

An selection from a poem by Ibn Abī Rabī'a (d. 23/645?)

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At night, in Dhī Dawrāni, travelling by night imposes upon me.

The lover, blinded (by love), may take fear upon himself.

So I spent the night watching the people at the edge (of the settlement),

cautious (of) one of them walking around, and I watch.

...

My she-camel and her baggage passed the night in the empty land

fearing for a night-visitor or one who comes.

I continued to whisper to myself: where is her place,

and how do i find the aim of the affair for which I come?

Then a fragrant smell, which I knew was hers, and the love of the soul

which was nearly visible, pointed her out to my heart.

So when I sought her voice from among them, the lamps

were extinguished, and the fires were kindled for the evening.

When a little moon was hidden, I was falling down (in) the darkness,

and the herders (went to) rest and gathered in sleep for conversation.

But the voice was lowered from my hearing; I went to meet with the gait

of a snake, my body bent over, inwardly afraid of the people around.

And I greeted (her) when I came upon her, and she was startled,

and she was nearly revealed though concealing the greeting.

She said, biting (her) fingers: You exposed me.

You are a man; what is easy (in the) affair (to) you is more difficult (for me).

You show yourself when (we women) are upon you; do you not fear?

Are you protected while around me (one of) your enemies is present ?

So by Allah, I do not comprehend: Does hurrying necessity

travel with you by night, or has one whom you were wary (of) slept?

So I said to her: Rather, longing and love led me

to you, and what (every) soul among people feels

So she said, as she relented and her fear calmed down:

May your Lord, the Proud, protect and preserve you
For you are the master of eloquence, not one to fight
while you linger, (I take) you (as) a chief appointed over me.
So I passed the night (with) consolation for the eye (for) I was given what I needed.
I kissed her mouth under the open sky, and then more,
O night, whose length grows short
(when) my night before that (moment) was not short!
And O delight there, and our sitting
together; no disturbing thing troubling us.
What is kissed brings forth the scent of musk from her.
The purity of (her) front teeth, one who has such gaps (between them) is noticed.
You see it whenever it is parted; it was like
little stones of hail or chamomile in bloom.
She gazes intently at me with her two eyes as if
a little wild calf is looking at a gazelle in the midst of a thicket.
Then the night passed, except for a little of it,
and the succession of its stars nearly was falling (to the horizon).
She said that a hubbub loomed
from the people: But a rendezvous from you is reviled.
But nothing frightens me but someone calling out; they wander about
while a fair-haired sign of the dawn has appeared.
Then when she saw one among them who had noticed (the dawn)
and aroused them, she said: Be quick! What do you command?
So I said: I will declare (myself to) them openly, and either I escape them
or else the sword is taken up in reprisal and takes vengeance.
Then she said ...
I will tell the beginning of our tale to my two sisters,
but i do not know how they will help (with) what comes after.
Perhaps the two of them will ask a way out for you?
and (perhaps) they will widen (my soul) which has been oppressed?
So she stood up, dejected, the blood drained from her face

from sadness; a tear fell from her eye, descending slowly.

Then two free women came to her, wearing

two garments of silk, (raw) green silk.

...

Then the younger one said to her: I will give him my *muṭraf* [outer dress]

and my chemise and this cloak, (so) that he will be prepared.

He will stand up and walk between us unnoticed

and so our secret will not be revealed, and he will not be visible.

And so my shield was three people, two with breasts

and a girl, less than one whom I was on guard against.