

# **The Ring of the Dove**

## **A TREATISE ON THE ART AND PRACTICE OF ARAB LOVE**

By IBN HAZAM (994-1064)

LOVE has certain signs, which the intelligent man quickly detects, and the shrewd man readily recognizes. Of these the first is the brooding gaze: the eye is the wide gateway of the soul, the scrutinizer of its secrets, conveying its most private thoughts, and giving expression to its deepest-hid feelings. You will see the lover gazing at the beloved unblinkingly; his eyes follow the loved one's every movement, withdrawing as he withdraws, inclining as he inclines, just as the chameleon's stare shifts with the shifting of the sun. I have written a poem on this topic, from which the following may be quoted.

My eye no other place of rest  
Discovers, save with thee;  
Men say the lodestone is possessed  
Of a like property.

To right or left it doth pursue  
Thy movements up or down,  
As adjectives in grammar do  
Accord them with their noun.

The lover will direct his conversation to the beloved, even when he purports however earnestly to address another: the affectation is apparent to anyone with eyes to see. When the loved one speaks, the lover listens with rapt attention to his every word; he marvels at everything the beloved says, however extraordinary and absurd his observations may be; he believes him implicitly even when he is clearly lying, agrees with him though he is obviously in the wrong, testifies on his behalf for all that he may be unjust, follows after him however he may proceed and whatever line of argument he may adopt. The lover hurries to the spot where the beloved is at the moment, endeavors to sit as near him as possible sidles up close to him, lays aside all occupations that might oblige him to leave his company, makes light of any matter however weighty that would demand his parting from him, is very slow to move when he takes his leave of him. I have put this somewhere into verse.

No captive for the gallows bound  
With more reluctance quits his cell  
Than I thy presence, in profound  
Regret to say farewell.

But when, my darling, comes the time  
That we may be together, I  
Run swiftly as the moon doth climb  
The ramparts of the sky.

At last, alas! That sweet delight  
Must end anew; I, lingering yet,  
Turn slowly, as from heaven's height  
The fixed stars creep to set.

Other signs of love are that sudden confusion and excitement betrayed by the lover when he unexpectedly sees the one he loves coming upon him unawares, that agitation which overmasters him on beholding someone who resembles his beloved or, on hearing his name suddenly pronounced...

A man in love will give prodigally to the limit of his capacity, in a way that formerly he would have refused; as if he were the one receiving the donation, he the one whose happiness is the object in view; all this in order that he may show off his good points, and make himself desirable. How often has the miser opened his purse strings, the scowler relaxed his frown, the coward leapt heroically into the fray, the clod suddenly become sharp-witted, the boor turned into the perfect gentleman, the stinker transformed himself into the elegant dandy, the sloucher smartened up, the decrepit recaptured his lost youth, the godly gone wild, the self-respecting kicked over the traces-and all because of love!

All these signs are to be observed even before the fire of Love is properly kindled, ere its conflagration truly bursts forth, its blaze waxes fierce, its flames leap up. But when the fire really takes a hold and is firmly established, then you will see the secret whispering, the unconcealed turning away from all present but the beloved.....

Other outward signs and tokens of love are the following, which are apparent to all having eyes in their heads: abundant and exceeding cheerfulness at finding oneself with the beloved in a narrow space, and a corresponding depression on being together in a wide expanse; to engage in a playful tug-of-war for anything the one or the other lays hold of; much clandestine winking; leaning sideways and supporting oneself against the object of one's affection; endeavoring to touch his hand, and whatever other part of his body one can reach, while engaged in conversation ; and drinking the remainder of what the beloved has left in his cup, seeking out the very spot against which his lips were pressed.

There are also contrary signs that occur according to casual provocations and accidental incitements, and a variety of motivating causes and stimulating thoughts. Opposites are of course likes, in reality; when things reach the limit of contrariety, and stand at the furthest bounds of divergence, they come to resemble one another. This is decreed by God's omnipotent power, in a manner that baffles entirely the human imagination. Thus, when ice is pressed a long time in the hand, it finally produces the same effect as fire. We find that extreme joy and extreme sorrow kill equally; excessive and violent laughter sends the tears coursing from the eyes. It is a very common phenomenon in the world about us. Similarly with lovers: when they love each other with an equal ardour, and their mutual affection is intensely strong, they will turn against one another without any valid reason, each purposely contradicting the other in whatever he may say; they quarrel violently over the smallest things, each picking up every word that the other lets fall and willfully misinterpreting it. All these devices are aimed at testing and proving what each is seeking in the other.

