person be politically tainted, materialistic, hypocritical, and greedy and can play with words. The person should be able to defend the indefensible with the same vigor he does the righteous. I wished Arafat would use Dr. Edward Said and other patriots whose only objective is to serve the cause, and who are not interested in amassing money either because they do not need it or because of their personal view of it. They should also not be in the least interested in power, which Arafat loves even more than he loves his wife Suha. They would not seek power because they don't like it and don't have agendas to accomplish through power. But this will fall on deaf ears. Our region is plagued with more people like Arafat. Edward Said now has American citizenship because he has been there forty years, but neither citizenship nor the forty years have changed him. I wished Arafat's command had a fraction of the love and loyalty those people have for their country.

I also saw a program on al Jazeera with French thinker Roger Garaudy. The speed with which he thinks and responds is incredible, and his answers are concentrated, expressive and supported by logic and world precedents.

Half of the conversation was about Iraq and his visit to Iraq; and he was great. I wish Iraqi leadership would take advantage of Garaudy and others like him by modern means and not the ways of old, and I wish our people had a fraction of this man's intellect, knowledge, and logic. But this is just a pipe dream, as the going says; they are like peas in a pod.

The same television channel then aired a meeting of Mr. Tariq Aziz with the Russian foreign minister. It said the joint press conference that was to be held Monday between the Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister and the Russian Foreign Minister had been cancelled because of disagreement and inability to decide on a framework for Iraqi cooperation with the United Nations. This was a result of Iraq rejecting resolution 1284 and demanding the embargo lifted and preventing international inspectors from returning to Iraq. I really thought about this and said to myself: What is the reason behind this behavior and this way of thinking? During this long period of time and especially when there is hope that the crisis will finally ease, this stubborn way of thinking suddenly appears.

I know the reason, but like others I cannot help but wonder if President Saddam has actually convinced himself he is the victor and wiped from his real memory the truth about what happened when on 02 August 1990 he made his decision to invade Kuwait and carried it out. God damn Kuwait and Kuwaitis until the day of reckoning! Until now, the president has a philosophical understanding of victory and it is how he expresses it. I believe victory is a fact, much like other facts whether they are geographic, historic, or existential. This is to say they have proven their validity and require no further proof or clarification in order to be understood. What occurred was very significant and very clear and I believe that the important link in the chain of problem solving is for decision makers to understand the truth, regardless of the legitimacy of Iraqi rights and demands. The truth is that two armies fought and one won and the other lost, and it is common knowledge that the victor sets the conditions. Many times these conditions are harsh, like what happened following the First World War and then the second. In great wars, the result is the fall of the losing regime from power; their countries may even be divided, as was the case with Germany. Decision maker in Iraq must take these facts and precedents into consideration. They must ponder how other countries who suffered what Iraq has suffered were able to achieve their goals eventually and through other means. They did not use violence because it proved ineffective when they used it the first time around.

This is not only because it is a backward method, but because the international and regional climate are now against doing things this way. This is why they changed course and began using methods that facilitated their significant return to the world and their region; methods that allowed them to reunite their country and build it better than it was before.

We remain an Eastern culture with conservative traditions. This makes me think, what good is victory, even a true one that can be seen and touched if the people are crushed and have no values, if they are blasphemous toward country and nationalism? I say that any victory, no matter how great, is worthless under such conditions because people who lost their personal honor and dignity, and a good portion of their national honor, cannot invest the victory they will seize. It would be like a wealthy father who leaves his fortune to a son addicted to drugs and alcohol, such a son cannot maintain and increase said fortune. And so I say, what remains of the Iraqi people's personal and national honor must be rescued in order for them to be able to deal with life at a future point.

Here I also wonder, why the President doesn't allow some flexibility at the Arab, international, and national levels now that there is a perception and a belief in the validity of this perception that the president is now stronger than before thanks to some events that took place recently with the visits by some Arab and foreign delegations, as well as the landing of some airplanes in the Baghdad Airport... etc. These events have created a feeling among the simple minded people that the problem has been resolved. That is why I am asking why doesn't the President extend his hand to the good Iraqis overseas or in Iraq? Then, he should tell them: go ahead and serve your people and your country, with the true front, not like the former fronts and alliances and on their basis. Why doesn't he change his tone and use a lighter tone with the Arabs, the Iraqis, and others? Wouldn't such a step help in solving the problem and would make Iraq in the eyes of the others different from the current Iraq, which is the sole property of the Ba'ath Party. Then, when we look inside today's Ba'ath Party we find that some say it is the sole property of the Sunnis; and when we look inside a smaller circle, we find that some others say it is the sole property of the Tikritis. Then, when we continue we reach another ring where it says that it is the sole property of the "Beck's." If we continue further, we find another ring within the tribal faction of the "Beck's" which says that it is the sole property of the house of Ghafur. Then, if we continue even further we find another ring within the house of Ghafur which says that the governance is the sole property of the house of Majid.

Then, even within the house of Majid we find another ring which says that it is the sole property of the house of Saddam. That is why I say, and I have said for many years, we must change the perception of the people of the way they think the nature of the governance should be, and the way Iraq should be governed. Moreover, this change will not happen without the participation of the other honorable citizens who are well known to the Arabs and to the world... With this image, we say that we have changed the way people think, and we made them believe that Iraq is for all Iraqis. Also, they would start believing that all Iraqis are Arabs and non-Arab, Sunnis and non-Sunnis, Ba'thists and non-Ba'thists, and all of them are defending Iraq, and that the President Saddam is the President for all of these, with their different colors and different spectrums; but there is nobody willing to listen.

Let us go back to our subject, which is the failure of the meeting of Tariq `Aziz with the Foreign Minister of Russia. Why wouldn't our demands be realistic with some flexibility which would make other people defend them? Do we really believe that Russia is actually capable of supporting Iraq in a way far from logic and far from European and US policies? Do we believe that Russia is capable of challenging the US and the European policy? If the answer is yes, we do not believe that; then, why do we put forth the issues this way? Why don't we take advantage of Russia's activities and the visit of its Foreign Minister to Iraq and try to push forward our agenda and take advantage of Russia in a smart way?

Do we still, until now, not understand that Russia and others want some cards, which we would give them, in order for them to make a move? Are we still thinking that the others, Arabs or non-Arabs, no matter how much sincere they are, will help us while we are still sticking to the same extremism and to the extremist political rhetoric? I know that not everybody believes that. However, each side has its own reasons. I am saying all of those who are around the President, including his own family, do not believe that. They have some ideas on how to resolve the issues but they cannot talk to the President about these issues. I used to talk to the President when I used to meet him, and I used to send him memos about these ideas; but for a while now, and using different excuses, he has put a wall between me and him. The last of it was when I was informed by his Diwan Director and his secretary not to write to the President about political issues. He has put such a wall, because he does not want to listen to such issues. What is more important, he gets extremely angry when an idea is presented to him on paper; because he is afraid of documentation; and he knows that I keep copies of the correspondence which I send to the others, and especially to him.

Speaking of those surrounding the president, there is another reason, besides fear, which also prevents them from talking to him and from advising him to be more flexible and less extreme.

The reason is that they started benefitting from this type of situation; benefitting materially and psychologically. A large portion of them know that they would lose their interests and privileges if the president took a more flexible approach towards a resolution. That is because a new page would require other elements, not these elements which have been consumed and are finished without producing any benefit; because the characteristics of these types of people do not help them achieve success under very harsh conditions, like those which Iraq is currently experiencing. That is why, and for these reasons, you find them not talking to the President. As for the President, why is he insisting on this tone and this policy despite their results? First, and especially in the last decade, since the nineties and to the new century, a change happened in the President's way of thinking. And this change always happens to those who start the countdown, and to those who have been raised in a special way like the President; because he was raised in a special way. He joined the Ba'ath Party which is known for its individualist ideology that does not lean towards flexibility, sharing, or admitting mistakes. The President is of this type, and has been raised in this environment, which is the environment of the Party. It has strengthened and deepened his commitment to this approach and this mentality. Like I have said, the countdown affects the President's way of thinking and those who are like him.

It makes them more extreme and makes them want to stay on the course that they started. They feel that they have started this course and have remained on it all this time, and so it does not make sense to change course in the last few years. This is of course illogical to them. They have put their credibility and their dignity above the interests of the country and the people. At the same time, they do not lack anything, nor did any of their family members die due to the lack of medicinal drugs health care services. They live a life which even the Emperors of Rome did not live in their era. So, why was there this change in course?

The one who brings change is the one who considers his people and his country above everything, and sometimes even above one's self. Also, the one who brings change is the politician who has experience in group politics and not in individual politics; the one who puts his dignity above all and who considers himself to be the country and the country to be him. President Saddam is not prepared to change his approach even a single inch for the above-mentioned reasons. Instead, it is the opposite that is happening; He is affirming his course, trying to restore his credibility, and telling others that until the last moment and despite his surrounding circumstances, he will not change and does not care what happens after him. There are others like him, because they are from the same school of thought. Castro tops that list which also includes Muammar al-Qadhafi and ends with Hafiz al-Assad. But he is not like the previous three who are ahead of him in the list.

I have said that President Saddam does not care what happens after him. Yes, this is true to a great extent; but what I want to say, for the sake of accuracy, is that the President in his public or private life uses the edge of the abyss policy. This method is similar to playing the Russian roulette, which is a notoriously dangerous game with a belief that there is a 1% chance to win. He goes towards that probability which constitutes a very low percentage, and still he may even go to a lower probability. This is the President, and this is his mentality, and his management style. He does not quiet down, and he becomes more energetic and livelier whenever there are problems.

Let us return to the subject of documents and the President's hatred for them. The President hates documents, except those which carry his successful opinions. As to the documents which carry any of his unsuccessful opinions, he tries to get rid of them either by attaching them to other successful events, which would confirm that he was correct, or by assassination; that is he destroys all the documents. He does not accept any ideas from his staff if it was presented to him in writing on a piece of paper. He might even completely rip it up, but this rarely happens, for the above-mentioned reason.

I am certain there is not a single document with an idea of any high official in the government. I mean here an idea, not a report about a visit or a meeting with an official of a country. Even these reports which are submitted by the envoys for years now do not include any recommendations. They do not include what the envoy had heard from the officials of the country he visited, if what he had heard was honest, direct, and included any remote hint for the need to change the course or to adopt flexibility and to use the flexible vocabulary. Because the President does not accept that they include such ideas in their reports. He does not want it to be said one day that his staff had submitted some ideas but the President had rejected them. At the same time, he does not accept that for another reason; he does not accept the documentation of anyone's ideas so that no one can say the idea was good and a start to a resolution of the problem. He only wants his ideas to be documented. As for the reports that are submitted by the envoys, he trembles when they include proposals or opinions of the country visited by the envoy. He does not want anyone to ever say that Arabs and the world were honest with Iraq and were giving advice but Iraq, under the leadership of the President, was rejecting them. He wants to show that the whole world was unfair towards Iraq, including his own staff. The government officials who were visiting the world's countries and some of the Arab countries have learned that the President does not accept these things in their reports.

They have known this when they would see the president getting angry at someone proposing a change of course and adopting flexibility... etc. He would then accuse them of being agents and of being cowards and weak. In fact, the President looks further than this; he looks at when these documents might leave the safe storage and become available to a researcher who would say that the world was proposing and willing to help and that the President's staff was frank and qualified, but the President was rejecting any idea that goes against what he believes in.

For this reason, the President issued a resolution a few years ago from the Revolutionary Command Council to severely punish any government official, regardless of their level, who would keep any official government document related to his or the government's work. The punishment was very severe.

Some of the president's staff know how things are run and in what direction. At the top of those in the know is Tariq `Aziz. He is intelligent, well educated, understands international and regional politics, very highly qualified, and is a nationalist who is loyal to his country. Until recently, his loyalty to his president was as high as his loyalty to his country, although that loyalty weakened a bit because the president chided him and expressed dissatisfaction with his performance. It is also due to him being under pressure from the president's sons; especially the eldest who did so through the media he owns.

'Aziz started to feel that there was unfavorable opinion of him, as if he were a collaborator. This was because he used to propose a more flexible stance which would anger the president, his sons, and Hussein Kamil. By the way, Hussein Kamil had a very large role in changing the President's view towards Tariq `Aziz. These difficulties changed Tariq `Aziz from that confrontational, honest, and brave person he once was when presenting his ideas. It turned him into a quiet person unless he was forced to speak, in which case he would say the minimum required of him and within what is allowed. He abandoned those traits and learned his lesson. This situation made him as extreme as the others in order to for him to change the perception with which the others were seeing him and in order to defend himself. He was afraid that a case, which would cost him his head, could be mounted against him.

Friday 01 December 2000. Today is the wedding of Muhammad. Ever since this morning, we have been thinking about the wedding's details. Every hour we would say: now they went to Tikrit to get the bride; now they have arrived over there; then, possibly now they have arrived in Baghdad. All this time we have been taking shifts on the phone trying to reach the house in Baghdad without any success. Then, after seven thirty, Geneva time, we gave up because it was too late to call.

We remained in front of the TV; one hour, we talk about the subject, and one hour there will be silence. Then, another hour we talk about other things. But at eleven o'clock the phone ring changed all this. Saja ran to the phone because nobody usually calls us at this time, and generally nobody in Switzerland calls at such hour, after 9:30. I picked up the phone; it was Muhammad calling us from there since he knew that we could not reach him because of the bad phone system. I talked to him, congratulated him, and expressed my blessings. I told him that I hope Asma' joining the family would be a blessing to all. After that 'Ali, and his sisters, Nur and Khawlah talked to him. Then, Saja talked to him again to ask him about the details of the wedding ceremony; the dinner, who attended, and the like. We asked him about his bride and he said that he had come to the large house, our home, to call and she was at his home where there was no phone. Then, Saja told him that we will call her tomorrow to congratulate her.

Saturday, 02 December 2000. We stayed at home and did not go out for a walk because it was cold and rainy. We tried to call Muhammad and his wife, but we couldn't because of the difficulty in calling Baghdad with its poor quality phone lines.

I remembered what James Baker had told us in the meeting with the Americans on 09 January 1991. He said "if war starts you will go back to a pre-industrial revolution era." He was right. Because for the last ten years we have been living in a pre-industrial revolution era, and we still are. The standard of living for most people has dropped below poverty line. The personal honor of a large portion of the people has been violated after their national honor had been violated. And so we could not reach them by phone and gave up. At seven thirty, Hammudi [nickname for Muhammad] called; so we talked to his wife and we congratulated her wishing her and ourselves the best. Saja asked where he was and he said he was at the big house, meaning our house. He said his cousins, Bashar and Ayman are there with him in the library room and that Isra' and Thurayya were in the TV room (the hall). When Saja finished with the phone call and came to sit with us, she told me what Muhammad said. I told her I was proud of his behavior because it showed meaning and pride.

I then had a conversation with the kids. We talked about Rex and how he has trouble with other dogs in the area, especially Labrador dogs. 'Ali talked about an older man who brings his dog from another area to walk it in ours.

So, to avoid the problems between Rex and his dog, I said I am thinking about asking him in a nice way if he could walk his dog in his neighborhood and not here. 'Ali said: "No, no my father, do not do that." I asked why not. I said "First, he comes from another area; second we want to avoid problems between his dog and our dog." He said: "Father, you do not know the Swiss people; he will go and complain about us, and say that we are forbidding him, we are threatening him, and he will create a problem for us. The Swiss do not need any more instigation or complaints against foreigners, especially against us." He then added: "Father, just let it go, and when you want to take Rex out, go out when there is nobody, and even then, keep Rex on a leash." I cursed the fact that we are expats and I cursed the circumstances that made others use the smallest matters as an excuse to take action against us. I also cursed those who caused such circumstances.

Sunday, 03 December 2000. Today is Khawlah's birthday. I woke up late and read the newspapers. The headlines were about the cease of oil production by Iraq. After that, I went out for a walk with Saja and 'Ali. The weather was good, the sun was shining, and the temperature was moderate.

I remembered this day in 1986 when I took Shajarat al-Dur to the hospital. There were complications during the birth due to her psychological state caused by the injustice, hostility, and unfair treatment from the (family) because we objected to Hussein Kamil joining the family when the president wanted him to marry his daughter. This issue exposed us to much hostility and harassment aimed at everything in our lives and future. It still casts its shadows over us till this day even though God revealed the truth and exposed the fakeness of the relationship between Hussein Kamil and the house of Saddam; the last of which was the best.

There were complications during the birth, to the point where the doctors had to do a caesarian section to save the lives of the baby and the mother. This day in 1986 was a very hard day for us. We had five children; the oldest was Muhammad who was 13 years old at that time, Saja was six years old, and the rest were younger. We had only one woman in the house, I had to stay with Shajarat al-Dur to take care of her and make decisions as requested by the doctors. This lady cannot manage the household; watch the children, their feeding, getting them ready for school, and managing the house.

Anyway, thank God for His kindness; the operation was a success. But Shajarat al-Dur remained in the hospital in order to recuperate her strength for twelve days. During that time and after she left the hospital, her sister did not come to visit her despite her health risks. It was because they were upset with us for objecting to Hussein Kamil marrying their daughter. Imagine what kind of people they are; they lead a whole country. This happened again twelve years later when Shajarat al-Dur was seriously ill and this time it ended tragically. Her sister did not come to visit her, nor did she send any letter. What happened is that she went to visit Shajarat al-Dur in Baghdad carrying the inheritance documents for Hajj Khayrallah, requesting the signature of Shajarat al-Dur. Shajarat al-Dur signed the papers relinquishing her share of the inheritance and told her sister "You came for this issue, and not to check on me; because you were afraid that I will die and the inheritance issue might get complicated. You want it all for yourself because you poor thing, you don't have money. Take it all, congratulations. But I will tell you a fact that you are not aware of; being rich or poor is up to God and not up to humans, and people who are never content will always feel that they are poor."

She added: "We are richer than you because we are content, not because we own more than you; nobody owns more than you. Unfortunately, it seems that you are never content, no matter how much you own, and no matter how much God gives you." She also told her: "Someone like you should have opened a home for orphans and give from her wealth to the people who are living a hardship because of you. But instead of doing good deeds, you have opened a shop to sell vegetables and fruits. God Guides those He loves to the right path of goodness; this proves that God does not love you because He is not guiding you to the correct path."

This is the way our relatives behave and deal with us. In spite of my strong faith, I can say that whatever happens, good or bad, is from God and what the Lord of the universe has ordained and decided. However, what happened to Shajarat al-Dur, and I mean the illness she suffered from, could not be far from the harm, pain, and suffering caused by the house of Saddam after what they did to us. I mean their inhumane behavior towards Saja and us which awakened this sleeping dragon leading to the events that took place. Because, they have tricked us with their promises, which nobody can refuse, except if he told them: I am against you, in public and in private.

