NIZAMI GANJAVI

LEYLI AND MAJNUN

HEYDAR ALIYEV
FOUNDATION

LEYLI AND MAJNUN. NIZAMI GANJAVI

TRANSLATED BY JAMES ATKINSON

RE-EDITED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION
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The anxieties and stresses of the restless human soul are the central topic of the epic poem Leyli and Majnun - the third of the Khamsa epics, which Nizami wrote in 1188.

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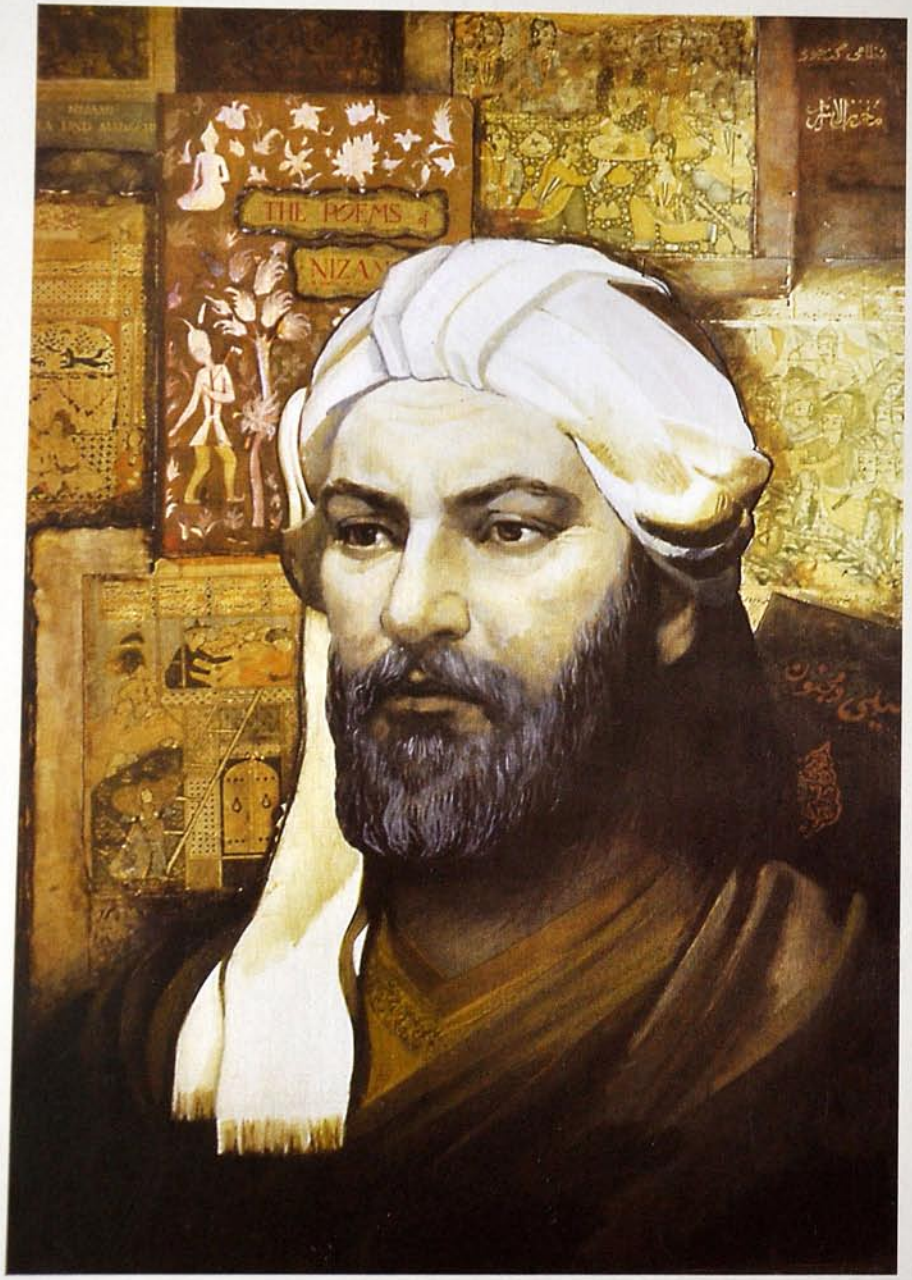


INTRODUCTION

THE STORY

This is the love-story told at the camp fire and among the tents in the desert. Both girl and boy, Leyli and Majnun, are children of two little wandering tribes. Syd Omri, chief of his clan, has a son Kais. Kais and Leyli, the daughter of another petty chief, are children together. Side by side they sat in the schools, and the lesson they learnt is read in each other's eyes. But the poet hurries us on to his tragedy. He spares us only a little of their early spring and the dreams and ideals of childhood, and passes on to the long, pitiless summer of separation and fruitless desire. Leyli is taken away with the rest of her tribe from the city of Bagdad into the distant hills, and Kais being left alone, deprived of his Leyli, is no longer Kais, but Majnun - mad of love. Like all the inspired madmen of old, he seeks the wilderness. Like them, he has dominion over wild beasts; the lion is his friend, and the jackal his servant. Syd Omri sets forth to find the father of Leyli, and implores her hand for his son. But no one wants a madman for a son-in-law. In the East, where madness and inspiration go hand in hand, the madman is always a man of God, a man of awe, one to propitiate, but never to love, pity, and heal. So Ibn Salam rides by with his money bags and his sound mind in his sound body, and Leyli, like a well-bred young lady, is passed to the wealthy bidder, and Kais remains immortally Majnun.

Thus briefly is the story told. For a short time Ibn Salam, under the habeas corpus act of marriage, is custodian of a hapless girl, then death under one more ancient and widely respected takes possession of Ibn Salam. So the woman that was a girl awaits the lord of her heart. Like a true Oriental of the submissive sex, she who has patiently borne the embraces of a man she loathes submits to the two long years of perfunctory lamentation laid down by the Mohammedan law before she sends her page, the faithful Zyd, telling him:

Together, where the cypress grows,
Place the red tulip and the rose;
And let the long-dissever'd meet—
Two lovers, in communion sweet.

But Zyd arrives too late. Majnun is already wed—his heart is given to an image of the past: all that Majnun belongs to all that was Leyli. The widow of Ibn Salam is no mate for love's own anchorite. For one brief moment the living woman, with the memories of her lost youth in her eyes, holds him. They are wordless and still, stricken with the tremendous silence of those that have waited and hoped and despaired, and found only when the whispering voice of consolation had ceased. To her he is indeed Kais; to him she is almost Leyli. Then the mirage of her remembered loveliness passes, the madness of the desert is upon him, and "the holy man" beloved of wild beasts, the counsellor of unhappy lovers, the one for whom no counsel may avail, flies from the presence of a broken-hearted woman.

So might the poem end with the death of Majnun on his Leyli's grave. But Nizami is not merely a poet — he is also kind; and to be kind is to be human, and to be human is often to err. Nizami tells us how Zyd, the faithful, dreams a wondrous dream. His soul mounts to the celestial regions. There is Paradise, with its green vistas lit with golden fruit. Bright spirits pass like glittering meteors with a trail of glory round the winding ways. From deep thickets the bulbul sings. Within "a rosy glade" are spread the carpets of Khorassan. and on a double throne of gold in the shadow of the palm sit Leyli and Majnun -

Sometimes to each their thoughts revealing,
Each clasping each with tenderest feeling.

Somehow, as we wander with Zyd through all this sensual Paradise, the thought trays back to earth, and down again to a land that lies remote, beneath the sea, to a ruined chapel, where the Nizami of England has laid his lovers; where

None shall say,
Here once, or here, Tristram and Iseult lay.

But peace they have that none may gain who live,
And rest about them that no love can give,
And over them, while death and life shall he,
The light and sound and darkness of the sea.

And the Thoughtful reader will surely pardon us if, to our dull Northern minds, the solemn twilights that sweep over the twain appeal more than the broad noontide of an Eastern Paradise.

THE POET

Nizami, the great romantic poet of Azerbaijan and the Muslim Orient as whole. He was born A.D. 1141, at the city of Ganja, in the province of Arran, which is on the borders of Azerbaijan and Georgia. He tells us himself that his father's name was Yusif (Joseph). He had a brother named Kawami who was also a poet of some merit; but beyond a reference to him as belonging to "The Masters of Poetry" by the great biographer Dowlatshah, we know nothing. Nizami's father died while he was still young, and the boy brought up in this stronghold of orthodox Mohammedan faith developed into a religious ascetic of the strictest kind. In the youth of genius there is almost always this period. The mind of a true poet is essentially prophetic and foresees a thousand sorrows and discomfortures which will only cease with death: and hence the desire for some haven of quiet, for the possession of the golden key which unlocks the shrine of peace within. And this mind that prophesies half consciously to itself, as it gathers power and finds expression will prophesy to the world through the medium of verse. To Nizami the prophet is even greater than the prophet-singer, because the latter wraps up truth in beauty; the former gives us truth in all its naked grandeur, with a message which stuns and overpowers us, too mighty almost for mortal ears to hear.

The mystic word which is veiled in poetry
Is the shadow of that which is veiled in prophecy.
Before and behind arc the ranks of grandeur,
Prophecy stands first and in front, poetry behind it ;

These two neighbours are intimates of one friend ;
That is the kernel, this the rind.

Suddenly, in the wonderful calm of an Oriental night, there comes a message like the breath of spring to the young recluse.

The voice of the heart has been stifled by the sackcloth of asceticism. Away with the gag!

Under the dome of this fair blue canopy
Sing the story of thine heart like a sweet melody.
Keep far away from those highwaymen, the passions
Thine heart knoweth the way—consult thine own heart!

So Nizami the ascetic becomes Nizami the poet; the dry winds of theology blow wide across the desert, and the gardens of the world are brighter for the glories of Leyli and Majnun.

In an age in which poets depended for their very existence on the favour of princes Nizami lived apart with his dreams, and always before him Firdowsi's Book of Kings, The Shah Nameh, with its legends of old Orient and heroic tales. From these legends of his country he took the story of Khosrow and Shirin; and this, the first great romance-epic from his pen, won for him the friendship of the Ata-beg Prince Qizil Arslan. He was summoned to Court, feted and dressed in robes of honour, and withdrew a little later, and perhaps not unwillingly, lord of the villages of Hemd and Nizan with

A royal deed duly secured and authenticated
by the king's own seal and superscription—
"This village is given by us in perpetuity
To Nizami and his sons to all generations".

His last great epic was Iskandername (The Book of Alexander). It is divided into two parts. In the first he treats of Alexander the Great as world conqueror; in the second as traveler, prophet, and philosopher.

Nizami died in A.D. 1203. Many have imitated, none succeeded, him. Saadi, Hafiz, and Jami laid their jewels on his grave.

THE TRANSLATOR

James Atkinson was born in the latter half of the eighteenth century. He entered the East India Company's Bengal medical service, and most of his long and honourable career was spent in India. It is strange that the Dictionary of National Biography, which can afford space to an obscure divine of his name, has nothing to say of the translator of Such epic poems as Nizami's, The Shahnameh, and Leyli and Majnun. Mind that in the twelfth century, two languages, Arabic and Persian, dominated science and literature of the Near and Middle East. All scientific works were written in Arabic, while poets of various nationalities from Central Asia to the Caucasus, Iran to India, created their literary heritage in the other main language - Persian. The cultural unification and merger reached its peak at this time, being created by the peoples of the Near and Middle East, resulting in what is now known as the "Islamic Culture". The literary school, created by Nizami, had a major and unprecedented impact on Indian, Persian, Turkish, Uzbek, Turkmen, Kazakh, Afghan and Kurdish literature, as well as the literature of other Turkic peoples. From the twelfth to the twentieth centuries, one sees in the East a sort of "response" to the Khamseh of Nizami. Of Atkinson's translation of the latter we must speak with reverence, for he is not here to defend himself from criticism or revise the work of his hands. His outlook on his age is not ours. William IV. was king when Leyli and Majnun, translated by James Atkinson, first saw light. In those days there were conventions in poetry, chiefly classical, to observe. He lived in a time, almost a twilight, of sentiment, which vaguely extended until it became merged into the dawn of the pre-Raphaelite Renaissance. It was the age of The Keepsake and The Gem, and a hundred pretty books of sentimental verse. A song was then a "ditty"; young ladies never sang, they "warbled"; they never sat, but "reclined", and their sofas were invariably green. Writing in 1856 on "The Poetry of the East", the late William Rounseville Alger contrasts the mysticism and depth of Oriental poetry with the sentimentality of his day:

"This whole province (the Oriental) of the world's literature is enveloped and saturated with mysticism—mysticism of a bewildering quality and comprehensiveness.

This mysticism, which is the soul's groping in a world of symbols after realities too vast and elusive, occupies the same place in Eastern literature that is filled by sentimentality in the modern literature of the West".

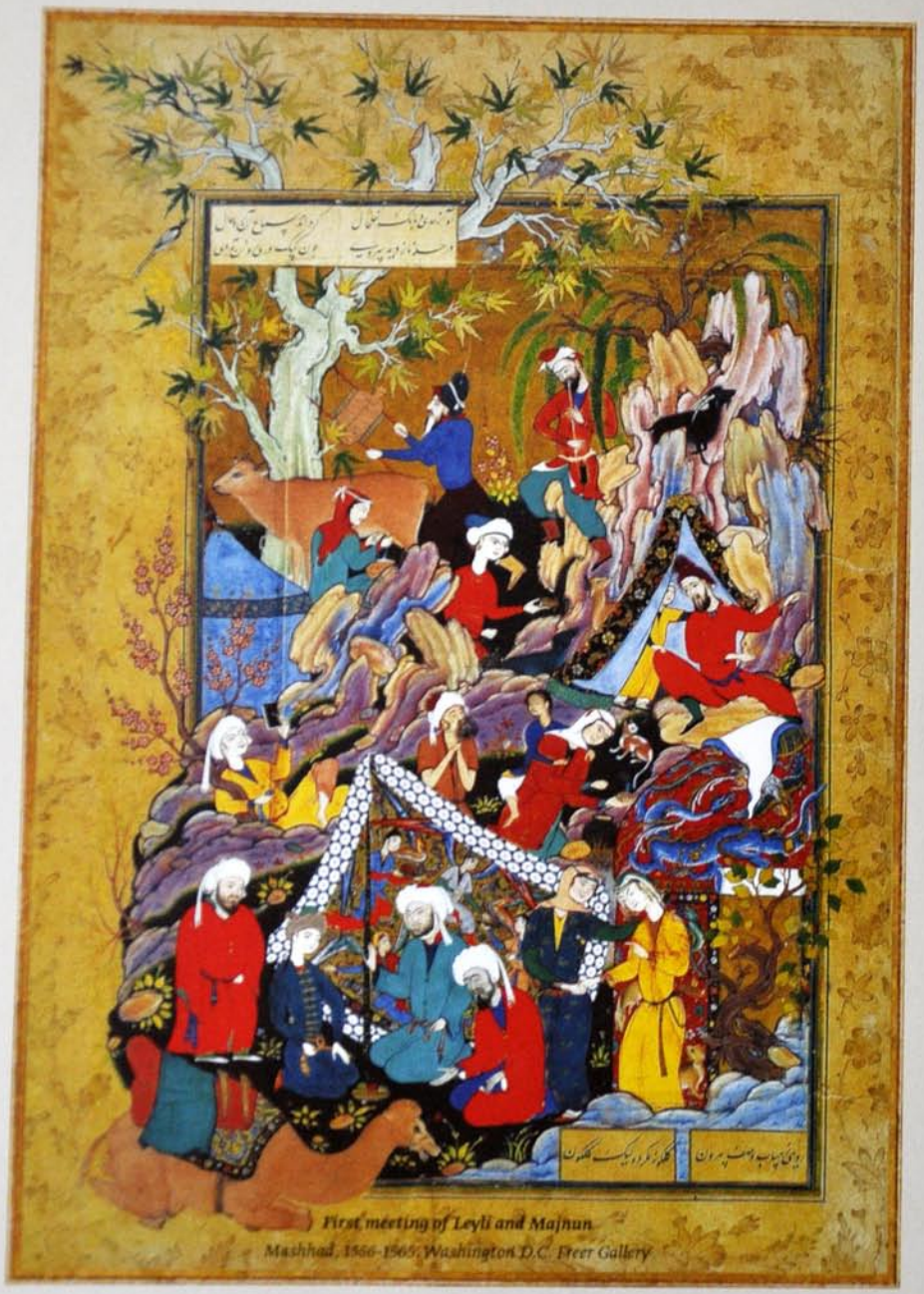
Their worn-out vehicles were too shallow, too frayed, to hold deep waters. Moreover, the age was so self-satisfied, so unshakably pleased with itself, that the critical spirit and the power to interpret was never born.

I have before me as I write a rare edition of Leyli and Majnun, printed for subscribers to the "Oriental Translation Fund", and containing a charming lithograph from a sketch of Leyli made by James Atkinson, Esq., Calcutta. It is in reality a pretty portrait of some young lady of the time of William IV. masquerading in Oriental (Azerbaijanian) costume. The very curls, gushed over by the minstrels of The Gem, unwind down her "damask" cheek—for, without the colour, we feel instinctively that the cheek must be damask. It is delightful, and it may be the picture of Caroline or Fanny or Louisa, but it is not Leyli. And this is the very spirit of Oriental translation in the days before Fitzgerald.

Yet when this, the merest breath of criticism, has gone forth, much remains to admire; there is much beauty and force and charm in this book of classic verse. The translator never made the common mistake of keeping the whole poem in the same metre. There are no dull passages, there is no obscurity, there are many lines that linger. And if amidst all that calls us here and there we have a little time to dream over an old tale of hapless love, and our ears wait for other sounds than the roaring of railroads, we may still faintly hear -

The rill
Of ancient waters murmuring to the moon
The secrets of the nightlands that they knew,
Of lorn dark winds whose cadent voices thrill
The leaves that roam o'er Leyli and Majnun
And the wild rose that stars them with her dew.
L. C . B.

LEYLI AND MAJNUN



First meeting of Leyli and Majnun
Mashhad, 1556-1565; Washington D.C. Freer Gallery

CHAPTER I

INVOCATION TO THE CUP-BEARER

Saki[1], thou know'st I worship wine;
Let that delicious cup be mine.
Wine! Pure and limpid as my tears,
Dispeller of a lover's fears;
With thee inspired, with thee made bold,
'Midst combat fierce my post
With thee inspired, I touch the string,
And, rapt, of love and pleasure sing.
Thou art a lion, seeking prey,
Along the glades where wild deer stray;
And like a lion I would roam,
To bring the joys I seek for home;
With wine, life's dearest, sweetest treasure,
I feel the thrill of every pleasure:
- Bring, Saki, bring the ruby now;
Its lustre sparkles on thy brow,
And, flashing with a tremulous light,
Has made thy laughing eyes more bright:
Bring, bring the liquid gem, and see
Its power, its wond'rous power, in me.
- No ancestors have I to boast;
The trace of my descent is lost.
From Adam what do I inherit?
What but a sad and troubled spirit?
For human life, from oldest time,

Is ever mark'd with guilt and crime.
And man, betrayer and betray'd,
Lurks like a spider in the shade;
But wine still plays a magic part,
Exalting high the drooping heart.
Then, Saki, linger not, but give
the blissful balm on which I live.
Come, bring the juice of the purple vine,
Bring, bring the musky-scented wine;
A draught of wine the memory clears,
And wakens thoughts of other years.
When blushing dawn illumes the sky,
Rill up a bumper, fill it that wine,
Which to the fever'd lip,
With anguish parch'd, when given to sip,
Imparts a rapturous smile, and throws
A veil o'er all distracting woes:
That wine, the lamp which, night and day,
Lights us along our weary way;
Which strews the path with fruits and flowers,
And gilds with joy our fleeting hours;
And lifts the mind, now grown elate,
To Jamshid's[2] glory, Jamshid's state.
But of the kingly race beware;
Tis not for thee their smiles to share:
Smiles are deceitful, fire looks bright,
And sheds a lucid dazzling light;
But, though attractive, it is known
That safety dwells in flight alone.
The moth the taper's radiance tries,
But 'midst the flame in torment dies:
And none lament that foolish pride
Which seeks to be with kings allied. -

Bring, bring the musky-scented wine!
'Tis the key of mirth, and must be mine
The key which opens wide the door
Of rapture's rich and varied store;
Which makes the mounting spirits glad,
And feel the pomp of Kai-Kobad.
Wine o'er the temper casts a spell
Of kindness indescribable:
Then, since I'm in the drinking vein,
Bring, bring the luscious wine again!
Swift to the teeming tavern hie,
Before the reveller's lips be dry.
Come, Saki, art not old nor lame;
Let not a poet bear thee blame;
Let him wash from his heart the dust of sorrow
And drink till the night melts into the morrow;
Bid the sound of the goblet charm his ear
Like the music that breathes from Heav'n's own sphere.