Now the difference between this sham, and real aversion and contrariness born of deep-seated hatred and inveterate contention, is that lovers are very quickly reconciled after their disputes. You will see a pair of lovers seeming to have reached the extreme limit of contrariety, to the point that you would reckon not to be mended even in the instance of a person of most tranquil spirit, wholly exempt from rancour, save after a long interval, and wholly irreparable in the case of a quarrelsome man; yet in next to no time you will observe them to have become the best of friends once more; silenced are those mutual reproaches, vanished that disharmony; forthwith they are laughing again and playfully sporting together. The same scene may be enacted several times at a single session. When you see a pair of lovers behaving in such a fashion, let no doubt enter your mind, no uncertainty invade your thoughts; you may be sure without hesitation, and convinced as by an unshakable certainty, that there lies between them a deep and hidden secret-the secret of true love. Take this then for a sure test, a universally valid experiment: it is the product only of an equal partnership in love, and a true concord of hearts. I myself have observed it frequently.

Another sign is when you find the lover almost entreating to hear the loved one's name pronounced, taking an extreme delight in speaking about him, so that the subject is a positive obsession with him; nothing so much rejoices him, and he is not in the least restrained by the fear that someone listening may realize what he is about, and someone present will understand his true motives. Love for a thing renders you blind and deaf. If the lover could so contrive, that in the place where he happens to be there should be no talk of anything but his beloved, he would never leave that spot for any other in the whole world.

It can happen that a man sincerely affected by love will start to eat his meal with an excellent appetite; yet the instant the recollection of his loved one is excited, the food sticks in his throat and chokes his gullet. It is the same if he is drinking, or talking he begins to converse with you gaily enough, and then all at once he is invaded by a chance thought of his dear one. You will notice the change in his manner of speaking, the instantaneous failure of his conversational powers; the sure signs are his long silences, the way he stares at the ground, his extreme taciturnity. One moment he is all smiles, lightly gesticulating; the next, and he has become completely boxed up, sluggish, distraught, rigid, too weary to utter a single word, irritated by the most innocent question.

Love's signs also include a fondness for solitude and a pleasure in being alone, as well as a wasting of the body not accompanied by any fever or ache preventing free activity and liberty of movement. The walk is also an unerring indication and never-deceiving sign of an inward lassitude of spirit. Sleeplessness too is a common affliction of lovers; the poets have described this condition frequently, relating how they watch the stars, and giving an account of the night's interminable length...

Among the accidents of Love may be mentioned an extreme impatience under affliction, such a paroxysm of emotion as completely overwhelms the lover and leaves him speechless, as when he sees his beloved turning from him in undisguised aversion....

Another sign of Love is that you will see the lover loving his beloved's kith and kin and the intimate ones of his household, to such an extent that they are nearer and dearer to him than his own folk, himself, and all his familiar friends.

Weeping is a well-known sign of Love; except that men differ very greatly from one another in this particular. Some are ready weepers; their tear-ducts are always overflowing, and their eyes respond immediately to their emotions, the tears rolling down at a moment's notice. Others are dry-eyed and barren of tears; to this category I myself belong. This is the result of my habit of eating frankincense to abate the palpitation from which I have suffered since childhood. I will be afflicted by some shocking blow, and at once feel my heart to be splitting and breaking into fragments; I have a choking sensation in my heart more bitter than colocynth, that prevents me from getting my words out properly, and sometimes well nigh suffocates me. My eyes therefore respond to my feelings but rarely, and then my tears are exceedingly sparse....

It will happen in Love that the lovers have evil thoughts of one another; each suspects every word the partner utters, and misconstrues it willfully; which is the origin of those reproaches which lovers often level each against each. I have an acquaintance who is normally the most unsuspecting man in the world, extremely broad-minded, possessed of great patience and untold tolerance, indulgent to a fault; yet when he is in love, he cannot endure the slightest thing between him and the object of his affection; let the least difference arise between them, and he will forthwith utter all kinds of reproaches and give voice to every manner of mistrust....