I felt, as did Shajarat al-Dur that getting close is political due to the situation at the time. Because of that situation, the president thought about connecting the family with links that cannot be broken. He looked at me as a bird that flies outside the flock. He knew of my abilities and reputation inside and outside Iraq; a reputation that nobody could tarnish. He knew my fighting history, my history in the party, and what I have done for the country. This is in addition to the Arab and international media focusing on me in a way that would make the president lose sleep. This was done to pressure him to take action against me; whether by physically eliminating me or by pushing me to be publically against him. The president is naturally suspicious because of how he grew up, his situation, and how he took power. He is suspicious of even his wife if she was different than the way she is now. A suspicious person does not know of principles and morals that connect humans and prevent betrayal; and so he is suspicious of everyone around him regardless of their history with him. This is why I think he took another step to get closer to me after the first step he took when he gave his daughter to Muhammad.

I was in Baghdad in the first month of 1993, due to the attack which was carried out against Iraq, and I requested to be summoned when it became clear that the crisis between Iraq and the US will surely result in an attack.

I always made sure that I am in Baghdad during any crisis that takes place. That is why I have sent a telegram requesting to be summoned, so that I can be there for solidarity as I had expressed in the telegram. The symbolic telegram is there and saved with the other telegrams and my personal documents starting on 02 August, 1990 until I left the diplomatic mission. The approval response came back swiftly, and I went there. Then the attack came as expected in the form of swift air strikes. We will come back to the air strikes and their effects.

I usually contact the Secretary, `Abd Hamid, when I arrive in Baghdad and ask him to tell the President that I have arrived in Baghdad; and so I did that. It was night time; because I arrived in Baghdad at sunset. The second day he called and said: "the President conveys his greetings and is asking what your position should be; in the Intelligence Service where you would have the same authority as the Director, in the military office where you would have the same duties and rights as the rest of the military office members, or as a deputy of the Minister of Foreign Affairs." Truly, I was surprised by this proposal. However, I collected my thoughts and told him "Convey my greetings and my thanks to the President and tell him that Barzan shouldn't be in those positions; my right and natural position during this crisis is in one of the offices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs because I am an ambassador and can help with my opinion or advice with my colleagues."

He said: "But the President specified these three positions, and we would like to issue an administrative order for that." I said: "This is my response, and my hope is that the President would consider my request." Indeed I went to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and I asked the Director of the Minister Office, who was Mr. Hassan al-Saffar, to allocate a room for me to use as an office during my stay in Baghdad. And so he gave me an office on the same floor as the Minister's office. This office was previously used by Ziyad, the son of former Minister of Foreign Affairs Tariq `Aziz. Two weeks later, or a little more than two weeks, `Abd Hamid called and asked me to come to the President's office in the National Council Building because it was the only building not hit except in the last attack in 1998. I was also there after the disaster which befell us and my transfer before that. It was done without taking into consideration my family situation and my wife's dangerous illness. Whoever made the decision did not take into consideration the roles played by me or my father in supporting him to reach his position. He also ignored the role played by Shajarat al-Dur's father and her mother who served Abu-'Uday the whole time he lived at Uncle Khayrallah's house. She used to respect him and be kind to him; and he acknowledges that.

Anyway, I went there. `Abd then informed the President of my arrival who in turn asked to see me. I entered his office where he was alone. We started talking about the crisis and about various issues regarding the current situation. I told him that the US will continue to use this type of aggression against Iraq because they are not able to carry out a large scale ground and air attack due to lack of justifications. This could create for them domestic problems, as well as problems with Europe; because they have an influential public opinion. If they send their sons to Iraq and some of them are killed; there will be questions: Why did you send our children to Iraq to die? In this case no matter what the answer is, it would not be convincing to the public which would lead to unimaginable problems. He said: "If the situation remains this way, we are not pleading, meaning we are not concerned." This is why I said earlier that I will go back to address the topic of surgical air strikes, along with what they have done and caused. What the air strikes have caused, after the President was sure that the US was not going to carry out a large scale ground and air attack against Iraq and that it will continue using this method of swift strikes, was that the president became more stubborn and stuck to his own ways. As a matter of fact, he started to benefit from those swift air strikes by showing that the regime and its leader are heroes and courageous because every now and then he would collide with the undefeatable US while others are following it.

His stubbornness increased to what it is today. If it weren't for this perception and confidence by the president, he would have taken many measures expected of him by Iraqis and by the region. He acted fast in 1991 when he ordered the starting of a new page unlike the previous policies; legislating new laws for parties, media, personal freedoms, economy, and many others. He had a complete and whole system, but when he felt that he was strong and that others would not work towards regime change out of fear of civil war and division, he went back to the same extreme policies.

Back to our subject; after this varying and wide-ranging talk, he started talking about the subject that he wanted to see me to discuss. He said: "How long are you going to stay overseas while all your people are holding positions and responsibilities? If you continue in this situation you will become a stranger to people, to the state, and to the Party; because you have been far for a long period of time. That is why I want you to come back to Iraq and be assigned a post in the government as you are qualified and well known"...etc. He then added "Everybody is working and helping, even Rukan" He means Rukan Razzuqi who is now in charge of the Tribal Affairs and helps on that front.

I told him: "God Bless them; and God Bless you. However, Mr. President, I have special circumstances, I mean the children who have started school and they do not know Arabic; their Arabic is weak and simple. This means, I mean to say, coming here, will destroy their future; and I do not want to be part of destroying the future of my children whom I brought into this world. They are innocent and they have nothing to do with what happened or what is happening with the public or private issues." He said: "Then, what is the solution?" I said: "By God, I do not have a solution." He said: "What do you think about being the Political Advisor to the President of the Republic?" I said: "Mr. President, I am not arguing titles because my situation is what I just told you." He said: "No, no; you remain ambassador, so that your family remains in Geneva, and you take this position and spend your time between Baghdad and Geneva." At that point I felt that he has closed the door to any excuses. I said: "No objection, especially that it does not affect the children's schooling." He immediately called Tariq `Aziz to explain and asked him for his opinion. He told him to think of a way to do it and tell it to `Abd to issue it as an administrative resolution. My perception and knowledge of the president made me think that he did this in order to bring me back to Baghdad and include me in the existing group which has a certain image they cannot escape.

This is why we find the president does not tolerate them like he used to because things have settled and because they have been burned in the eyes of Iraqis and non-Iraqis. Indeed, an order was issued, if I remember correctly on 20 February 1993. On the same day, the Minister of Information contacted me requesting my opinion or informing me that he will publish the order and broadcast it on radio and television. I asked him to wait two or three days because I was about to publish the last installment of a study titled: "Reasons behind the downfall of the USSR" which also talks a lot about the situation in Iraq, how similar it is to that of the USSR, and the need to act fast to remedy the situation before it is too late. The Minister, Hamid Hammadi, accepted my request and I was thankful. I published the last installment two days later and then requested the publication of the appointment order if it were necessary. The order was published and broadcasted the next day.

On 23 February 1993, I was at home with the workers planting some citrus trees in the garden. Butrus, who works for me in the house came and said that my aunt wanted to talk to me on the phone. So I went into the house and talked to her. She said that my sister Umm-`Uday wants to visit me in the house in an hour. I said: "She is welcome."

I was a surprised, however, because Umm-'Uday doesn't socialize much with people, and especially not with us. This is due to chemical reasons, since our chemistry is at odds with hers.

I took a bath and put on a pair of pants and a sweater because it was still cold in Iraq. I then went back to the workers to watch them. At this time, suddenly a Mercedes stopped at the door. I looked closely and noticed that it was armored. Suddenly the President stepped out of the car. I hurried towards him, greeted him, and led him into the house. This was the first time the President visits us. I took him to the family room, which is the television room. We sat down and I welcomed him but I was not able to guess or know the reason behind his visit. I could have guessed anything except the actual subject that he actually came to discuss. This subject was emotionally and practically closed. The fact that he gave me his daughter for my son is another matter with its own circumstances that I mentioned elsewhere in this memoir. He started to look closely at the house, the living room, and the furniture. He looked here and there and I knew what he was looking for. He was looking at the quality of the furniture and also looking for his picture which he did not see. This made me take him on a tour of the ground floor of the house until we got to the library room since there is a picture of him there.

I reached that conclusion, that he was looking for his picture, because he had told me in the past when I worked with him in the government in 1983 "You and the party can know how loyal people are by listening to the children talking about what kind of talk takes place at their homes and whether or not they have my pictures up in their houses." These are the same ideas and practices used by Hitler's government before and during World War II. In fact, I remember once in the summer of 1966, we were in the main house; The president, myself, my sister, and his wife, it was midafternoon, and the President was talking about a German military parade during the Hitler Era, and how the army generals could not keep their hands upwards for a long time to salute [TC: Illegible, writing is cut-off]. So this is why I came to that conclusion regarding what he was looking for. Anyway, before I gave him the tour he said "'Uday and his mother wanted asked me to talk to you about our wish to marry `Uday to Saja." This was a surprise for me; but, thank God, I always manage to organize my thoughts. And so I said in a brotherly way "But, Abu-'Uday, you know that Saja is engaged to one of her cousins." I thought that this would help me get out of this tight corner I found myself in. But he said "If you agree, then I will go to the house of Salih al-'Abdallah and ask them." I told him "But then they will think that I changed my mind and interpret things incorrectly, and you know how sensitive I am and how much I try to preserve my reputation and keep my word." He said "No, no, do not worry, if you approve, then I will go and explain everything to them."

After a moment of silence, I told him; "Well, you did not leave me a choice; and in the past you were the one who gave me your daughter for Muhammad and so I have to agree. But first, you know how `Uday behaves and at the same time you know our view on life, home, and on family. If `Uday continues with this type of behavior, then this will not happen" He said: "No, no, Barzan, you do not know `Uday. In fact `Uday now is a completely different person; he is praying, he is religious, and he is the one who asked for this." Then, he added: "If I wasn't so sure about how much he wanted this, I would not have come to you." I said: "Well, then I will also give you her sister so you can give her to the family of Salih al-'Abdallah instead of Saja." He said: "No, I will convince them." I said: "No, give them her sister, so that they do not think that I have reneged on my word and so that they do not interpret things incorrectly." He said: "Fine." Tears then started coming down from his eyes and he asked me to call his wife and tell her to ask both her sons to come to her because he is going to be on his way to them. So, I got up and called saying that Sami is in my home. She said: "I know." I told her, he is asking you to tell both your sons to come to your home and he is on his way there. He left my home and went to his wife and sons to inform them that I agreed. After that I learned that he went to the home of Salih al-`Abdallah that same day to ask them for Saja.

Honestly, I am not comfortable at all, because I know them and I know that they cannot keep a promise, and I know their inability to resist worldly things; it is in their blood.

I contacted Shajarat al-Dur on the same day, so that she does not hear it from anybody else but me. When she understood the subject, it was like a shock to her. She said: "Barzan, how?" I said: "I will get to Geneva in a few days and we will discuss it." The next day, Tariq `Aziz told me that the President ordered that I go as his envoy to visit the presidents of Yemen, Tunisia, Palestine (who was in Tunisia), Libya, and Algeria, as well as to the King of Morocco, Hasan II, may he rest in peace. I discussed with Tariq `Aziz and the Minister of Foreign Affairs al-Sahhaf the issues that I will present in my meetings. Al-Sahhaf wrote the telegrams to our embassies in those countries asking the ambassadors to contact the respective Ministry of Foreign Affairs to inform them about my visits and to draft an agenda for the visit. It was to start with Yemen, then, Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, and Morocco. I forgot to mention Mauritania which was my last stop before going to Geneva.

I arrived in Geneva and Shajarat al-Dur was eager to learn the details of the issue. I informed her in the presence of Saja and Muhammad. I explained everything that took place to them and how there was no way out of it. Saja said: "Father, I am afraid that he will do to me what he did to the daughter of Izzat al-Duri." I told her: "By God, my dear, I cannot tell you no. However, what reassures me is the talk of your uncle and his promise." I added that they surely know that we are not like the family of `Izzat alDuri. I was saying these words, but I was not comfortable. During this whole time, ever since Abu-'Uday visited me, asked for Saja's hand, and we agreed, I have been in an abnormal state, which I have experienced before. I even cried on more than one occasion when I was alone before I travelled. The mother and her two sons came to me at home. I forgot to mention that `Uday and his brother have paid me a visit at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the next day after their father's visit, and thanked me for my approval. The mother and her two sons came in the evening and they wanted to discuss the details of the wedding, etc. The shock of this visit, added to the emotional state I was in, made me speak harshly to them. God knows I did that on purpose hoping they would say forget this whole thing.

I told them you are always in a hurry; what is the hurry for? The other thing is: you know that the girl is a student, and I cannot accept that she leaves her school. She cannot come here before the end of June.

Then, I addressed `Uday and told him: "Don't you want us to prepare the girl psychologically so that she accepts? And also, there are other things that need to be prepared." Then, I stopped talking, but it was apparent that I was upset. They in turn stopped talking and then left a few minutes later. An hour later, or a little more, my aunt called me and said: "My son, your brother's family would like to get their son married and are asking you to allow Saja and her mother to come to Baghdad." I found out that they left my home and went to my aunt and that they were still there. That is why I was harsh with my aunt; it is not how I usually am with her. I said: "I seek God's protection from Satan the rejected one." Then, I added "My Aunt- the children and their mother were in my home, and we discussed the subject; so why are they insisting on speeding things up this way? Please do not interfere in the subject." Then, I hung up. Anyway, we lived in a state of anxiety until it was done.

At the beginning of June 1993, I sent Shajarat al-Dur along with some of the children to Baghdad ahead of me; and I remained with Saja and 'Ali until they finished school at the end of June. Shajarat al-Dur and I agreed on what we will tell them; the behavior of their son and the fact that we would not tolerate any recklessness or lack of manners on his part because as you know we are people who do not ask for anything but our dignity.

We agreed that she would call me and give me a signal if it turns out that they intend on taking us hostage through or daughter. Shajarat al-Dur along with some of the children went to Baghdad, and we remained in touch; but she did not confirm our fears. Instead, I felt that she was relaxed and her psyche was normal. At the end of June, I went to Baghdad with Saja and 'Ali. We arrived and they came to visit us, and they were very happy. I took advantage of the frequent visits by the mother and her daughters to stress the important points which we fear. I stressed that he should respect the relationship, respect my daughter as a person, and turn a new clean page in our relationship. I also insisted that my daughter continues her high school education. I got her a transfer from International School in Geneva to the International School in Baghdad. I also told the mother in the presence of Shajarat al-Dur, her sister who is married to my younger brother, my aunt, and her two daughters the wives of Husayn Kamil and Saddam Kamil "Yesterday, I was in al-Nazimiyah; I, as well as everyone else know that there is a home of an Armenian individual your son has taken to use for personal matters, and I have noticed that the guards were still there in civilian clothes; so, what does all of this mean? This type of behavior will make us cancel the whole thing."

I also told her: "You should realize something and tell it to your son. We are a family with a certain image and a certain understanding we use to deal with others who respect us and who know the meaning and importance of family relationships. If your son wants a woman to be his loyal wife and companion, to preserve his reputation during the good and the bad or whether he is dead or alive, to give him an honorable family, to guard his honor and money, and put his mind at ease, then Saja is perfect for that. But if he is looking to something similar to what he knows now, then our daughter is not like that and will refuse to be like that. The other thing you need to know, this is her mother, she is in her thirties and has 6 children. Our relationship, if you take into account the years before our marriage, is 25 years long; but she knew that I do not respect myself she would not hesitate to leave me. Based on her mother, you can rest assured that's how my 15 year old daughter will also act." She told me that she knows all this; she reiterated that `Uday was the one who asked for this; that `Uday now, is a completely different person from the past, how he is praying, how he is religious, and how he is fasting every Monday and Thursday.

That was not enough for me. I also told her: "Abu-'Uday [Saddam] knew you before he married you; because he was living in your father's house. I also knew Ahlam before I married her, due to the relations between the two families, making them like one single family." She said: "True" I added: "Saja and `Uday should meet in our presence so that they can make their own decisions." She said: "Agreed." I said: "However, you must tell your son that if he does not find in Saja the qualities that he wants, then he should not hesitate in cancelling the whole thing; and Saja has the same right." We agreed on the next day. She came with, I believe, her older daughter who is the wife of Hussein Kamil; a man with a bad reputation. Also, Shajarat al-Dur, her sister Ilham who is the wife of my younger brother, and Saja attended. I reiterated the same things I had said to his mother the previous day, because I believe that the mother did not tell her son everything she heard from me, either out of fear that it would create a problem, or due to her lack of accuracy. So I reiterated the exact same thing. I said that our traditions and our culture dictate respect for the family and the wife, and this is our daughter, so if he's looking for a loyal wife to build a family and preserve his reputation and honor in life and death, then Saja is up to the task.

But if he wants something else, then Saja is not like that; and here she is in front of him. I also told him "Saja is protective like her mother." Then, I reiterated "If her mother ever found out about something I have done that hurt her pride she would not hesitate in leaving the house despite anything she has here." He laughed, but his laugh did not seem to me that it was out of malice or evasion; it showed that he knew the family's traditions and customs.

This was not enough for us because I wanted to first hear from the father and have his assurance, because his word is the one that means commitment, not the words of others. But unfortunately it turned out that all their words are the same and they all behave the same way. Abu-'Uday invited us for lunch and said he wanted the children and their mother to attend. The lunch was in al-Ridwaniyah, we all went, and it was midday. His wife was there. We sat down; he welcomed us and he was playful with the children. We then talked about politics and the US attack on the Intelligence Directorate a few days ago in retaliation for Iraq's attempt to assassinate George Bush in Kuwait. I told him "Mr. President, the world's countries are different than ours." He said "How?" I said "Here, when a person leaves his position, he becomes like everybody else. Sometimes he would want to live like regular people."

I then reminded him about the time in 1982 or 1983 when I told him how `Abd-al-Rahman `Arif would stand in line with the people waiting for his turn to buy eggs, and how I suggested that we give him a car and a driver.