CHAPTER II

THE DAWN OF LOVE

Mark, where instruction pours upon the mind
The light of knowledge, simple or refined;
Sheikhs of each tribe have children there, and each
Studies whate'er the bearded sage can teach.
Thence his attainments Qays[3] assiduous drew,
And scattered pearls from lips of ruby hue;
And there, of different tribe and gentle mien,
A lovely maid of tender years was seen:
Her mental powers an early bloom displayed:
Her peaceful form in simple garb array'd

Bright as the morn, her cypress shape, and eyes
Dark as the stag's, were view'd with fond surprise:
And when her cheek this Arab moon reveal'd,
A thousand hearts were won; no pride, no shield,
Could check her beauty's power, resistless grown,
Given to enthral and charm - but chiefly one.
Her richly flowing locks were black as night,
And Leyli' she was call'd - that heart's delight:
One single glance the nerves to frenzy wrought,
One single glance bewilder'd every thought;
And, when o'er Qays affection's blushing rose
Diffused its sweetness, from him fled repose:
Tumultuous passion danced upon his brow;
He sought to woo her, but he knew not how:
He gazed upon her cheek, and, as he gazed,
Love's flaming taper more intensely blazed.
Soon mutual pleasure warm'd each other's heart;
Love conquer'd both - they never dreamt to part;
And, while the rest were poring o'er their books,
They pensive mused, and read each other's looks:
While other schoolmates for distinction strove,
And thought of fame, they only thought of love:
While others various climes in books explored,
Both idly sat - adorer and adored:
Science for them had now no charms to boast;
Learning for them had all its virtue lost:
Their only taste was love, and love's sweet ties,
And writing ghazels to each other's eyes.
Yes, love triumphant came, engrossing all
The fond luxuriant thoughts of youth and maid;
And, whilst subdued in that delicious thrall,
Smiles and blight tears upon their features play'd.
Then in soft converse did they pass the hours,-

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Their passion, like the season, fresh and fair;
Their opening path seem'd deck'd with balmiest flowers,
Their melting words as soft as summer air.
Immersed in love so deep,
They hoped suspicion would be lull'd asleep,
And none be conscious of their amorous state;
They hoped that none with prying eye,
And gossip tongue invidiously,
Might to the busy world its truth relate:
And, thus possess'd, they anxious thought
Their passion would be kept unknown;
Wishing to seem what they were not,
Though all observed their hearts were one.
By worldly prudence uncontroll'd,
Their every glance their feelings told;
For true love never yet had skill
To veil impassion'd looks at will.
When ringlets of a thousand curls,
And ruby lips, and teeth of pearls,
And dark eyes flashing quick and bright,
Like lightning on the brow of night -
When charms like these their power display,
And steal the wilder'd heart away -
Can man, dissembling, coldly seem
Unmoved as by an idle dream?
Qays saw her beauty, saw her grace,
The soft expression of her face;
And as he gazed, and gazed again,
Distraction stung his burning brain:
No rest he found by day or night -
Leyli for ever in his sight.
But, oh! When separation came,
More brightly glow'd his ardent flame;

M.F.Axundov adına
Azərbaycan Milli
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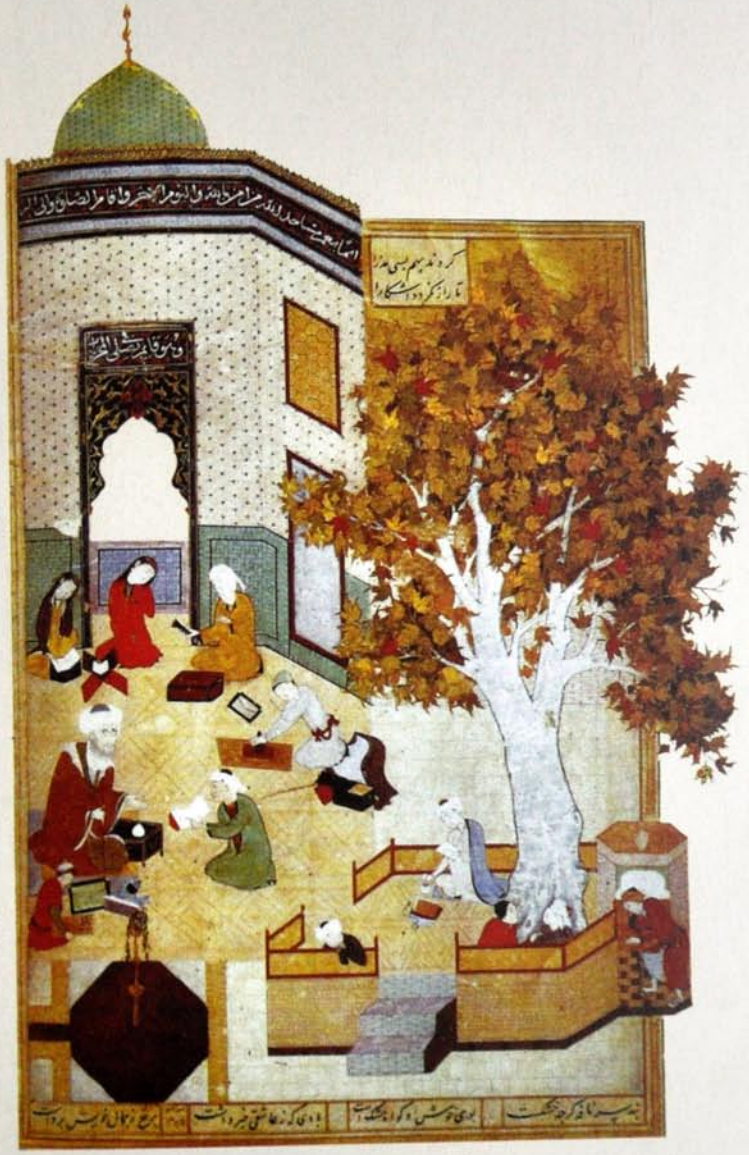
And she, with equal sorrow fraught,
Bewail'd the fate upon them brought.
- He wander'd wild through lane and street,
With frantic step, as if to meet
Something which still his search defied,
Reckless of all that might betide.
His bosom heaved with groans and sighs,
Tears ever gushing from his eyes;
And still he struggled to conceal
The anguish he was doom'd to feel;
And, maddened with excessive grief,
In the lone desert sought relief.
His head and feet no covering knew;
And every night, with growing pain,
The woes of absence mark'd his strain.
The secret path he eager chose
Where Leyli's distant mansion rose;
And kiss'd the door, and in that kiss
Fancied he quaff'd the cup of bliss.
How fleet his steps to that sweet place!
A thousand wings increased his pace;
But thence, his fond devotions paid,
A thousand thorns his course delay'd.

CHAPTER III
THE PARTING

The lover from his mistress parted,
Lingering, oppress'd, and broken-hearted,
Sank, like the sun all rayless, down -
Khosru, without his throne or crown.
With matted locks and bosom bare,



Leyli and Majnun studying in the madrasa
Herat, 1494. London, British Library

Unshielded from the scorching air,
This hapless youth, absorb'd in grief,
Longed with his friends to find relief;
The few, by strong affection bound,
And, midst his woes, still faithful found.
But vain the refuge - friendship's smile
Could not his love-lorn heart beguile:
Again he hasten'd to that place remote,
Where all he loved in life had gone:
He call'd her magic name, but she was not,
Nor of her kindred, one, not one,
In that sequester'd lonely spot:
He call'd a thousand times, but call'd in vain;
None heeded, for none heard the strain;
And thence no fond reply that hapless youth could gain.
Leyli had, with her kindred, been removed
Among the Nijid mountains, where
She cherish'd still the thoughts of him she loved,
And her affection thus more deeply proved
Amid that wild retreat. Qays sought her there;
Sought her in rosy bower and silent glade,
Where the tall palm trees flung refreshing shade.
He call'd upon her name again;
Again he call'd, alas! in vain;
His voice unheard, thought raised on every side;
Echo alone to his lament replied;
And Leyli! Leyli! rang around,
As if enamour'd of that magic sound.
Dejected and forlorn, fast-falling dew
Glisten'd upon his cheeks of pallid hue;
Through grove and frowning glen he lonely stray'd,
And with his griefs the rocks were vocal made.
Leyli the beautiful forever fled!

Oh, never, never! let the thought lie dead.
Whilst deep emotion agonised his breast,
He to the morning-breeze these words address'd:
"Breeze of the morn! So fresh and sweet,
Wilt thou my blooming mistress greet;
And, nestling in her glossy hair,
My tenderest thoughts, my love, declare?
Wilt thou, while 'mid her tresses sporting,
Their odorous balm, their perfume courting,
Say to that soul-seducing maid,
In grief how prostrate I am laid!
And gently whisper in her ear
This message, with an accent clear:
'Thy form is ever in my sight,
In thought by day, in dreams by night;
For one, in spirits sad and broken,
That mole[5] would be the happiest token;
That mole which adds to every look
A magic spell I cannot brook;
For he who sees thy melting charms,
And does not feel his soul in arms,
Bursting with passion, rapture, all
That speak love's deepest, wildest thrall,
Must be, as Kaf's[6] ice-summit, cold,
And, haply, scarce of human mould.
Let him, unmoved by charms like thine,
His worthless life at once resign
Those lips are sugar, heavenly sweet;
O let but mine their pouting meet!
The balsam of delight they shed;
Their radiant colour ruby-red.
The Evil eye has struck my heart,
But thine in beauty sped the dart:

Thus many a flower, of richest hue,
Hath fall'n and perish'd where it grew;
Thy beauty is the sun in brightness,
Thy form a Peri's self in lightness;
A treasure thou, which, poets say,
The heavens would gladly steal away -
Too good, too pure, on earth to stay!"

CHAPTER IV

SYD OMRI'S PILGRIMAGE

As morning broke, the sun, with golden light,
Eclipsed the twinkling stars of silvery white;
And Majnun, rising, eagerly pursued
The path which wound to Leyli's solitude,
Grieved to the heart; and, as he went along,
His lips breathed softly some impassion'd song;
Some favourite lay, which tenderly express'd
The present feeling of his anxious breast.
In fancy soon her image he beheld;
No shadowy cloud her lucid beauty veil'd;
He saw her fresh as morning's scented air -
Himself exhausted by incessant care:
He saw her blooming as the blushing rose -
Himself dejected by unnumber'd woes:
He saw her like an angel soft and bland -
Himself consuming like a lighted brand:
Her ringlets flowing loosely to the ground,
His ringlets, fetters by affection bound;
And still, all faint with grief, he pass'd his days,
Pouring his soul out in melodious lays.
His friends, to whom his griefs are known

His altered aspect now bemoan;
Alarm'd to hear the sufferer still
In frantic mood unceasing fill
The night-breeze with his plaintive woes;
For sorrow with indulgence grows.
They try to soothe his wilder'd mind,
Where reason once was seen enshrined;
His father, with a father's love,
Sought his sad sorrows to remove,
And gave him maxims full and clear,
And counsel meet for youth to hear.
But, though good counsel and advice
May often lead to Paradise,
When love has once the heart engross'd,
All counsel, all advice is lost;
And weeping Majnun not a word
Of his poor father's counsel heard,
Ah! When did prudence e'er control
The frenzy of a lovelorn soul?
Disconsolate the father now
Behind the Harem-screen appears,
Inquiring of his females how
He best might dry the madman's tears;
And what had drawn the sparkling moon
Of intellect from him so soon.
The answer of the old and young
Was ready, quivering on the tongue:
"His fate is fix'd - his eyes have seen
The charms of his affection's queen
In all their winning power display'd;
His heart a captive to that Arab maid.
Then what relief canst thou supply?
What to the bleeding lover, doom'd to die?

Majnun's father asks for Leyli's hand
Tabriz, 1539-1543. Fogg Museum, Cambridge

What but fulfilling his desires?
And this a father's generous aid requires.
See them united in the bands of love;
And that alone his frenzy will remove."
These words (for woman's words convey
A spell, converting night to day,
Diffuse o'er troubled life a balm,
And passion's fiercest fever calm) –
These words relieve the father's heart,
And comfort to his thoughts impart.
Resolved at once, he now with speed
Marshals his followers, man and steed;
And, all assembled, bends his way
To the damsel's home, without delay.
Approaching, quick the inquiry rose:
"Come ye hither as friends or foes?
Whatever may your errand be,
That errand must be told to me;
For none, unless a sanction'd friend,
Can pass the boundary I defend."
The challenge thouch'd Syd Omri's pride:
And yet he calmly thus replied:
"I come in friendship, and propose
All future chance of feud to close."
Then to the maiden's father said:
"The nuptial feast may now be spread:
My son with thirsty heart has seen
Thy fountain pure with margin green;
And every fountain, clear and bright,
Gives to the thirsty heart delight,
That fountain he demands. With shame,
Possess'd of power, and wealth, and fame,
I to his silly humour bend,

And humbly seek his fate to blend
With one inferior. Need I tell
My own high lineage, known so well?
If sympathy my heart incline,
Or vengeance, still the means arc mine.
Treasure and arms can amply bear
Me through the toils of desert-war;
But thou'rt the merchant, pedlar-chief,
And I the buyer; come, sell, - be brief!
If thou art wise, accept advice;
Sell, and receive a princely price!"
The sire of Leyli mark'd his haughty tone,
But smoothly answer'd: "Not on us alone
Depends the nuptial union - but on Heaven,
By which all power, and right, and truth are given.
However just our reasoning may appear,
We're still beset by endless error here;
And proffer'd friendship may perchance become
The harbinger of strife and of the tomb;
Madness is neither sin nor crime, we know,
But who'd be link'd to madness or a foe?
Thy son is mad - his senses first restore;
In constant prayer the aid of Heaven implore;
But while portentous gloom pervades his brain,
Disturb me not with this vain suit again.
The jewel, sense, no purchaser can buy,
Nor treachery the place of sense supply.
Thou hast my reasons - and this parley o'er,
Keep them in mind, and trouble me no more!"
Abash'd, his very heartstrings torn,
Thus to be met with scoff and scorn,
Syd Omri to his followers turn'd,
His cheek with kindled anger burn'd;

But, scorning more to do or say,
Indignant homeward urged his way.
And now for a disorder'd mind,
What med'cine can affection find?
What magic power, what human skill,
To rectify the erring will?
- The necromancer's art they tried -
Charms, philtres used, to win a bride,
And make a father's heart relent,
As if by Heaven in pity sent. -
Vain efforts all. They now address
Kind words, his mind to soothe and bless
And urge in his unwilling ear
(Treason and death for him to hear):
"Another love, of nobler race,
Unmatch'd in form, unmatch'd in grace;
All blandishments and fairy wiles;
Her every glance the heart beguiles :
An idol of transcendent worth,
With charms eclipsing royal birth;
Whose balmy lips like rubies glow;
Sugar and milk their sweetness show;
And her words like softest music flow:
Adorn'd in all the pride of spring,
Her robes around rich odours fling;
Sparkling with gold and gems, she seems
The bright perfection of a lovers dreams;
Then why, with such a prize at home,
For charms inferior amid strangers roam?
Bid all unduteous thoughts depart,
And wisely banish Leyli from thy heart."
When Majnun saw his hopes decay,
Their fairest blossoms fade away;

And friends and sire, who might have been
Kind intercessors, rush between
Him and the only wish that shed
One ray of comfort round his head,
(His fondly cherish'd Arab maid),
He beat his hand, his garments tore,
He cast his fetters on the floor
In broken fragments, and in wrath
Sought the dark wilderness's path;
And there he wept and sobb'd aloud,
Unwitness'd by the gazing crowd;
His eyes all tears, his soul all flame,
Repeating still his Leyli's name.
And Leyli! Leyli! echoed round,
Still dwelling on that rapturous sound.
– In pilgrim-garb he reckless stray'd,
No covering on his feet or head;
And still, as memory touch'd his brain,
He murmur'd some love-wilder'd strain:
But still her name was ever on his tongue,
And Leyli! Leyli! Still through grove and forest rung.
Sad inmate of the desert wild,
His form and face with dust defiled;
Exhausted with his grief's excess,
He sat him down in weariness.
"Estranged from friends," he weeping cried,
"My homeward course is dark to me;
But, Leyli, were I at thy side,
How bless'd would thy poor lover be!
My kindred think of me with shame;
My friends they shudder at my name.
"That cup of wine I held, alas!
Dropp'd from my hand, is dash'd in pieces

And thus it is that, like the glass,
Life's hope in one dark moment ceases.
O ye who never felt distress,
Never gay scenes of joy forsaking,
Whose minds, at peace, no cares oppress,
What know ye of a heart that's breaking!

• • •

Worn out at length, he sank upon the ground,
And there in tears the mournful youth is found
By those who traced his wanderings: gently they
Now to Syd Omri's home the faded form convey:
His sire and kinsmen round him moan
And, weeping, make his griefs their own;
And, garrulous, recall to memory's eye
The brighter pageant of the years gone by –
The flattering promise of his boyish days –
And find the wreck of hope on which they gaze
They deem'd that Mecca's sacred fane
His reason would restore again;
That blessed boon to mortals given,
The arc of earth, the arc of heaven;
The holy Kaba[7] where the Prophet pray'd,
Where Zam-Zam's waters yield their saving aid.
'Tis now the season of the pilgrimage,
And now assemble merchant, chieftain, sage,
With vows and offerings, on that spot divine:
Thousands and thousands throng the splendid shrine.
And now, on that high purpose bent, await
Syd Omri's camels, ready at his gate;
Around their necks the tinkling bells are hung,
Rich tassel'd housings on their backs are flung;
And Majnun, faint, and reckless what may be,

Is on a litter placed - sad sight to see! -
And tenderly caress'd, whilst borne along
By the rough moving camel, fleet and strong.
The desert soon is pass'd, and Mecca's bright
And glittering minarets rise upon the sight;
Where golden gifts, and sacrifice, and prayer,
Secure the absolution sought for there.
The father, entering that all-powerful shrine,
Thus prays: "Have mercy, Heaven, on me and mine!
O from my son this frenzied mood remove,
And save him, save him from the bane of love!"
Majnun at this, poor wayward child,
Look'd in his father's face and smiled;
And frankly said his life should prove
The truth and holiness of love.
"My heart is bound by beauty's spell,
My love is indestructible.
Am I to separate from my own,
From her for whom I breathe alone?
What friend could wish me to resign
A love so pure, so true as mine?
What, though I like a taper burn,
And almost to a shadow turn,
I envy not the heart that's free -
Love's soul-encircling chains for me!"
The love that springs from Heaven is bless'd;
Unholy passions stain the rest;
That is not love: wild fancy's birth,
Which lives on change, is constant never:
But Majnun's love was not of earth,
Glowing with heavenly truth for ever;
An earthly object raised the flame,
But 'twas from Heaven the inspiration came.