You will see the lover, when unsure of the constancy of his loved one's feelings for him, perpetually on his guard in a way that he never troubled to be before; he polishes his language, he refines his gestures and his glances, particularly if he has the misfortune and mischance to be in love with one given to making unjust accusations, or of a quarrelsome disposition.

Another sign of Love is the way the lover pays attention to the beloved; remembering everything that falls from his lips; searching out all the news about him, so that nothing small or great that happens to him may escape his knowledge; in short, following closely his every movement. Upon my life, sometimes you will see a complete dolt under these circumstances become most keen, a careless fellow turn exceedingly quick-witted.

I was seated one day at Almeria, with a knot of other people, in the shop of Ismail Ibn Yunus, the Hebrew physician who was also a shrewd and clever physiognomist. Mujahid Ibn al-Hasin al-Qaisi said to him, pointing to a certain man named Hatim-he was familiarly known as Abu 'l-Baga'-who was withdrawn apart from the rest of us, "What do you say about his man? " He looked at him for a brief moment, and then said, "He is passionately in love ". Mujahid exclaimed, "You are right; what made you say this " Ismail answered, "Because of an extreme confusion apparent in his face. Simply that; otherwise all the rest of his movements are unremarkable..."

One of the strangest origins of passion is when a man falls in love through merely hearing the description of the other party, without ever having set eyes on the beloved. In such a case he will progress through all the accustomed stages of love; there will be the sending to and fro of messengers; the exchange of letters, the anxiety, the deep emotion, the sleeplessness; and all this without actual sight of the object of affection. Stories, descriptions of beautiful qualities, and the reporting of news about the fair one have a manifest effect on the soul; to hear a girl's voice singing behind a wall may well move the heart to love, and preoccupy the mind.

All this has occurred to more than one man. In my opinion, however, such a love is a tumbledown building without any foundations. If a man's thoughts are absorbed by passionate regard for one whom he has never seen, the inevitable result is that whenever he is alone with his own reflections, he will represent to himself a purely imaginary picture of the person whose identity he keeps constantly before his mind; no other being than this takes shape in his fantasy; he is completely carried away by his imagination, and visualizes and dreams of her only. Then, if some day he actually sees the object of his fanciful passion, either his love is confirmed, or it is wholly nullified. Both these alternatives have actually happened and been known.

This kind of romance usually takes place between veiled ladies of guarded palaces and aristocratic households and their male kinsfolk; the love of women is more stable in these cases than that of men, because women are weak creatures and their natures swiftly respond to this sort of attraction, which easily masters them completely...

These conditions also obtain in the relations between friends and comrades, as I shall show in a personal reminiscence. There was once a strong bond of affection between myself and a member of a noble family; we corresponded frequently, but had never set eyes on one another. Then Allah granted me the boon of meeting him; and but a few days elapsed when a violent aversion and strong antipathy arose between us, that has continued uninterruptedly down to the present day....

Often it happens that Love fastens itself to the heart as the result of a single glance. This variety of Love is divided into two classes.

The first class is the contrary of what we have just been describing, in that a man will fall head over heels in love with a mere form, without knowing who that person may be, what her name- is, or where she lives. This has happened to more than one man ....

The second class of the variety of Love now under discussion is the contrary of what we shall be describing in the chapter next following, if Allah wills. This is for a man to form an attachment at first sight with a young lady whose name, place of abode and origin are known to him. The difference here is the speed or tardiness with which the affair passes off. When a man falls in love at first sight, and forms a sudden attachment as the result of a fleeting glance, that proves him to be little steadfast, and proclaims that he will as suddenly forget his romantic adventure; it testifies to his fickleness and inconstancy. So, it is with all things; the quicker they grow, the quicker they decay; while on the other hand slow produced is slow consumed ....

Some men there are whose love only becomes true after long converse, much contemplation, and extended familiarity. Such a one is likely to persist and to be steadfast in his affection, untouched by the passage of time what enters with difficulty goes not out easily. That is my own way in these matters, and it is confirmed by Holy Tradition. For God, as we are informed by our teachers, when He commanded the Spirit to enter Adam's body, that was like an earthen vessel-and the Spirit was afraid, and sorely distressed -said to it, "Enter in unwillingly, and come forth again unwillingly!"