I told him "When a president in America leaves at the end of his term, he keeps a special status and respect, and they assure his personal security. They consider his security part of the pride and security of the United States of America. It is the same thing in Britain, France, and other developed countries. That is why we should not be mistaken by thinking that the current US administration will not care very much if Iraq assassinates George Bush." He was listened and did not interrupt me. This was one of the rare occasions where the president does not interrupt those he's talking to. He usually has the habit of speaking up if he has a comment or an observation which usually makes the person stop talking. This also makes the speaker unable to focus and makes him lose his train of thoughts. I told him: "I do not know why when the Iraqi people, when they hate their ruler, allow just about anyone to talk about the ruler and the government without telling him these things are of no concern to your country and you should not interfere in them. Instead we find that this makes a lot of people happy and they even add to the hurtful talk."

I then told him "Your Excellency, allow me to tell you a true story that happened to one of my friends. You know him; engineer Fadil 'Ajinah. One day, Fadil was supervising the roof construction for his brother's house. You know that workers are usually in a rush to finish pouring the cement in one day because it is best to do so when pouring cement. So one of the workers, a Sudanese national, was working slowly and was not rushing like the others, which made Fadil lose his usual calm and ask him to move it. Fadil even cursed Ja'far al-Numayri, who was out of the government at that time. When, suddenly, the Sudanese man became angry and screamed 'why are you insulting Ja'far al-Numayri, would you like it if I insulted Saddam Hussein?' This made Fadil realize the dilemma he got himself into. He said 'I apologize; but Ja'far al-Numayri is not even in power right now.' The Sudanese man said 'so what, he was the Sudanese president'." I then said "Mr. President, the Sudanese people cannot be compared to the Iraqi people when it comes to culture and civilization, but their nationalist views are better than that of Iraqis, unfortunately." I noticed that his patience was running short and that he could barely remain quiet. Indeed, he suddenly said in loud voice "Look, I swear I will eliminate them one after the other."

His words surprised me, like I was defending the others; which made me say "Mr. President, I'm not in disagreement with what you're saying. But as the saying in Iraq goes (the blow is commensurate to the cheek's size)." I added "The Americans hit Iraq with missiles from Kuwait a few days ago because of the Bush assassination attempt, then why don't you hit Kuwait with our missiles which are internationally allowed? In fact, Kuwait is south of Basra, it is not more than 120 km away; so why don't you bombard them? At least it will make them hesitate before allowing the US to bombard Iraq from their territory again." When he heard this, he gave me a look which to me meant that he didn't think of this idea. We then went to the dining room where he was playful with the children asking them "why don't you come back to Baghdad?" I said "Mr. President, their schooling there is better for them and for you. They will learn languages and cultures of other countries. They may benefit you in the future." He shocked me with his answer "Why would we need languages?" When I heard that I stopped talking.

We went back to the living room, where we were before lunch and we talked about Saja's marriage to his son.

I told him "Honestly, I am not comfortable, but I trust you; I am giving Saja to you and not to anyone else." He repeated that 'Uday was the one who asked for this and that he is serious, prays, and fasts... etc. I told him that Saja is still a child and he needs to understand her so that she can understand him. I said she is still in her childhood years and not like the other women who are experienced in life. He said "I know how you raise your children and I know about your family life, but 'Uday also still has a mind of a child." He said this in a way to address the age difference between his son and Saja. On 13 July 1993, the wedding of his son and Saja took place; and the day before, we married Thurayya to her cousin Salih al-'Abdallah. Before Saja's ceremony Umm'Uday arrived before anyone else. We sat in the television room and discussed the issue. I told her "Muhammad's marriage to your daughter should happen at the same time as Saja's marriage to your son especially since the issue of Muhammad's marriage to your daughter is older than Saja's." She said "You gave your brother your approval to Saja's marriage, and he appreciates this. But when you tie the two marriages together you will make him uncomfortable and your decision, which we all appreciate, will not look as good." I insisted on my request even though her words had an effect on me.

However, Shajarat al-Dur, May God Bless her soul, intervened and took the side of her sister which made me agree to Saja's wedding before Muhammad's. We went ahead with the wedding but I was not comfortable. Before they took Saja, and because I was nervous, and because of the pain, the emotions, the regret, and confusion that I was feeling, I treated Shajarat al-Dur in a way that I have never done before during out life together. They came on 14 July 1993 to take Saja, Abu-'Uday was with them and he was very happy. When Saja wore the wedding dress and came down with her mother, Shajarat al-Dur asked me to come. I excused myself from Abu-'Uday and went to her. I found her standing next to Saja. The expressions on her face were saying it is all now in God's hands because he is the only one who can be fair to this child and to us; our intentions are good. She said: "Here is Saja, take her." I held her hand and we walked through the living room until we were a few meters from Abu-'Uday; I said in front of everyone, men and women "Here is Saja, she is in your care now Abu-'Uday, I am giving her to you and not to others because I only know you." He said "She is in good hands, God willing." That is when I handed her over to him.

However, after only a few days, we started hearing things that would embarrass the most honorable of men. We started hearing about the behavior of the son and his rounds in public places. Husayn and Saddam, sons of Kamil Hasan, started going out with him to these public places along with girls of bad reputation... etc. We did not do anything about it hoping that the father would intervene and correct things; but he did not. Of course we were not asking for the impossible and did not ask for the son to turn into a monk; we were asking for reasonable respect for himself and other concerned parties. And so we continued acting like we did not hear anything until I visited Baghdad in April of 1994. Abu-'Uday invited me to dinner in al-Ridwaniyah. His brothers, Sab'awi and Watban, were also there. We spoke about various topics, political and other. Then he surprised me with this question "What is this article you plan to publish?" For a few moments I forgot all about it and asked "what article?" He said "the article where you say that some people are hungry while others are full." At that moment I remembered. A few days before coming to Baghdad I received an article written by his son accusing the Foreign Ministry, ambassadors, and security services of incompetence and being busy with doing business... etc. He wrote that some ambassadors were hoarding surpluses and were facilitating trade matters to businessmen for a commission.

He meant Nuri al-Ways and other local ambassadors. He also said similar things about security services and he mainly meant Sab'awi. So, I wrote an article, which was not long, and in a nice and gentle way. I took it with me to Baghdad. By coincidence, the President's son came to visit me at home. We talked about the subject and I gave him the article, and gave him the choice of whether or not to publish it. I told him "I think you shouldn't talk about the security services and the Foreign Ministry in this way at this time, because it would make them stop working, and we need them to work in order to get out of this problem that we face, especially since the domestic situation depends on the security services and political work depends on the Foreign Ministry. If we attack them, they will turn against us and they have countless ways at their disposal to hurt someone." He left my home, and it seems that he gave the article to `Abd Hamid so that 'Abd can tell Saddam that someone wants to publish this article or he did in fact asked for his father's opinion about publishing it. I cannot say for sure because I do not like to be unfair to anyone, and God Almighty is capable of dealing with him and others.

I told the president "Did you read the article your son published in his newspaper a few days ago? This article that you're asking about is my response to your son's article." He said that he did not read it. I told him it is important that he does.

I then told him "Did you read what the Jordanian newspapers wrote about that same article?" He said "No," I said "The Jordanian newspapers asked why 'Uday is criticizing the performance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its embassies; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs policy is an implementation of the President's orders, just like every Foreign Ministry in any other country," etc. He said: "No, I did not read them." I said: "It will be useful if you asked for them." He asked me again "Who are the hungry? And who are the full and fat?" I told him "Most of the people are hungry, and the government is full and fat." He said "No, this is not true." I told him "You confirm it yourself, the parties held by government officials in public places like weddings and birthdays which the government officials carry out, whether they are weddings, or birthday are done in way that cannot be imagined by a sane person in our situation. There is usually enough leftover food to feed dozens of families for a week." I noticed that he got angry; he said "You come every six months, or once a year, where did you get this information? This is not true." Then, he said "For your information, now every family has two or three individuals working, and the salary of each is two thousand Dinars, or 1500. So people are living comfortable lives." I said "I wish for that to be true, but this is not the information I have." He replied angrily "Where did you get this information?"

I said "Mr. President, it is true I live outside Iraq, and it is also true that my visits to Iraq are few and far in between. However, when I visit Iraq, I can learn the important matters; because I ask my friends who are normal people and they tell me the truth since they know that I like honesty and truthfulness and know that I would not put them in jail or have them sent there. This is why they tell me everything." He was silent but upset. This happened end of April. He gathered the Party members in a broad conference in September and said to them "I want you to tell me If Iraqis are living uncomfortable lives so I can open up the world's warehouses and satisfy them." In October there was uproar when the Iraqi Army moved southward, which was explained at the time that the President wants to invade Kuwait again. This is what Husayn Kamil confirmed when he escaped to Jordan to "save" Iraq from the current regime; he explained the operation in detail.

In the end we talked about the subject of his daughter, as we wanted to move forward. He started looking for words to help him formulate a response. I understood what was happening; because we heard that the widow of the cursed Husayn Kamil was playing an evil role to scare the girl away from us. She was telling her sister things like you cannot live with them because they live by a strict system.

She also told her that have a certain etiquette, that we only eat with forks and knives, and that we do not sit in front of the TV in pajamas and we have to wear anything but sleep wear before we watch TV. She would continue saying "You, how can you live with aunt Ahlam? Nothing is ever good enough for her. Also, she is known for her etiquette, taste, and organization. Did you not see how prepare ourselves two days before her visits?" etc. She ends by saying "They will take you to Switzerland and you will not be able to meet with your family because they are not coming back to Iraq. And you won't be able to live there; they speak English and French and will ask you to learn other languages."

After some discussion, he said "My brother, honestly, we cannot give her to you." I asked "Why?" He said "You live by a strict system and on etiquette; and our daughter is not used to that." I said "Then strict organization and good customs are now a crime and a thing that is not good?" He said "No; but each family has its own way." I told him "Yes, we are an organized family, but we do not eat human beings." I continued to pressure him. He said "I have talked to my daughter several times but she is frightened." I told him "Because there is someone who is scaring her." He said "Who?" I said "Her sister." He said "I forbade her from visiting her siblings or meeting with them. But this is how it is."

I continued to pressure him, saying that if he were determined and insisting he would be able to convince her. He said "What do you want me to do? Do you want me to hit her with a stick and force her to agree? I fear forced marriages." He meant fear from digression. I told him "This is because your daughter was not raised on a special system." He asked "how?" I replied "I mean her mother did not spend enough time with her when she was younger, and now it is too late for that. Notice the children who were raised on a special system; I brought Saja from Switzerland and handed her over to you so you can imprison her after she was flying free in the most beautiful gardens like a butterfly. And now she is living behind three check points. She accepted the marriage despite what she heard about you son in newspaper and in other media. But she accepted because she was raised to obey her parents and to trust their choices for her." He did not say anything and did not comment. We left around 2:30 in the morning. I went home extremely upset, could not sleep for more than two or three hours, and got up early. I called Watban, and asked to meet at noon the same day. He said "Come to my home and we'll have lunch together." I told him "Fine."

We met, and I told him "Watban, I am now convinced that the President has changed his mind regarding the marriage of Muhammad to his daughter. This is why I came to you with this idea; go to him without saying that you and I discussed the matter, tell him that you noticed from the conversation last night that it will be hard to go through with this marriage, and then tell him that you can convince me to abandon the whole marriage idea. This will make him tell you what he is thinking and at the same time save face for both parties. I don't want to tell him that I changed my mind regarding the marriage because it would hurt him and that is not my aim."

Watban's opinion was completely different from my opinion. He said that I misunderstood the issue and said that he was surprised at how I was looking at the matter in such a way. He said the president is keeping his word and will give me his daughter, and that the issue is a done deal; in my favor. I said "I don't see things like you do." He repeated what he said. I reluctantly stopped talking, and dropped the subject; because I do not have any channel to the President through which I can talk about such a personal matter. I regretted consulting with Watban; this was the first time I seek his opinion in such important matters.

I visited Baghdad in June to attend an ambassadors' conference that was held there.

But I left Baghdad before the closing session of the conference on purpose because I expected that the President was going to meet the ambassadors and I did not want to meet him. Saja left Baghdad one week after me. I left Baghdad on 09 June 1994 and she left Baghdad on 17 or 18 June 1994 to visit her family, not because she was upset with her husband. However, before her trip, and for seven months, which is how long she had lived with them, she was in hell and she was complaining to her mother in-law; and she asked Saddam to give her some time because she wanted to discuss some issues with him. He would always say God willing we'll meet, but would not follow up. The president always depended on time to solve problems and for time to normalize things; he did so regarding both public and private matters. He did not know that time cannot play a positive role in all issues.

And so it was decided that she will not return unless the problem was addressed. The way the mother dealt with her son's behavior was stupid and almost caused my daughter emotional problems. Saja would complain to her and say 'Uday did not come home until 3 in the morning and did not even come home before that, and the mother would respond by saying "no no I saw him come home at 11," to which Saja would say "Aunt, I'm the one living with him not you, and I'm telling you he came home at 3 in the morning"... etc.

The mother would insist that "no no I saw him come home"... etc instead of saying that she would talk to him and scold him which would have made my daughter feel better.

Suddenly, in September or October, we heard through the media that the President had married his daughter. Honestly, this news was too much for us to bear. It was insulting to our traditions and customs; starting from the village all the way to the top of society. We were not insisting on this issue because we knew the nature of the merchandise in question, but he could have told me about it through one of his brothers or sons, he could have told me that he knows what's best for his daughter and that we should just drop the subject. But his behavior in such way was opposite to our values and traditions and got on our nerves. But despite all this, God who did not guide him to the right path, did help me to get over the issue. Later on I found out that his behavior was his way of getting back at us because Saja did not return since he thought that I planned her departure and then stopped her from returning. This is in spite of the fact that Saja sent him a letter from Jordan in which she explained in detail the reasons why she wanted to meet with him and why for those same reasons she could not continue this humiliating life.

I have learned this because I know his mentality and because every time he meets someone from the family he would tell them "Barzan gave me Saja but then took her without my knowledge."

In the same sitting that took place in al-Ridwaniyah in April 1994, and when we talked about politics, he said "Why don't you come back to Baghdad? We do not need you as an ambassador over there." He added "You can run the Intelligence Services." When I heard this I said in spontaneous reaction "intelligence?" I said it in a way that made him know that I was rejecting the idea. He said "Yes, the intelligence services, those who run intelligence services go on to become foreign ministers and prime ministers." In yet another spontaneous reaction, I said "And who told you I want to be a foreign minister or a prime minister?" He responded "I thought because you served and gave to the field that you would want to return to it." I said "No, because those who work in this field always leave it with a bad reputation." Sab'awi interrupted me by saying "Don't scare me." I said "I'm not trying to scare anyone but this is the truth and it's my experience. I left the intelligence services field 13 years ago when it was a true institution, but the intelligence service now does not mean anything because it was emptied of everything; and you want me to come back and run it?" He said "Fine, it's up to you. I offered you the position because I thought you wanted it."

When I met Watban, I told him "Did you notice that the president still thinks that want to run the intelligence service?" He said "Yes, I noticed, but your reply was clear and put that assumption to rest. It also made Abu-Yasir happy because he is looking forward to returning to the intelligence service." I said "Congratulations to him and to others for have the keys to the prison."

In the evening of 03 December 2000, Khawlah's birthday, we had a simple celebration with a birthday cake baked by Saja for the occasion. We tried to be normal because of the recent wedding of Muhammad, which was celebrated at the beginning of the month, and the birthday of Khawlah, which was on 03 December. I gave her a bracelet as a birthday gift, which is one of her mother's bracelets. I asked her to take care of it because it belonged to her mother. And I asked her to always remember and follow her mother's principles. I asked her and her siblings to be like their mother. I also asked her to study hard, to always remember that we are guests in this country and that we have our culture and religion while they have their own; we have to adopt the good from their culture and avoid the things that clash with traditions, customs, and religion. At seven o'clock 'Ali went to the train station to go to Fribourg to go to his university tomorrow.

I said goodbye to him because he didn't want me to go with him to the train station. Two hours later I called and found him in his dorm room organizing his stuff and preparing for his classes tomorrow. I noticed for the last two weeks that 'Ali was comfortable, when I was walking with him near the house we talked about the university. He said "Dad, the university classes are even easier than the High School classes we took." I said "do you remember that I told you exactly that because I experienced it. University study is easier and more enjoyable than high school because the student shifts to different way of thinking, and because studying at university does not involve memorizing names and dates." He said "True, but the difficulty is in the fact that we have to study in French but you know that I used to study in English." I said "In 2 or 3 months, your French will be on the same level as your English." He said "God willing." I was extremely happy when I heard this from 'Ali because it means he is now settled and has adapted to the conditions there.

Monday, 04 December 2000. I read the newspapers and found that al-Quds al-Arabi Newspaper which is published in London had published a large article in its issue # 3595 on 30 November 2000.

It had the headline: His Articles signed by Abu-Sarhan criticize the intelligence services and make ministers nervous, `Uday Saddam Hussein carries the ID Card # 1 in the Writers Union and lives like the philosophers. The article is written by 'Ali alKazimi. His name reminded me of 'Umar al-Kazimi who write a rebuttal to an article I wrote in which I said when unity is achieved by weapons and blood will not last. I wrote it during the war in Yemen waged by President Ali Abdallah Salih to eliminate the separatist movement. I also referred in the article to how 'Abd-al-Nasir handled the separation in Syria. 'Umar al-Kazimi wrote that my ideas are strange and do not represent us. He wrote that Barzan has been outside the decision-making circle for far too long and has been living in the west and so his ideas have shifted from Ba'thist to western.

He missed how he contacted the US embassy in 1988 when he disagreed with his father because of the father's relationship with the famous woman Samirah al-Shahbandar and then he killed his father's servant Kamil Hanna. He also insisted on marrying his friend Thurayya `Abd-al-Karim al-`Ali, with whom he had a relationship known to everyone. Things with his father deteriorated to a point where there was a shooting; he attacked his father in October, Watban and I were at the father's house when we went outside after hearing him firing towards the house.

In the same evening he contacted the American Embassy to ask the officials in charge over there to facilitate his travel to the United States, asking for political asylum. All of this was relayed to the president by Husayn Kamil by means of a tape recorder as 'Uday's telephones were all tapped by Husayn Kamil. Subsequently, the President ordered Husayn Kamil and Saddam Kamil to arrest 'Uday. He was arrested at the house in the presence of his mother and both his aunts, and he was taken to jail. Then the play started with preparing for his trial, the president sending a letter to the Justice Minister, and the Justice Minister replying to the president with a letter in which he praises the president's sense of justice and asks for mercy for 'Uday... etc. This is all known by everyone because the letters were all broadcasted on the radio and published in the newspapers.

