

The Believer

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There remained unto Him no friend or companion and He became alone in the world except for His wife, who believed in God and served Job in all His tribulations. We confirmed her to be His support in all matters.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Tablet of Patience*
(provisional translation)

Air breathed soft in the valley where our herds slept
hock deep in winter pasturage—but I woke to hear
wild howls. Raiders down from the mountain stripped
our household bare, flensed of fat, to start the year
in famine. Then a tempest, the solid hill flowed, swept
my sons and daughters into the pit, and all those near
to my Beloved were gone, all but me. I could
not breathe. The tribe waited for my screams. I stood

still, did not run into the storm, nor wail, nor prise
crushed limbs from sodden earth—could only pray,
and wait to be told my children had died. My Lord's eyes
held me—for Him I chose to be silent, obey,
let the tribe call me cold—unmoved by their lies.
But I did shake with cold that night, keeping to His way.
Mud folded over my dear ones, buried them deep.
My throat closed on swallowed tears I must not weep.

My Love woke next day, skin thick with sores that flayed
skin from flesh. He shook with ague, could neither lie
nor sit, nor stand but in raw torment. I longed to aid
Him—held out empty hands, begged, 'Call on God, cry
out for relief!' Cobweb frail, unbroken, face greyed
with pain—why ask for Himself what He must deny
Himself? He would suffer the world's evil, and endure.
Next day, men sure in knowledge came to offer a cure.

There they were, kilted and curled for the occasion,
cheeks plump with certainty—these, who once envied
the Father of the poor. They did not think to listen,
scorned the words that could have answered all our need.
'Those who sow trouble reap the same,' the false physician
claimed, that one named wise. They told my Lord to plead
for mercy, to repent—and smiled, those men, while
calling God an unbeliever; we were cast out, into exile.

I scooped stones, picked thorns, smoothed a hollow
in the ground—small shelter. His pain was a prison
of seeping foulness, there was no balm to offer, no
comfort. We slept cold. I wakened into a vision
of the pit, and in darkness knew what I did not know.
But songs sounded in earth's bones—my children
chanted descant to their Father, and filled the night
with sweet prayer— till I woke again in starlight.

Days passed in hunger. Foraging brought little. Poor,
in want, I went to ask the women of the tribe for bread.
How many, once familiar, turned me from their door?
My faith made them afraid, I was no longer any kindred
of theirs. But one called—in hope, I went. She tore
the ribbon from my brow, pulled my hair about, said
she'd buy, then scraped the blade so close across my head
some skin went too. She cursed me, but I took her bread.

Who are our kin, if not those we can turn to in distress?
The unknown hand that reaches down into a wrecked
boat is not a stranger's; the foreign guide in the wilderness
is no alien—he knows the way. It held no kindness, but I kept
the bread I had demeaned myself to get—and went to confess.
My Beloved took the loaf in His wounded hands and wept.
He blessed and broke it, then strewed it for the birds to eat.
This torment is devised by love; it has a purpose to complete.

He taught us with words, with His body, and blind derision
answered Him. But the last, best teacher is dire need.
Dark, marbling clouds turn like a millwheel, fill the horizon,
close in. Rain hammers towards us in a bellowing stampede.
He speaks now as God, opens wide the pit, and our children
rise to aid us, singing in the wilderness, ready to lead
our lost kin home. O my Lord, teach us to love; shrive
all things, tell the end of all things, make all things alive!