I have myself seen a man of this description who, whenever he sensed within himself the beginnings of a passionate attachment, or conceived a penchant for some form whose beauty he admired, at once employed the device of shunning that person and giving up all association with him, lest his feelings become more intense and the affair get beyond his control, and he find himself completely stampeded. This proves how closely Love cleaves to such people's hearts, and once it lays hold of them never loses its grip....

I indeed marvel profoundly at all those who pretend to fall in love at first sight; I cannot easily prevail upon myself to believe their claim, and prefer to consider such love as merely a kind of lust. As for thinking that that sort of attachment can really possess the inmost heart, and penetrate the veil of the soul's recess, that I cannot under any circumstances credit. Love has never truly gripped my bowels, save after a long lapse of time, and constant companionship with the person concerned, sharing with him all that while my every occupation, be it earnest or frivolous. So I am alike in consolation and in passion; I have never in my life forgotten any romance, and my nostalgia for every former attachment is such that I well nigh choke when I drink, and suffocate when I eat. The man who is not so constituted quickly finds complete relief and is at rest again; I have never wearied of anything once I have known it, and neither have I hastened to feel at home with it on first acquaintance. Similarly I have never longed for a change for change's sake, in any of the things that I have possessed; I am speaking here not only of friends and comrades, but' also of all the other things a man uses-clothes, riding-beast, food, and so on.

Life holds no joy for me, and I do nothing but hang my head and feel utterly cast down, ever since I first tasted the bitterness of being-separated from those I love. It is an anguish that constantly revisits me, an agony of grief that ceases not for a moment to assail me. My remembrance of past happiness has abated for me every joy that I may look for in the future. I am a dead man, though counted among the living, slain by sorrow and buried by sadness, entombed while yet a dweller on the face of this mortal earth. Allah be praised, whatever be the circumstances that befall us; there is indeed no other God but He! [...]

As for what transpires at first blush as a result of certain accidental circumstances-physical admiration, and visual enchantment which does not go beyond mere external forms-and this is the very secret and meaning of carnal desire; when carnal desire moreover becomes so overflowing that it surpasses these bounds, and when such an overflow coincides with a spiritual union, in which the natural instincts share equally with the soul; the resulting phenomenon is called passionate love. Herein lies the root of the error, which misleads a man into asserting that he loves two persons, or is passionately enamored of two entirely different individuals. All this is to be explained as springing out of carnal' desire, as we have just described; it is called love only metaphorically, and not in the true meaning of the term. As for the true lover, his yearning of the soul is so excessive as to divert him from all his religious and mundane occupations; how then should he have room to busy himself with a second love affair?

Know now-may God exalt you! -that Love exercises an effective authority, a decisive sovereignty over the soul; its commands cannot be opposed, its ordinances may not be flouted, its rule is not to be transgressed; it demands unwavering obedience, and against its dominion there is no appeal. Love untwists the firmest plaits, and looses the tightest strands it dissolves that which is most solid, undoes that which is most firm; it penetrates the deepest recesses of the heart, and makes lawful things most strictly forbidden.

I have known many men whose discrimination was beyond suspicion, men not to be feared deficient in knowledge, or wanting in taste, or lacking discernment, and who nevertheless described

their loved ones as possessing certain qualities not by any means admired by the general run of mankind, or approved according to the accepted canons of beauty. Yet those qualities had become an obsession with them, the sole object of their passion, and the very last word (as they thought) in elegance. Thereafter their loved ones vanished, either into oblivion, or by separation, or jilting, or through some other accident to which love is always liable; but those men never lost their admiration for the curious qualities which provoked their approval of them, neither did they ever afterwards cease to prefer these above other attributes that are in-reality superior to them. They had no inclination whatsoever for any qualities besides these; indeed, the very features which the rest of mankind deem most excellent were shunned and despised by them. So they continued until the day of their death; all their lives were spent in sighing regretfully for the loved ones they had lost, and taking joyous delight in their remembered companionship. I do not consider, that this was any kind of affectation on their part; on the contrary, it was their true and natural disposition to admire such eccentric qualities; they chose them unreservedly, they thought none other worthy of regard, and in the very depths of their souls they did not believe otherwise.