In any case, I found that 'Ali al-Kazimi was explaining in details 'Uday's lifestyle, pointing to how he parties all night, with the figurative winks and nudges as to the types of parties, and how he sleeps all day to the point that he once conceded to an appointment with the chief of the Jordanian Press Syndicate but only at 03:00 AM, which made the latter gracefully decline attending said meeting. When I read this, it became clear to me that the matter was leaked from Baghdad and that the aim was to completely eliminate 'Uday and to neutralize him from any position of power; and I do not put it past his brother to be behind this.

Uday was unable to do anything about this. I am sure he heard of it from the sons of uncle Khayrallah, because they used to speak of that matter and I had heard that talk from them. Later on, he allied himself with 'Ali Hasan and he accepted the gift of his (uncle) `Ali, which was his daughter; this was a move against me. He forgot that the first and foremost threat against him and against his father was 'Ali Hasan who had, for some time, the ambition to rule Iraq because he felt that he is the one who stabilized the regime, especially after the disappearance of Husayn Kamil. `Uday was also oblivious to the fact that, deep inside, 'Ali Hasan blamed `Uday and his father for the loss of more than twenty people from the Majid family who considered the departure of Husayn Kamil to Jordan as a direct result of pressure exerted by the sons of the president, and especially by `Uday. Husayn's mother said that to `Uday's mother in the first few days of Husayn's escape. She said to her that her son ran away because of "your children's tyranny," in reference to the president's sons as the conversation was with the president's wife. Consequently, he lost his position in politics and the cause in all this was the system by which he was raised, which was set by Husayn Kamil, and which was destructive in every sense of the word. Indeed, it destroyed its target, which was `Uday. I say that 'Uday now is the weakest link in the power circles in Iraq.

I said unfortunately because I know if `Uday had been surrounded by honest people and if it weren't for the destructive role played by Husayn Kamil, it would have been very possible for `Uday to become somebody, because he was an intelligent young man and he had many attributes that were much more superior and noble than those of his brother. The article is included with this paper.

From the onset he loved the trade business, and so he became "engaged" to it and then he "married" it until it destroyed him just as much as Husayn Kamil destroyed him. But despite the damage it inflicted upon him he could not get rid of it. Business destroyed him socially, politically, and professionally because he overdid it, because he dealt with it in an unusual manner, and because he used every legal and illegal method when practicing it. He also used the state and its "sword" to facilitate and to pave the road for his business. He traded in everything without exception, and this is something everyone knew both inside and outside Iraq. Moreover, anything that was said about him was easily believed because he had the personality to fit rumors.

I said to myself unfortunately this boy has lost everything; he has lost in this life and the afterlife. He has lost his health, his family, the society, and politics. He lost as a result of his uncalculated and unstable alliances. He allied himself with Husayn Kamil against me, and it is known what happened afterwards between him and Husayn.

He then wanted to ally himself with me against Husayn Kamil but I never have been one for alliances and I do not allow anyone to use me because I learned a lot after what happened with the father. I concluded that we were brothers, but the president used me and when Husayn appeared on his radar he fabricated problems with me to throw me outside the arena. Therefore, it is not possible, nor are they capable, to use me again. Even the father cannot do that; because I have learned a bitter and important lesson from what happened with them. I have become a different person and I can only thank them for what they have done with me and which has given me a great experience and knowledge that has benefited me. Indeed, it has benefited me in life in general. Later on, he allied himself with the family of his uncle, Khayrallah al-Talfah, not knowing that they are the weakest link in the tribe and in the family, and that they only care about their own interests. He forgot how and why Lu'ay walks behind him, (overlooking) what `Uday had done to him when he caused the fracture to his hand, and his imprisonment, and his ultimate humiliation as was said. Whoever forgets all this as if nothing ever happened is either extremely opportunist or has lost all fervor and gallantry. Before that, he had courted and allied himself with his uncle, `Adnan Khayrallah. He used to socialize with him and have evening parties with him which were free of all familial barriers and traditions. They became friends.

However, he was killed, and all the indicators point to Husayn Kamil as the one who had killed `Adnan, etc...

Back to our subject, I called Mr. Ilyas Khuri to ask him about the issue of extending the residency and he told me that he had yet to receive anything from the Residency Department even though he called an official there, and he was of the opinion that we should wait until the day after next and then, if we still have not received anything, call the consulate department in the Foreign Ministry in the capital. However, that same day at 3:30 he called back to say that the official at the Residency Department had called to say that an approval was issued for an extension until 20 January 2001. I was happy about that and I thanked Ilyas for his efforts, and I asked him to request the documents concerning the memorial of Shajarat al-Dur which we had given to the Engineering Office in order to provide us with the information we had asked for concerning the temperature and the humidity... etc, because we have not reached any results in that regards with the officials. He said that he advises not ask for the documents until after we pay for all the expenses incurred by Shajarat al-Dur's stay at the center, because the center at which she is staying had given us the name of the office that we dealt with. Therefore, in the event they become sure that we are not dealing with them, it is possible that they will do something against us by coordinating with the center. I told him that his hesitations are justifiable but I asked him to call the secretary of the official at the center and ask her to send the complete list from 01 September 2000 and until 31 December 2000. He said that was feasible. I thanked him.

Tuesday, 05 December 2000. Today is the day we visit Shajarat al-Dur...nothing is important besides visiting Shajarat al-Dur. We went there, as is the case every week, and we stayed there from four in the afternoon until five thirty. I noted the temperature which was 20.3 and humidity was 39. We recited some verses from the Koran. We returned home at six and broke our fast, as today was the ninth of Ramadan.

Wednesday, 06 December 2000. Nothing important happened besides the usual matters, reading the newspapers, and picking up the children from the school.

Thursday, 07 December 2000. I read the newspapers, and I took Saja to art school, and then brought her back. 'Ali arrived in the evening because Friday is a holiday in Freiburg. I am still wearing a black tie. Of course, I have noticed for a while that the children, especially Saja, are waiting for me to stop wearing a black tie. Saja spoke to me from the perspective that Muhammad just got married and that it was inappropriate to continue wearing a black tie because it indicates pessimism, etc.

I do agree with her but I cannot bring myself to let go of it; and I said so to Saja. She said "very well, Dad, but a person must stay optimistic." And she left it at that, with the hope that she will convince me at a later time. I felt that she spoke with Muhammad about this subject, as well as with 'Ali. 'Ali followed me to my bedroom when I went to change out of the clothes I was wearing and into my house clothes. 'Ali came in and closed the door behind him. He said "Dad, I would like to speak to you about a certain issue." I said, "Go ahead." He said "You have to get out of the state you are in." I said "And what state is that?" He said "The sadness that is overtaking you." I told him "I do not feel the weight of that sadness you are talking about." He said "You have been here for five months now, refusing to get out of the house or to go anywhere, except to go walking around the house, or to take my siblings to school, and you continue to wear that black tie!" He added "At least do it for the sake of your son who got married." He continued, as if questioning "Why did you not grieve this way when my grandfather or grandmother passed away?" I said "I did grieve." He said "But not like this." I said "Yes, because this is different." He said "And how is it different?" I said "My father and mother lived their lives; my father passed away at the age of eighty three and my mother passed away when she was sixty eight years old. However, your mother was still a young woman, not even forty years old when she was afflicted by the illness."

I added "The other thing is that she was the companion of my life, my youth, and even my childhood. She accompanied me, she supported me, and she fought battles with me. She has been loyal. She guarded my honor, my money, and my children. How do I repay her this favor and these noble stances?" He said "True; but this is God's will, and such is life." He left the room and closed the door behind him.

When I came back to sit in the living room, he said "Dad, I will not go with all of you to Southern France during the Christmas and New year vacation." I asked him why. He said "Because you, again, will stay at home and will refuse to go out." I said to him "But we will enjoy it." He said "That's true, but never leaving the house is not normal." I know that he does not mean what he said, and that his goal was only to put pressure on me so that I will change my life style which has lasted more than three years now.

Friday, 08 December 2000. I read the newspapers as usual, and then I got dressed to go into the city with Saja to buy a few things for Muhammad's wife. I put on a dark blue tie that has a fine white line, and when I came out of the room 'Ali noticed. He came towards me and he embraced me warmly without saying a word. He smiled but his smile was hiding a deep-rooted pain and the wish to say such is life.

Friday, 16 December 2000. Once again the wound is reopened, but this time it is not in Geneva nor in Baghdad, but in Paris. I went to Paris at the insistence of the children and hoping a change of scenery will help me feel better, because ever since I arrived on 04 July 2000, I did not get out of the house except to walk around it or to get the children from school or from the doctor. I also never went out for fun unless it was necessary, such as when I was in the French village of Anmass waiting for the entry visa into Switzerland. I think I went to have dinner with the children twice, and that was because we had to; because there was no other place to eat besides the restaurant. And so I went to Paris and I acted like my trip to Paris was in response to the children's wishes but in reality it was to meet with Muhammad and his wife since I couldn't attend their wedding because I was here with his siblings and because I did not want to be there at the same time as he was. Also, this whole time, the two of us never happened to be in Baghdad at the same time. Furthermore, I had been attempting to research certain issues because I am afraid that the Swiss do not renew the residence visas for children.

It was also because I had made an appointment with a Lebanese individual whom I had known since the days of the magazine All the Arabs which was established in Paris by the intelligence apparatus. I wanted to get some information from him, and so I went there. I had not visited Paris since 1990 when I had gone to visit the son of my brother, Sab'awi, when he was receiving medical treatment over there. I arrived in Paris in the afternoon, and I had a problem because I had made a reservation in a hotel from the same chain as the hotel where I stayed for twenty days when I was in the village of Anmass because it was out of the way and because their prices were reasonable. When I called the information line to make my reservation and asked them about the distance between the hotel and the centre of Paris, which the Shanzelize Street, I was told it was two kilometers. However, after I arrived and paid in advance the fees for three nights, I realized that the distance was different than what I was told when I spoke with him from Geneva. The distance was actually more than ten kilometers which makes walking there a difficult matter; so, I took the bus and that took around an hour because Paris always has traffic, in addition to the fact that the bus makes frequent stops at every station to pick up and drop off passengers. Furthermore, the bus passes through an area, the Place de la Concorde, which is three kilometers away from the end of the Shanzelize Street.

So you need more than an hour to reach the end of the street from the L'Arc de Triomphe, because the hotel where Muhammad made his reservations is at the end of the street and by L'Arc de Triomphe. Moreover, the hotel itself is not comfortable because it is situated on a main street and it lacks cleanliness and order. Nevertheless, I called Mr. `Aziz Sulayman in the evening because he was the one who made the reservations for Muhammad, and I asked him about the arrival time of the Jordanian flight coming from Amman. He said it will arrive tomorrow, Saturday, in the afternoon unless there is a delay. I told him I will be in the Shanzelize in the evening so let's meet unless you have a prior engagement. He welcomed the idea and we agreed to meet in front of the Mercedes showroom on the same street. I went there by bus two hours ahead of the appointment time which was at seven thirty. When I arrived to the area of La Tour d'Eiffel and then La Place de la Concorde, I walked along the street from the La Place de la Concorde to the end, reaching L'Arc de Triomphe. I saw the area lit up like a crystal chandelier. It is a breath taking sight. I have never seen a city this beautiful and this organized before, because I have never visited Paris in the period immediately preceding the Christmas and New Year's holidays. The people are joyous, some are shopping, many are crowding the restaurants and the cafes, and others are taking a stroll; men treat women with the ultimate respect and graciousness, and the women shower the men with love by way of a glance or a kiss or a touch.

This atmosphere reminded me of the times before the war with Iran, which was the opening into our era, when I used to visit Paris with Shajarat al-Dur. The joy was doubled because Paris adds glee and happiness, which are only completed by the presence of Shajarat al-Dur, who used to fill my life with happiness, grace and pride, because she was more beautiful and more elegant than the Parisian women. She was more beautiful than fashion models, but she had the dignified eastern and Islamic principles and appearance. She looked like an Indian princess or a girl from an old European aristocratic family. She was proud, beautiful, elegant, educated, charming, and pleasant company. She gave others the respect they deserved in accordance with their merit, the level of acquaintance, and their social status. I felt a sense of hopelessness and regret tightening their grip on my chest, and rivers of tears flowed from my eyes. This started from the moment I passed in front of l'Hotel de Crillon. I entered inside, walked through the lobby, and our memories together came back to me; we used to stay in this hotel when we were young. I would tell myself this is where we used to sit, and this is where we used to eat lunch and this where we used to drink tea by the small aquarium. We used to entertain ourselves by watching the colorful fish swimming in the aquarium.

And when I left the hotel to head towards the Avenue Champs-Elysees, I remembered how we would most often go there on foot, just for a walk or to buy some things, and we used to run and have fun together, and have walking and running races. I looked over at the Maxim Restaurant, which is right by the hotel, and I remembered when we had dinner there. On the other side there was the famous Lanvin Store where I bought a dress for Shajarat al-Dur in 1972. The dress was magnificent, and when she wore it, it became even more splendid. I arrived, in the state I was in, in front of the Mercedes showroom. I had not felt how long it took me to get there because I was enthralled by the beautiful movie which I was reliving on location. When I sensed that I had reached the place, I purposely did not go near it so that I may pull myself together. So I continued walking and, once I had gotten myself in order, I returned and found the man waiting in front of the showroom. I was wearing a hat and sunglasses so he did not recognize me until I got close to him. He welcomed me and we continued walking in the direction of the Tour d'Eiffel, while having a general conversation. We went to a Lebanese restaurant behind the Tour d'Eiffel and had dinner there. I needed to eat because I had not eaten anything since that morning. The ambience was great and the food was good. We left the restaurant at ten thirty and I took a taxi from the taxi stand near the Tour d'Eiffel despite Mr. `Aziz's insistence on driving me to the hotel as his brother-in-law had joined us there in his car, after `Aziz called him.

We agreed that he would call me the next day once he verified the arrival time of the Jordanian flight from Amman.

Saturday, 17 December 2000. I woke up late, around eleven. I had breakfast, got myself ready, and left the hotel around half past noon. I headed out on foot in the direction of the center of the city, and I got within a few hundred meters of l'Hotel de Crillon. I had passed l'Eglise de la Madeleine, the famous church in Paris; and I walked by the most famous flower arrangement shop in Paris, (La Charme). I stopped in front of this last one to gaze at all the different varieties and colors of flowers, as well as all the different arrangement styles; it really is a joy to look at them. At this time Mr. `Aziz called to say that the plane will arrive at four thirty and that we must go to the airport now. I said "alright, let's meet at the l'Hotel de Crillon at three 0' Clock." He said "okay." I arrived at the hotel and I sat in the lobby reflecting upon the place and the memories as well as the people here, coming and going; the women were carrying Hermes and Dior shopping bags, and they were wearing fur and they were dressed from the most famous designer houses, and they were walking around as if they're showing off in front of people there.

I thought "How regretful that joy did not last for Iraqis while we were with them." And I continued thinking "when are we going to be able to stay in this hotel again? What about the others?" So I answered my own question saying that most probably no one can stay in this hotel because the destruction inflicted upon Iraq cannot be repaired in our lifetime, even if Iraq was to start on a course of self-sufficiency and repairing the damage. This possibility is very farfetched, because the decision makers consider themselves to be in the right and all others are wrong and, moreover, they don't suffer from the lack of anything.

`Aziz and his brother-in-law arrived at quarter past three. I got up to leave and when we got to the car, which was a Volkswagen Golf, I said to him "You go home and I, along with brother Ilyas, will go to the airport because the car will not fit five people." He said he will take a taxi on the way back. I told him there is no need for that. I went to the airport with Ilyas; indeed, the airplane arrived on time. I welcomed Muhammad and his wife; I embraced both of them and I congratulated them. We left the airport heading towards the center of the city and we went to the hotel where Muhammad and his wife will be staying. We arrived at the hotel and `Aziz arrived to welcome Muhammad and his wife.

I asked Ilyas and `Aziz to go home but they refused. I insisted; so they agreed when they sensed that I wished to spend time with Muhammad and his wife by ourselves, but they insisted that we meet for dinner along with `Aziz's wife and her sister. I agreed after they kept insisting. `Aziz said he would have Ilyas come pick us up at eight thirty to take us to the restaurant. We were left alone and we spoke of personal matters, of the family over there, and I asked him about the relatives, the brothers, and the sisters. He spoke to me about Sab'awi's plans to marry a young girl from Mosul, etc... I asked them how they were doing, and whether they are comfortable in their home. He said that, praise be to God, all is well, and that they spend most of their time in the big house. While I'm asking him and talking to him my mind was completely engrossed in thoughts of Shajarat al-Dur and her absence in this occasion. Yet, I go back and tell myself praise be to God, the only One who can be thanked even for unpleasant matters. And I pressured myself so that they would not sense what I was feeling and suffering from, and especially Muhammad's wife. Afterwards, we went out for a walk on the Champs-Elysees Avenue. I explained to Asra' some things like the meaning and purpose of this ornamentation and decoration, and I told her that this is L'Arc de Triomphe, but there are no skulls around it. We then went back to the hotel and Ilyas came to take us to the restaurant. We had dinner, and the people were very nice and very hospitable.

We left at eleven O'clock after thanking them. We went to Muhammad's hotel, we dropped him and his wife off, and I asked Ilyas to drop me off just after the Church of La Madeleine. He did as I asked but only after insisting on dropping me off at the hotel, which I refused. Afterwards, I walked to the hotel and I arrived there at twelve thirty.

Next day, Sunday 18 December 2000, I called Muhammad at noon. I said goodbye to him and told him that I am traveling to Geneva. He said: "I will come to drive you." I told him there is no need for that and that I was leaving right away. I told him to take good care of his wife, especially since this is her first trip abroad, and I told him to take good care of himself too.

I left Paris by train at two thirty five in the afternoon. I arrived in Geneva at quarter past six. I arrived at the house, kissed the children; we sat down and they began to ask about their brother and his wife, etc... I told them everything that happened.

Tuesday, 19 December 2000. Today is Shajarat al-Dur's visiting day. This is the visit that precedes her birthday by one day. I wished that the visit would have fallen on the same day as her birthday which is 21 December. However, since the appointment for the visit is set and coordinated with the administration of the center where Shajarat al-Dur resides, it is difficult to change it.

This visit is especially painful and sad, and it has its own way of bringing back memories, the youth years, and the first stages of maturity, on to one of the most beautiful, original, meaningful, and fruitful human stories. But unfortunately, Almighty God has decided it must end early in a tragic manner. Yesterday, I had agreed with Saja that we would buy six red roses because I always give Shajarat al-Dur this type and color of flowers; the six roses represent the other family members: the father and the five children, they are — in chronological order — Muhammad, Saja, `Ali, Nur, and Khawlah. We bought the red roses, and another bouquet of multi colored roses, because Saja said "Mom likes this type of flower arrangement." Since the children were on their Christmas and New Year's holiday break, we all went straight from the house without going to school as we usually do every time. We arrived at the time agreed upon with the administration of the center, which was four thirty in the afternoon. We entered the center and we headed towards Shajarat al-Dur's room which is located twenty seven steps below ground level, or the second floor below ground. We entered and gazed upon her as she was deep in her sleep.