Majnun at the tent of Leyli in sheep's clothing
Mashhad, 1556-1565, Washington D.C. Freer Gallery

In silent sorrow the aged sire
Found all his cares were vain;
And back to his expecting tribe
Address'd his steps again;
For Mecca had no power to cool
The lover's burning brain;
No consolation, no relief
For the old man's heart-consuming grief.

CHAPTER V

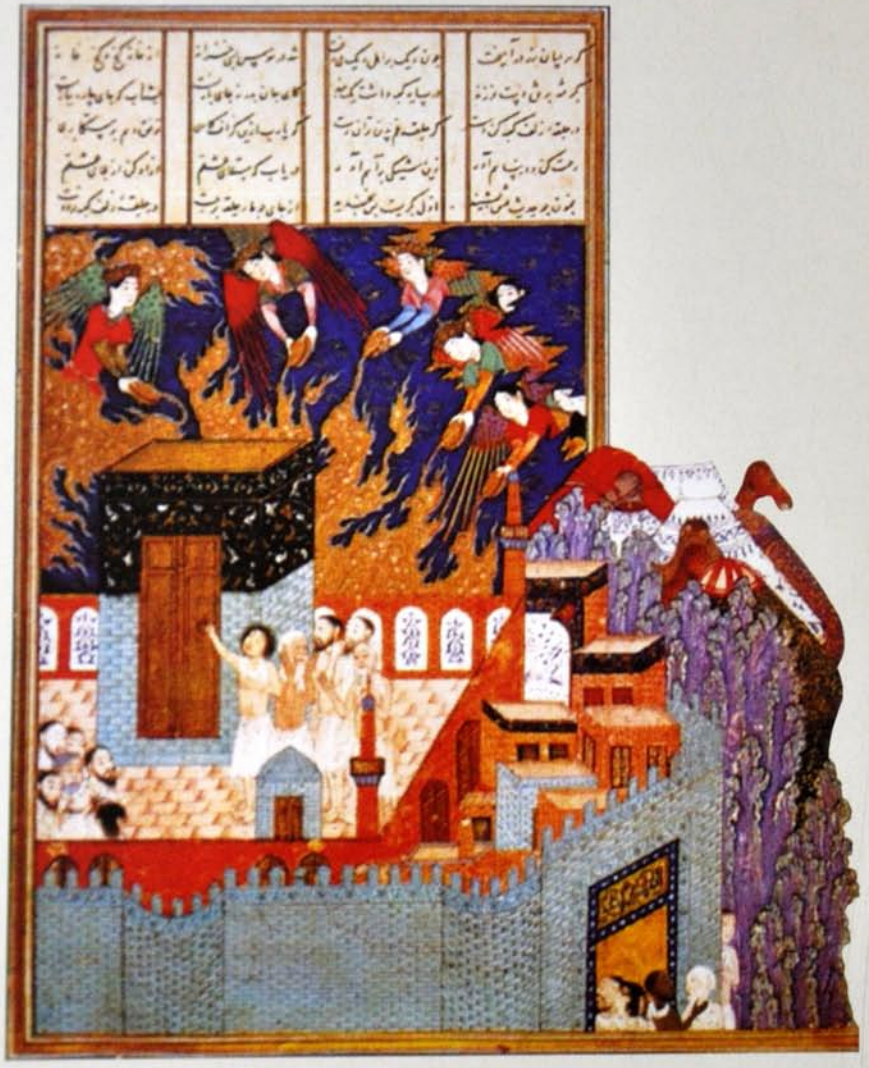
THE MADNESS OF MAJNUN

Sweet Leyli's kinsmen now describe
To the haughty chieftain of their tribe,
A youth amidst the desert seen,
In strange attire, of frantic mien;
His arms outstretch'd, his head all bare,
And floating loose his clustering hair:
"In a distracted mood," they say,
"He wanders hither every day;
And often, with fantastic bound,
Dances, or prostrate hugs the ground;
Or, in a voice the soul to move,
Warbles the melting songs of love;
Songs which, when breathed in tones so true,
A thousand hearts at once subdue.
He speaks - and all who listen hear
Words which they hold in memory dear;
And we and thine endure the shame,
And Leyli blushes at his name."
And now the chieftain, roused to wrath,
Threatens to cross the maniac's path.

But, haply, to prevent that barbarous deed,
To Omri's palmy groves the tidings flew,
And soon the father sends a chosen few
To seek the lost one. Promptly they proceed
O'er open plain and thicket deep,
Embowering glen and rocky steep,
Exploring with unwearied eye
Wherever man might pass or lie,
O'ercome by grief or death. In vain
Their sight on every side they strain,
No Majnun's voice, nor form, to cheer
Their anxious hearts; but far and near
The yell of prowling beasts they hear.
Mournful they deem him lost or dead,
And tears of bitterest anguish shed.
But he, the wanderer from his home,
Found not from beasts a living tomb;
His passion's pure and holy flame
Their native fierceness seem'd to tame;
Tiger and ravenous wolf pass'd by him,
The fell hyena came not nigh him;
As if, ferocious spirits to quell,
His form had been invisible,
Or bore a life-protecting spell.
Upon a fountain emerald brink
Majnun had stoop'd its lucid wave to drink;
And his despairing friends descried
Him laid along that murmuring fountain's side,
Wailing his sorrows still; his feeble voice
Dwelt, ever dwelt, upon his heart's sole choice.
A wild emotion trembled in his eye,
His bosom wrung with many a deep-drawn sigh;
And groans, and tears, and music's softest lay,

Successive mark'd his melancholy day.
- Now he is stretch'd along the burning sand,
A stone his pillow - now, upraised his hand,
He breathes a prayer for Leyli, and again
The desert echoes with some mournful strain.
As wine deprives us of the sense we boast,
So reason in love's maddening draughts is lost.
Restored to home again, he dreads to meet
His father's frowns, and bends to kiss his feet;
Then, gazing wildly, rises up, and speaks,
And in a piteous tone forgiveness seeks:
"Sad is my fate, o'ercast my youthful morn,
My rose's leaves, my life's sweet buds are torn;
I sit in darkness, ashes o'er my head,
To all the world's alluring pleasures dead;
For me what poor excuse can soothe thy mind?
But thou'rt my father still - O still be kind!"
Syd Omri his unchanged affection proved,
And, folding to his breast the child he loved,
Exclaim'd: "My boy! I grieve to mark
Thy reason erring still, and dark;
A fire consuming every thread
Of which thy thrilling nerves are made.
Sit down, and from thy eyesight tear
The poisonous thorn that rankles there:
'Tis best we should to mirth incline,
But let it not be raised by wine:
'Tis well desire should fill the breast;
Not such desire as breaks our rest.
Remain not under grief's control,
Nor taunt of foe which stings the soul;
Let wisdom every movement guide;
Error but swells affliction's tide;

Though love hath set thee all on fire,
And thy heart burns with still unquench'd desire,
Despair not of a remedy;
From seedling springs the shady tree,
From hope continued follows gladness,
Which dull despair had lost in sadness;
Associate with the wealthy, they
Will show to glittering wealth the way;
A wanderer never gathers store,
Be thou a wanderer now no more.
Wealth opens every door, and gives
Command, and homage still receives
Be patient then, and patience will
By slow degrees thy coffers fill.
That river rolling deep and broad,
Once but a narrow streamlet flow'd;
That lofty mountain, now in view,
Its height from small beginning's drew
lie who impatient hurries on,
Hoping for gems, obtains a stone;
Shrewdness and cunning gain the prize,
While wisdom's self unprosperous lies:
The fox of crafty subtle mind
Leaves the wolfs dullness far behind;
Be thou discreet, thy thoughts employ,
The world's inviting pomp enjoy.
In search of wealth from day to day
Love's useless passion dies away;
The sensual make disease their guest,
And nourish scorpions in their breast.
And is thy heart so worthless grown,
To be the cruel sport of one?
Keep it from woman's scathe, and still



Majnun at the Kaaba

Tabriz, 1445-1446. Istanbul, Topkapi Palace Museum

Obedient to thy own free will,
And mindful of a parent's voice,
Make him, and not thy foes, rejoice."
Majnun replied: "My father! - Father still! -
My power is gone; I cannot change my will:
The moral counsel thou hast given to me,
(To one who cannot from his bondage flee),
Avails me nothing. 'Tis no choice of mine,
But Fate's decree, that I should thus repine:
Stand I alone? Look round, on every side
Are broken hearts, by sternest fortune tried:
Shadows are not self-made - the silver moon
Is not self-stationed, but the Almighty's boon.
From the huge elephant's stupendous form,
To that of the poor ant, the smallest worm,
Through every grade of life, all power is given,
All joy or anguish by the Lord of Heaven.
I sought not, I, misfortune - but it came -
I sought not fire, yet is my heart all flame:
They ask me why I never laugh nor smile,
Though laughter be no sign of sense the while.
If I should laugh in merry mood, a-gape,
Amidst my mirth some secret might escape.
- A partridge seized an ant, resolved to kill
The feeble creature with his horny bill;
When, laughing loud, the ant exclaimed - 'Alas!
A partridge thou! And art thou such an ass?
I'm but a gnat, and dost thou think to float
A gnat's slight filmy texture down thy throat?'
The partridge laugh'd at this unusual sound,
And, laughing, dropp'd the ant upon the ground.
Thus he who idly laughs will always find
Some grief succeed - 'tis so with all mankind.

The stupid partridge, laughing, droop'd his crest,
And by that folly lost what he possess'd.
- This poor old drudge, which bears its heavy load,
Must all lifelong endure the same rough road;
No joy for him, in mortal aid no trust,
No rest till death consigns him to the dust."
Here paused the youth, and wept; and now
The household smooth his furrow'd brow,
And with unceasing eagerness
Seek to remove his soul's distress.
But grief, corroding grief, allows no space
For quiet thoughts; his wounds break out anew;
His kindred every change of feature trace,
And unavailing tears their cheeks bedew;
A deeper, keener anguish marks his face;
His faded form so haggard to the view;
Useless the task his sorrows to remove,
For who can free the heart from love, unchanging love?
Few days had pass'd, when, frantic grown,
He burst from his domestic prison,
And in the desert wild, alone,
Pour'd, like the morning bird, new risen,
His ardent lay of love. Not long
The mountains echoed with his song,
Ere, drawn by sounds so sweet and clear,
A crowd of listeners hover'd near:
They saw him, tall as cypress, stand,
A rocky fragment in his hand;
A purple sash his waist around,
His legs with links of iron bound;
Yet, unencumber'd was his gait;
They only show'd his maniac state.

* * *

Wandering he reach'd a spot of ground,
With palmy groves and poplars crown'd;
A lively scene it was to view,
Where flowers too bloom'd of every hue;
Starting, he saw the axe applied
To a cypress-tree - and thus he cried:
"Gardener! Did ever love thy heart control?
Was ever woman mistress of thy soul?
When joy has thrill'd through every glowing nerve,
Hadst thou no wish that feeling to preserve?
Does not a woman's love delight, entrance?
And every blessing fortune yields enhance?
Then stop that lifted hand, the stroke suspend,
Spare, spare the cypress-tree, and be my friend!
And why? Look there, and be forewarn'd by me,
Tis Leyli's form, all grace and majesty;
Wouldst thou root up resemblance so complete,
And lay its branches withering at thy feet?
What! Leyli's form? No; spare the cypress-tree;
Let it remain, still beautiful and free;
Yes, let my prayers thy kindliest feelings move,
And save the graceful shape of her I love!"
- The gardener dropp'd his axe, o'ercome with shame,
And left the tree to bloom, and speak of Lail's fame.

CHAPTER VI

LOVE'S INTERCOURSE

Leyli in beauty, softness, grace,
Surpass'd the loveliest of her race;
She was a fresh and odorous flower,

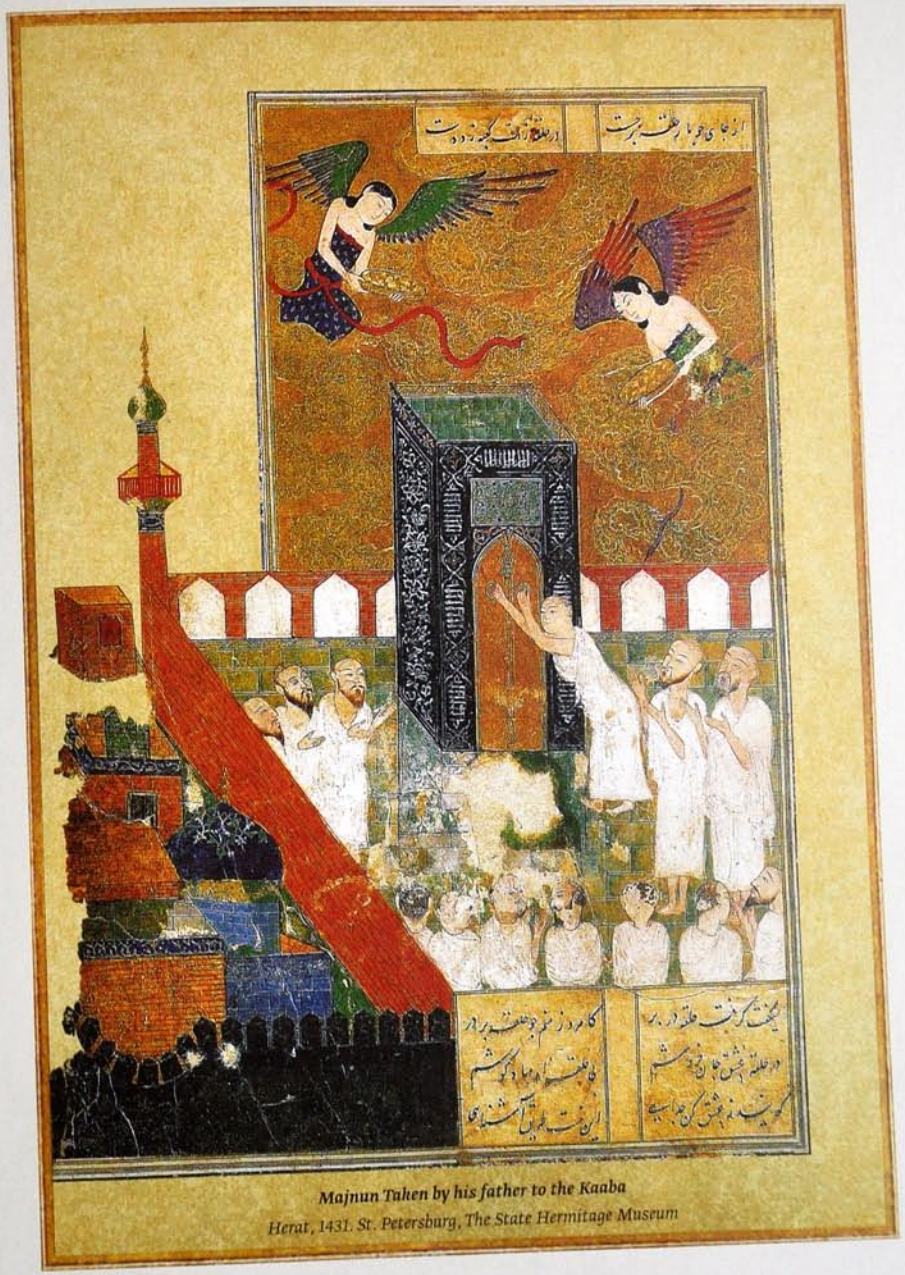
Pluck'd by a fairy from her bower;
With heart-delighting rosebuds blooming,
The welcome breeze of spring perfuming.
The killing witchery that lies
In her soft, black, delicious eyes,
When gather'd in one amorous glance,
Pierces the heart, like sword or lance;
The prey that falls into her snare,
For life must mourn and struggle there;
Her eyelash speaks a thousand blisses,
Her lips of ruby ask for kisses;
Soft lips where sugar-sweetness dwells,
Sweet as the bee-hive's honey-cells;
Her cheeks, so beautiful and bright,
Had stolen the moon's refulgent light;
Her form the cypress-tree expresses,
And full and ripe invites caresses;
With all these charms the heart to win,
There was a cureless grief within –
Yet none beheld her grief, or heard;
She droop'd like a broken-winged bird.
Her secret thoughts her love concealing,
But, softly to the terrace stealing,
From morn to eve she gazed around,
In hopes her Majnun might be found,
Wandering in sight. For she had none
To sympathise with her – not one!
None to compassionate her woes –
In dread of rivals, friends, and foes;
And though she smiled, her mind's distress
Fill'd all her thoughts with bitterness;
The fire of absence on them prey'd,
But light nor smoke that fire betray'd;

Shut up within herself, she sate
Absorb'd in grief, disconsolate;
Yet true love has resources still,
Its soothing arts, and ever will!
Voices in guarded softness rose
Upon her ever-listening ear;
She heard her constant lover's woes,
In melting strains, repeated near;
The sky, with gloomy clouds o'erspread,
At length soft showers began to shed;
And what, before, destruction seem'd,
With rays of better promise gleam'd.
Voices of young and old she heard
Beneath the harem-walls reciting
Her Majnun's songs; each thrilling word
Her almost broken heart delighting.
Leyli, with matchless charms of face,
Was blessed with equal mental grace;
With eloquence and taste refined;
And from the treasures of her mind
She pour'd her fondest love's confession
With faithful love's most warm expression;
Told all her hopes and sorrows o'er,
Though told a thousand times before:
The life-blood circling through her veins
Recorded her affecting strains;
And as she wrote, with passion flush'd,
The glowing words with crimson blush'd.
And now the terrace she ascends
In secret, o'er the rampart bends,
And flings the record, with a sigh,
To one that moment passing by:
Unmark'd the stranger gains the prize,

And from the spot like lightning flies
To where the lingering lover weeps unseen.
– Starting upon his feet, with cheerful mien,
He gazes, reads, devours the pleasing tale,
And joy again illumes his features pale.
Thus was resumed the soft exchange of thought;
Thus the return of tenderest feeling wrought:
Each the same secret intercourse pursued,
And mutual vows more ardently renew'd;
And many a time between them went and came
The fondest tokens of their deathless flame;
Now in hope's heaven, now in despair's abyss,
And now enrapt in visionary bliss.

CHAPTER VII
THE SORROW OF LEYLI

The gloomy veil of night withdrawn,
How sweetly looks the silvery dawn!
Rich blossoms laugh on every tree,
Like men of fortunate destiny,
Or the shining face of revelry.
The crimson tulip and golden rose
Their sweets to all the world disclose.
I mark the glittering pearly wave
The fountain's banks of emerald lave;
The birds in every arbour sing,
The very raven hails the spring;
The partridge and the ring-dove raise
Their joyous notes in songs of praise;
But bulbuls, through the mountain-vale,
Like Majnun, chant a mournful tale.



