

from *The Seven Poems Suspended in the Temple at Mecca*,
translated by F.E. Johnson

1) By Imru l-Qays b. Hujr al-Kindi (d. ca. 540)

Stop, oh my two friends, and weep for the memory of my beloved
and her abode which lies between Dakhool and Hawmal
And Tawdzih and Maqrât, whose traces have not been obliterated
by the South wind and the North wind that has blown over them.
You will see the dung of the white deer in its enclosures
as if they were seeds of pepper.
On the morning of the day they parted, it was as if I,
standing by the tribe's acacia shrubs, was breaking wild colocynth.*
My companions, stopping their camels near me there, say,
"Do not die of grief, but bear it patiently." 5
But truly my cure is the flowing tear.
But is there near ruins a place for crying?
As was your experience with Umm al-Huwairith before her
and her neighbor, Umm al-Rabâb in Mâsal.
When they stood up, the (scent of) musk came from them
like the soft breeze of a zephyr with the smell of clove.
So the tears of my eyes flowed down on my breast
for the tenderness of my love, until they wetted my sword belt.
How many pleasant days you had with them,
especially the day at Dârat Juljul. 10
And the day I killed my riding-camel (for food) for the maidens.
How pleasant was their dividing her saddle, to be carried on theirs.
Oh its wonder at being unsaddled after being saddled.
And wonder at the extravegant slaughterer.
Then the maidens began throwing her flesh (into the kettle)
and her fat like loose fringes of white silk twisted round the meat.
And the day on which I entered the *howdah* of 'Unayzah,
And she said, "Whoa, you will make me travel on foot!"
So she said while the *howdah* was swaying with us,
"You have galled my camel, Imru l-Qays, so dismount." 15
So I said to her, "Go on and loosen his reins,
And do not distance me from your oft-plucked fruit.
"Let the young camel be, and show it no pity for riding together on it.
Come let us taste your fruit, like an apple."

* The juice of the colocynth makes the eyes water

For many a (beautiful woman) like you I have visited at night
 when she was pregnant or nursing, and I diverted her thoughts.
 When the child cried behind her, she turned to him
 with one half, and her other half under me, not turned away.
 One day on the back of a sandhill she made excuses to me
 and swore an oath to which she made no exception. 20
 Oh Fatima, gently put aside this coquetry, and if you have indeed
 decided to cut off (friendship) with me, do it kindly.
 Has anything deceived you about me, that you love is killing me,
 and that as often as you order my heart, it will do as you order.
 If any one of my habits has caused you annoyance
 then put away my heart from your heart, and it will be put away.
 And your two eyes did not flow with tears, except to strike me
 with your two arrows in my broken heart, conquered by love.
 And many a fair one unseen behind her curtain, whose tent is not sought,
 I have enjoyed playing with, without rushing away. 25
 I passed by the sentries (watching) near her,
 desiring to kill me, if they could conceal my murder.
 I passed by them when the Pleiades appeared in the heavens
 appearing (like gems) in an ornamented girdle set with pearls.
 I came to her when she had taken off her clothes for sleep
 except her night-garment, and she standing near the tent screen.
 Then she said to me, "I swear by God you have no excuse (for this).
 I don't expect your bad habits will ever be removed from you.
 I went out with her; she walking and drawing behind us
 the skirts of an embroidered garment over our tracks. 30
 Then, when we had crossed the tribes enclosure, the open plain,
 with its sandy undulations and hills was sought by us.
 I drew the two sidelocks of her head (to me), and she leaned toward me,
 and she was slender of waist, but full in the ankle,
 Thin-waisted, white-skinned, not fat in the abdomen,
 her breast shining polished like a mirror.
 In complexion she was like the first egg of an ostrich — whiteness mixed
 with yellow — pure water (unsullied) had nourished her.
 She turned away and shows me her smooth (cheek), prohibiting me
 with a glancing eye like a wild animal with young in Wajrah, 35
 And a neck like the neck of a white deer
 neither disproportionate when she raises it, nor unornamented,
 And a perfect head of hair, adorning her back, black
 very dark-colored, thick like a date-cluster on a laden date tree.
 Her curls crept up to the top of her head
 and the plaits were lost in the doubled hair falling loose.
 She met me with a slender waist, thin as the twisted leather nose-rein
 of a camel, and a shank like the stem of a laden palm tree bending.