I stood by her side looking at her beautiful face which continues to maintain its beauty, its glow, its calmness, its grandeur, and its glory. I said to her in my head "my love, this long sleep is not for you, because you are the energetic, ingenious, and creative one who is always looking in every corner of the house for ways to reorganize it and renew it daily in a manner reflective of you. You did not let a day pass without beautifully rearranging something in the house and this is also true to the way you look and your great mind." I said to her "Today is a beautiful day because the sun is shining and the temperature is mild, you don't like staying home on such a day." We used to always go out for a walk to go to the city and she would be dressed in the best, most elegant, and simplest clothes, over which she would have a leopard print jacket. I remembered how people would stare at us as we walked through the city, and especially at Shajarat al-Dur, because her beauty, her personality, the way she walked, and the way she dealt with everything was so high class that it brought attention and you it was something that most people do not possess. This is why people wanted to know where this beautiful lady was from; was she a princess from the East, an Italian princess, or a Spanish princess? After being lost in all these thoughts and memories, I realized that I was standing besides Shajarat al-Dur in a place that was not our home, and that Shajarat al-Dur was not the same as she was in the period I was remembering.

At this point I felt an indescribable pain and sadness; I could not even see the children who were standing on the other side of their mother's bed. After reciting the Fatihah, I checked the temperature and humidity levels on the machine which I had placed by Shajarat al-Dur so that I could monitor changes in temperature and humidity levels in the room. The humidity level was 31 degrees and the temperature was 22 degrees. I sat next to her again and I started reading from the Koran. We stayed with her until a quarter past five. Before I left, I bent down and kissed her many times. I then noticed that my tears had fallen on her beautiful face; so, I took out my handkerchief and wiped away my tears from her face. I fixed her make-up, I looked at her as I said goodbye, and I left her with a knot in my heart and tears streaming down my face because her birthday was in one day, and the New Year's, a holiday she always made sure the whole family spends together, was only a few days away. But this is God's will and this is His wish.

21 December 2000. Shajarat al-Dur's birthday, but the difference is incredible and this day cannot be compared to the same day in 1997, the last time we celebrated Shajarat al-Dur's birthday. That was the last time we celebrated a birthday together.

She was, despite her illness, elegant, and proud, filling the room with love and joy, and filling my heart and the children's hearts with love and happiness. But on this day, and on two occasions before it, sadness had overtaken us as we looked around us and we found that everything had changed and everything had become dark, and life did not have the same meaning as before. Everything had lost its flavor, its color, and its essence. I did not savor things or life as I used to, but I must keep moving; although, this does not mean that I am enjoying or desiring this motion. However, I keep reminding myself on a daily basis of her only request after her situation became serious; she said "Barzan, life must go on." Especially since I am not the only one remaining after she leaves; the children were still with me, and I am the only one responsible for them. Their lives are tied to mine and to everything I do; therefore I absolutely must keep that in mind and avoid putting them through an emotional state that might ruin their present and their future. Therefore, two years and several months after her departure, I found that remaining in my past state is going to bring harm to the children's emotional well-being and will affect their present and their future life. There is also another reason; their older brother, Muhammad, had gotten married and he and his wife are in Southern France because the Swiss are refusing to give his bride an entry visa.

Consequently, he had gone to France in the hope that I will go there with his siblings to see him. Thus, since the children's vacations had started two days ago, five days for Nur and Khawlah, and Saja's and `Ali's started yesterday, we decided to go to Southern France to see Muhammad. We made this decision while each of us knew what this day was but didn't talk about it, because none of us wanted to hurt the others. We sufficed ourselves, instead, with our visit to her on 19 December and with offering her two bouquets of flowers; the first a bouquet of red roses which I always give her and especially on her birthday, and the second was also a bouquet of roses but of different colors. Saja had arranged that one and had said "Mom likes this kind of flower arrangement." We left the house at ten O'clock and we arrived in Cannes at three thirty. The road was clear and the weather was beautiful so we did not feel how the time passed even though we did not talk much except about Muhammad's wedding and his bride and how his siblings are going to meet the bride, especially since Saja had never met her before because the last time Saja was in Baghdad was in 1994. That was before she refused to accept her situation which was opposite our standards, our upbringing, and our outlook on family life and on the relationship between a husband and a wife.

One of the topics Saja talked about was a discussion she had with her brother Muhammad who told her that employees at our embassy in London were eating canned dog food for six months not knowing it was dog food. They were happy about it praised it, telling new employees about this new type of delicious food, urging them to buy the "dog" brand of canned food, meaning the canned goods with the picture of a dog on them. I told her there are always incidents and stories that remind me of US Secretary of State Baker when he told us in at the Intercontinental Hotel in Geneva on 09 January 1991 "If the war erupts, you will return to the era before the industrial revolution." I told Saja this and I added "50 years ago, Iraqis were in better shape than the one they are in now. And Iraqi diplomats were more distinguished and advanced than their diplomat counterparts."

We arrived and Muhammad and his bride met us at the door. He and his bride embraced his siblings. We were very happy about the meeting and about his marriage. We sat down and talked about the (great) Iraq and later Muhammad brought out the wedding pictures.

I noticed that the president's wife looks younger than her sister who is actually twenty years younger. I said to myself "this is the result selfishness; otherwise, how does a 64 year old woman whose country has experienced so much destruction appear younger than a woman who is twenty years younger?"

Thursday 22 December 2000. After we ate breakfast, 'Ali said "Dad, you are going to stay home," and then he said without waiting for an answer "Dad, I told you if continue to stay home and refuse to go out to the city for a walk or to go to cafes or restaurants, then I won't go to Southern France." He added "Your answer was that you will go out to the city, isn't that right?" I said "That's right." He said "Well, then, let's go to the city." I was put on the spot and so I went with him; and Saja came along. We walked by the beach, and we sat on the benches which were placed on the beach by the city. This was the first time I had gone out for a walk with people since October of the fateful year of 1998 when I was here with the children and Shajarat al-Dur was with Saja in New York for treatment. A month and a half before she left, the weather was beautiful and the sea looked amazing; the coast was calm and not crowded because people don't come to this area in the winter season. Instead, people prefer to go to the mountains to ski.

I was looking at the sea, at people, and at the stores as if it were my first time visiting the area because I had forgotten this scenery and had not thought of anything like this since Shajarat al-Dur's illness got worse, and then the catastrophe occurred. I have not thought of anything related to life at all since that time. We returned home after this stroll during which we talked about Muhammad and his bride, and Saja and 'Ali each expressed their opinions about her. They both had positive opinions of her and both agreed that she was still as soft as dough which Hammudi could shape as he pleases, and we could mold her into someone who accepts our way of life and thinking; however, he has to take care of her more. We arrived at the house, ate dinner, and then sat in front of the television. I was trying to inconspicuously observe how the children were looking at their brother's wife to observe how she acts and behaves. Indeed, they were looking at her without letting her notice so as to get to know what she is like. When they went to sleep, a debate started where each of them was expressing his opinion about her. Their opinions were positive in general. They were happy to have her and were asking her if she wants anything to eat or drink... etc.

Friday 23 December 2000. We went to the city after breakfast because the children said "Dad, you are going to ruin our vacation with your fasting; because you are fasting and you do not go with us to the city and to cafés." Therefore, I decided to postpone my fasting for another day. We took Muhammad and his bride with us and we suggested that Saja takes her to hairdresser to style her hair. She agreed and went with Saja to the hairdresser while the rest of us sat at the café. After they came back from the salon we all complimented her hair especially since the hairdresser had cut off almost ten centimeters. When we went back home I asked Saja about what had happened at the hair salon and she said that the hairdresser asked where was this young lady's hair done before, and Saja had told him that it had been fixed here in France; he answered her "Impossible;" so, she said "I kept quiet and stopped my conversation with him." I said to her, "why did you not tell him that it was done in the (Great) Iraq?" She said "Dad, for God's sake, don't embarrass us."

Sunday 25 December 2000. Today is the birthday of Jesus Christ, Peace be upon Him. We went to the city in the afternoon and everything was closed and only a few people were in the streets. There wasn't any store or café open.

So we just walked around the streets of the city and afterwards we looked for a café to have coffee or anything else. The only one we found was the café at the Hilton. We entered the hotel and headed towards the coffee shop. There were not many people there either because as I had mentioned earlier in these memoirs, people in the winter prefer to go to the mountains to ski instead of coming to the coastal cities. We sat down and the waiter came over so we each gave him our order of coffee, tea, or juice. In less than an hour, I noticed the children looking at the clock so I knew they wanted to go for a walk or go back home. I acted as if I had not noticed and I said "I had a friend who was a well-known doctor in his field and well known because of his family name too. His name was Dr. Jabir Muhsin al-`Ani. He was a pleasant person, and he used to tell his friends amusing stories about things he would encounter in his life. In one encounter he told of a patient he had at the hospital whom he had treated and who was cured from his illness. So, the doctor went to visit him and tell him that he had been cured from his illness and that he was able to leave the hospital. However, what caught the doctor's attention was that he found the patient moaning. So the doctor was surprised and asked the patient 'Hajji, why are you moaning? Your health is well and I came to tell you that you can go home.'

The patient answered 'I know, doctor, that my health has improved and I am not in pain.' The doctor was surprised and asked 'well then why are you moaning?' The patient answered 'doctor, I came from outside Baghdad, I withstood all this exhaustion, and I have been in the hospital for ten days, and yet despite all this you still do not think I should be moaning?' The doctor laughed, and said 'You are right about that'."

When I finished my story, I noticed that the children understood what I meant by it so they laughed and said "Dad, you are right." I said to them "my dears, we have to get our money's worth! We have to stay here for a reasonable amount of time; maybe some famous people will come by and we will get to see them, maybe we will see something useful or something amusing that might benefit us. By the same token, it is not like we came thirsty from an island and we drank some water and now we must be on our way." No one commented but I noticed that they paid attention and that they were convinced by what I said to them, and I could see joy in their faces. Of course we talked about many life issues and how to deal with them. I was, and I continue to talk about these things on purpose in front of Muhammad's wife so I can indirectly make her pay attention to things concerning her relationship with the family and with her husband, and so I can warn her about things which we might consider inauspicious and unfavorable per our family's standards.

I used this method since we first met Muhammad and his wife on Thursday, 21 December 2000, because I had agreed with Saja and `Ali, and even with Nur and Khawlah, on a way to deal with their brother's wife. We returned home and Nur was with me in my room helping me organize my things. I asked her about her opinion concerning the new member who had joined the family, and I meant Isra', Muhammad's wife. She said that she was pleasant, intelligent, easy to deal with, and it is very possible for her to develop and reach the level that we desire of her. She said all this in English. I did not comment, not because I disagreed with Nur's evaluation but because I wandered far in my thoughts as I thanked God for my children's foresight and how they view things with patience to tend to that which needs to be tended to. They are not rash, short tempered, or look at things from a short term perspective. It seemed as if Nur was waiting for me to comment so she asked "what about you? What is your opinion?" It made me pay attention and pull myself together, so I said "dear, your opinion is correct." She answered "Praise be to God."

Wednesday, 27 December 2000. Today is the first day of Eid al-Fitr. We have not celebrated any religious holidays or family occasions since 1996 when Shajarat al-Dur got sick which was unfortunately devastating and will always remain a painful event in our hearts for as long as we live.

If we did celebrate something before Shajarat al-Dur left us, then it was a celebration and joy on the outside but in reality and deep down it was worry and fear of the unknown and what would happen to Shajarat al-Dur. This was because everyone knew the seriousness, danger, and ferocity of her illness. However, everyone was putting on a show to hide their feelings and each one of us had their reasons for doing so. Shajarat al-Dur was acting that way because of two reasons; the first was her faith in God and her courage which cannot be described; and I can say that a great percentage of men do not possess the same level of courage as Shajarat al-Dur. The second reason was the result of her noble spirit, her great character, and her willingness to sacrifice for others. This is why she used to pretend to be happy and normal, so that she would not bother and worry others. She cares about the comfort of others and especially her family members who love her as much as she loves them, and she has given herself to her children, to her husband, and to her home. As for the other side, which is the family and that includes me and the children, we used to pretend the opposite of what we felt in our hearts and minds of fear and worry concerning the future of the family and Shajarat alDur who is the more important of the two main backbones which the family relied on.

The reason which made us pretend and show something contrary to that which was terrorizing us inside was so that we do not add to the burden of the fondly remembered Shajarat al-Dur and because we believed that this would make her stronger and give her more courage and optimism. I still believe that, because all the doctors and friends who know about this dangerous disease advise of doing so. Therefore, and since that ill-fated year, we have not celebrated Eid or any other general or personal occasion. However, I felt that the children needed a different emotional state that would lessen the burden of nearly five years which were harsh, heavy, and unjust in their days, months, and in all their elements and memories that we experienced. Therefore, I decided to force myself to try and control my emotions as much as possible so that I can accomplish that which I became sure the children needed. In addition to that reason, there was their brother's marriage and the fact that he, along with his wife, are here with us.

Thus, I embraced the children as well as Muhammad's wife and we exchanged greetings on the occasion of Eid. As I said before, that was the first time this had occurred. I then approached the picture of Shajarat al-Dur which we had brought with us from Geneva, as we have always done since this tragedy started, and I fixed my eyes on it, held it, kissed it, and held it to my chest, which brought tears streaming down my face, and so the children pretended not to notice, as they usually do in such cases.

Early in the afternoon I suggested to the children that we go to the Principality of Monaco, which is known and famous for its beauty and the road that links Cannes to it passes through Nice is also known for its scenic beauty. I suggested this for Muhammad's wife as this was the first time she leaves Iraq; it was in fact the first time she went beyond the road that links Tikrit to Baghdad. They agreed to my suggestion and so we went. It is well known for people who previously visited that area that no matter how educated and imaginative the visitor is, they will find that the reality of the area is even more beautiful than they imagined. So imagine how it would be for a young lady who had never walked around even in the capital of her own country because of the circumstances which had walloped the country for the past twenty years, which is a year before she was even born. Obviously the surprise is going to be a great one but, and to tell the truth, I noticed that this young lady was well-grounded and calm and she was trying to learn, to discover, and to enjoy the beauty of things with the least amount of questions and inquiries and with calmness. We arrived to the city center of Monaco and parked on the fifth floor of a parking garage because we could not find an empty spot anywhere else; that's 3 floors below sea level.

We then walked around the city and the streets surrounding the famous casinos. Everything was beautiful and exquisite in its splendor and its array. Every time I visit the city of Monaco I find that it becomes classier and more beautiful and even more organized. We sat in one of the cafes near the casino, which overlooked the main square and we watched from behind the glass the people and the cars which cannot be seen anywhere else in the world. When you take a good look at the people you think that they might be from a different planet in the way that they behave, in their appearance, and in the lavishness that they exude. I said to myself as I always say "God, give people more," because God always gives His servants according to what they deserve. Ever since my childhood, I heard my parents say when you see people living well and in luxury, say "God give them more," and if you see others living otherwise say "God give them more," because the Almighty God does not oppress anybody but some people do so themselves.

After more than an hour, which passed as if it were five minutes, we left and I suggested to the children that we should go to the area behind the casino, so that Isra' could see the area overlooking the sea from the back; and so we went.

At the north corner of the casino we saw three middle aged women whose appearance was good and in accordance with what is common in this city of aristocrats, bourgeois, or nouveau-rich, or even the simple people who have good taste and the curiosity to increase their knowledge and experience, or for whatever other purpose, whether it is legitimate or not, by certain people whether they are rich or poor. When we passed those women, I heard them speaking Arabic and, as a matter of fact, in Iraqi dialect. Saja noticed that too. Saja also noticed that they stood and stared in our direction, so she said "dad, it's a scandal walking around with you! Because a great deal of people know who you are." She added "I suggested that you shave your moustache." I said to her "dear, I swear it's a good suggestion but I find it difficult to do. Not because I believe, like your uncle Saddam, that whoever does not have a moustache does not have 'fervor' or 'virility,' because those who fought us in Kuwait or in the South of Iraq did not have moustaches, and some of them did not even know their own fathers; and yet they fought better than the best bearded ones and those who can go back in their ancestry to Tamim, al-`Izzah, al-Jubbur, and others. This was because they had clear goals they believed in, and they had faith in their weapons. However, I fear that some might say that I'm trying to act like a young man; which would be unfair to me because I have never done that even when I was young, so I would not do so now."

She said "true, but in order to avoid the curiosity of some people..." and at this moment we saw a man wearing a winter hat and holding a video camera filming the area. As we got within a couple meters from him I noticed that he was staring at me and, all of sudden, he said hello in Arabic as if he knew me and he put his hand out to shake mine. I shook his hand and, since I could not identify him, I told him "I could not make out who you are." So he said that his name was Riyadh and that he was an Iraqi working at the Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna. He said that Mr. Abu-Rim is over there, and he pointed to the area behind the trees that were about twenty meters away from us; then he added "Mr. Ni'mah Faris." He said that when he felt that I did not understand whom he meant when he said Abu-Rim. Indeed, as we kept walking we met up with Ni'mah Faris; because if I had gone back I would have given the impression that I did not want to see him (meaning Ni'mah Faris) and that was unnecessary. We greeted each other and I asked him if he had visited back home recently. He said "No, I have not gone back home since I left." So I made a point to say goodbye to him without hesitation because I did not like that person and never respected him. This is due to subjective reasons, not personal ones.

The reason is because I know that he is a hypocrite, an opportunist, cares only about his personal benefit, and is professionally and socially weak. He is a professional military man who had attained the rank of Staff Major General and a commander of a division and corps. I recall that I objected to his appointment as a commander to the First Corps when the Iranians occupied Karmand... etc. If I remember correctly, he was in charge of the north of Iraq during the war with Iran. This happened during a Military Office meeting when I was a member. At that time, the president was sending the names of people he wanted to appoint in the army to the Military Office to be discussed. I said that he would fail because Ni'mah is not fit for a leadership position especially under those circumstances at the time. I told him that he is a civilian dressed in a military uniform and that he spends the bulk of his time in the company of rich families and in the clubs of the well-to-do class. This was unbecoming of a professional officer. I subtly pointed to his social status; I was referring to his wife because his daughters at that time were too young. I knew his wife because she was an employee at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs when I first worked there. I learned a lot of information about her, none of which were good.