I know a man whose loved one was somewhat short of neck; thereafter he never admired anyone, man or girl, whose neck was long and slender. I also know a man whose first attachment was with a girl inclined to be petite; he never fell in love with a tall woman after that....

Let me add a personal touch. In my youth I loved a slave-girl who happened to be a blonde; from that time I have never admired brunettes, not though their lark tresses set off a face as resplendent as the sun, or the very image of beauty itself. I find this taste to have become a part of my whole make-up and constitution since those early days; my soul will not suffer me to acquire any other, or to love any type but that. This very same thing happened to my father also (God be pleased with him!), and he remained faithful his first preference until the term of his earthly life was done.

All the Caliphs...and especially the sons of al-Nasir, were without variation or exception disposed by nature to prefer blondes. I have myself seen them, and known others who had seen their forebears, from the days of al-Nasir's reign down to the present day; every one of them has been fair-haired, taking after, their mothers, so that this has become a hereditary trait with them; all but Sulaiman al-Zafir (God have mercy on him!), whom I remember to have had black ringlets and a black beard. As for al-Nasir and al-Hakam al-Mustansir (may God be pleased with them!), I have been informed by my late father, the vizier, as well as by others, that both of them were blond and blue-eyed. The same is true of Hisham al-Mu'ayyad, Muhammad al-Mahdi, and `Abd al-Rahman al-Murtada (may God be merciful to them all!); I saw them myself many times, and had the honour of being received by them, and I remarked that they all had fair hair and blue eyes. Their sons, their brothers, and all their near kinsmen possessed the selfsame characteristics. I know not whether this was due to a predilection innate in them all, or whether it was in consequence of a family tradition handed down from their ancestors, and which they followed in their turn. This comes out clearly in the poetry of `Abd al-Malik Ibn Marwan Ibn `Abd al-Rahman Ibn Marwan, the descendant of the Caliph al-Nasir, better known as al-Taliq; he was the greatest poet of Andalusia in those times, and in most of his love lyrics he serenades blondes. I have seen him personally, and sat in his company....

## OF THE MESSENGER

The next scene in the love-play, now that confidence prevails and complete sympathy has been established, is the introduction of the Messenger. He needs to be sought and chosen with great care, so that he shall be both a good and an energetic man; he is the proof of the lover's intelligence, for in his hands (under God's Providence) rest the life and death of the lover, his honour and his disgrace.

The Messenger should be presentable, quick-witted, able to take a hint and to read between the lines, possessed of initiative and the ability to supply out of his own understanding things which may have been overlooked by his principal; he must also convey to his employer all that he observes with complete accuracy; he ought to be able to keep secrets and preserve trusts; he must be loyal, cheerful and a sincere well-wisher. Should he be wanting in these qualities, the harm he will do to the lover for whom he is acting will be in strict proportion to his own shortcomings.

Lovers for the most part employ as their messengers to the beloved either a humble and insignificant fellow to whom nobody will pay much attention, because of his youthfulness or his scruffy look or untidy appearance; or a very respectable person to whom no sort of suspicion will attach on account of his show of piety, or because he is of advanced years. Women too are frequently used, especially those who hobble along on sticks, and carry rosaries, and are wrapped up in a pair of red cloaks. I remember how at Cordova young women had been put on their guard against such types, wherever they might happen to see them. Women plying a trade or profession, which gives them ready access to people, are popular with lovers-the lady doctor for instance, or the blood-letter, the peddler, the broker, the coiffeuse, the professional mourner, the singer, the soothsayer, the schoolmistress, the

errand girl, the spinner, the weaver, and the like. It is also found convenient to employ a person who is closely related to the beloved, and who will therefore not be grudging admittance.

How many an inaccessible maiden has proved approachable by using messengers like these! How often have apparently insurmountable difficulties been easily overcome, and the one who seemed so far off proved close at hand, the one most refractory been readily tamed! How many disagreeable surprises have befallen well-protected veils, thick curtains, close guarded boudoirs, and stoutly fashioned doors, at the hands of suchlike persons! But for my desire to call attention to them, I would never have mentioned these types at all; but I felt bound to do so, in order that others may have their eyes open, and not readily trust in any of their sort.