Majnun Taken by his father to the Kaaba
Herat, 1431. St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum

The season of the rose has led
Leyli to her own favourite bower;
Her cheeks the softest vermilion-red,
Her eyes the modest sumbul flower.
She has left her father's painted hall,
She has left the terrace where she kept
Her secret watch till evening fall,
And where she oft till midnight wept.
A golden fillet sparkling round
Her brow, her raven tresses bound;
And as she o'er the greensward tripp'd
A train of damsels ruby-lipp'd,
Blooming like flowers of Samarkand,
Obedient bow'd to her command.
She glitter'd like a moon among
The beauties of the starry throng,
With lovely forms as Houris bright,
Or Peris glancing in the light;
And now they reach an emerald spot,
Beside a cool sequester'd grot,
And soft recline beneath the shade,
By a delicious rose-bower made:
There, in soft converse, sport and play,
The hours unnoticed glide away;
But Leyli to the bulbul tells
What secret grief her bosom swells,
And fancies, through the rustling leaves,
She from the garden-breeze receives
The breathings of her own true love,
Fond as the cooings of the dove.
In that romantic neighbourhood
A grove of palms majestic stood;
Never in Arab desert wild

A more enchanting prospect smiled;
So fragrant, of so bright a hue,
Not Irem richer verdure knew;
Nor fountain half so clear, so sweet,
As that which flow'd at Leyli's feet.
The Grove of Palms her steps invites;
She strolls amid its varied scenes,
Its pleasant copses, evergreens,
In which her waken'd heart delights.
Where'er the genial zephyr sighs,
Lilies and roses near her rise:
Awhile the prospect charms her sight,
Awhile she feels her bosom light,
Her eyes with pleasure beaming bright:
But sadness o'er her spirit steals,
And thoughts, too deep to hide, reveals:
Beneath a cypress-tree reclined,
In secret thus she breathes her mind:
"O faithful friend, and lover true,
Still distant from thy Leyli's view;
Still absent, still beyond her power
To bring thee to her fragrant bower;
O noble youth, still thou art mine,
And Leyli, Leyli still is thine!"
As thus she almost dreaming spoke,
A voice reproachful her attention woke.
"What! Hast thou banish'd prudence from thy mind?
And shall success be given to one unkind?
Majnun on billows of despair is toss'd,
Leyli has nothing of her pleasures lost;
Majnun has sorrow gnawing at his heart,
Leyli's blithe looks other thoughts impart;
Majnun the poison-thorn of grief endures,

Leyli, all wiles and softness, still allures;
Majnun her victim in a thousand ways,
Leyli in mirth and pastime spends her days;
Majnun's unnumber'd wounds his rest destroy,
Leyli exists but in the bowers of joy;
Majnun is bound by love's mysterious spell,
Leyli's bright cheeks of cheerful feelings tell;
Majnun his Leyli's absence ever mourns,
Leyli's light mind to other objects turns."
At this reproof tears flow'd apace
Down Leyli's pale, dejected face;
But soon to her glad heart was known
The trick, thus practised by her own
Gay, watchful, ever sportive train,
Who long had watch'd, nor watch'd in vain;
And mark'd in her love's voice and look
Which never woman's glance mistook.
Her mother too, with keener eye,
Saw deeper though the mystery,
Which Leyli thought her story veil'd
And oft that fatal choice bewailed;
But Leyli still loved on; the root
Sprang up, and bore both bud and fruit;
And she believed her secret flower
As safe as treasure in a guarded tower.

CHAPTER VIII
THE SUITOR

That day on which she pensive stray'd
Amidst the Grove of Palms - that day
How sweetly bloom'd the Arab maid,

Girt by her train in fair array!
Her moist red lips, her teeth of pearl,
Her hair in many a witching curl.
Haply, on that devoted day,
A gallant youth, with followers gay,
In splendid fashion pass'd that way;
Who saw that lamp of beauty gleaming?
Her luscious eye with softness beaming;
And in his bosom rose the fire
Of still-increasing fond desire.
Resolved at once her hand to claim
(Ibn Salim his honour'd name),
He from her parents seeks success,
Offering nuptial-knot to tie;
And, to promote that happiness,
Scatters his gold abundantly,
As if it were but common earth,
Or sand, or water, little worth -
But he was of illustrious birth.
The parents scarce believed the word,
The marriage-union, thus preferred;
And, though consenting, still they prayed
The nuptial morn might be delay'd:
In her no ripen'd bloom was seen,
The sweet pomegranate still was green;
But a future day should surely deck
With a bridal yoke her spotless neck;
"We will then surrender the maiden to thee.
The maiden, till now, unaffianced and free!"
The promise soothes his eager heart,
And he and his followers, pleased, depart.

Majnun in chains

Herat style, 1481-1482. St. Petersburg, National Library of Russia

CHAPTER IX

THE FRIENDSHIP OF SHEIKH NOUFAL

Majnun, midst wild and solitude,
His melancholy mood pursued:
In sterner moments, loud he raved,
The desert's burning noon-tide braved.
Or, where refreshing shadows fell,
Warbled of her he loved so well.
The Arab chief of that domain
Which now his wandering footsteps press'd,
Was honour'd for his bounteous reign -
For ever succouring the distress'd,
Noufal was his name - well known to wield,
Victorious in the battlefield,
His glittering sword, and overthrow
The robber-band or martial foe;
Magnificent in pomp and state,
And wealthy as in valour great.
One day the pleasures of the chase,
The keen pursuit of bounding deer,
Had brought the chieftain to that place
Where Majnun stood, and, drawing near,
The stranger's features sought to trace,
And the sad notes of grief to hear,
Which, ere he saw the madman's face,
Had, sorrow-laden, struck his ear.
He now beheld that wasted frame,
That head and mien o'ergrown with hair,
That wild, wild look, which well might claim
Brotherly kindred with despair,
Dejected, miserable, borne
By grief to life's last narrow verge,

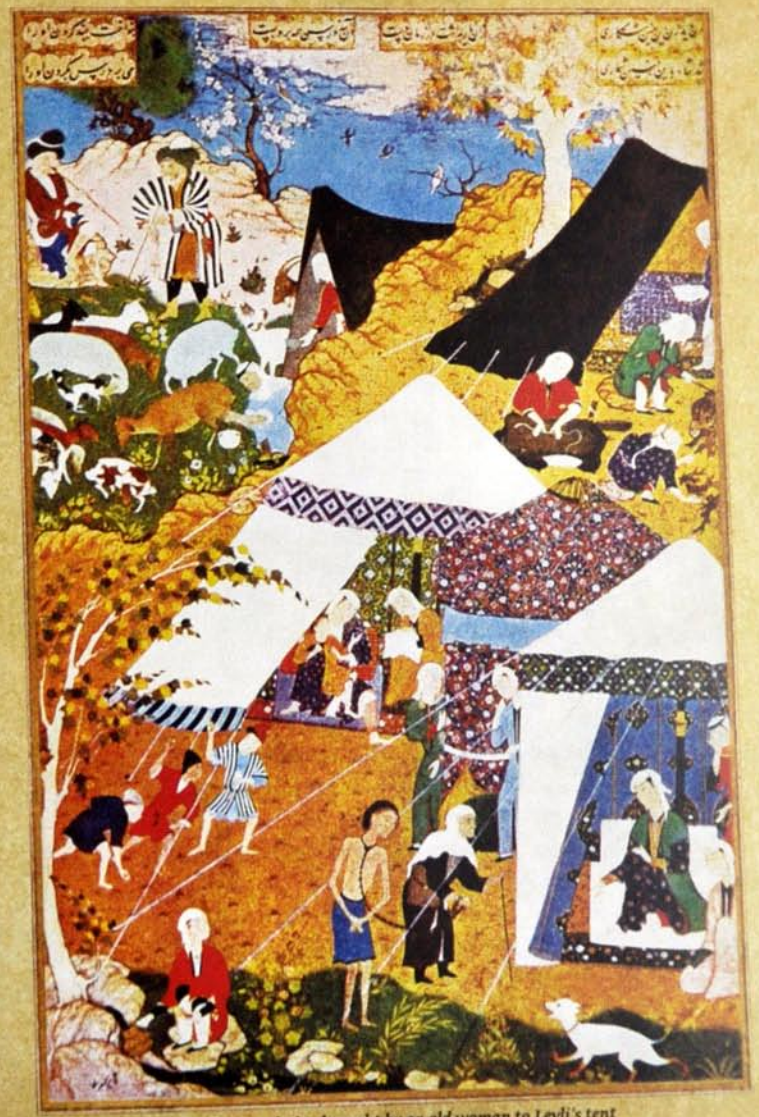
With wounded feet and vestment torn,
Singing his own funereal dirge.
Noufal had traversed forest, copse and glade,
In anxious quest of game, and here he found
Game - but what game? - Alas! A human shade
So light it scarcely touch'd the ground.
Dismounting straight, he hears what woes
Had marr'd the mournful youth's repose;
And kindly tries with gentle words
To show what pleasures life affords;
And prove the uselessness, the folly,
Of nursing grief and melancholy;
But worse, when men from reason flee,
And willing steep their hearts in misery.
The sympathy of generous minds
Around the heart its influence winds,
And, ever soothing, by degrees,
Restores its long-lost harmonies;
Majnun, so long to love a prey,
Death hastening on by swift decay,
Began to feel that calming spell,
That sweet delight, unspeakable,
Which draws us from ourselves away.
A change now gently o'er him came;
With trembling hand he took the cup,
And drank, but drank in Leyli's name,
The life-restoring cordial up.
His spirits rose; refreshing food
At Noufal's hospitable board
Seem'd to remove his wayward mood,
So long endured, so long deplored.
And Noufal with delight survey'd
The social joy his eyes betray'd,

And heard his glowing strains of love,
His murmurings like the turtle-dove,
While thinking of his Arab maid.
Changed from himself, his mind at rest,
In customary robes he dress'd;
A turban shades his forehead pale,
No more is heard the lover's wail,
But, jocund as the vintner's guest,
He laughs and drinks with added zest;
His dungeon of gloom exchanged for day,
His cheeks a rosy tint display;
He revels midst the garden's sweets,
And still his lip the goblet meets;
But so devoted, so unchanged his flame,
Never without repeating Leyli's name.
In friendly converse, heart uniting heart,
Noufal and Majnun hand in hand are seen;
And, from each other loathing to depart,
Wander untired by fount and meadow green.
But what is friendship to a soul
Inured to more intense control?
A zephyr breathing over flowers,
Compared to when the tempest lours?
A zephyr, friendship's gentler course;
A tempest, love's tumultuous force;
For friendship leaves a vacuum still,
Which love, and love alone, can fill:
So Majnun felt; and Noufal tried,
In vain, to fill that aching void:
For, though the liquid sparkling red
Still flow'd, his friend thus sorrowing said:
"My generous host, with plenty bless'd,
No boding cares thy thoughts molest;

Thy kindness many a charm hath given,
But not one solace under heaven;
Without my love, in tears I languish,
And not a voice to check my anguish;
Like one of thirst about to die,
And every fountain near him dry:
Thirst is by water quench'd, not treasure,
Nor floods of wine, nor festive pleasure.
Bring me the cure my wounds require;
Quench in my heart this raging fire;
My Leyli, oh! My Leyli give,
Or thy poor friend must cease to live!
Majnun had scarce his wish express'd
Ere rose in generous Noufal's breast
The firm resolve to serve his friend,
And to his settled purpose bend
Leyli's stern father.
Now, in arms array'd
And lifting high his keen Damascus blade,
He calls a band of veterans to his aid.
Swift as the feather'd race the assembled train
Rush, sword in hand, along the desert plain;
And when the chieftain s habitation bright
Upon the blue horizon strikes the sight,
He sends a messenger to claim the bride,
In terms imperious, not to be denied;
Yet was that claim derided. "Thou wilt soon
Repent this folly: Leyli is the moon;
And who presumes the splendid moon to gain?
Is there on earth a man so mad, so vain?
Who draw their swords at such a hazard? None.
Who strikes his crystal vase upon a stone?"
Noufal again endeavours to inspire

With dread of vengeance Leyli's haughty sire;
But useless are the threats - the same reply:
"Alike thy power and vengeance I defy!"
The parley over, Noufal draws his sword,
And with his horsemen pours upon the horde,
Ready for battle. Spears and helmets ring,
And brass-bound shields; loud twangs the archer's string;
The field of conflict like the ocean roars,
When the huge billows burst upon the shores.
Arrows, like birds, on either foe stood,
Drinking with open beak the vital flood;
The shining daggers in the battle's heat
Roll'd many a head beneath the horses' feet;
And lightning, hurl'd by death's unsparing hand,
Spread consternation through the weeping land.
Amidst the horrors of that fatal fight,
Majnun appear'd - a strange and appalling sight!
Wildly he raved, confounding friend and foe,
His garments half abandon'd in his woe,
And with a maniac stare reproachful cried:
"Why combat thus when all are on my side?"
The enemy laugh'd - the uproar louder grew -
No pause the brazen drums or trumpets knew;
The stoutest heart sank at the carnage wrought;
Swords blush'd to see the numerous heads they smote.
- Noufal with a dragon's fierceness prowl'd around,
And hurl'd full many a warrior to the ground:
Whatever hero felt his ponderous gerz[8]
Was crush'd, tho' steadfast as the Mount Elberz[9].
Upon whatever head his weapon fell,
There was but one heart-rending tale to tell.
Like a mad elephant the foe he met;
With hostile blood his blade continued wet;

- Wearied at length, both tribes at once withdrew,
Resolved with morn the combat to renew;
But Noufal's gallant friends had suffer'd most;
In one hour more the battle had been lost;
And thence assistance, ere the following dawn
From other warlike tribes was promptly drawn.
The desert rang again. In front and rear
Glitter'd bright sword and buckler, gerz and spear;
Again the struggle woke the echoes round,
Swords clash'd, and blood again made red the ground;
The book of life, with dust and carnage stain'd,
Was soon destroy'd, and not a leaf remain'd.
At last, the tribe of Leyli's sire gave way,
And Noufal won the hard-contested day;
Numbers lay bleeding of that conquer'd band,
And died unsuccour'd on the burning sand.
And now the elders of that tribe appear,
Imploring the proud victor. "Chieftain, hear!
The work of slaughter is complete;
Thou seest our power destroy'd; allow
Us, wretched suppliants, at thy feet,
Humbly to ask for mercy now.
How many warriors press the plain,
Khanjer and spear have laid them low
At peace, behold our kinsmen slain,
And thou art now without a foe.
"Then pardon what of wrong has been:
Let us retire, unharm'd - unstay'd -
Far from this sanguinary scene,
And take thy prize - the Arab maid."
Then came the father, full of grief, and said
(Ashes and dust upon his hoary head):
"With thee, alas! How useless to contend!



Majnun in chains brought by an old woman to Leyli's tent
Tabriz, 1539-1543. London, British Library

Thou art the conqueror, and to thee I bend.
Without resentment now the vanquish'd view,
Wounded and old, and broken-hearted too;
Reproach has fallen upon me, and has dared
To call me Persian - that I disregard;
For I am Arab still, and scorn the sneer
Of braggart fools, unused to shield and spear,
But let that pass. I now, o'ercome, and weak,
And prostrate, pardon from the victor seek:
Thy slave am I, obedient to thy will,
Ready thy sternest purpose to fulfil;
But if with Leyli I consent to part,
Wilt thou blot out all vengeance from thy heart?
Then speak at once, and thy behest declare:
I will not flinch, though it my soul may tear.
My daughter shall be brought at thy command;
Let the red flames ascend from blazing brand,
Waiting their victim, crackling in the air,
And Leyli duteously shall perish there.
Or, if thou'dst rather see the maiden bleed,
This thirsty sword shall do the dreadful deed:
Dissever at one blow that lovely head,
Her sinless blood by her own father shed!
In all things thou shalt find me faithful, true,
Thy slave obsequious - what wouldst thou have me do?
But mark me; I am not to be beguiled;
I will not to a demon give my child;
I will not to a madman's wild embrace
Consign the pride and honour of my race,
And wed her to contempt and foul disgrace.
I will not sacrifice my tribe's fair fame,
Nor taint with obloquy her virtuous name.
Has honour on an Arab heart no claim?

Better be overwhelm'd by adverse fate
Than yield up honour, even for kingly state.
Through all Arabia is her virtue known;
Her beauty match'd by heavenly charms alone.
I'd rather in a monster be enshrined
Than bear a name detested by mankind.
What! Wed a wretch, and earn my country's ban!
A dog were better than a demon-man.
A dog's bite heals, but human gnawings never;
The festering poison-wounds remain for ever."
Thus spake the father, and in Noufal's breast
Excited feelings not to be repress'd:
"I hoped to win consent," he said,
"But now that anxious hope is dead,
And thou and thine may quit the field,
Still arm'd with khanjer, sword and shield;
Horseman and elder. Thus in vain
Blood has bedew'd this thirsty plain."
When Majnun this conclusion hears,
He flies incensed to Noufal, and with tears
Wildly exclaims: "The dawn, my generous friend!
Promised this day in happiness would end;
But thou hast let the gazelle slip away,
And me defrauded of my beauteous prey.
Near where Forat's[10] bright stream rolls on, reclined,
Staunching my wounds, hope soothed my tortured mind,
And gave me Leyli; now that hope is cross'd,
And life's most valued charm for ever lost."
Noufal with heavy heart now homeward bent
His way, and Majnun with him sorrowing went;
And there again the pitying chieftain strove
To calm the withering pangs of hopeless love;
To bless, with gentleness and tender care,

The wounded spirit sinking in despair:
But vain his efforts; mountain, wood and plain,
Soon heard the madman's piercing woes again:
Escaped from listening ear and watchful eye,
Lonely again in desert wild to lie.

CHAPTER X

MAJNUN AND THE GAZELLE

The minstrel strikes his soft guitar,
With sad forebodings pale;
And fills with song the balmy air,
And thus resumes his tale:
The pensive bird, compell'd to cower,
From day to day in Noufal's bower,
Tired of the scene, with pinions light,
Swift as the wind has urged its flight,
And, far from Noufal's wide domain,
Enjoys its liberty again;
Pouring aloud its sad complaint
In wildest mood without restraint.
And now remote from peopled town,
Midst tangled forest, parch'd and brown
The madman roams; with double speed
He goads along his snorting steed,
Till, in a grove, a sportsman's snare
Attracts his view, and, struggling there,
Its knotted meshes fast between,
Some newly prison'd deer are seen;
And as the sportsman forward springs
To seize on one, and promptly brings
The fatal knife upon its neck,

His hand receives a sudden check;
And looking upwards, with surprise,
(A mounted chief before his eyes!)
He stops - while thus exclaims the youth -
"If e'er thy bosom throbb'd with ruth,
Forbear! For 'tis a crime to spill
A gazelle's blood - it bodeth ill;
Then set the pleading captive free;
For sweet is life and liberty.
That heart must be as marble hard,
And merciless as wolf or pard,
Which clouds in death that large black
Beaming like Leyli's, lovingly.
The cruel stroke, my friend, withhold;
Its neck deserves a string of gold.
Observe its slender limbs, the grace
And winning meekness of its face.
The musk-pod is its fatal dower,
Like beauty, still the prey of power;
And for that fragrant gift thou'rt led
The gentle gazelle's blood to shed!
O, seek not gain by cruel deed,
Nor let the innocent victim bleed."
"But," cried the sportsman, "these are mine;
I cannot from my task resign:
'Tis the sportsman's task, and free from blame,
To watch and snare the forest game."
Majnun, upon this stern reply,
Alighted from his steed, and said:
"O, let them live! They must not die.
Forbear! And take this barb instead."
The sportsman seized it eagerly,
And, laughing, from the greenwood sped.

Majnun in chains brought by an old woman to Leyli's tent

Herat, 1431. St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum

Majnun, delighted, view'd his purchased prize,
And in the gazelle's eyes, he sees his Leyli's eyes;
But soon, freed from the snare, with nimble feet
The tremblers bound to some more safe retreat.
The simple madman starts, and finds, amazed,
The vision vanish'd which his fancy raised

* * *

Tis night - and darkness - black as Leyli's tresses
Veils all around, and all his soul oppresses;
No lucid moon like Leyli's face appears;
No glimpse of light the gloomy prospect cheers;
In a rude cavern in despair he lies,
The tedious moments only mark'd with his sighs.