After the last war, I hope that it will indeed be the (last), Ni'mah Faris was appointed as the Iraqi ambassador to the Philippines.

Then, as a result of letter he sent to the president, he was appointed as the Iraqi ambassador to Austria, and his wife, Jinan Shawkat, was appointed as the second person in charge in the embassy. He was transferred in 1988 with the rest of the ambassadors; I was one of them, to the Office the Ministry. He took charge of the Office of the Neighboring Countries, but after a few months, and per a letter from the president, a presidential order was issued approving his travel to Austria to join his wife who was excluded from the transfer based on her need for examination every six months because she was diagnosed with cancer more than fifteen years ago. The order also states that his airline tickets along with those of his family were all free when he visited Iraq along with a gift of fifty thousand dollars given to him?! So what was the reason for this generosity, this preferential treatment, and this way of dealing with Ni'mah? The reason is that he is a coward and his wife offered special services during a certain period of time...but chances had it that he did me a favor when Saja went to Baghdad after `Uday's accident.

But, the years passed and the circumstances changed and I was in a position where I was in need of Ni'mah... In December 1996, Shajarat al-Dur was afflicted with the illness when she was in Baghdad with Muhammad, Nur, and Khawlah.

I discussed with her the general and personal circumstances, the situation in Baghdad, and what was going on with the president's family and especially what was going on in the mind of the president who had been affected by what the media has been saying about me and how I have conflicts with the president and how I have a personal political agenda which they described as a reform plan, etc. There were also many other things said in the media and behind the scenes about how Barzan is fit to rule Iraq instead of President Saddam because he is open minded, how Barzan benefitted from being in Europe for years, how he has Arab and international connections, how he is from the same family, how he is Ba'thist and has a revolutionary history, and how he had important government positions and can control things without any bloodshed... etc. The president was highly influenced by these things and was extremely worried, especially after Husayn Kamil, whom he completely trusted, stabbed him in the back. He thought Barzan would be even worse; he denied him and traded him for cheap. Ever since 1983, he has been pushing me behind the scenes. This is in addition to the president's mentality which is filled with conspiracy theories, and what he hears from his family which time has proven that it is shortsighted and stupid. This is why these things happened. As for what is found in the media, it is plenty, in addition to what intelligence services leak to coerce him into making decisions against his own interest.

And since I do not intend to cut the last ties with him as a matter of principle and because my circumstances do not allow me to return to Baghdad because of the children's education as well as Saja's situation with them when I left them in June of 1994, and because of the fact that there is no personal or general benefit to my presence in Baghdad since the difference in mentalities has become vast, and so my return to Baghdad has become far-fetched, therefore I contemplated the situation with Shajarat al-Dur and in order to prevent any complications which are likely to result from the president's suspicions, I thought that reassuring him is necessary because leaving matters as they were could inadvertently create an unfavorable action from my side. Since I had previously decided not to give a chance to anyone who is waiting to stab me in the back, and in order to prevent matters from reaching this point, I concluded that I could not stay where I was. Thus, we decided that Shajarat al-Dur should go with Nur and Khawlah, and that Muhammad will move back and forth between Baghdad and Geneva because he was preparing his Master's degree at the time. I said to Shajarat al-Dur that this operation is similar to what the Soviets did for Egypt during the war of attrition between Egypt and Israel during the era of `Abd al-Nasir, when he secretly visited Moscow and complained to the Soviets of the Israeli air activity and the extent of the harm it caused Egypt. The Soviets decided to send a number of pilots to chase away the Israeli airplanes using Egyptian airplanes.

They directed them to speak Russian amongst each other when they are chasing after the Israeli planes attacking Egyptian targets because they knew that Israel will intercept the communications and will know that the Soviets have come into the picture, and will therefore cease its aggression against Egypt. The Soviet plan did indeed work. Therefore, surely the president will take note of this operation and will take it into consideration. It will comfort him; and as he is an expert on scheming and conspiracies he will realize that anyone working against him would not send his wife and half his kids to be under his mercy, especially since he knows our family values and the extent of our commitment to each other, and how we cannot live away from each other for longer than a few weeks. So we agreed on that, and in the middle of August Shajarat al-Dur took the children and went to Baghdad, but unfortunately she came back in the middle of December after she was afflicted with the illness and she underwent a surgery over there. She arrived in Geneva with the children, who were transferred to the International School in Baghdad for the reason mentioned earlier, and after that which God had willed for us, they were sent back again from Baghdad to the International School in Geneva, which was their old school.

A few days later she traveled to New York to continue the treatment and to ensure everything was going in the right direction. A few days after she left, I heard that the president's son was shot several times by unknown assailants, so I called the president's secretary, `Abd Hammud and relayed my sympathy to the president. I then called Shajarat al-Dur in New York and found that she was aware of what had happened. I suggested to her the idea that Saja and Muhammad should go to Baghdad because we have a delicate situation at hand and because we do not want to prove anyone right when they say that their son was fighting for his life and yet we did not send his (wife) to stand by his side or to be there with him in his last days. She agreed with me. So, I talked to Saja about the issue, and while we were still in this stage, Muhammad's aunt called from Baghdad and talked to Saja and said that 'Way wanted to speak to her; she gave her the phone number. I told Saja to call him. She called him and talked to him; he was nice to her, and he said that he thought she would be by his side when he got out of surgery. He also said that the years that went by while they were apart were wasted (a shame) and he said he wanted her, etc. So we prepared Saja and Muhammad to travel, and we bought them gifts, clothes, food, and chocolate, and they went to Amman to continue with their trip to Baghdad.

At the same time, Hamid Hamadi, the Minister of Information at the time, had arrived with an Iraqi delegation to Geneva to meet with an American delegation, which claimed to represent the American government. I was preoccupied with them and, after Muhammad and his sister left, Hamid was at my office at the embassy and we were involved in a long conversation about the accident which the president's son had suffered. All of a sudden he told me that 'Ali Hasan had offered his daughter to the president's son and that the marriage had taken place and was overseen by Mulla Isma'il `Abdallah al-Sultan, 'Ali Hasan's cousin. The next day I received a letter from my office manager in Baghdad informing me of the same matter, and a faithful friend of mine who used to work with me in Geneva, Mr. Mazin Muhammad Salih, told me the same thing. Hammadi also said that the president was upset and when he found out he went to the hospital and spoke with his son in a loud voice and in a very angry manner and said to him "how could you do such a thing when you are still legally married to your cousin?" etc. Honestly the news shocked me, and the reason was that it brought back to memory their malicious behavior and betrayal, and how they use detective methods with the people closest to them because when he spoke with Saja she only felt affection, desire for the relationship, and regret for what had happened. But soon everything was exposed and proved that everything was a lie and a lure to trap this innocent girl over there.

The other thing that shocked me was that Saja and Muhammad were about to arrive to Amman, so I decided to call Muhammad when he arrived to Amman and ask him to go Baghdad with the gifts to check on the president's son and to tell him that Saja was with him in Amman but when we found out about his engagement or marriage to the daughter of 'Ali Hasan, she went back to Geneva, because Saja would never live with another wife, and if she refused the sick situation when she was alone, how do you suppose she will feel now?? I also told him he must book a ticket for Saja on the first flight out of Amman to Europe where she can change planes and go to Geneva. So, he bought a ticket for Saja on the Austrian Airlines, leaving in the afternoon of the following day. From there she would take a Swiss airlines flight to Geneva. However, the Austrian Airlines flight was delayed in Amman which caused Saja to miss her flight from Vienna to Geneva. When Saja arrived her flight had left already. She called me from the airport in Vienna, and before that Muhammad had called me from Amman and told me that the flight was delayed, which means that Saja is going to miss her connection flight.

I told him that was not important and that what is important was that Saja must leave Amman because I was afraid they would carry out an operation to kidnap Saja and take her to Baghdad. So, I stayed on the phone with Muhammad until he told me that the airplane took off and then I was at peace.

At that point I called Ni'mah Faris, the Iraqi Ambassador in Austria, I explained the matter to him and asked him to arrange for an entry visa for her just for twelve hours until she can take the airplane the next day. Gratefully, the man went with his two daughters to the airport and did all he could and then succeeded in obtaining a visa for Saja for twelve hours. He took her to his home and she spent the night with them after she had been delayed at the airport for six hours. Saja arrived the next day in the afternoon. She was exhausted and unable to even stand on her feet from fatigue. So this was the favor that Mr. Ni'mah Faris had done for me; a favor that I will always remember and will always be grateful.

Back to our subject; we went back at seven thirty and as we were sitting in front of the television I asked Isra' about her impression of what she had seen. She said "Uncle, honestly, when I saw what I saw since I arrived, and even since I arrived in Jordan which relies in its economy on Iraq even in these circumstances, I kept asking myself if we are alive or dead?"

I told her that is why the government keeps putting one obstacle after another to stop people from travelling because it, meaning the government, knows the shock that will happen which will not be in its favor; because the Iraqi citizen will begin to count the years that have been wasted, the chances that he has missed, and the unknown future that awaits him and awaits his children. This feeling and these facts can then turn him into an enemy of the government and make him spiteful towards it.

She said that, when speaking about the circumstances that the country is experiencing, some of the women in Tikrit say "praise be to God, we are alive, eating, and drinking." And she continues, wondering "What kind of life is that? Even animals eat and drink; even though there's a difference in the situation of humans over there and animals over here."

I said to her "This is true, but I would like to add something...God did not create humans merely so they can eat and drink; especially after he differentiated them from other living creatures by their brain which is different from the brains of all other living creatures. Therefore he is expected to take on a leadership role, or even a pioneering one, and he is expected to lead life and ameliorate it to that which is better. That is why we see that what the Babylonians left behind is different from that which the Akkadians left behind, and what the latter have left is different from that of the Assyrians and so on."

I continued "this proves the practicality and ability of mankind for creativity and creation. So it is not enough for mankind to suffice itself with eating and drinking. On the contrary, he must reject that if it were imposed upon him; even the animal in the progressive world performs a duty or has a role. I personally have seen dogs acting as guides for people who have lost their vision, or other such duties including entertaining those who do not have children or families so as to alleviate their sense of loneliness. This is here in Europe, but over there, in the backwards parts of the world, dogs are watch guards. So, even animals have a role in this life, so imagine how it is for a human...a human must lead life but he cannot perform this role until he frees himself from the chains, and revolt against them, and reject any inherited backwardness. But this has to be done in a well-planned manner and not in the same way as what had happened in the revolutions in the near and distant world, which were all failures, and which ended up being covers for the growth of dictatorships, reclusion, tyranny, and exploitation after reaching power."

We then discussed the issue of women here in Europe and there in the backward world. I said that I support giving women their complete rights just like men, including the right to inheritance as in the Islamic religion.

This is because I believe that the needs of women have become equivalent to those of men these days, not like they used to be in the past. Nevertheless, as I say this, you will also hear me say that women should fulfill all their duties just like men after they get all their rights and are entitled to everything men are entitled to...I said that Islamic religion limits the activity of women, and since women make up half the society, or in some cases more than half, it is therefore not right to freeze the movement of half the population under different pretenses and claims. Faith in God does not mean you should be a burden on your family and on your husband. Notice how women here build their lives side by side with men, while in the backwards world women just put a veil over their head as if honor is merely in this manifestation. This is at a time when if you look closely, you will find that the percentage of those who are veering from the right path of honor is increasing more so among those women that are veiled than those who are living modern lives. I said the backwards world must get away from these beliefs so that it may take the first step on the right path.

Sunday 31 December 2000. Today is the end of the year and in a few hours the world will welcome a new one, but the New Year will be different from one country to another and from one person to another.

Here, countries welcome the New Year with optimism, energy, and new plans to insure the future of human beings and those yet to come while taking into account what is suitable in this era and its necessities. And there are countries that welcome the New Year with sadness, depression, and fear of surprises and decisions destructive to the present and the future that are hidden within the days and months of the coming new year because these nations are ruled by persons and not by organizations. Their futures are drawn up by persons and not by parliaments; the persons decide the future of nations without the involvement of those who have the qualifications required to build these vanquished and helpless nations. I look closely at everything around me from people and objects, and I find everything optimistic and smiling at life, they know what they are going to do tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, and even the next year. And then I remember the situation over there which does not allow a man to even think; how will he then think in order to plan things for a few months? That is something that unfortunately no one thinks about anymore because people over there are unable to, or rather not allowed to think beyond their current day and only on the condition that they do not think beyond their needs for that day.

I remembered Baghdad, the capital of the Arab nation, indeed the capital of the Arab empire and I compared it to the cities of the world. I was humble and compared it to Amman, Damascus, Beirut, and Riyadh, and not to Paris, London, and Rome. I found that Baghdad, which is great in every way, is similar to a girl who comes from a noble family, but one which the world has turned on and now is dressed in tattered, old clothes, its appearance is dirty, its face is pale from hunger and weariness, and maybe even illness, and she sits next to a bride who is wearing her wedding gown and is joyful and happy about her wedding, and is wearing the finest make-up and appears to be in the best of health and spirits. I felt a great deal of pain for this situation but what alleviates some of my pain is the fact that I did not cause what happened to Baghdad and to the people of Baghdad. Indeed, I tried very hard to prevent what happened, and afterwards I worked on correcting what had already taken place before matters get even worse and become forgotten or something that nobody wants to go near. What is present in the archives of the presidency and of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs proves this, and I hope that God will grant me the health to be able to show the people what I have done so that they can know the extent of my work to save what I could. I have done a lot and with persistence to the point that I was accused of fear and (instability) as it was portrayed during the period before 16 January 1991 and beyond.

Even more, I noticed that there were cowardly winks and signals indicating that I was proposing the implementation of western ideas. `Umar al-Kazimi published in the Babel Newspaper an article saying that Barzan no longer represents the Ba'th ideology and does not represent us because, for a long time now, he has been outside the decision-making center, has been living in the West, and now he is adopting and calling for Western ideology?? He forgot or chose to forget how he called the American Embassy and asked for help to get to Washington under political asylum and, consequently, he was arrested. He also forgot when I went as an ambassador in 1988 and the president asked me about which country I would prefer so I asked for England, of course because of English — a language which I make sure that the children master and which I and their mother both are versed in. The president said no, and that he preferred Switzerland. I asked him why, and he said because England is a country that has problems with Iraq and relations with it are not stable. He said it was because all Iraqi opposition members are there and he is not sure about the behavior of this (bad guy) as he said. He forgot who lives a western-like life to an unbelievable extent, and he forgot who coordinated and still coordinates with companies and embassies to exchange currency and send it to Kuwaiti banks at that time, and how his father discovered that and returned that money to Baghdad.

His mother received it and she placed in her vaults which are similar to the vaults at the Central Bank. Many things escaped him; because this is their approach, this is how they think and that is why Iraq reached this level of (prosperity).

The evening came and I felt it passing somewhat slowly, yet, I prefer it that way. If I could stop the wheel of time from turning; I would have done so in 1996 when Shajarat al-Dur met the fate that God predestined for us. Yet, no one can stop the wheel of time except for the One and Only from His position, Praise be to Him. Rather, a sharp person is one who makes use of every hour he has. As I mentioned in this diary, since I have noticed that the children need psychological treatment; especially that their brother and his wife are with us, I neglected what children wanted to do that evening because I noticed that Saja bought some of the food items and desserts that her mother, Shajarat al-Dur used to prepare on such evening. I instructed the cook to prepare dinner exactly how her mother used to prepare it. The time is passing by slowly while I, in turn, was procrastinating; I haven't shaved in two days, I was wearing a shirt and a pair of jeans and sitting in front of the television which was getting ready to broadcast the New Year's party to the audience who does not need that since the whole country was living a celebration.

Even the hospitals were decorated and had music for those healthy enough to celebrate. Every door to a house, to a building, or to a store had decorations of this occasion as a sign of joy and festivity of the New Year. I noticed the children pass by me and look at me; 'Ali walks away and Nur comes to sit next to me pretending to be watching what's on TV. After a while, she leaves and Khawlah comes; she sits next to me, kisses me, and asks, "Dad, are you staying here?" She repeats the question, and I tell her, "No, dear." Few moments after she hears my response, she leaves and 'Ali comes once again. He stands next to me, looks at me, and says, "Dad, I am going to change. Are you going to stay here?" He adds, "It is now 9:30!" All of these simple and innocent gestures remind me of many other situations along the same lines, yet, they are more blunt and clearer. Family members and some friends had told me a lot that what happened may not be back to what it used to be except by a miracle, and the age of miracles had lapsed, the last one was the revelation of the Holy Koran to Prophet Muhammad. Moreover, they would tell me that they are saying that at the time when they know very well that Shajarat al-Dur's memory and her place in my heart will remain; it is impossible for it to go away just as much as it is impossible for her to return.

They continue to say that and, therefore, they see that I have to believe in this truth and act accordingly. Moreover, some relatives and friends recommended that I live my life saying, "Live your life because there are no guarantees and you have experienced that." I always responded by keeping quiet; because, no matter how much they know, they do not know exactly the magnitude of my loss when Shajarat al-Dur chose to be by the side of God the Most Gracious when He chose her first. At the same time, regardless of how much they know about the depth of deep rooted relationship between Shajarat al-Dur and I, they cannot appreciate the extent of its depth and magnitude. They have general knowledge about the relationship between a man and a woman. Perhaps they say that a woman may be a wife and they correct themselves to say that God created her to be a wife then a mother, just as God created man to be a husband and then a father. However, the fact that I have lost much more than that had escaped them. I say with extreme objectivity and detached from emotion that during the entire period Shajarat al-Dur and I lived together, I never felt she was a wife; I used to feel she was a lover and I treated her accordingly.

Although the nature of such relationship might pamper, and perhaps, spoil most women, I have not noticed any of that at all. This is an indication of her wisdom, her fine moral values, and her understanding of her responsibility towards me and towards her children. Furthermore, I say it escaped them that I lost a lover, because; I did not only love her, I also worshipped her and the meaning of worship is very well known. At the same time, I lost a friend, a sincere counsel, and advisor; I lost a sister who is wise, has good judgment and one I refer to at times of calamity. I lost a wife and a mother who is faithful to my children, my home, my money, and my reputation. I was a firm believer that this faithfulness was genuine and sincere whether I am alive or when I am dead. Moreover, I have lost a mother of a special kind; she is educated, wise, patient, virtuous, and generous with her money when there is a need. I have lost a dignified woman who combines all qualities; thus, one can understand the magnitude of my loss. Isn't it very hard for a woman to combine more than one quality, let alone when she has all these qualities and she becomes a wife, a mother, a friend, a lover, a big sister, a counselor, etc... Isn't she one of very few? Indeed, she is one of very few and rare. Therefore, family and friends notice the intensity of my grief and pain over her.