### **OF UNION**

One of the significant aspects of Love is Union. This is a lofty fortune, an exalted-rank, a sublime degree, a lucky star; nay more, it is life renewed, pleasure supreme, joy everlasting, and a grand mercy from Allah.

Were it not that this world below is a transitory abode of trial and trouble, and Paradise a home where virtue receives its reward, secure from all annoyances, I would have said that union with the beloved is that pure happiness which is without alloy, and gladness unswayed by sorrow, the perfect realization of hopes and the complete fulfillment of one's dreams.

I have tested all manner of pleasures, and known every variety of joy; and I have found that neither intimacy with princes, nor wealth acquired, nor finding after lacking, nor returning after long absence, nor security after fear and repose in a safe refuge none of these things so powerfully affects the soul as union with the beloved, especially if it come after long denial and continual banishment. For then the flame of passion waxes exceeding hot, and the furnace of yearning blazes up, and the fire of eager hope rages ever more fiercely. The fresh springing of herbs after the rains, the glitter of flowers when the night clouds have rolled away in the hushed hour between dawn and sunrise, the plashing of waters as they run through the stalks of golden blossoms, the exquisite beauty of white castles encompassed by verdant meadows not lovelier is any of these than union with the well-beloved, whose character is virtuous, and laudable her disposition, whose attributes are evenly matched in perfect beauty. Truly that is a miracle of wonder surpassing the tongues of the eloquent, and far beyond the range of the most cunning speech to describe: the mind reels before it, and the intellect stands abashed. ...

### **On Separation**

I have seen this happen to many people, and can relate to you a personal experience of the same order; for I am also one who has been afflicted by this calamity, and surprised by this misfortune. I was deeply in love with, and passionately enamoured of, a certain, slave-girl once in my possession, whose name was Nu`m: she was a dream of desire, a paragon of physical and moral beauty, and we were in perfect harmony. She had known no other man before me, and our love for each other was mutual and perfectly satisfying. Then the fates ravished her from me, and the nights and passing days carried her away; she became one with the dust and stones. At the time of her death I was not yet twenty, and she younger than I. For seven months thereafter I never once put off my garments; my tears ceased not to flow, though I am a man not given to weeping, nor discovering relief in lamentation. And by Allah, I have not found consolation for her loss even to this day. If ransoms could have been of avail, I would have ransomed her with everything of which I stand possessed, my inheritance and all my earnings, aye, and with the most precious limb of my body, swiftly and willingly. Since her death life has never seemed sweet to me; I have never forgotten her memory, nor been intimate with any other woman. My love for her blotted out all that went before, and made anathema to me all that came after it.

A visitor from Cordova informed me, when I asked him for news of that city, that he had seen our mansion in Balat Mughith, on the western side of the metropolis; its traces were well nigh obliterated, its way marks effaced; vanished were its spacious patios. All had been changed by decay; the joyous pleasantries were converted to barren deserts and howling wildernesses; its beauty lay in shattered ruins. Where peace once reigned, fearful chasms yawned; wolves resorted there, ghosts frolicked, demons sported. Wild beasts now lurked where men like lions, abounding in wealth and every luxury, once paid court to statuesque maidens; who were all now scattered and dispersed to the four corners of the earth. Those gracious halls, those richly ornamented boudoirs, that once shone like the sun, the loveliness of their panorama lifting all cares from the mind, being now entirely overwhelmed by desolation and utter destruction seemed rather like the gaping mouths of savage beasts, proclaiming the end that awaits this mortal world, and revealing visibly the final destiny of those who dwell therein, the ultimate fate of those you now see abiding here below; so that you would be moved, after so long reluctance to abandon the world, henceforth eagerly to renounce it. Then I remembered the days that I had passed in that fair mansion, the joys I had known there, the months of

my ardent youth spent in the company of blooming virgins, very apt to awaken desire in the heart of the most sedate young man. I pictured those maidens now lying beneath the dust, or dispersed to distant parts and far regions, scattered by the hand of exile, torn--to -pieces by the fingers of expatriation. I saw in my mind's eye the ruin of that noble house, which I had once known so beautiful and thriving, and in the shadow of whose well-ordered establishment I had passed my childhood; empty were those courts once so densely thronged. I seemed to hear the voices of owls hooting and screeching over those passages; astir of old with the busy concourse of people in whose midst I grew to manly estate. Then night followed day with the selfsame bustle, the selfsame coming and going of countless feet; but now day followed night there, and all was forever hushed and desolate. These sad reflections filled my eyes with tears and my heart with anguish; my soul was shattered as if by a jagged rock, and the misery in my mind waxed ever greater...

