

IMRU AL-QAIS

# Al-Mu'allaqat المعلقات

Stop, friends! Let's stay and weep at the thought of my love. She lived here on the desert's edge between Dakhool and Howmal.

Even now the campsite's not been totally wiped out.  
The Southerly blows sand over it, but the Northerly sweeps it away.

The fields and fences of the old home are desolate now; The dung of wild deer lies around thick as peppercorns.

The morning we parted it was as if I were standing in our tribe's gardens, in acacia-shrubs, my eyes watering at the popping colocynth pods.

As I pour out my heart in this lonely place, my friends stop their camels; shouting, "Don't kill yourself with this grief; bear this sorrow patiently. '

But I can only relieve my pain with relentless tears. Can this desolation really bring me solace?

Before I met Unaizah, I mourned for two others; Ummul-Huwairith and her neighbor Ummul-Rahab in Masal.

They were also beautiful, spreading the odor of musk as they moved, as the soft zephyr brings the scent of the clove.

So the tears dropped down on my breast, remembering days of love; The tears even wet my sword-belt, so soft was my love.

Look how many good times I've spent with beautiful girls; I especially remember the day at the oasis of Darat-i-Juljul.

On that day I killed my camel for food for the girls: who happily split up its gear to be lugged by their camels.

It's a wonder, a riddle, that an unsaddled camel was put onto saddles! The butcher was a wonder, too; so selfless in his generous gift!

Then the girls started throwing the camel's flesh into the pot;  
fat was woven with lean like loose hanks of white twisted silk.

That was the day I entered the camel's howdah, Unaizah's howdah! But she objected, saying, "Shame on you, now I'll have to go by foot.

She pushed me away, while the howdah was swaying with the motion;  
She said, "You're wearing my camel out, Oh Imru-ul-Quais, so get off.

Then I said, "Drive him on! Let his reins loose, while you turn to me.  
Don't think of the camel and how we weigh him down; let's be happy.

"Oh Unaizah, I've visited a lot of beautiful girls like you, at night; I've won them over to me, even won them away from their children.

There was another day when I walked with her behind the dunes, But she cut me short and said she was going to be a virgin forever.

“Oh, Unaizah,” I said, “have pity on me; stop flirting.  
If you’ve really decided to dump me, then do it kindly, gently.

“Don’t you realise that your love is killing me,  
And as often as you give my heart orders, it will carry them out?

“And if there’s anything you don’t like about me  
Then put my heart away from your heart, and it will stay put away.

“And your tears are like arrows sticking into my bleeding heart. I’ve had a  
lot of beauties, whose tents were out of bounds.

I evaded guards on watch, people who wanted my blood;  
who would conceal my murder, since they were unable to attack me up  
front.

I passed by these enemies when the Pleiades appeared in the heavens, like  
an ornamented girdle whose spaces are set with pearls and gems.

Then she said to me, “By god, you have no excuse for your wild life; I  
don’t think you’ll ever change.”

I went out with her; she went on foot and dragged behind her  
embroidered woolen hem, smoothing our footprints.

Then, when we’d crossed the tribal enclosure,  
we made for the middle of the open plain, with its sand-waves and dunes.

I tugged the fair side-locks of her head toward me; she leaned toward me;  
Her waist was small, her ankle was full.

Tiny waist, white skin, slender body, breast shining like a polished mirror.

Her skin was like the ostrich's first egg — white, mixed with yellow. She'd  
been fed on pure water, undisturbed by too many feet.

She turns away to show her smooth cheek, then shoots me a warning  
glance, Like that of a wild animal, with young, in the desert of Wajrah.

And she reveals a neck like the neck of a white deer; neither inordinate  
when lifted, nor unadorned.

And a glorious head of hair which, when loosened, covers her back in  
black, dark, thick clusters like dates on an overburdened palm.

Her curls creep upward to the top of her head;  
And the braids are lost in the twisted hair, and the hair falling loose.

She meets me with a waist thin as a camel's nose-rein of twisted leather.  
She's like the stem of a palm-tree bending over from the weight of its fruit.

In the morning, when she wakes, grains of musk are strewn on her bed.  
In the morning she sleeps in; no need to belt that waist with a working  
dress.

She gives with thin fingers, not thick like the worms of the Zabi desert, In  
the evening she brightens the gloom, like a monk's light-tower.

The man with good taste gazes incessantly, lovingly at someone like her:  
a good shape for her height, between a gown-wearing woman and girl in  
short skirt.

Men's games cease with their youth, but my heart does not cease to love  
you. Sour counselors said your love was disaster, but I turned away.

Night has often let its curtains fall and surround me in my grief, It has  
swallowed me as a wave would, weighed me with sorrow.

Then I said to the night, as his huge bulk dragged over me,  
As his breast, his loins, his buttocks crushed me before going on,

"Oh long night, dawn will come, but won't be any brighter without my  
love. You are a wonder, with your stars hung as if by hemp ropes to a solid  
rock.

Other times, I've filled my tribe's water-skin and braved the desert, ranged  
its wastes while the wolf howled like a gambler whose family starves.

I said to the wolf, "You make as little, achieve as little as I. Whatever we  
gain, we give away. That's how we stay thin.

Early in the morning, birds still in their nests, I mounted my horse. He was  
a thoroughbred, long-bodied, faster than wild beasts,

Quick to attack, to retreat, to turn, but firm as a rock in a torrent, A bay so  
smooth the saddle slips off him like the rain off a stone,

Thin but full of life, fire boils within him like the sputter of a boiling kettle;  
He speeds up when other horses are dragging their feet in the dust.

A boy would be blown off his back; even a strong rider loses his clothes.  
My horse is as fast as a top when a child has spun it well.

He has the flanks of a buck, the legs of an ostrich, and the stride of a wolf.  
His thick tail hides the space between his haunches, nearly sweeps the  
ground.

Standing in front of the house, his back looks like the huge grinding-stone.  
the blood of studs runs as thick in him as henna juice in combed white  
hair.