All of that amounts to a fraction of what she deserves; she is a perfect lady and she is worthy of everything.

Then, as 'Ali was still standing there waiting for me to say or do something, I slowly got up off the couch as if I was too weak to stand. He knew I was heading to shower and get dressed, he was certain when he saw me going up the stairs. I returned after I got ready and we sat in front of the television. I was making attempts to be social with the kids every so often; we ate the dinner which Saja ordered. Shajarat al-Dur's chair was empty; she was with us every moment. The year ended when the clock struck twelve and the children came towards me with bashfulness mixed with sadness. They kissed me and I kissed them, I wished them good health and success while they in turn wished me good health. At that point, I felt choked and about to cry; since I do not want to add to the children's misery, I left the living room to avoid making the children sad. Shajarat al-Dur had all the high qualities combined; which is a rare thing.

Usually, it is hard to have all the high qualities or most of them present in one person. It is hard because one who has all these superior qualities must have rare and sublime qualifications as well as unusual and uncommon capacity for giving, generosity, readiness for sacrifice, love, honesty, good organization, good thinking, wisdom, patience, selflessness, and such rare qualities. Nonetheless, with complete objectivity and after deep thinking and assessment, I say with confidence that Shajarat al-Dur have had all these qualities and more because she was a pleasant spirit and a good company. She was generous with her noble and sublime values, in her sacrifice and forgiveness; she rose above petty matters that some consider significant but she considered them minor and trivial because she was bigger in everything she did. That is why I say with complete objectivity I will not be fair enough to Shajarat al-Dur even if I were a professional novelist with a very special and rare style, because; her ethics and her radiance are too big and too exquisite to articulate.

These words are not the result of emotional reactions or out of partiality to a person I loved, better yet, loved passionately; rather, these words are the result of thinking, evaluation, comparison, and going back more than thirty years. I say these words at a stage considered the ultimate mental and emotional maturity of a human being who is in his second age or approaching it.

Therefore, I consider these words to be out of awareness and far from emotions and partiality.

Friday 05 January 2001. Escaping forward

Today is the last day of the kids' vacation and tomorrow we have to return to Geneva because Monday, 08 January 2001 the children resume school after the Christmas and New Year's Holiday. Tomorrow, Muhammad and his wife will fly to Paris then to Amman and Baghdad; therefore, I decided to approach them with the issue of 'escaping forward,' although, I have not made a final decision in its regard. I have not made an ultimate decision because I am not sure I will be able to adjust and adapt with the new situation. Besides, the other side is unknown to me and I have become used and accustomed to a condition where I cannot think of another situation that can fill the void left open. And since I am not the hasty and rushed type with regard to life matters, even when they are less significant than this issue; I find myself careful because my situation does not tolerate problems or failure especially that I have a viewpoint on this matter which is, in a nutshell, I do not accept failure in it. For these reasons as well as others, I did not make a decision. However, I found it appropriate to discuss this matter with the children just as a precautionary measure in case it happens.

I also understand their psychological state when I am away from them and they happen to hear of matters that concern me; they will definitely reach them distorted and far from the truth. Therefore, I have to tell them about the likelihood of me escaping forward although I have not made up my mind. So, I asked Muhammad, Saja, and 'Ali to stay home while their younger sisters will go to the city with their brother's wife and we would catch up with them after we discuss a certain matter. So, Nur, Khawlah, and Isra' left and the four of us stayed. I explained in great detail the practical aspects of the matter and how each of their lives will become after getting married and moving out to their respective houses as it is the case with Muhammad. I also explained how their responsibilities will increase and grow bigger and their time will grow shorter, etc... thus, I thought of, but have not made a decision yet, escaping forward. No one responded to what they heard and silence prevailed. This silence never happened before, ever since the family began to evolve. I explained some things to them although they are aware of them, because, I always remind them of these things. However, Muhammad did not remember them then. That is why I told him, "As long as I'm living, I will never leave you, or others, with problems or trouble." Saja responded saying, "He buys half, etc..."

`Ali, who was far from me, did not utter a word because he understands the issue despite his young age and because I was with him at one of the coffeehouses in the city a few days ago. He usually has a habit of asking and bringing up general topics, especially when the two of us are together. He asked me, "Dad, I see you worried all the time; you refuse to leave the house unlike your usual self when you used to be active and enjoy looking around, go exercise, walk and go out to restaurants and coffeehouses. But now you are completely different from what you used to be, although I know your situation." He said that with grief. I told him, "You provided the answer yourself." He replied, "I understand that but you have to acclimate yourself with the matter because it became a reality. Besides, the way you are will affect your health and everything that concerns you; in addition to impacting us." I told him, "That is true and that is why I have been studying the issue of escaping forward for some time now, but, I have not made a final decision in that regard yet. What do you think?" I added, "I know you very well and know that you think logically and in a practical manner; therefore, I would like to hear your opinion. However, since I have not made a decision yet, I ask that you do not tell your siblings because I have not told them yet and when they hear about this matter from you, they will have sensitivity towards you and I do not want that." He said, "I understand what you meant and I don't have an issue, but, I have one thing to say."

He said "More than a year ago, you said that my mother's place will remain the same and it is clear as to how we deal with it during special occasions; thus, I ask that no one takes this place." I told him that I still hold by my position. Sure enough, none of his siblings felt from him a thing before I told them and even after that. Although, after our initial conversation, I noticed that he was concerned and in a bad mood; yet, he was trying not to let anyone sense there is something because; he is very careful to do what I ask of him. When I told his siblings in his presence, he pretended he did not know about it already; as if, he is hearing it for the very first time. After the meeting, which lasted for two and a half hours, ended I was the only speaker and was keen to clarifying even the minute details. After his siblings left to get ready to go to the city, 'Ali and I remained in the living room. He told me, "dad, I have one thing I would like to say, that is, don't ask me to visit the new person." I told him that it's a deal, if and when. Yet, in case we accidentally meet the person somewhere, how should we react? Is it appropriate not to greet the person, and how would his behavior be interpreted? He said, "We have no issue here; yet, don't ask me to visit, etc..."

Saturday, 06 January 2001. We left Cannes at 10:30. It was raining. The clouds were thick and in some spots, they were very close to the ground.

Yet, due to modern roads and accurate signs; whether they are written, drawings, or electronic signs, drivers never have difficulties. One can easily drive at a speed of 140 km/h and not feel a thing despite the heavy rain. Whenever I see an electronic sign, I ask Saja about it and she says, "Dad! This sign reads: 'moderate your speed, control your charm'." Indirectly, it is telling drivers not to fool themselves, be overly confident in their cars, and not to think they are skilled drivers; adjust your speed watch yourself. So on and so forth, many signs that warn drivers of a curved road or one where potentially might cause the car to slip and other signs that would allow a person who is strange to the area to reach his destination easily. As for the gas stations; which are most of the time spaced no more than 20km apart, they are similar to a supermarket and not a gas station. They have everything a traveler might need for himself or for his car beginning with chewing gum and Kleenex to windshield fluid, food, some medical supplies that do not require a doctor's prescription, umbrellas, etc...

As for restrooms, they are plenty along the road. I cannot describe how clean they are except by saying they are much cleaner and far more organized than the restrooms inside the Iraqi Foreign Ministry; this is exact and precise description and it is not exaggerated.

We arrived in Geneva at 4:30. After we settled down and put our stuff where they belong, the children asked to view their brother's wedding video; so, we sat down together to watch it. The taping was good, the sisters and the relatives were there. Yet, Shajarat al-Dur's absence was noticeable and it is not possible for anyone not to notice her absence because her presence cannot be overlooked or unfelt due to her strong personality, good company, generosity, hospitality, her interesting conversation, her refined beauty, and her elegance that is hard for most women to reach. These high qualities as well as others make her presence felt. Yet, the photographer tried to deal with her absence by showing pictures of her and I in the background. All of that caused me pain and sorrow beyond description and for two hours I did not stop crying. It lingered through the evening and up to the next day which made Saja tell me that I have a woman's heart.

She added, "You should toughen up like me!" I did not say a word but after a bit, I told her, "The wound is deep my dear!"

Tuesday, 09 January 2001. Today is Shajarat al-Dur's visit day. As with every Tuesday, I have a feeling that is unlike other days. I feel a little tired even if I rested the night before. This weary feeling is mixed with sadness, sluggishness, reflection, and review of the past with all of its sad and happy memories. I view the journey with Shajarat al-Dur; how exciting, rich with examples, meanings, sublime values, and expressions of a rare and genuine relationship. I view the problems that our family had caused us and which had, unfortunately, wasted many opportunities for us that we would have been able to utilize for our advantage and theirs in the best way possible. Yet, regrettably, things happened and left wounds and scares in the skin and in the heart that are hard to heal; they will remain open wounds because of the family who neither fit the word "family" nor its meaning. Yet, because we are committed to values and to the milk that turned into blood running through our veins and theirs, we remain passive and speechless. (They are my family, even when they are mean to me, they are precious).

I went for a walk with Saja and Rex, the family friend, before we go to visit Shajarat al-Dur in order to ease up the pressure I am sensing, especially since the weather was so beautiful and because the sun was shining. You could not feel the cold weather in spite of the low temperature; it was 4°C. We returned home after an hour or so. The clock was approaching 3:30; I changed my clothes and, like every other time, we left the house at 3:25 so we can be at the kids' school at 3:30 to pick-up Khawlah; Nur would catch up with us later. Indeed, we arrived there on time and found Khawlah waiting for us in the parking lot. She rode with us and went to the center where Shajarat al-Dur is staying. We got there on time; but, as soon as we left the car in the parking lot and headed to the center, I had a feeling that was different from every other time. I felt sadness mixed with shame. I had the very same feeling one would have when committing an act or have the thinking that hurts the feelings of another person he loves and is proud of, while, in the past, this person had avoided everything that might upset that person or violate his/her feeling or pride. This feeling is an extension of an attitude that lasted for long years when my only obsession was how others, both men and women, would perceive Shajarat al-Dur when she enters a place.

Therefore, I was, and still am, trying to avoid anything that might hurt her pride and dignity. That is the reason for my honesty and for adhering to logic, decency, and values. Perhaps, the reason I felt this way is because throughout the life I shared with Shajarat al-Dur, it was hard for me to hide anything from her. Anything I do would show on my face and be evident in my behavior, regardless of how insignificant or how far it is from what women think. She was skillful at reading my face and its features because she was and still is very close to my soul and still living in my heart and my conscience. We entered her room and like all the other visits she was deep in her sleep. We recited al-Fatihah and took the temperature and humidity readings on the machine that I placed by her bed; the temperature was 21°C and the humidity was 31. I made a note of that in my notebook. After that, we sat around her bed reading Koran for an hour and a half. When I concluded the reading, I dedicated it to her pure soul and told her, "Ahlam, my love! I will return to Baghdad on Sunday, January 14; but, this might be the last visit before my trip. Although we will meet one way or another; either we meet before God, here, or on the soil of Iraq that you loved and were faithful to."

I added, "Iraq was in your heart and on your mind up to the very last moment. I would like to ask your forgiveness, and you are gracious, I would like to ask your forgiveness for what I am thinking because you are gracious, wise, reasonable and understanding. You are aware of my situation since you left us; after God chose you to be by his side, it has been a tragic situation. It is quite possible that it reflects negatively on my health; which I am only clinging to because of the children who still need me after you left us with God's will. They need my care which became the only one in their life. If I become sick or follow you early on, I would leave a great void and it is quite possible that it would hurt them and hurt their future. They are still young and inexperienced. This is true for Saja, Nur, Khawlah, and even 'Ali; they need this care for the reason I mentioned. Therefore, I thought of escaping forward so life can go on like you said when you told me, 'Barzan, life must go on!' You know, based on our perception of life and its meaning, I am unlike the majority of men who find it easy to live life regardless of how trivial and superficial it is. I respect myself and care about my reputation that was dear and precious to you when you were with me and after you left to be by our Lord."

I then said, "For those reasons, I thought; but, have not made a decision yet, about escaping forward. Therefore, I am asking your pardon and forgiveness for such thinking and for the outcome of such thinking; provided that it happens." I said all that while my eyes were flooded with tears. Then, I stood up and put my head on her chest, I kissed her several times and my tears were falling over her face. I recited Al-Fatihah, bid her farewell, and said, "Good-bye, until we meet again in one of the three cases I have mentioned."

It escaped me to mention that Saja told me when we were walking near the house before we left to see her mom that she had a suggestion. I asked what it was and she said, "Dad, why don't you go to see mom alone this time?" I understood what she meant and told her, "No dear, we go together because I talk to her every hour and every day; she knows what goes on in my head and she understands my circumstances, my situation, and what I am going through ever since she became sick and to this day." She replied, "True dad, we are still managing with her blessings; but, I thought you might want to tell her something you don't want us to hear."

Thursday, 17 May 2001. The Twelfth National Ba'th Party Conference convened today. It is 6:30 A.M. The place is the Conference Palace, then on to the Council of Ministers Building, then on to a Special Security hall next to the Presidential Palace, and from there to al-Radwaniyah.

At 9:50, the president's youngest son entered the hall from the main door. He was walking cheerfully and proudly as if the gates of history opened wide for him since he was aware of what will take place. He was happy and joyful because of what he will get or inherit. He does not know that if he receives what he is excited about, he will get it as a bomb loaded with all types of explosives and poisonous gases; it will explode in his face and destroy him and all that he is thrilled about because it is an inheritance that holds true for what I mentioned above. The President arrived at 10:40 and was received by the caucus with applause and chants pledging to sacrifice flesh and blood for Saddam. He said, "With God's blessing, the Twelfth National Ba'th Party Conference is now in session." He recited the motto and we repeated it after him. Afterwards, he said, "Let us recite al-Fatihah in observance of the martyrs." He then said, "My responsibility will be limited; it will end after I am done with the speech, and by tradition, the caucus elects the chairman and the secretariat and perhaps the comrades considered the age factor."

Applause began and he started reading the speech. In his speech, he gave the conference the name; "The Jerusalem Conference." He said in his speech that was transmitted live and published "If you elect a leader, you elect him based on the fact that when you tire he is vigilant. If it is not possible for you to discern, you cast your votes based on who is best." He talked about the conference's agenda and the election of the chairman and two assistants. He added, "I nominate Comrade 'Izzat to head the conference." Applause! He then left the meeting hall. 'Izzat talked about the confidence that the Commander President placed in him and said that he is proud and honored by it and hoped to achieve the fine objectives of the conference, etc... He said, "We have to prove the legitimacy of the conference, do you agree? Are there any comments concerning the legitimacy of any of the conferees? There aren't any! We begin with the comments concerning the disbanded National Command. I nominate Comrade 'Ali Hassan and Comrade Latif Nasif Jasim for the secretariat of the conference. According to the President's view, the decision was that I point out few past achievements. First, all the accomplishments were achieved through the President's directives. The directives were conveyed through letters sent to the Command and the Organizational Committee or through addressing me directly with instructions since I am the organization's officer in the state, teaching Koran to the party cadre, teaching the members Arab and Islamic history."

He added "they also include the cohabitation of the party cadre with the military organization and the organization of the south, the competition approach within the party organization; branches, sections, divisions, and this is the third year of such practice. The Party formed 28 branches during the election period and dedicated one day during the week for the people to meet with the party at any level; branch, section, division. During the past period, the party built many posts for the branches, sections, and divisions and volunteered a large number of party members and several millions of the people to liberate Jerusalem; it put together a plan to qualify those volunteers mentally, practically and physically. Party membership reached 2,750,581 members. There is solidarity within the party based on the directives of the President; throughout the life of the party — 42 years — there has never been such level of jihad, fighting, and principled awareness. The women's organization within the party and paying attention to it: few days ago, the State Command assessed the women's party organization and there is a women section in every branch, rather, some branches have more than one section. The creation of al-Nawah Organization that is parallel to the Ba'th Party by directive from the President, may God protect him and guide him."

He then said, "Now, if there are no comments, we open up the meeting for nominations. We nominate the Comrade Commander for the State's Secretariat" — he said this instead of saying: "the membership of the Command," because choosing the secretariat of the command is the job of the new Command which consists of the comrade members of the former Command except for Comrade Kamil Yasin who excused himself from nomination. The members are: `Izzat Ibrahim, Taha Yasin, 'Ali Hasan, Tariq `Aziz, Muhammad Zamam, Muhammad Hamzah, Latif Nasif, Fadil alMashhadani, `Adil `Abdallah, Samir al-Najm, `Aziz al-Khafaji, 'Abd-al-Ghani 'Abd-al-Ghafur, Muhsin al-Khafaji, Rashid Ta'an, `Ukiah `Abd Sakr, Fadil Mahmud Gharib, Qusay Saddam, Yahya al-`Abbudi, Fawzi Khalaf, Hamid Rashid al-Rawi, Thabit al-Duri, Sa'dun Mislih, Huda `Ammash.

He said that Comrade Muhammad al-Zubaydi is sick and the command wished that he does not nominate himself and so are comrades Muhammad Yunus, Radi Hasan, Fadil al-Mashhadani, and `Abd al-Ghani `Abd-al-Ghafur; thus the following individuals are considered the Command's nominees: Taha Yasin, Tariq `Aziz, Muhammad Zamam, Latif Nasif Jasim, Samir al-Najm, Mizban Khaddar; in addition to the six comrades who have been in the command for the last six months and they are:

Qusay Saddam, Muhsin al-Khafaji, Fadil Mahmud Gharib, Rashid Ta'an and 'Ukiah `Abd Sakr

At 10:40, the President walked into the hall again and `Izzat began talking and explaining the nominees saying that Qusay was nominated for the command. The President said that he has something to say about Qusay's nomination. He said "We are looking for context and core. I said that Comrade 'Ali was told in the past not to nominate himself and the same thing happened to Barzan. Qusay should not be nominated. I say that not because Qusay is young or because his qualifications are below the leadership level; rather, he is neither young nor less experienced because in the past he had taken several important responsibilities including the role of the President's Aid in a state of emergency." At that point, there were applause and chants calling for the nomination of Qusay. Meanwhile, 'Ali Hasan was calm beyond description, speechless and rigid; his state of mind was: let's cross Qusay's name off the board. While Izzat al-Duri's situation was similar to 'Ali Hasan but he was looking towards the President waiting for a sign from him to remove Qusay's name from the board. After that, Tariq `Aziz stood up and said, in short, we have to give a chance to the youth; because he is 65 years old now and in the next conference, he will be 70 and he will not nominate himself, therefore, he has to give a chance to the youth.