In the morning, when she awakes, the particles of musk (lie) on her bed.
 She sleeps late in the morning and does not put on her work-clothes
 She gives with thin fingers, not thick, like worms of the desert of Zabi
 and soft as the tooth-brushes of the Ishil tree.
 In the evening she brightens the darkness, as if she were
 the light tower of a monk, a recluse, in the evening.
 The wise man gazes incessantly, lovingly, towards one like her being
 well-proportioned in height between a long dress and short frock.
 The follies of men are removed after their youth,
 but my heart is not freed from your love.
 Behold many bitter contender advising, (reproaching me) for you,
 unfailing in his blame; I have turned him back from reproach. 45
 And many a night like a wave of the sea has let down
 its curtains upon me, with all kinds of griefs to try (me).
 Then I said to him [ie: the night], when he stretched his loins
 and followed with his buttocks and removed his breast distant,
 "Oh thou long night, be brightened by dawn, but the morning
 is not preferable to you (for the pain of separation continues).
 "What a wonder you are as a night, whose stars
 as it were, are (secured) by ropes of hemp to a firm rock."
 And many a leathern water-bag of the people, I have placed submissively
 its strap over my shoulder and repeatedly saddled up. 50
 And many a valley like the plain of 'Ayr, a sterile desert, have I crossed,
 where the wolf howled like a gambler with a family (to support).
 I said to him when he howled, "Our business is small in wealth
 if you also have never been prosperous.
 "If either of us obtains anything, he makes away with it,
 and he who cultivates as you and I do will become thin."
 Indeed, I started in the early morning, when the birds were still in their nests,
 on a well-bred (horse), long-bodied, outpacing the wild beasts.
 Attacking, fleeing, advancing, retiring, all together,
 like a boulder which the torrent has hurled down from on high. 55
 Bay colored, he makes the saddle-pad slide off his back
 like a smooth stone causes the rain to slip off.
 In spite of his thinness, he is very lively, and when his heat
 boils over in him, his snorting is like the boiling of a kettle.
 At full gallop, when swift horses raise up dust on the rough ground
 beaten by their hooves, out of fatigue.
 A light boy slips off his back,
 and he throws off the garments of a heavy rough rider.
 Very fast, like a child's top, whose two hands working
 in succession with the connecting string have spun it well. 60
 He has the flanks of a buck and the legs of an ostrich,
 and the gallop of a wolf, and the canter of a cub.

Well-shaped (of bone and sinew): if you stand behind him he shuts the place
 between his thighs with an ample tail, which is not crooked,
 As if, when standing in front of the house, his back was the stone
 for grinding the bride's musk or for breaking colocynth pods;
 As if the blood of the herd leaders on his neck
 were the juice of Henna in combed white hair.
 Then there appeared to us a flock of wild sheep, the ewes
 like virgins of Duwâr in long trailing robes. 65
 They turned round for flight, like a shell clearly marked on the neck
 of a boy, whose relations on both sides are distinguished.
 (The horse) caused us to overtake the foremost ones, while besides
 them were some remaining behind in a crowd not dispersing.
 He killed one after the other, a bull and a cow, overtaking them,
 and did not break into a sweat that should be washed.
 Then some of the meat-dressers were baking slices of roasted meat
 placed in a line, and some were boiling quickly the kettle.
 We returned in the evening, and the eye almost failed (to see his beauty)
 being raised to see (his upper part), but attracted to the lower. 70
 He passed the night with his saddle and bridle on, standing
 in my eyesight without being sent to the stable.
 Oh my companion, do you see the lightening, the glittering I show you
 like the flashing of the two hands in the thick crowned clouds?
 The glory of it shines, or, like the lamps of a monk,
 who has dipped the well-twisted wicks in the oil.
 I sat down with my companions, between Zârij and 'Uzayb
 after watching the lightening attentively.
 In looking for the rain, (we guessed) its downpour on the right
 was over Qatan, and on the left, Satâr, and beyond upon Yazbul. 75
 The storm commenced pouring out its waters over Kuthaifah,
 overturning the big trees called Kanahbul upon their faces.
 Then there passed over the hills of Qanân from the spray of it
 (that) caused the wild goats to descend from every haunt in it.
 And at Taimâ it did not leave the trunk of a date tree (standing)
 and not a building except those strengthened by hard stones
 As if Thabeer at the first downfall of its rain
 was a large man wrapped in a striped cloak,
 As if in the morning the summit of Mujaimir were the whirl
 of a spindle, from the flood and the debris around it. 80
 And the cloud poured out its goods on the desert of Ghabeet,
 (resembling) the arrival of a Yemeni (merchant) with loaded trunks
 As if in the morning the small birds of the valley Jiwân
 had taken a morning draught of old, pure spiced wine;
 As if in the evening the wild beasts in it drowned
 in the furthest parts of it, were the root-bulbs of a wild onion.