CHAPTER XI

MARRIAGE OF LEYLI AND IBN SALAM

Behold, what clouds of dust emerge
Prom the lone desert's distant verge!
And, high in dusky eddies driven,
Obscure the azure hue of heaven:
And now the tramp of steeds is heard,
And now the leaders angry word -
Now nearer, more distinct they grow -
Who is the leader? Friend or foe?
Alas! 'tis Leyli's vanquish'd sire,
Returning home, his heart on fire;
For though he has survived the blow,
Still burns the disgrace of his overthrow.
His tale is told: some Diw[11] or Ghoul
Had palsied his intrepid soul,

And held his arm by magic foul,
Or potion from the enchanter's bowl;
Else had he driven, with easy hand,
The miscreant Noufal from the land;
For when did ever braggart lord
Fail, but when magic held his sword?
Now, shielded by the harem screen,
The sweet Narcissus sad is seen:
Listening she hears, disconsolate,
Her father's words, which seal her fate;
And what has Leyli now to bear,
But loneliness, reproach, despair,
With no congenial spirit to impart
One single solace to her bursting heart!
Meanwhile the spicy gale on every side
Wafts the high vaunting of her beauty's pride
Through all the neighbouring tribes, and more remote
Her name is whisper'd and her favour sought.
Suitors with various claims appear - the great,
The rich, the powerful - all impatient wait
To know for whom the father keeps that rare
But fragile crystal with such watchful care.
Her charms eclipse all others of her sex,
Given to be loved, but rival hearts to vex;
For when the lamp of joy illumes her cheeks,
The lover smiles, and yet his heart it breaks:
The full-blown rose thus sheds its fragrance round;
But there are thorns, not given to charm, but wound.
Among the rest that stripling came,
He who had before avow'd his flame;
His cheerful aspect seemed to say,
For him was fixed the nuptial-day.
His offerings arc magnificent;

Garments embroider'd every fold,
And rarest gems to win consent,
And carpets work'd with silk and gold:
Amber, pearls and rubies bright,
And bags of musk attract the sight;
And camels of unequall'd speed,
And ambling nags of purest breed;
These (resting for a while) he sends
Before him, and instructs his friends,
With all the eloquence and power
Persuasion brings in favouring hour,
To magnify his worth, and prove
That he alone deserves her love,
"A youth of royal presence, Yemen's boast,
Fierce as a lion, powerful as a host;
Of boundless wealth, and valour's self, he wields
His conquering sword amid embattled fields.
Call ye for blood? 'Tis shed by his own hand.
Call ye for gold? He scatters it like sand."
And when the flowers of speech their scent had shed,
Diffusing honours round the suitor's head;
Exalting him to more than mortal worth,
In person manly, noble in his birth;
The sire of Leyli seem'd oppress'd with thought,
As if with some repulsive feeling fraught;
Yet promptly was the answer given -
he soon Decreed the fate of Yemen's splendid moon;
Saddled the steed of his desire, in sooth,
Flung his own offspring in the dragon's mouth
Forthwith the nuptial pomp, the nuptial rites,
Engage the chieftain's household - every square
Rings with the rattling drums - whose noise excites
More deafening clamour through the wide bazaar.

The pipe and cymbal, shrill and loud,
Delight the joyous assembled crowd;
And all is mirth and jollity,
With song, and dance, and revelry.
But Leyli, mournful, sits apart,
The shaft of misery through her heart;
And black portentous clouds are seen
Darkening her soft expressive mien:
Her bosom swells with heavy sighs,
Tears gush from those heart-winning eyes,
Where Love's triumphant witchery lies,
In blooming spring a wither'd leaf,
She droops in agony of grief;
Loving her own – her only one –
Loving Majnun, and him alone;
All else from her affections gone;
And to be joined, in a moment's breath,
To another! Death, even worse than death!
Soon as the sparkling stars of night
Had disappear'd, and floods of light
Shed from the morn's refulgent beam
Empurpled Dijla's[12] rolling stream,
The bridegroom, joyous, rose to see
The bride equipp'd as bride should be:
The litter, and the golden throne,
Prepared for her to rest upon:
But what avails the tenderest care,
The fondest love, when dark despair
And utter hatred fill the breast
Of her to whom that fondness is address'd?
Quickly her sharp disdain the bridegroom feels,
And from her scornful presence shrinks and reels
A solemn oath she takes and cries,

With frenzy flashing from her eyes,
"Hop'st thou I ever shall be thine?
It is my father's will, not mine!
Rather than be that thing abhorr'd,
My life-blood shall distain thy sword.
Away! Nor longer seek to gain
A heart foredoom'd to endless pain;
A heart no power of thine can move;
A bleeding heart, which scorns thy love!"
When Ibn Salim her frenzied look beheld,
And heard her vows, his cherish'd hopes were quell'd,
He soon perceived what art had been employ'd,
All his bright visions faded and destroyed;
And found, when love has turn'd a maiden's brain,
Father and mother urge their power in vain.

CHAPTER XII

MAJNUN LEARNS THE TIDINGS

The Arab poets who rehearse
Their legends in imperishable verse,
Say, when Majnun these tidings knew,
More wild, more moody wild, he grew;
Raving through wood and mountain glen;
Flying still more the haunts of men.
Sudden a perfume, grateful to the soul,
O'er his awaken'd senses stole.
He thought from Leyli's fragrant couch it came,
And filled with joy his wearied frame.
Ecstatic with the unexpected pleasure,
The fond memorial of his dearest treasure,
He sank upon the ground, beneath the shade

Of a broad palm, in senseless torpor laid.
A stranger quickly passing by,
Observed the lovelorn wanderer lie
Sleeping, or dead, and check'd his earners pace
To mark the features of his face.
Loud roaring, like a demon, he awoke
The madman from his trance, and gaily spoke:
"Up, up, thou sluggard! Up and see,
What thy heart's ease has done for thee!
Better drive feeling from thy mind,
Since there's no faith in womankind:
Better be idle, than employ'd
In fruitless toil; better avoid
A mistress, though of form divine,
If she be fair and false as thine!
They've given her charms to one as young -
The bride-veil o'er her brow is flung;
Close, side by side, from morn till night,
Kissing and dalliance their delight;
Whilst thou from human solace flying,
With unrequited love art dying.
- Distant from her adorers view,
One in a thousand may be true:
The pen which writes, as if it knew
A woman's promise, splits in two.
While in another's warm embrace,
No witness to thy own disgrace,
Faithless, she wastes no thought on thee
Wrapped in her own felicity.
Woman's desire is more intense
Than man's - more exquisite her sense;
But, never blinded by her flame,
Gain and fruition are her aim.

The meeting of lovers
Shiraz commercial style, late 15th century. St. Petersburg, National Library of Russia

A woman's love is selfish all;
Possessions, wealth, secure her fall.
How many false and cruel prove,
And not one faithful in her love!
A contradiction is her life;
Without, all peace; within, all strife;
A dangerous friend, a fatal foe,
Prime breeder of a world of woe.
When we are joyous, she is sad;
When deep in sorrow, she is glad.
Such is the life a woman leads,
And in her sorcery still succeeds.
These words confused the lover's brain;
Fire ran through every swelling vein:
Frantic he dash'd his forehead on the ground,
And blood flow'd trickling from the ghastly wound.
"What added curse is this?" he groaning said,
"Another tempest roaring round my head!"
Whenever did a bleeding heart
Betray no sign of blighted reason?
Can the most skilful gardener's art
Still keep his flowers of fruit in season?
No; hearts dissolved in grief give birth
To madness, as the teeming earth
Yields herbs; and yet bewilder'd mind,
To all but one bright object blind,
Suffers no censure from the seer
Who guides the faithful Muslim here.
Love sanctifies the erring thought,
And Heaven forgives the deed by frenzy wrought.
"A rose, a lovely rose, I found,
With thorns and briers compass'd round;
And, struggling to possess that prize,

The gardener in his wrath denies,
Behold my heart, all torn and bleeding,
Its pangs all other pangs exceeding:
I see the leaves expand and bloom,
I smell its exquisite perfume;
Its colour, blushing in the light,
Gives to my raptured soul delight:
I weep beneath the cypress-tree,
And still the rose is not for me.
Alas! None hear, nor mark my moan;
Pride of my soul, my rose, is gone!
Another has, in open day,
Borne the heart-winning prize away.
Though wrapp'd in sweetest innocence,
The fell oppressor snatch'd her thence.
But who deserves the curse that's sped
Upon the foul betrayer's head?
The gardener, in his lust for gold,
That rose - the boast of Irem - sold.
"Poor wretch! If worlds of wealth were mine,
Full willingly I'd make them thine;
But not a dirham for that rose,
The fatal cause of all my woes.
I would not play a villain's part,
And buy with gold a woman's heart;
'Tis not in gold to purchase love,
Above all wealth, all price above;
For I would rather die than see
A smile on lips that are not free.
Give me the boundless swell of bliss,
The heart upspringing to the kiss,
When life, and soul, and breath combine
To tell me she is only mine;

The flood of joy o'erwhelming quite
My glowing senses with delight.
- Base wretch! And thou that rose hast sold
A demon's curse upon thy gold."
The traveller witness'd with surprise
How he the madman's heart had wrung -
What remedy could he devise?
He from his camel sprung;
And when the sufferer seem'd to be restored
Forgiveness anxiously implored:
"'Twas wrong, and I deserve the blame;
I mark'd with infamy her name:
My fault is of the darkest hue,
My crime - for Leyli still is true!
What! Though in nuptial band united,
Her faith, to thee so often plighted,
Spotless remains, still firm, unbroken,
As proved by many a mournful token.
For every moment's space can claim
A thousand recollections of thy name:
Thus ever present to her memory,
She lives, and only lives for thee.
One year has pass'd since she was made a bride;
But what of years? Whatever may betide,
Were it a thousand, still her heart's the same,
Unchanged, unchangeable her earliest cherish'd flame."
Now Majnun, desolate, his fate perceived,
As in a glass the misery of his lot,
And, from the first impression scarce relieved,
Felt his abandonment, and only not forgot.
Wasted and wan, he flutter'd where he lay;
And, turning to that magic point which led
To where his angel-face was wont to stay,

Thus, in a melancholy tone, he said:
"Alas! My passion glow'd in every part;
Thine in thy tongue, but never in thy heart;
With thy new love hast thou so amorous grown?
And am I worthless as a desert-stone?
What is a word, a promise, oath or pledge?
Mockery, which never can the heart engage.
What was my garden's wealth but fruit and flowers?
And all that wealth a raven now devours;
And what has been my constant care and toil,
But for another to prepare the spoil?
When first my soul was destined to be thine,
I little thought that treasure to resign;
Think of thy broken vows, to what they tend;
Think of thy falsehood, and lament its end.
My doom is fixed; my choice no longer free;
My martyr-life devoted still to thee!"

CHAPTER XIII
SYD OMRI'S DEATH

Meantime, the father mourn'd his wretched state
Like Jacob o'er his Joseph's unknown fate;
No rest by day, no sleep by night;
Grief o'er him shed its withering blight;
And ceaseless yearnings wrung his heart,
He sat in darkness, silent, lone:
"Why did my child from home depart?
Where has the hopeless wanderer gone?"
Dreading that death's relentless dart
His best-beloved had overthrown.
Sudden he rose - despair gave force

Majnun watching Noufal's battle with Leyli's tribe
Herat, 1494. London, British Library

And vigour to his aged frame;
And, almost frantic with remorse,
Gathering upon himself the blame,
He trod the maze of wood and wild,
Seeking his poor forsaken child;
And when the day withdrew its light,
He pass'd in cavern rude the night;
But never ceased his venturous quest -
No peace for him - no strengthening rest.
In vain he paced the desert round,
For not a trace of him was found.
At length a herdsman, falling in his way,
Described the spot where Majnun lay;
Craggy, and deep, and terrible to view,
It seem'd a grave all damp with noxious dew.
Thither proceeding, by the stranger led,
He finds with horror that sepulchral bed;
And, fearful of the worst, beholds the wreck
Of his once-lovely boy;
He sees a serpent winding round his neck,
Playful, not destined to destroy:
It stays but for a moment - all around,
Limbs half-devour'd, and bones, bestrew the ground.
With cautious step descending, he surveys
Th' unconscious youth, who meets his anxious gaze
With a wild look, which could not recognise
The tottering form before him: "Who art thou?
And what thy errand?" The old man replies
"I am thy father! I have found thee now,
After long search!" Embracing, both remain'd
In deep compassionate sorrow, fondly strain'd
Each to the other's bosom: and when he,
The madman, had regain'd his memory,

And beams of light burst through his 'nighted brain,
And he beheld and knew his sire again,
Joy sparkled in his faded eye awhile,
And his parch'd lips seem'd curl'd into a smile.
The poor old father said, with feeble voice:
"Thou mak'st my heart both tremble and rejoice:
The path o'er which thy feet are doom'd to pass
Shows blades of swords, not harmless blades of grass;
And I would warn thee never more to roam;
Thy only safety is to stay at home.
Dogs have a home, and thou hast none to boast:
Art thou a man to human comfort lost?
If man thou art, then like a man appear,
Or, if a demon, be a demon here.
The ghoul, created to perplex the earth,
Is still a ghoul, and answers to its birth;
But thou'rt a man; and why, with human soul
Forget thy nature and become a ghoul?
Today, if thou shouldst throw the reins aside,
Tomorrow thou may'st ask, and be denied.
Soon shall I pass away, and be at rest;
No longer this frail world's unhappy guest.
My day is mingling with the shades of night;
My life is losing all its wonted light.
Soul of thy father! Re-inspire with grace,
Rise, and protect the honours of thy race!
That, ere this frame be in the grave laid low,
I may the guardian of my birthright know;
"That, ere I die, to soothe a parent's grief,
Thou mayst be hail'd in thine own home, the chief.
Forbid it, Heaven, that when my hour is past,
My house and home should to the winds be cast!
That plundering strangers, with rapacious hand,

Should waste my treasure and despoil my land!
And Heaven forbid, that both at once should fall,
(My greatest dread) and thus extinguish all!
That when the summons reaches me to die,
Thy death should also swell the funeral cry!"
These words sank deep in Majnun's breast; he seem'd
Alter'd in mood, as through his senses stream'd
The memory of his home, the fond regard
Of his dear mother, and the joys he shared
From her affection. Days and nights he tried,
To banish from his thoughts another's bride:
Repentance came, and oft the strife renew'd,
But tyrant love that feeling soon subdued;
(Love, a wild elephant in might, which grows
More powerful when opposed by friends or foes;)
And the poor madman thus his sire address'd:
"Thy counsel, father, is the wisest, best;
And I would gladly to thy wish conform:
But what am I? A helpless wretch, a worm,
Without the power to do what I approve,
Enslaved, the victim of almighty love.
To me the world is swallow'd up - I see
Nothing but Leyli - all is lost to me,
Save her bright image - father, mother, home,
All buried in impenetrable gloom,
Beyond my feeling yet I know thou'rt here,
And I could weep but what avails the tear,
Even were it at a father's funeral shed?
For human sorrows never reach the dead.
Thou say'st, the night of Death is on thee falling!
Then must I weep, thy fostering care recalling;
But I shall die in utter misery,
And none be left in life to weep for me."

Syd Omri, with unutterable grief,
Gazed on his son, whose sorrows mock'd relief;
And, hopeless, wretched, every thought resign'd
That once was balm and comfort to his mind.
Then, showering blessings o'er his offspring's head,
Groaning, he parted from that dismal cave;
And, wrapt in deepest anguish, homeward sped;
But 'twas, alas! To his expected grave.
Gently he sank, by age and grief oppress'd,
From this vain world, to that of endless rest.
Vain world indeed! Whoever rested here?
The lustrous moon hath its eternal sphere;
But man, who in this mortal prison sighs,
Appears like lightning, and like lightning flies.
A pilgrim-step approach'd the wild retreat,
Where Majnun linger'd in his rocky seat,
And the sad tale was told. He fell
Upon the earth insensible;
And, grovelling, with a frantic air,
His bosom beat - he tore his hair,
And never rested, night or day,
Till he had, wandering far away,
Reach'd the sad spot where peaceful lay
His father's bones, now crumbling with decay.
His arms around the grave he flung,
And to the earth delirious clung;
Grasping the ashes of the dead,
He cast them o'er his prostrate head,
And, with repentant tears, bedew'd
The holy relics round him strew'd.
O'erwhelming was the sharpen'd sense
Of his contrition, deep, intense;
And sickness wrapp'd his shatter'd frame

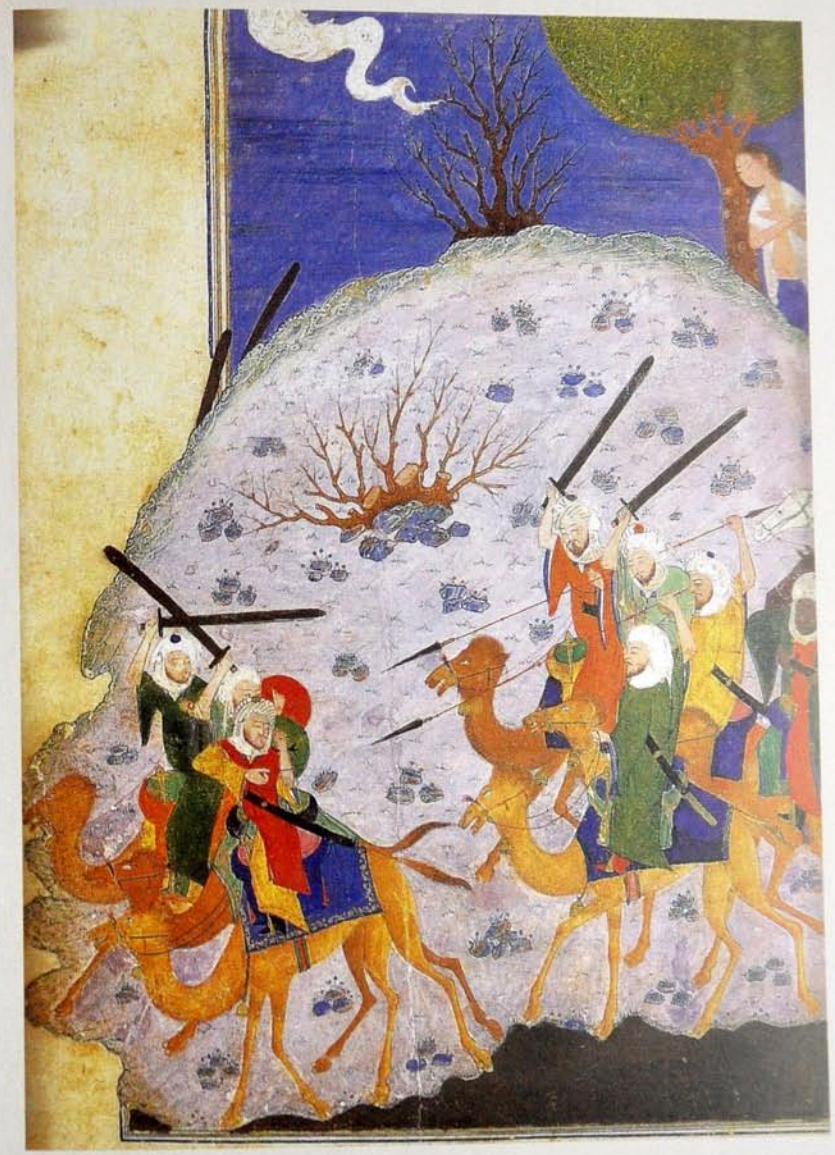
In a slow fever's parching flame;
Still, ceaseless, 'twas his wont to rave
Upon his father's sacred grave.
He felt the bitterness of fate;
He saw his folly now too late;
And worlds would give again to share
His generous father's constant care;
For he had oft, in wanton guise,
Contemn'd the counsels of the wise;
Had with a child's impatience burn'd,
And scorn for sympathy return'd;
And now, like all of human mould,
When the indulgent heart is cold,
Which would have seal'd his happiness,
He mourns - but mourns his own distress
For, when the diamond blazed like day,
He cast it recklessly away.