So, there was applause and the President did not object. The reason is obvious, even to a simple man. There was coordination to orchestrate the scenario and there is no one better than Tariq `Aziz, the man who makes deals and enjoys doing it, to take on this role thinking that he is protecting his seat just as `Abd-al-Halim Khaddam of Syria kept his seat. But he is wrong because the situation and circumstances are different here that they are there. Qusay's name remained on the board. 'Ali then objected to the nomination of `Abd-al-Ghani. He was adamant and used a sharp uneducated tone and repeated more than once that `Abd-al-Ghani does not respect himself and does not know his place because the instructions of the Commander and the Command were in favor not nominating him.

We left at 2 PM and returned at 2:50 PM; I walked in with Isam al-Saffar and `Abd-al-Karim Jihad. We found Qusay and `Izzat. Isam lifted his hand in a military salute until he reached Qusay to greet him. Qusay was at the front end of the hall while we entered from the back. Isam shook his hands and hugged him; then, Qusay came over to greet me. At that moment, `Uday walked in and I saw him from a distance heading in my direction as he walked slowly and with difficulty. I headed towards him and we shook hands.

The conference ended at 7:30 with a word from Izzat after the comrades whose names were announced won the nominations. He said, "On behave of the conference, we promise the Commander President to remain faithful to the principles. The energy and vigor have to be greater than in the past in order to achieve victory, with God's help. Thank you!" We then recited the motto to conclude the meeting.

Thursday, 07 June 2001; I was in Tikrit. At 3:00 PM, an employee from the Presidential Protocols called to tell me, "The President wants you at the Presidential Protocols at 6:00 PM." I arrived there on time, my brothers Sab'awi and Watban had arrived there before me. An officer by the name Mis'ir Ibn-Salih Ahmad al-Sultan from Bayt Ghafur took us to al-Radwaniyah. We sat there in one of the small houses. The president arrived about an hour later. He sat with us and we all had a general conversation but I did not say much because after I arrived in Baghdad in December of 1998, following the disaster I went through, I met him three times only.

The first time was when he visited me to pay his condolences, the second time was when he insisted that I be present with a group of people to give me a medal and I still do not know why I was presented with this medal; but, my guess is to make me appear on TV to give people the impression that things are alright. The third visit was at the end of Ramadan when I attended a dinner invitation to break our fast with a large number of men, women, children, and elderly from the "family." Things got tense during that dinner when the President, Sab'awi, and the President's sons began discussing America and how it wasn't able to finance its troops in the region. I said, "Why would it finance them when there are Arab states that pay. Thus, America does not finance not because it is incapable, rather, it is due to the reason I have mentioned." Another main reason for the tension was when the President talked about the structure of the US as a country. He said that the president in the United States cannot make any decisions because there are many circles that have to participate, etc. I said, "That is the right thing! Otherwise, it means there is an individual rule and there is no democracy." I added, "This means there is a law and the president has authorities that are agreed upon in accordance with the law and they are not unlimited. At the same time, it means that the state is a state of institutions and not individuals and the decision has to go through many layers before it is carried out."

I noticed that the President was annoyed and did not talk about anything. He excused himself and left a little while later. He later asked me, "How long will your children stay in Switzerland?" I said the children are studying there. He said, "Does school last for twenty years?" I said, until they are done with their schooling. He said, "Aren't there schools here? Or is it because of the clash between you and your nephew regarding Saja?" He added, "How come we don't know where your wife is although she is our relative? Even her family doesn't know her whereabouts. You would not be able to behave this way with the Mislit family if you weren't my brother!"

As for extending my stay in Geneva — which was something I brought up because the decision to transfer me was made when Shajarat al-Dur was sick, rather, dying. I told him "you have made that decision at a crucial time without considering my situation." I added, "My wife was dying as she was watching us gather our belongings and search for a place to live after you made your decision and we could not do anything. That added to her pain and put her in a tough mental state at a time when we are supposed to provide her with an atmosphere that is mentally relaxing not wrecking." He said, "You want the government to fit you; I cannot delay your return because that will embarrass me before the Iraqi people."

He added, "At the same time, Iraq is not Yemen; there is medicine and doctors and your wife can be treated in Iraq. I thought to myself, if that is the case, how come you send all your favorite ones abroad for treatment and for trivial matters not for serious ones like this? Why would you send `Izzat al-Duri to Jordan to undergo a hernia operation and the embassy in London sends the surgeons and even the anesthetic? Why do you send for a full team to operate on Izzat's son who is six weeks old and send women abroad to receive treatment in order to become pregnant? The examples are many. He added, "I know that this disease does not have a cure and it would have been better to bring her here so she can be buried in her homeland and not Switzerland." He said, "I get embarrassed when someone asks me: where is your brother's wife, is she buried or mummified?" I said to myself, if that is true, then Iraq is in good shape because no one dares asking you about things that are less significant than that, let alone asking about this. At this point, I remembered a true story that happened in the mid-eighties when the late Muhammad Hazza' al-`Ali, God rest his soul, had cancer. He was a relative of ours and the only brother of Miss Bahiyah Hazza' al-`Ali, a friend and a servant of the President's wife Umm-`Uday.

Bahiyah went frantically crying and asking Umm-`Uday, her friend and relative, to appeal to the President in order to send her brother abroad for treatment. The President's wife's response to her was that she will not talk to the President about this matter because this disease has no cure so why should he go abroad? She insisted saying let him die here. This is what Bahiyyah told Shajarat al-Dur in a form of a complaint accompanied with pain and hurt from Umm-Tday's approach and harshness. I remembered this story after I heard the President's words and said to myself; it seems that this inhumane way of thinking is the norm for these people, because, how could the same things that were said seventeen years ago be said again now during this similar incident? Imagine how sensitive this family must be; a family that is in charge of everything in this troubled and miserable country.

Then, he said, "Brothers! You and `Uday have worn me out." He rectified that quickly saying, "As a matter of fact, it is you Barzan and `Uday." He made this strategic correction to win over the other two brothers because he has a certain idea in mind and he might need them to make it succeed. The idea is about making his younger son his successor but this is opposed by the older son.

This means something might take place where he would need the others to make this idea succeed. At the same time, he can use them against me in case he cannot settle the issues he has hanging with them; of course it would have to be done on his terms. He said, "Notice how the State Conference elected Qusay for the command membership because he is calm and keeps away from the limelight; unlike `Uday who loves public attention and talking to the media." He added, "When I objected to Qusay's nomination, it was not a tactic and it was not arranged." He then addressed me saying, "However, you did notice how the conference attendees insisted on electing him and how Tariq `Aziz said that we should give a chance to the youth, because he is 65 now and will be 70 by the next conference and will not nominate himself and therefore, he has to give a chance to the youth; the applause erupted and Qusay's name remained on the board."

After he talked at length and finished, I asked to speak saying, "I will talk frankly if you promise me not to get angry or upset." He said, "I don't. I enjoy talking to those not close to me, so I would enjoy it more with you." I said, "Good!"

I said, "As for the issue of the children; it is a private matter, so please leave that matter to me for that reason and for another reason; they are the only thing I have left in this life. The reason for their stay there is to complete their education and school and I am the one who determines their future."

He said, "What about our customs and traditions? They will be raised according to European culture; a plant is the crop of its environment." I said that would not happen because they are receiving intense upbringing at home and they have their brothers there who are now men, praise be to God, in addition to their sister whom I rely upon. I said, "It has been proven that we raised them successfully because we have brought two girls and we married them here without them knowing their husbands."

He said "true," but quickly corrected himself saying "Swiss culture is what made Saja leave her husband and her house and not return. Besides, two days prior to her leaving Iraq, I told her if that dog, (meaning his son) bothers her, I will punish him." At this point, Watban agreed with the President. The president added, "But she left a letter after she left and I don't know if that was something that you arranged. Why did she behave this way without prior warning?" I said; "For our dignity. I have told in the presence of our two brothers when we met in al-Radwaniyah during my visit to Iraq in April 1994 that your son was behaving inappropriately and showing lack of respect for himself, yourself, the person he married, and us."

I added, "And so he offended everyone, including himself. Only a week after they got married, he went to the hunting club with Husayn and Saddam Kamil along with a group of bad women to dance... etc. They went to a party attended by no less than five hundred families. This does not show respect for the relationship." The President said; "Religion affords this right, etc" I said, "As a family, we do not consider what the religion says in this aspect of the relationship between a man and his wife. Besides, there is a saying that is 'If you have a problem, don't make it public'." I added; "This is carelessness!" He responded, "It seems that many things during that period had taken place in your mind to the extent that made you think different than the family and not in the same direction." I said, "We are brothers, as I have mentioned, but we have to leave each some privacy in thinking and conduct."

Then I added, "As for my relation with the Mislit family, first; I am honored to be your brother but I want to say that the Mislit family cannot reach further than I can because they owe me. My father was the one who killed a man just for talking inappropriately about one of the Mislit daughters. And you know this."

He said, "That is true!" He went on giving the details of the story. I said, "And you killed the son of Hasan al-`Umar for the Mislit family and specifically because of Uncle Khayrallah. I killed four people because of the Mislit family and if it weren't for me, the blood of Dahham al-`Abd and his sons would have been spilled in vain and not avenged." Watban got upset and said, "Why do you say you did it alone? I was with you!" I said, "I am speaking on behalf of the group. That is why I started talking about my father, then the President, and then this case." And I talked about how our father took care of the Mislit families and assets when they were arrested for killing As'ad's son. However, one time when we were at Ibrahim al-Kamit's guest room to negotiate with the Haraymis family, Ibrahim al-`Umar told our father that he was a shepherd working for them. He [our father] told him that the shepherds, the Bu-ljayl uncles were the ones who said this. He [the father] explained to them how he took care of their assets and honor when his family was arrested. I said, "Also, I heard some people from the family of Khayrallah Talfah say that Lu'ay and Mudar are hearing news from here and there that Husayn Kamil is the one who murdered `Adnan Khayrallah." I told the President that I have sent him a letter about that matter. I added that after Husayn Kamil fled, the same conversation took place with Ibrahim al-`Umar who said that it was true and confirmed that they heard it but they are scared to say anything. The President said, "Is it true that they heard this but are afraid to say anything?"

I said, "They are cowards. Why don't they go to the President, who is their cousin, to tell him Mr. President, we heard such and such, etc?"

I added that I have heard this from Mr. Mayzar al-Hamid, the husband of Ibrahim `Umar al-Mislit's daughter. The President did not comment on this issue, yet, he commented by praising the Mislit Family for their bravery, decency, and keeping their honor and that we inherited courage from them, etc. Watban talked along the same lines and in a very smart way in order to get the President on his side. He said, "We used to eat oranges when Uncle Khayrallah came to visit us and brought fruit with him." He talked about how he forgave them when they visited him after Lu'ay caused the incident he was subjected to by `Uday and told them that he exonerates them because he could see Uncle Khayrallah in them. The President said, "Great! That is one of Uncle Ibrahim's traits." He meant my father. Watban's attitude, for the second time we meet with the President, draws attention as flatterer and one who plays both sides in order to gain the President's approval. Of course I know Watban. He is an expert at playing both sides; however, I did not imagine him to be like that. Besides, I don't think he will gain anything regardless of how hard he plays his games because; he cannot gain the President on his side. Not because of things the President is looking for and Watban is lacking, rather, because the President is focused on clearing the road for his son.

Unless he believed that the Watban or others may help him in executing his agenda and are necessary for it; at that point, he might consider giving Watban a job.

The President did not make a single comment about what I mentioned regarding Husayn Kamil and the talks pertaining to him murdering `Adnan Khayrallah.

As for the issue of Shajarat al-Dur, I said that a wife is the business of her husband and no one has the right to interfere. Such things are considered private. I added that Khayrallah's family did not inquire about her during her illness, with the exception of Ilham and Ghaydaa', who had talked to her a few times when she was visiting Ilham. At this point Watban said, "They are trying but they are scared of you, they cannot call her." I said, "That is not an excuse because I would not hang up the phone on them, and it is their right to ask about their sister." Watban was an excellent advocate of Khayrallah's family and the reason is that he wants to please the President. I heard him on more than one occasion painting a harsh picture of them and judging them cruelly, even in personal letters addressed to me. I said that I did not sense any support from the family during the period when Shajarat al-Dur was ill. I mentioned how I requested that my discharge be postponed but the President refused saying that this is the law and he cannot extend the period because it would embarrass him in front of the Iraq people.

I said that I respect and sanctify the law; it has to prevail but this is a special case. He said that there is treatment in Iraq and there are doctors, etc. I said, "You are the President and you can decide." He said that was true but he would not make a decision that would embarrass him before the Iraqi people. At this point, I was unable to take this double standard and this logic that believes if one does not object, it means one is convinced because it is right. I said, "How do you issue an order to appoint Husayn Kamil as an acting Minister of Industry in 1985 when he was not a minister and that contradicts the constitution. The constitution states that no one should be entrusted with the responsibility of a ministry if that person is not a minister in the government." He said that that decision is constitutional because the constitution gives the president the authority to appoint someone off the street to be a minister. He said he could ask a person "Hey, do you want to be a minister?" The person would say yes and the president can issue an order to appoint that person. I kept quite despite being unconvinced. I thanked him for clarifying that point. I said, "How do I bring Shajarat al-Dur to Iraq? Did you send me a plane like you did with Rukan; I myself chartered a private jet for him for \$300,000.00 to take him to Paris because he is sick.

I added, "And when he arrived in Paris he refused to get into a wheelchair and ride the ambulance which made the United Nations reject our request to charter a plane for his return to Iraq." The president said that he takes care of his friends and Rukan killed insurgents with his own gun. He added that there are pictures of Rukan at the United Nations and that is why they refused to grant permission to charter a plane for his return to Iraq. Few days ago, he gave Hisham Sabah \$15,000.00; he does not hesitate to speak on TV about his support of his friends.

I said the reason for not bringing Shajarat al-Dur is due to personal timing. He said "what is that timing?" I replied that I intend to build a special place for her, and then I will bring her. He said "why don't you bring her and then build whatever you want. She is no better than our mother or Uncle Ibrahim. It is true she is better than Ibtisam because she is educated, etc. They were all buried then structures were built for them." I said, "At any rate, these issues are personal and fit into my timing."

The atmosphere was tense and edgy, the conversation was direct, but the President was calm and collected. Sab'awi then spoke. Because I was extremely tense due to the subjects presented and thinking of how to handle them, Sab'awi talked about miscellaneous matters and attacked me by saying that Barzan is good at strategizing and he can present things in a way that is convincing to the listener.

The President said, "That is a good thing!" Sab'awi added, "Barzan is selfish; he only cares about his own interest." The president did not comment at all. But I neglected to explain to Sab'awi who is the selfish one and what is the meaning of selfishness. I should have told him that the selfish person is the one who married a woman 27 years younger than him and abandoned his wife and mother of his children; a woman who put up with him when he had nothing; the selfish person is the one who broke up his own family and displaced his wife and children because of his desires and lust; that's a selfish person. Yet, I did not respond to him because I do not respect his opinion and because I was upset and want this meeting over as soon as possible.

Commenting on my conversation with the President about the children and their presence in Geneva, Watban said to the President, "Mr. President, exercise your right against him as his custodian." I looked at him and said, "I do not understand what you are saying now or what you said before." I meant his hypocrite talk and not the principle, because; I heard him before saying things that are different from what I heard from him in this meeting and the previous meeting.

In the few times that we met since I came to Iraq December 1988, I was calming him down and calling his attention to the seriousness of what he was proposing. Strangely, I see him today like this; considering the President his custodian and asking him to exercise his right against me. I told him that this was instigating the President against me. He said, "No, this should be done." I said, "Am I a renegade, or perverted?" He said, "Mummifying Umm Muhammad is not allowed in religion." I told him, without going into much detail, "It is not considered atheism. Even an atheist who does not show his atheism and does not teach it is not held accountable by the law." I said, addressing the President, "There are ministers in your government who are ontological." He asked, "Like whom?" I said, "Mundhir al-Shawi" The President had no comment.

When I told the President "I am not asking you for anything here in Iraq, but I am asking you to give me an embassy in Europe so I can be with my children. If this is difficult, I will go to Geneva to be with my children because I neither have a job here nor a wife or anything else." He said, "It looks like Switzerland is your homeland and not Iraq." I said "No, not to this extent, but, there is nothing that makes me settle here and my children are there." Four days after this meeting, `Aziz al-Khaffaji, the man in charge of AIRusafa branch of the party, came to the branch.

He said, "We had a discussion about your situation (he meant me) and it was decided that you will be in charge of a section provided that the branch is a people branch." And so I was put in charge of the New Baghdad Branch of the party. My guess, which I am convinced of, is that this decision had many objectives. First, to prevent me, indirectly, from traveling; because, it would not make sense to take on party responsibility in June and then request permission to travel in July to be with my children for six months. Second, discussing my issue at the command then at the bureau in the presence of the secretaries of the branches who are not concerned with my issue is an indication of a policy and a plan to harm my reputation at the party by making me look like someone who needs to be qualified because I deny my working class, since there was emphasis at the command, the bureau and the branch that the branch has to be a populace branch which caused it to spread among the people and inside the party. Third, perhaps something might happen to me by "an unidentified person" which makes is easy to justify, because; in the first scenario, that is before I took responsibility, it would be hard to justify that because any operation targeting me would only be administered by the government since my movement is semi nonexistent and if any, it is in an area that is located completely under government control, in particular, the Special Security.

Fourth, the reason for the decision and the President's disappointment was my refusal of everything he suggested or implied whether at the public or private level including not nominating me for the Command membership because he learned that I do not want a party position or any other high ranking position that would make me have constant contact with him. I did not want that because I disapproved of the prevailing way of thinking in politics and other aspects of life in Iraq.

In another setting, the President said, for no reason, "True, we are not geniuses but we understand and we wear a tie and a suit like you." Then he touched his tie and it was a clear indication that I put myself at a different level than theirs when it comes to their understanding and views on matters. I knew he meant me because at the beginning of the session he started talking about how I used to choose my friends from a different social class that is far from the party and the family and told me, "Your doctor friends." At another occasion, he told me, "The long period you spent in Europe made your thinking different from ours."

I told him that I don't believe that I am a genius. The meeting and the dinner; which I ate nothing from, ended around 11:00. The President noticed that and told me to eat something from the plate that was before him but I thanked him.