CHAPTER XIV

WILD BEASTS BEFRIEND MAJNUN

Who wanders near that palmy glade,
Where the fresh breeze adds coolness to the shade?
Tis Majnun he has left his father's tomb,
Again 'mid rocks and scorching plains to roam,
Unmindful of the sun's meridian heat,
Or the damp dewy night, with unshod feet;
Unmindful of the forest's savage brood,
Howling on every side in quest of blood;
No dread has he from aught of earth or air,
From den or eyry, calm in his despair:
He seems to court new perils, and can view

With unblench'd visage scenes of darkest hue;
Yet is he gentle, and his gracious mien
Checks the extended claw, where blood has been;
For tiger, wolf and panther, gather round
The madman as their king, and lick the ground;
Fox and hyena fierce their snarling cease;
Lion and fawn familiar meet in peace;
Vulture and soaring eagle, on the wing,
Around his place of rest their shadows fling;
Like Suliman[13], o'er all extends his reign;
His pillow is the lion's shaggy mane;
The wily leopard, on the herbage spread,
Forms like a carpet his romantic bed:
And lynx and wolf, in harmony combined,
Frisk o'er the sward, and gambol with the hind.
All pay their homage with respect profound,
As if in circles of enchantment bound.
Among the rest, one little fawn
Skipp'd nimbly o'er the flowery lawn;
And, beautifully delicate,
Sprang where the wondering madman sate:
So soft, so meek, so sweetly mild,
So shy, so innocently wild,
And, ever playful in his sight,
The fondling grew his great delight;
He loved its pleasing form to trace,
And kiss its full black eyes and face,
Thinking of Leyli all the while;
For fantasies the heart beguile;
And with th' illusive dream impress'd,
He hugg'd the favourite to his breast:
With his own hand the fawn he fed,
And choicest herbs before it spread;



Majnun watching Noufal's battle with Leyli's tribe
Herat, 1431. St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum

And all the beasts assembled there
Partook of his indulgent care,
And, day and night, they, unconstrain'd,
In wondrous harmony remain'd.
And thus, throughout the world, we find
'Mid brutes, as well as humankind,
A liberal hand, a friendly voice,
Bids e'en the savage heart rejoice.
There is a curious story told
Of a despotic king, of old,
Which proves ferocious beasts endued
With a deep sense of gratitude.
The king had in his palace-bounds
A den of man-devouring hounds;
And all on whom his anger fell
Were cast into that dreadful cell.
Among the courtiers there was one,
For wisdom, wit, and shrewdness known,
Long in the royal household nursed,
But still he always fear'd the worst,
Thinking the fatal day might come
For him to share an equal doom;
And therefore, by a dexterous scheme,
His life endeavour'd to redeem.
Unseen, by night, he often stood
And fed the hounds with savoury food;
And well their bounteous friend they knew,
And in their hearts attachment grew;
When, just as he, prophetic, thought,
The king his death unfeeling sought;
Sternly his good old courtier blamed,
And to the ravenous dogs condemn'd.
'Twas night when in the den he cast

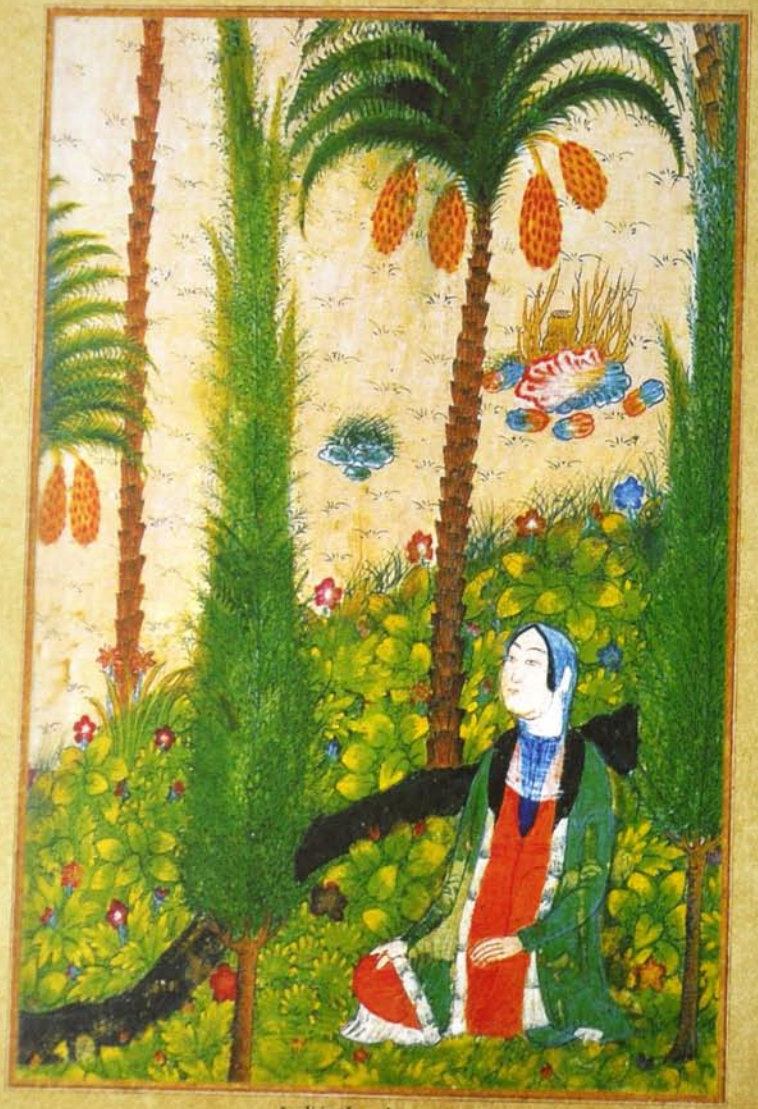
His victim for a dog's repast:
Next morn, unshamed by such a deed,
(Dooming the innocent to bleed,)
He sent a page to look for him,
Torn, he expected, limb from limb:
The wondering keeper, who obey'd
The king, had not a trice delay'd.
Now, hastening to the presence, cried:
"O king! His virtue has been tried;
He bears an angel's blessed charm,
And God protects his life from harm:
Untouch'd, though fetter'd fast, I found him,
The dogs all fondly fawning round him!"
The king was struck with wonderment
At this miraculous event;
And seeing, in that horrid cell,
The guiltless courtier safe and well,
He ask'd, with tears profusely shed,
By what strange spell he was not dead?
"No juggling words had I to say;
I fed the bloodhounds every day;
And thence their gratitude arose,
Which saved me from my cruel foes.
But I have served thee many a year,
And for it thou hast sent me here!
A dog has feeling - thou hast none -
A dog is thankful for a bone;
But thou, with hands in blood imbrued,
Hast not one spark of gratitude."
Abash'd the despot saw his crimes,
And changed his frightful course betimes.

CHAPTER XV

LEYLI'S MESSAGE

Sweet slumber had diffused the charm of rest
Through the poor madman's agitated breast,
And as the morn, magnificently bright,
Pour'd o'er the cloudless sky its purple light,
The smiling presage of a prosperous day,
He rose refresh'd, and hail'd the heavenly ray.
Graceful he stood amidst the varied herd,
And, warm'd with hope, his orisons preferr'd;
When suddenly a horseman met his view,
Who, as it seem'd, the wandering lover knew.
"Romantic youth! I see the timorous deer
And the fierce lion meet in concord here,
And thou the monarch - strange! But mark! I bear
A secret tale of one, so loved, so fair.
What wouldst thou feel, did I her name declare?
What is the cypress to her form divine?
What is the perfume from a martyr's shrine?
What, should that idol's fate be mix'd with thine?
Her ringlets twisted like the graceful Jím,
Her shape an Alif, and her mouth a Mím[14]
Her eyes like two Narcissuses that grow
Where the pure waters of a fountain flow;
Her eyebrows, join'd, a double arch express;
Her beauteous cheeks an angel might caress.
But what can I of such perfection say?
How to the blind Creation's charms portray?
I saw her weep - the tear-drops glistening fell
In showers from eyes which their own tale could tell
And yet I ask'd for whom she wept and mourn'd -
For one untrue, or one to dust return'd?

Opening her ruby lips, she softly said:
"My heart is desolate - my joys are fled:
I once was Leyli - need I more reveal?
Worse than a thousand madmen now I feel:
More wild than that dark star which rules my fate,
More mad than Majnun's my distracted state.
If that dark spirit thou shouldst haply find -
That mournful wreck of an enlighten'd mind -
How wilt thou recognise him? By that sad
Disorder'd aspect, oft pronounced as mad;
By that unutterable grief which preys
Upon his heart; that melancholy gaze,
Which has no sense of outward things; that love
So pure, an emanation from above.
O that I could escape this wretched thrall,
And leave, for ever leave, my father's hall.
But go, and seek the wanderer; - glen and cave
Patient explore - his refuge, or his grave:
Find him; and, faithful, with unwearied feet
Return, and tell me his forlorn retreat."
Silent I heard her earnest prayer;
Mark'd her desponding voice and air;
And while she still, in tenderest mood
Bedew'd with tears, before me stood,
The story of thy woes, which long
Had been the theme of many a song,
Familiar to the country round,
I sang, and deep affection found;
So deep, that sigh, succeeding sigh,
She trembled in her agony,
And, senseless, sank upon the ground,
Where pale and motionless she lay
As if her life had ebb'd



Leyli in the palm grove
Herat, 1431. St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum

But soon as that dread swoon was o'er,
And sobs and tears relieved her heart;
Again she press'd me to restore
Him she adored: "If kind thou art,
And kind thou must be to a wretch forlorn,
I feel thou wouldst not play a traitor's part;
Thou canst not view my misery with scorn.
Alas! Though I may seem to him untrue,
Pity is still to woman's sorrows due."
Her rosy fingers press
The written tale of her distress;
And, raising to her ruby mouth
That passionate record of her truth,
Kiss'd it a thousand times, and shed
A flood of tears, whilst mournfully she said:
To him for whom alone I live.'"
Majnun, perplexd, with painful feelings riven,
Seem'd to refuse what still to him was Heaven;
Imputed falsehood swept across his mind,
Hut left no dark distrustful thoughts behind.
At length, the writing eagerly he took;
But, as he read, he falter'd, wept and shook.
Adoring the Creator, she began:
"Beyond the praise of tongue, to mortal man
His love and goodness," - thus her nameh ran -
"He with the light of wisdom cheers the soul;
He bids the cheek to glow, the eye to roll,
And every mortal bends to His control.
To this, He scatters jewels bright and rare,
To that, good sense to strive with worldly care:
To me He gave the love which time defies -
The love I bear thee, spotless from the skies;
Fountain of Khizer, sparkling in the shade!

Fountain of life to thine own Arab maid!
In truth and love to thee my heart was given,
That love and truth remain, the gift of Heaven.
Though far from thee - a wife against my will,
I am thine own affianced partner still:
Still single - still, in purity and faith,
Thine own unchanged - unchangeable in death.
Thou'rt all the world to me - the very earth
Thou tread'st on is to me of matchless worth;
Yet in a different sphere my race is run;
I am the moon, and thou the radiant sun:
By destiny thus sunder'd - how can I
Merit reproach, who at thy feet would die?
Since thus divided, pity thou my lot,
With all thy vows and raptures I never forgot;
Life's sweetest flow'rets, in their brightest bloom,
Turn'd to the bitterness of fell Zikum[15]."
Yes, Majnun wept and shook; and now
What answer could he frame, and how?
A wanderer, destitute - no reed,
No tablets to supply his need -
But Leyli's messenger had brought
The means - and thus the madman wrote:
"To Him who form'd the starry throne
Of heaven, and rules the world alone;
Who, in the dark mysterious mine,
Maketh the unseen diamond shine;
Who thus on human life bestows
The gem which in devotion glows;
To Him be gratitude and praise,
The constant theme of Muslim lays!
- A burning heart, in sorrow deep,
What can it do but sigh and weep?

And what can this memorial bear
To thee, but wailings of despair?
I am the dust beneath thy feet,
Though destined never more to meet.
Thy beauty is my Kaba shrine,
The arc of heaven, forever mine;
Garden of Irem - hidden from me,
The paradise I must not see;
Yet thou hast quenched my genial light;
My day is now like blackest night.
With fondness on thy flattering tongue
Thou smilest, and my heart is wrung;
For those whose tongues are gentlest found
Are wont to give the deadliest wound.
The lily's petals oft appear
As fatal as the sword or spear.
She, whom 'twas rapture to behold,
Could she be basely bought and sold?
Couldst thou to me thy promise break,
And spurn me for another's sake?
Acting a bland deceiver's part,
And solacing another's heart!
But, peace! - No more of thoughts so sad,
Or I shall grow intensely mad;
I yearn no more those lips to press;
But is the joy of memory less?
The morning breeze thy fragrance brings;
And up my heart exulting springs;
Still more when I reflecting see
How once the cup was fill'd by thee.
O Heaven! How rapturous to receive
That which forbids the heart to grieve;
To sit with thee in amorous play,

And quaff the ruby every day;
To kiss those lips, all honey-dew,
Of liquid bright cornelian hue!
O! Could I kiss them once again!
The fancy fires my wilder'd brain.
- Need I the painter's art to trace
The lineaments of thy angel-ic face?
No - they're indelibly impress'd
Within my ever-faithful breast.
'Tis ours, divided, to deplore
Scenes we can never witness more;
But, though on earth denied to rest,
Shall we not both in heaven be bless'd?"

* * *

Majnun's distracted state was not unknown
Where to the wretched kindness could be shown;
- A wealthy chieftain (Selim was his name),
Whose generous deeds had won the world's acclaim;
Whose heart was still on others' woes engaged -
He heal'd their wounds, their anguish he assuaged;
Raiment and various food had oft supplied,
Where'er the lovelorn wanderer might abide.
Mounted upon his rapid steed, one day,
He sought the distant place where Majnun lay;
And him at length, with placid mien, he found
By herds of forest-beasts encompass'd round.
Fearful of savage natures, he retired,
Till Majnun, beckoning, confidence inspired;
And then, approaching near, he told his name,
And recognised him, though his wasted frame
Seem'd an uncoffin'd corse. Ashamed, he said:
"O let these robes thy naked body shade,

These robes for thee brought hither." "Not for me;
I want no covering, - without clothes I'm free.
Behold these tatter'd fragments, thrown aside;
These once were robes, and once my foolish pride."
But, press'd again, those tatters he resumed,
And sat like one to death and darkness doom'd.
Now savoury viands were before him spread,
But not a morsel raised he to his head;
He turn'd him round, and, scorning the repast,
To his familiars all the banquet cast.
Then Selim asked: "What is thy food, my friend?
Without support, thy life will quickly end."
- "My spirit's freshness, and its secret power,
Come from the breeze which marks the morning hour.
Yes, every zephyr from my mistress brings
Life to the soul upon its fragrant wings;
When hunger presses, from the weeping trees
I gather gums, its cravings to appease;
And herbs and grass, and the transparent rill,
Support me in the state thou seest me still;
But though thy proffer'd food regale not me,
The beasts around enjoy'd the banquetry;
And if I sought on living thing to feed,
Birds might be caught; but I detest the deed;
And he who is contented grass to eat,
Defies the world - the world is at his feet;
For what can pomp, and wealth, and feasts avail?
I live on grass: but hear the Zahid's tale.
In ancient times a king, they say,
Through a wild forest took his way;
And marking, as along he rode,
A Zahid's desolate abode,
Ask'd his attendants if they knew

What the Recluse was wont to do;
What was his food, and where he slept,
And why remote from man he kept.
A courtier towards the Zahid ran,
And soon brought forth that holy man
'And wherefore dost thou pass thy days
Shunning the world's inviting ways,
Choosing this dismal wretched hole,
Grave of the body and the soul?'
- 'I have no friends to love me - none;
No power, except to live alone.'
Then, where his fawns in quiet fed,
Took up some blades of grass, and said
'This is my food - this, want supplies!'
The courtier look'd with scornful eyes,
And answer'd 'Taste but royal food,
And thou'lt not fancy grass so good.'
'Indeed!' the Zahid said, and smiled,
'That is a sad mistake, my child!
Worldlings are still to luxury prone;
To thee its sweetness is unknown;
Stranger to such delicious fare,
No doubt thou'rt charm'd with food more rare!'
- Soon as this speech the monarch heard,
Noting, attentive, every word,
And wondering such a seer to meet,
Fell at the pious Zahid's feet,
And kissed the greensward, as he knelt
Where that contented hermit dwelt."

Majnun in the desert
Artist: Agha Mirak, Tabriz, 1539-1543, London, British Library

CHAPTER XVI

SELIM BRINGS MAJNUN HOME

O'er Majnun's spirit, long in darkness cast,
A fitful gleam of homeward feeling pass'd:
And now he asks for friends he once preferr'd,
Asks for his mother, broken-winged bird:
And wishes e'en to visit home again -
As if the maddening fire had left his brain.
Selim at this brief glimpse of reason caught,
And to his mother s distant mansion brought
Without delay the wanderer. Deep her grief
To see how wither'd was that verdant leaf -
To see the red rose faded from his cheek,
His eye so alter'd, and his frame so weak;
From head to foot she kisses him, and weeps;
His hair, all matted, in her tears she steeps,
And clasps him fondly to her beating heart,
As if she never from her boy would part:
"My darling child! The love-game thou hast play'd
Has thus, alas! Reduced thee to a shade;
In that encounter sad of mortal scathe
Thou grasp'dst the two-edged scimitar of death.
Thy father gone, his troubles all are past,
Heart-broken man! And I shall follow fast.
Arise! And enter thy own mansion here;
Come, 'tis thy own dear home, and doubly dear
- Thy nest; and birds, though distant in their flight,
Always return to their own nests at night.
While yet an infant in thy cradle-bed,
I watch'd thy slumber, pillow'd thy sweet head;
And canst thou now that mother's fondness see,
And mark without remorse her love for thee?

Refuse the joy thy presence can impart,
And cast a shadow o'er her drooping heart?"
A cloud again obscured the orb of day
- Again his wavering intellect gave way;
"Mother, there is no hope - the time is past;
With gloom eternal is my fate overcast;
No fault of mine - no crime to press me down -
But all my countless woes to thee are known;
Like a poor bird within its cage immured,
My soul has long this prison-life endured.
Ask me not, mother, to remain at home;
For there, to me, no peace can ever come.
Oh, better will it be for me to stray
'Mid mountain glens, and herd with beasts of prey,
That linger on the spot where human care
Only augments my misery and despair."
He ceased, and kiss'd his mother's feet, and fled
Precipitate along the path which led
To the wild mountains. Dreadful was the stroke!
The mother's heart, like the old father's, broke;
In Death's cold ocean, wave thus follows wave;
And thus she follow'd to the silent grave.
Selim again the madman's haunts explored,
Again supplied his frugal board,
And, with a mournful voice, the tale reveal'd -
Father and mother gone,
Himself now left alone,
Sole heir - his doom of desolation seal'd -
He beat his brows, and from his eyes
Fell tears of blood; his piercing cries
Rang through the forest, and again,
Pouring the saddest, wildest strain,
He hasten'd from his gloomy cave,

To weep upon his mother's grave.
But when that paroxysm of grief -
That agony intense, but brief -
Had, like a whirlwind, pass'd away,
And left him in a milder mood,
To love and Leyli still a prey,
He trod again his mountain solitude:
For what to him was hoarded store,
The wealth of parents now no more?
Had he not long, ill-fated one!
Abandon'd all for love alone?

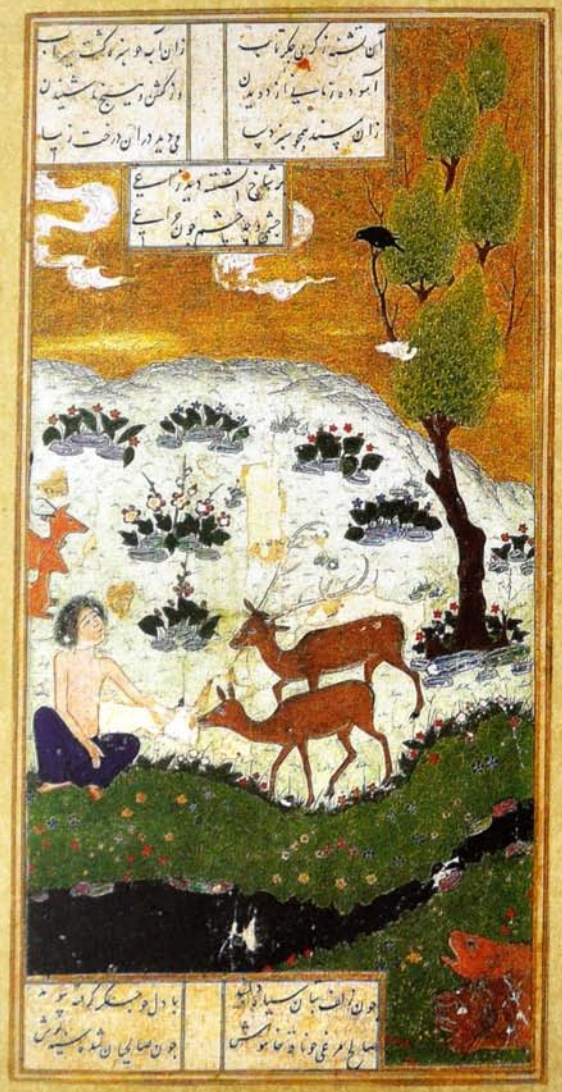
CHAPTER XVII
THE SECRET LISTENER

Leyli meanwhile had read and seen
What Majnun's thoughts had ever been;
And though her plighted faith seem'd broken,
From him she held the tenderest token:
Deep in her heart a thousand woes
Disturb'd her days' and nights' repose:
A serpent at its very core,
Writhing and gnawing evermore;
And no relief - a prison-room
Being now the lovely sufferer's doom.
- Fate look'd at last with favouring eye;
The night was dark, no watchman nigh;
And she had gain'd the outer gate,
Where, shrouded, unobserved, she sate,
Gazing on every side to find
Some friend to calm her troubled mind;
When, welcome as a cherish'd guest,

A holy seer her vision bless'd,
Who, ever, like an angel, strove
The heart's deep anguish to remove:
Who lived to succour the distress'd,
To soothe and staunch the bleeding breast:
To him she spake: "In pity hear,
A wretch distraught with love and fear!
Know'st thou the youth, of peerless grace,
Who mingles with the forest race,
Savage or tame, and fills the air,
Alas! For me, with his despair?"
"Yes, lovely moon!" he answered, "well I know
That hapless wanderer, and his cureless woe;
Leyli still on his tongue, the Arab maid
He ceaseless seeks through every bower and glade,
Unconscious of the world, its bloom or blight,
Leyli alone for ever in his sight."
The Arab maiden wept, and cried "No more!
I am the cause, and I his loss deplore;
Both have our sorrows, both are doom'd to feel
The wounds of absence, which will never heal;
For me he roams through desert wild and drear,
While Fate condemns me to be fetter'd here!"
- Then from her car a lustrous gem she drew,
Which, having kiss'd, she to the hermit threw,
And said: "Forbid it I should ask in vain!
Let these fond eyes behold his face again!
But caution must control the zeal you show:
Some signal must be given, that I may know
When he is nigh - some stanzas of his own
Warbled beneath my casement, where, alone
I sit and watch - for secret must we be,
Or all is lost to Majnun and to me!"

- Within his girdle-fold the smiling saint
Placed the rich gem, and on his errand went.
But did no obstacle his task oppose?
A thousand, daily, in his progress rose:
Where'er his arduous course he anxious urged,
Perplexing paths in various lines diverged;
Through tangled glens, the ground with creepers spread,
Meshes of shadowy branches o'er his head,
Now a wide plain before him - mountains grey,
And now an emerald greensward cheer'd his way:
At last, upon a hillock's shady side,
The long-sought love-sick wanderer he descried
By forest-beasts surrounded, in a ring,
Like guards appointed to protect their king.
Majnun perceived him, and with upraised hand
Made his wild followers at a distance stand;
And then the seer approach'd - his homage paid -
"O thou, unmatch'd in love!" he kindly said:
"Leyli, the world and beauty's queen,
Who long has thy adorer been;
And many a year has run its race,
Since she has seen that pensive face -
Since she has heard that tuneful voice
Which ever made her heart rejoice:
And now, at her command, I bear
Her earnest, almost dying, prayer.
She longs to see thee once
To sit with thee and soothe thy pain;
To feel, on pleasure's downy wings,
The joy a lover's presence brings.
And wilt thou not, with equal glee,
Behold thyself from bondage free?
The Grove of Palms thy feet must trace,

Near Leyli s rural dwelling-place.
That is the promised spot; and thou
Wilt there receive both pledge and vow
And sing, with voice subdued and clear
Thy sweetest ghazal in her ear."
Majnun uprose with joyous look,
And for his guide the hermit took:
And, passing quick the space between,
Arrived at that romantic scene
Where the majestic palms display'd
A cool, refreshing depth of shade;
And there the tribes of wood and plain,
Which form'd the wanderer's vassal-train,
Promptly as human retinue,
To an adjoining copse withdrew.
The seer, advancing with a cautious pace,
To the pavilion of that angelic face —
That star of beauty - that sweet silvery moon -
Whisper'd the presence of her own Majnun.
But woman's mind can from its purpose range,
And seem to change, without the power to change;
And thus she said: "Alas! It cannot be:
I must not meet him - such is Fate's decree;
The lamp thus lit, Love's temple to illume,
Will not enlighten, but the heart consume:
For I am wedded - to another given -
This worthless dust still in the view of Heaven;
And though compell'd - let others bear the blame!
I was not born to sacrifice my fame,
Prudence forbids such perils should be mine;
Rather forever let me here repine;
But faithful still, with his melodious tongue
How often have the sweetest echoes rung?



Majnun in the desert surrounded by animals

Herat, 1431. St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum

Yes, faithful still, he may upon mine ear,
Chant the rich numbers which I love to hear:
Let him with nectar fill his luscious cup,
And, still adoring, I will drink it up."
Prostrate, in tears, upon a fountain's side,
The saint found Majnun, who impatient cried:
"What is this amber incense round me flying?
Is it the breath of spring o'er rose-buds sighing?
No - not the fragrance of the early spring -
Leyli's sweet locks alone such odours fling!
So powerful is the impulse they impart,
They fill with dying ecstasy my heart."
The saint, well-taught in love's mysterious lore,
Knew what it was the absent to deplore;
But said: "Thou canst not hope that she,
Unsought, unask'd, will come to thee!
Woman demands a warmer suit,
And none her sacred power dispute."
"Upbraid me not with maxim old -
Think'st thou that Majnun's suit is cold
When, from the very scent, I feel
Intoxication o'er me steal?
Must I the real bliss decline
And never taste the luscious wine?"
So saying, seated in that palmy grove,
To Leyli thus he breath'd his lay of love:
"O whither art thou gone?
And where am I? Alone!
Forsaken, lost - and what remains?
Life only creeping through my veins
And yet that life is not my own,
But thine; I only breathe to moan:
A thing of memory, to deplore

The past, since hope can smile no more.
Familiar to the pangs which scorn relief,
Grief smiles upon me, and I smile on grief.
Grief makes thee dearer still; for grief and thee
Seem of each other born. Grief paints to me
Thy matchless beauty: without grief, no thought
Of thy perfections to my mind is brought.
O Heaven! That ever we were doom'd to part
We are but one - two bodies and one heart.
As summer clouds with rain the meadows greet
Majnun dissolves in sorrow at thy feet;
Whilst thy soft checks lend beauty to the sky,
Majnun, Alas! Is taught by them to die.
The bulbul o'er thy roses joyous stoops;
Majnun, from thee disjoin'd, divided, droops;
And whilst the world devotes itself to strife,
Majnun would sacrifice to thee his life.
O that kind fortune would our joys approve,
And yield the blessings of successful love!
The gorgeous moon, with her pellucid light,
Converting into dazzling day the night;
And we together seated, ear to ear,
The sparkling wine, our beverage, ever near;
I playing with those ringlets, which descend
In magic curls, and o'er thy shoulders bend;
Thou, with those dark and love-enkindling eyes,
In which the living spell of witchery lies,
Gazing in fondness on me. Those sweet lips!
The mouth red-mirrored by the wine it sips
I see. I see us twain—what joy! And none
To drive the sovereign pleasure from his throne;
Nor shame, nor fear, to crush affection's flower.
Happy, unseen, in that sequester'd bower.

- But bring me wine! This bright illusion stay!
Wine! Wine! Keep sad realities away!
Wine, Saki, wine! The house without a light
Is but a prison, odious to the sight;
For broken hearts, immured in gloom like mine
Are dungeon-dark, unbless'd with light or wine;
O God! Save me from this endless night!
Give me one day of joy - one moment of delight!'
Then, strangely moved, he wildly closed his lay
Sprung on his feet, and suddenly burst away;
And Leyli, who had heard him, deeply mourn'd
And sad, to her secluded home return'd.

CHAPTER XVIII
THE SORROWFUL YOUTH

Through many a town and bower had spread
The madman's tale - all anxious read
In Bagdad and far-distant plains
The mournful lover's amorous strains;
And every heart, which had been wrung
With wither'd hopes, in pity hung
O'er sorrows which to madness drove -
The very martyrdom of love.
And all aspired to seek the cave
Which hourly might become his grave;
To find th' enduring man; to view
That prodigy - but seen by few -
Of whom the world astonish'd spoke,
As crush'd beneath misfortune's yoke;
Whose truth and constancy excell'd
All that the world had e'er beheld.

A gallant youth, who long had known
The pangs of love, impatient rose,
And on his camel, all alone,
Sought for the man of many woes;
Anxious to be the first to see
The man pre-eminent in misery;
And many a farsang[16] he had rode,
Before he reach'd the lover's wild abode.
Majnun beheld him from afar,
And sent his vassals to their lair;
And welcome gave, and ask'd his name,
And whence the hurrying stranger came:
"I come, my friend, to make thee glad;
I come from beautiful Baghdad.
In that enchanting place I might
Have lived in transport day and night;
But I have heard thy tender lays,
Thy sorrows, which the world amaze;
And all that now remains for me
Is, all life long, to dwell with thee.
Thy tuneful strains such joy impart,
Each word is treasured in my heart:
In love, like thee, I weep and sigh -
Let us together live - together die!"
Astonish'd at this strange desire
Laughing, the madman thus replies:
"Sir knight! So soon does pleasure tire?
And dost thou worldly pomp despise,
And all that luxury can give,
With me in a cave to live ?
"Mistaken youth! What dost thou know
Of broken hearts - of love like mine -
That though shouldst life's sweet joys forego,

And every cheering hope resign?
I nave companions, night and day;
But forest-inmates - beasts of prey;
Yet do I ask no other - none;
I'd rather live with them alone.
What hast thou social seen in me,
When demons from my presence flee,
That thou wouldst brave the noon-tide heat,
The dangers of the midnight air,
Unshelter'd, naked head and feet,
To herd with one not worth thy care,
Nor worth a thought? Beneath the scorching sun
I thread the wild wood, and, when day is done,
Lie myself down upon a beggar's throne -
My canopy, the trees - my pillow, a rude stone.
Houseless and poor, and oft with hunger press'd,
How can I take a stranger for my guest?
Whilst thou, surrounded by thy friends at home,
Moved by no need, but by a whim to roam,
Mayst pass thy hours in cheerfulness and glee,
And never think of such a wretch as me!"
The gallant youth now placed in view
Various refreshments he had thither brought -
Sweet cakes and fruit - and from his pannier drew
Heart-easing wine, his purpose to promote,
To win the favour of the moon-struck man;
And thus his brief but earnest speech began:
"Friend, share my meal in kindness, and allow
A smile of joy to clear that furrow'd brow!
In bread is life; it strengthens every part,
And, while it strengthens, cheers the drooping heart."
Majnun rejoin'd: "The argument is just;
Without refreshment man descends to dust:

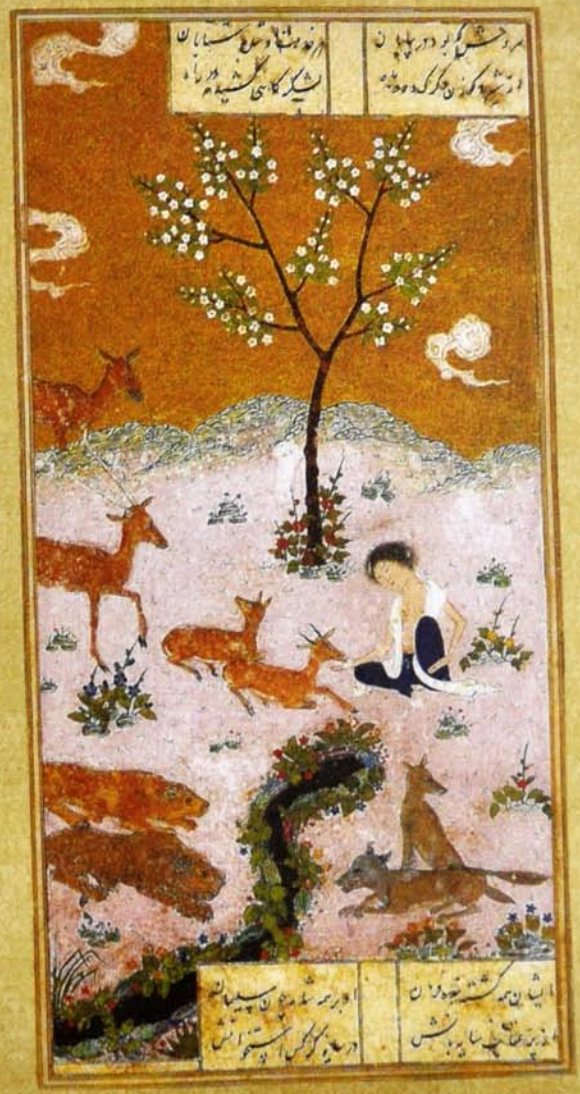
Nerve, power, and strength from nourishment proceed;
But this is not the nourishment I need."
"Yet mortals change, whate'er their aim;
Nothing on earth remains the same:
I know thou canst not be unmoved;
Forever thus thou canst not be;
Perpetual change the heavens have proved;
And night and morn, successively,
Attest its truth. That thou hast loved
I know; but thou mayst yet be free;
The heavens are clothed in deepest gloom;
Black is the threatening day of doom;
The clouds fly off, the storm is past,
No longer howls the scattering blast;
The heavens resume their wonted sheen
And brighter grows the varied scene:
So grief devour the heart awhile;
Like thee, was I enchanted, bound?
Girt by love's galling fetters round;
But to the winds my grief I flung,
And to my fate no longer clung.
This fire of love, which burns so bright,
What is it but a treacherous light?
The burning mountain flames no more!"
But Majnun spurn'd the treacherous thought and said:
"Speak'st thou to me as if feeling in me is dead?
I am myself the king of love; and now
Glory in my dominion: and wouldst thou
Persuade me to abandon all that Heaven
Has, 'mid my sufferings, for my solace given,
To quit that cherish'd hope, than life more dear,
Which rivets me to earth, and keeps me here?
That pure ethereal love, that mystic flower,

Nurtured in heaven, fit for an angel's dower?
What! From my heart expel the dream of love?
First from the ocean's bed the sands remove!
Useless the effort, useless is thy aim,
Thou canst not quench a never-dying flame.
Then cease persuasion. Why to me appear
A master, teaching, like some holy seer?
He who aspires to open locks, they say,
To be successful, first must know the way."
The youth perceived his error, yet remain'd
In friendly converse a few fleeting days;
And, by the oracle of love enchain'd,
Listen'd, enraptured, to his varied lays;
Companionship delectable! Then rose
To bid adieu, since there he might not stay,
And, sorrowing, left the man of many woes,
Surrounded by his vassal-beasts of prey.

CHAPTER XIX
THE LAST MEETING

How beautifully blue
The-firmament! Bow bright
The moon is sailing through
The vast expanse, to-night!
And at this lovely hour
The lonely Leyli weeps
Within her prison-tower,
And her sad record keeps -
How many days, how many years,
Her sorrows she has borne!
A lingering age of sighs and tears,

A night that has no morn;
Yet in that guarded tower she lays her head,
Shut like a gem within its stony bed.
And who the warder of that place of sighs?
Her husband!—He the dragon-watch supplies.
What words are those which meet her anxious ear?
Unusual sounds, unusual sights appear;
Lamps flickering round, and wailings sad and low,
Seem to proclaim some sudden burst of woe.
Beneath her casement rings a wild lament,
Death-notes disturb the night; the air is rent
With clamorous voices; every hope is fled;
He breathes no longer - Ibn Salim is dead!
The fever's rage had nipp'd him in his bloom;
He sank unloved, unpitied, to the tomb.
And Leyli marks the moon; a cloud
Had stain'd its lucid face;
The mournful token of a shroud,
End of the humble and the proud,
The grave their resting-place.
And now to her the tale is told,
Her husband's hand and heart are cold:
And must she mourn the death of one
Whom she had loathed to look upon?
In customary garb array'd,
The pomp of grief must be display'd -
Dishevell'd tresses, streaming eyes,
The heart remaining in disguise -
She seem'd distracted in her mien,
To feel her loss, if loss had been
But all the burning tears she shed
Were for her own Majnun, and not the one now dead!
The rose that hail'd the purple morn,



Majnun in the desert surrounded by animals
Herat, 1431. St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum

All glistening with the balmy dew,
Look'd still lonelier when it grew.
But Arab laws had still their claim
Upon a virtuous widow's fame.
And what destroy'd all chance of blame?
Two years to droop behind the screen;
Two years unseeing, and unseen!
No, not a glance in all that time,
Blooming in life's luxurious prime,
Was e'er allow'd to womankind;
Since, but to household faces blind,
She must at home her vigils keep,
Her business still to groan and weep.
And Leyli weeps; but who can tell
What secret may her bosom swell?
The beauteous eyes in tears may swim,
The heart may throb, but not for him
Who in the grave unconscious sleeps,
Alone for Majnun Leyli weeps!
Accustom'd hourly to rehearse
Her distant lover's glowing verse,
Framed like a spell to charm and bless,
And soothe her heart's extreme distress.

* * *

"Oh, what a night! A long and dreary night!
It is not night, but darkness without end;
Awful extinction of ethereal light,
Companionless I sit, without one friend.
"Is the immortal source of light congeal'd?
Or has the dreadful day of judgement come?
Nature's fair form beneath a pall concealed:
O! What a night of soul-destroying gloom!
"Can the shrill awakener of the morn be dead?

Is the Mowazzin heedless of his trust?
Has the lone warder from his watch-tower fled?
Or, weary of his task, return'd to dust?
"O God! Restore to me the joyous light
Which first illumed my heart - the golden ray
Of youthful love - that from this prison, night,
I may escape and feel the bliss of day!"
Years, days, how slowly they roll on!
And yet, how quickly life is gone!
The future soon becomes the past -
Ceaseless the course of time. At last
The morning came; the king of day
Arose in festival array,
And Leyli's night had pass'd away:
Her morn of beauty o'er her face,
Shining, resumed its wonted grace,
And with soft step of fairy lightness
She moved, a glittering moon in brightness.
And what was now her highest aim?
The impulse quivering through her frame?
Her secret love, so long conceal'd,
She now without a blush reveal'd,
And first she called her faithful Zyd,
On many a tender mission tried
In whom her heart could best confide:
"Today is not the day of hope,
Which only gives to fancy scope;
It is the day our hopes completing,
It is the lovers' day of meeting!
Rise up! The world is full of joy;
Rise up! And serve thy mistress, boy;
Together, where the cypress grows,
Place the red tulip and the rose;

And let the long-dissever'd meet -
Two lovers, in communion sweet."

* * *

They met; but how? Hearts long to joy unknown
Know not what 'tis to be, except alone;
Feeling intense had check'd the power to speak;
Silent confusion sat upon each cheek;
Speechless with love unutterable, they
Stood gazing at each other all the day.
Thus, when a chamber holds no golden store,
No lock protects the ever-open door;
But when rich hoards of gold become a lure,
A lock is placed to keep that wealth secure;
So when the heart is full, the voice is bound -
For ready speech with grief is rarely found.
Leyli, with looks of love, was first who caught
The soft expression of her budding thought:
"Alas!" she said, as over him she hung,
"What wondrous grief is this that chains the tongue?
The bulbul, famed for his mellifluous note.
Without the rose can swell his tuneful throat,
And when in fragrant bowers the rose he sees,
He warbles sweeter still his ecstasies.
Thou art the bulbul of the bright parterre,
And I the rose - why not thy love declare?
Why, being absent, whilst unseen by thee,
Arose to heaven thy voice and minstrelsy,
And now, at length, when we are met, alone,
Thy love has vanish'd, and thy voice is gone!"
A gush of tears to Majnun gave relief,
Words came: "The misery mine, and mine the grief;
The memory of those lips, so balmy sweet,
Bound up my tongue, which would their charms repeat.

When I, a falcon, through the woodlands flew,
The spotted partridge never met my view;
And now, when I'm unequal to the flight,
The long-sought beauteous bird has come in sight:
The substance thou, in angel charms array'd,
And what am I? I know not, but a shade;
Without thee nothing. Fancy would enthrone
Us both together, melted into one;
And thus, united to each other, we
Are equal - equal in our constancy:
Two bodies with one heart and spirit the same;
Two tapers with one pure celestial flame;
Of the same essence form'd, together join'd,
Two drops in one, each soul to each resign'd."
He paused, and, with ineffable delight,
Leyli gazed on his glowing countenance,
So long estranged and hidden from her sight.
Now throbs his heart at every fondling glance:
The fragrance of her ringlets which enwreath
Her smooth round neck, her jasmine-scented breath,
The sweet confession of her trembling eyes,
The ardent love which time and chance defies.
The chin of dimpled sweetness, the soft cheek,
The open ruby lips prepared to speak,
Madden his finer feelings, and again
A sudden tempest rushes through his brain;
Furious he gazes round him for a while,
Then looks at Leyli with a ghastly smile;
Rends off his Jama-dress in frantic mood,
Starts, as with more than human force endured,
And, shouting, hurries to the desert plain,
Follow'd by all his savage vassal-train.
His love was chaste and pure as heaven

But by excess to madness driven,
Visions of rapture fill'd his soul;
His thoughts sublime despised control;
A joy allied to joys above
Was mingled with his dreamy love:
O Majnun! Lost, forever gone;
The world is full of love, but none,
None ever bow'd at beauty's shrine
With such a sinless soul as thine.
In summer all is bright and gay;
In autumn verdure fades away,
The trees assume a sickly hue,
Unnourish'd by the fragrant dew;
The genial sap, through numerous rills,
From root and branch and leaf distils;
But, drying in the chilly air,
The groves become despoil'd and bare;
Sapless, the garden's flowery pride
The winds disperse on every side,
And all that sight and smell delighted
Is by the ruthless season blighted.
So Leyli's summer hours have passed;
And now she feels the autumnal blast;
Her bowers, her secret bowers, assail'd,
The perfume of the rose exhaled,
Its wither'd leaves bestrew the ground,
And desolation reigns around:
For, from the moment she beheld
Her lover's mental state unveil'd,
Her heart no consolation knew,
Deprived of hope's refreshing dew.
Ere that o'erwhelming misery came,
Thoughts of new life upheld her frame:

Amidst her bitterest weeping and distress,
'Mid the dark broodings of her loneliness,
Though crush'd her feelings, and the man she loved
A wanderer of the forest, strangely moved,
Still was there hope, still was her mental gaze
Fix'd on the expected joys of after-days.
But now all hope had perish'd! She had seen
The frenzied workings of that noble mien:
The fit delirious, the appalling start,
And grief and terror seized her trembling heart.
No tears she sheds, but pines away
In deep entire despair;
The worm has seized its destined prey,
The blight is on that face so fair.
And fearful symptoms of a swift decay
Come o'er her delicate frame, that in the strife
She almost sinks beneath the load of life.
Feeling the ebbing of the vital tide,
She calls her weeping mother to her side.
"Mother, my hour is come, thou need'st no longer chide,
For now no longer can my heart conceal
What once 'twas useless to reveal;
Yet, spite of thy affection, thou
Mayst blame my fatal passion now.
But I have in my rapture quaff'd
Poison in love's delicious draught;
And feel the agony which sears
The soul, and dries the source of tears.
O mother! Mother! All I crave,
When I am pillowed in my grave,
Is that the anguish-stricken youth,
Whose wondrous constancy and truth
Blended our souls in one, may come

The last meeting of lovers
Herat, late 15th century. St. Petersburg, National Library of Russia

And weep upon his Leyli's tomb.
Forbid him not; but let him there
Pour forth the flood of his despair,
And no unhallow'd step intrude
Upon his sacred solitude.
For he to me, my life, my stay,
Was precious as the light of day.
Amazing was his love, sublime,
Which mock'd the wonted power of time;
And when thou seest him grovelling near,
Wildly lamenting o'er my bier,
Frown not, but kindly, soothingly relate
Whate'er thou know'st of my disastrous fate.
Say to that woe-worn wanderer 'All is o'er;
Leyli, thy own sad friend, is now no more;
From this world's heavy chains for ever free,
To thee her heart was given - she died for thee
With love so blended was her life, so true
That glowing love, no other joy she knew.
No worldly cares her thoughts had e'er oppress'd,
The love of thee alone disturb'd her rest;
And in that love her gentle spirit pass'd,
Breathing on thee her blessing to the last.'"
The mournful mother gazed upon her child,
Now voiceless though her lips imploring smiled;
Saw the dread change, the sudden pause of breath -
Her beauty settled in the trance of death;
And, in the frenzy of her anguish, tore
Her hoary locks, the embroider'd dress she wore;
Dissolved in tears, her wild and sorrowing cries
Brought down compassion from the weeping skies,
And so intense her grief, she shivering fell
Prostrate upon the corpse, insensible,

And never, never rose again – the thread
Of life was broken – both, clasp'd together, dead!
O world! How treacherous thou art!
With angelic form and demon's heart;
A rosary of beads in hand,
And, covertly, a trenchant brand.
The lolling heavens with azure glow,
But storms o'erwhelm our hopes below;
The ship is toss'd upon the shore,
The wanderer meets his friends no more;
On flowery field, or boisterous wave,
Alike is found a yawning grave;
For formless, riding through the air,
Devouring death is everywhere;
Khosru and Kai-kobad, and Jum,
Have all descended to the tomb;
And who, composed of mortal clay,
The universal doom can stay?
For this, in vain, have youth and age
Ponder'd o'er learning's mystic page;
No human power can penetrate
The mysteries of all-ruling fate;
Frail life is but a moment's breath;
The world, alas! Is full of death.
How many wept that fair one, gone so soon!
How many wept o'er that departed moon!
How many mourn'd with broken hearts for her!
How many bathed with tears her sepulchre!
Round her pure dust assembled old and young,
And on the sod their fragrant offerings flung;
Hallow'd the spot where amorous youth and maid
In after-times their duteous homage paid.
Again it was the task of faithful Zyd,

Through far-extending plain and forest wide,
To seek the man of many woes, and tell
The fate of her, alas! He loved so well.
Loved, doted on, until his mind, o'erwrought,
Was crush'd beneath intolerable thought.
– With bleeding heart he found his lone abode
Watering with tears the path on which he rode,
And beating his sad breast, Majnun perceived
His friend approach, and ask'd him why he grieved;
What withering sorrow on his cheek had prey'd,
And why in melancholy black[17] array'd.
"Alas!" he cried, "the hail has crush'd my bowers;
A sudden storm has blighted all my flowers;
The cypress-tree o'erthrown, the leaves are sear;
The moon has fallen from her lucid sphere!
Leyli is dead!" No sooner was the word
Utter'd, no sooner the dread tidings heard,
That Majnun, sudden as the lightning's stroke,
Sank on the ground unconscious, with the shock,
And there lay motionless, as if his life
Had been recovering, he prepared to rise,
Rewaken'd frenzy glaring in his eyes,
And, starting on his feet, a hollow groan
Burst from his heart. "Now, now, I am alone!
Why hast thou harrowing words like these express'd?
Why hast thou plunged a dagger in my breast?
Away! Away!" The savage beasts around
In a wide circle crouch'd upon the ground,
Wondering look's on, whilst furiously he rent
His tatter'd garments, and his loud lament
Rang through the echoing forest. How he threads
The mazes of the shadowy woods, which spreads
Perpetual gloom, and now emerges where

Nor bower nor grove obstructs the fiery air;
Climbs to the mountain's brow, o'er hill and plain
Urged quicker onwards by his burning brain,
Across the desert's arid boundary lines;
Zyd, like his shadow, following where he flies;
And when the tomb of Leyli meets his view,
Prostrate he falls, the ground his tears bedew;
Rolling distraught, he spreads his arms to clasp
The sacred temple, writhing like an asp:
Despair and horror swell his ceaseless moan,
And still he clasps the monumental stone.
"Alas!" he cries, "no more shall I behold
That angelic face, that form of heavenly mould.
She was the rose I cherish'd - but a gust
Of blighting wind has laid her in the dust.
She was my favourite cypress, full of grace,
But death has snatch'd her from her biding-place
The tyrant has deprived me of the flower
I planted in my own sequester'd bower;
The Basil sweet, the choicest ever seen,
Cruelly torn and scatter'd o'er the green.
O beauteous flower! Nipp'd by the winter's cold,
Gone from a world thou never didst behold.
O bower of joy! With blossoms fresh and fair,
But doom'd, alas! No ripen'd fruit to bear.
Where shall I find thee now, in darkness shrouded!
Those eyes of liquid light for ever clouded!
Where those carnation lips, that musky mole
Upon thy cheek, that treasure of the soul!
Though hidden from my view those charms of thine,
Still do they bloom in this fond heart of mine;
Though far removed from all I held so dear,
Though all I loved on earth be buried here,

Remembrance to the past enchantment gives,
Memory, blest memory, in my heart still lives.
Yes! Thou hast quit this contentious life,
This scene of endless treachery and strife;
And I like thee shall soon my fetters burst,
And quench in draughts of heavenly love my thirst:
There, where angelic bliss can never cloy,
We soon shall meet in everlasting joy;
The taper of our souls, more clear and bright,
Will then be lustrous with immortal light!"
He ceased, and from the tomb to which he clung
Suddenly to a distance wildly sprung,
And, seated on his camel, took the way
Leading to where his father's mansion lay;
His troop of vassal-beasts, as usual, near,
With still unchanged devotion, front and rear;
Yet, all unconscious, reckless where he went;
The sport of passion, on no purpose bent,
He sped along, or stopp'd; the woods and plains
Resounding with his melancholy strains;
Such strains as from a broken spirit flow,
The wailings of unmitigable woe;
But the same frenzy which had fired his mind
Strangely to leave his Leyli's grave behind,
Now drove him back, and with augmented grief,
All sighs and tears, and hopeless of relief,
He flings himself upon the tomb again,
As if he there forever would remain
Fatally mingled with the dust beneath,
The young, the pure, the beautiful in death.
Closely he strain'd the marble to his breast,
A thousand kisses eagerly impress'd,
And knock'd his forehead in such desperate mood,

The place around him was distain'd with blood.
Alone, unseen; his vassals keep remote
Curious intruders from that sacred spot,
Alone, with wasted form and sombre eyes,
Groaning in anguish he exhausted lies;
No more life's joys or miseries will he meet,
Nothing to rouse him from this last retreat;
Upon a sinking gravestone he is laid,
The gates already opening for the dead!
Selim, the generous, who had twice before
Sought his romantic refuge, to implore
The wanderer to renounce the life he led,
And shun the ruin bursting o'er his head,
Again explored the wilderness, again
Cross'd craggy rock, deep glen, and dusty plain,
To find his new abode. A month had pass'd
'Mid mountain wild, when, turning back, at last
He spied the wretched sufferer alone,
Stretch'd on the ground, his head upon a stone.
Majnun, up-gazing, recognised his face,
And bade his growling followers give him place;
Then said: "Why art thou here again, since thou
Left me in wrath? What are thy wishes now?
I am a wretch bow'd down with bitterest woe,
Doom'd the extremes of misery to know,
Whilst thou, in affluence born, in pleasure nursed,
Stranger to ills the direst and the worst,
Can never join, unless in mockery,
With one so lost to all the world as me!"
Selim replied: "Gladly would I change thy will,
And bear thee hence, be thy companion still:
Wealth shall be thine, and peace and social joy,
And tranquil days, no sorrow to annoy;

And she for whom thy soul has yearned so long
May yet be gain'd, and none shall do thee wrong."
Deeply he groan'd, and wept: "No more, no more!
Speak not of her whose memory I adore;
She whom I loved, than life itself more dear,
My friend, my angelic bride, is buried here!
Dead! But her spirit is now in heaven, whilst I
Live, and am dead with grief - yet do not die.
This is the fatal spot, my Leyli's tomb,
This is the lamented place of martyrdom.
Here lies my life's sole treasure, life's sole trust;
All that was right in beauty gone to dust!"
Selim before him in amazement stood,
Stricken with anguish, weeping tears of blood;
And consolation blandly tried to give.
What consolation? Make dear Leyli live?
His gentle words and looks were only found
To aggravate the agonising wound;
And weeks in fruitless sympathy had pass'd,
But, patient still, he linger'd to the last;
Then, with an anxious heart, of hope bereft,
The melancholy spot, reluctant, he left.
The life of Majnun had received its blight;
His troubled day was closing fast in night.
Still weeping, bitter, bitter tears he shed,
As grovelling in the dust his hands he spread
In holy prayer. "O God! Thy servant hear!
And in Thy gracious mercy set him free
From the afflictions which oppress him here,
That, in the Prophet's name, he may return to Thee!"
Thus murmuring, on the tomb he laid his head,
And with a sigh his wearied spirit fled.
And he, too, has perform'd his pilgrimage.

And who, existing on this earthly stage,
But follows the same path? Whate'er his claim
To virtue, honour, worthy praise, or blame;
So will he answer at the judgment-throne,
Where secrets are unveil'd, and all things known;
Where felon-deeds of darkness meet the light,
And goodness wears its crown with glory bright.
Majnun, removed from this tumultuous scene,
Which had to him unceasing misery been,
At length slept on the couch his bride possess'd,
And, awakening, saw her mingled with the bless'd.
There still lay stretch'd his body many a day,
Protected by his faithful beasts of prey;
Whose presence fill'd with terror all around
Who sought to know where Majnun might be found:
Listening they heard low murmurs on the breeze
Now loud and mournful, like the hum of bees;
But still supposed him seated in his place,
Watch'd by those sentinels of the savage race.
- A year had pass'd, and still their watch they kept,
As if their sovereign was not dead, but slept
Some had been call'd away, and some had died -
At last the mouldering relics were descried;
And when the truth had caught the breath of fame,
Assembled friends from every quarter came;
Weeping, they wash'd his bones, now silvery white,
With ceaseless tears perform'd the funeral rite,
And, opening the incumbent tablet wide,
Mournfully laid him by his Leyli's side.
One promise bound their faithful hearts - one bed
Of cold, cold earth united them when dead.
Sever'd in life, how cruel was their doom!
Ne'er to be join'd but in the silent tomb!

The minstrel's legend-chronicle
Which on their woes delights to dwell,
Their matchless purity and faith,
And how their dust was mix'd in death,
Tells how the sorrow-stricken Zyd
Saw, in a dream, the beauteous bride,
With Majnun seated side by side.
In meditation deep, one night,
The other world flush'd on his sight
With endless vistas of delight -
The world of spirits; as he lay
Angels appeared in bright array,
Circles of glory round them gleaming,
Their eyes with holy rapture beaming;
He saw the ever-verdant bowers,
With golden fruit and starry flowers;
The bulbul heard, their sweets among,
Warbling his rich mellifluous song;
The ring-doves' murmuring, and the swell
Of melody from harp and shell:
He saw within a rosy glade,
Beneath a palm's extensive shade,
A throne, amazing to behold,
Studded with glittering gems and gold;
Celestial carpets near it spread
Close where a lucid streamlet stray'd;
Upon that throne, in blissful state,
The long-divided lovers sate,
Resplendent with seraphic light:
They held a cap, with diamonds bright;
Their lips, by turns, with nectar wet,
In pure ambrosial kisses met;
Sometimes to each their thoughts revealing

Each clasping each with tenderest feeling.
- The dreamer who this vision saw
Demanded, with becoming awe,
What sacred names the happy pair
In Irem-bowers were wont to bear.
A voice replied: "Yon sparkling moon
Is Leyli with her loved Majnun;
Deprived in your frail world of bliss,
They reap their great reward in this!"
Zyd, wakening from his wondrous dream,
Now dwelt upon the mystic theme,
And told to all how faithful love
Receives its recompense above.
O ye, who thoughtlessly repose
On what this flattering world bestows,
Reflect how transient is your stay!
How soon e'en sorrow fades away!
The pangs of grief the heart may wring
In life, but Heaven removes the sting;
The world to come makes bliss secure,
The world to come, eternal, pure.
What other solace for the human soul,
But everlasting rest is virtue's unvarying goal!
SAKI! Nazami's strain is sung;
The Persian poet's pearls are strung;
Then fill again the goblet high!
Thou wouldst not ask the reveller why?
Fill to the love that changes never?
Fill to the love that lives for ever!
That, purified by earthly woes,
At last in Heaven's splendour glows.

END

COMMENTS

1. Saki - Cup-bearer. In Orintal literature the cup-bearer is the great inspirer.
2. Jamshid - one of the early rulers of Persia, who after a reign of great splendour and magnificence came to a terrible end, being sawn asunder.
3. Qays - the original name of Majnun, which signifies 'mad'.
4. Leyli in Arabic signifies 'night'.
5. The mole is reckoned to be a mark of great beauty amongst Orintal writers.
6. Kaf - the Caucasus.
7. The Kaba is the celebrated mosque at Mecca said to have been built by the patriarch Abraham.
8. Gerz - a mace or club.
9. Elberz is a celebrated mountain in Persia and forms a favourite simile in the Shahnamh of Firdausi.
10. Forat - the River Euphrates
11. Diw - a demon, giant, devil, ghost or hobgoblin. The ghoul is a demon of the woods, of different shapes and colours, supposed to devour men and animals.
12. Dijla - the River Tigris
13. King Solomon by virtue of his magic seal had power over all living things. He laid all secrets bare; he cast out evil spirits; the genii were his slaves.
14. The letter Jim in Persian and Arabic is formed something like the capital 'T' of the German text; Alif is number one in writing; and the Arabic letter Mim is a small horizontal oval.
15. Zikum - an infernal tree, mentioned in the Koran, the fruit of which is supposed to be the heads of devils.
16. Farsang - a league.
17. Green is the exquisite symbol of Muslim mourning, the colour of hope renewed and the return of spring. Black is the token of hopeless despair.

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LEYLI AND MAJNUN
NIZAMI GANJAVI

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