Then my father the vizier (God rest his soul) moved from our new mansion in Rabad al-Zahira on the eastern side of Cordova, to our old residence on the western side, in the quarter of Balat Mughith; this was on the third day of the accession of Muhammad al-Mahdi to the Caliphate. I followed him in February 1009; but the girl did not come with us, for reason that obliged her to remain behind. Thereafter, when Hisham al-Mu'ayyad succeeded to the throne, we were, sufficiently preoccupied with the misfortunes which came upon us, thanks to the hostility of his ministers, we were sorely tried by imprisonment, surveillance and crushing fines, and were finally obliged to go into hiding. Civil war raged far and wide; all classes suffered from its dire effects, and us in particular. At last my father the vizier died (God have mercy on his soul!), our situation being still as I have described, on the afternoon of Saturday, 22 June 1012. Things remained unchanged with us thereafter, until presently the day came when we again had a funeral in the house, one of our relatives having deceased. I saw her standing there amid the clamour of mourning, all among the weeping and wailing women. She revived that passion long buried in my heart, and, stirred my now still ardour, reminding me of an ancient troth, an old love, an epoch gone by, a vanished time, departed months, faded memories, periods perished, days forever past, obliterated traces. She renewed my griefs, and reawakened my sorrows; and though upon that day I was afflicted and cast down for many reasons, yet I had indeed not forgotten her; only my anguish was intensified, the fire smouldering in my heart blazed into flame, my unhappiness was exacerbated, my despair was multiplied. Passion drew forth from my breast all that lay hidden within it; soul answered the call, and I broke out into plaintive rhyme.

Then destiny struck its heaviest blows, and we were banished from our loved abodes; the armies of the Berbers triumphed over us. I set forth from Cordova on 13 July 1013, and after that one glimpse of her she vanished from my sight for six long years and more. Then I came again into Cordova in February 1019 and lodged with one of our womenfolk; and there I saw her. I could scarcely recognize her, until someone said to me, "This is So-and-so"; her charms were so greatly changed. Gone was her radiant beauty, vanished her wondrous loveliness; faded now was that lustrous completion which once gleamed like a polished sword or an Indian mirror; withered was the bloom on which the eye once gazed transfixed seeking avidly to feast upon its dazzling splendor only to turn away bewildered. Only a fragment of the whole remained, to tell the tale and testify to what the complete picture had been. All this had come to pass because she took too little care of herself, and lacked the guardian hand which had nourished her during the days of our prosperity, when our shadow was long in the land; as also because she had been obliged to besmirch herself in those inevitable excursions to which her circumstances had driven her, and from which she had formerly been sheltered and exempted.

For women are as aromatic herbs, which if not I tended soon lose their fragrance; they are as edifices, which, if not constantly cared for, quickly fall into ruin. Therefore it has been said that manly beauty is the truer, the more solidly established, and of higher excellence, since it can endure, and that without shelter, onslaughts the merest fraction of which would transform the loveliness of a woman's face beyond recognition: such enemies as the burning heat of noonday, the scorching wind of the desert, every air of heaven, and 'all the changing moods of the seasons.

If I had enjoyed the least degree of intimacy with her, if she had been only a little kind to me, I would have been beside myself with happiness; I verily believe that I would have died for joy. But it was her unremitting aloofness which schooled me patience, and taught me to find consolation. This then was one of those cases in which both parties may excusably forget, and not be blamed for doing so: there has been no firm engagement that should require their loyalty, no covenant has been entered into obliging them to keep faith, no ancient compact exists no solemn plighting of troths, the breaking and from getting of which should expose them to justified reproach. ...

To speak on matters such as these requires a breast unencumbered by cares, and a heart free from anxieties. To remember anything at all, to preserve a faint trace of former joys, to recollect happy events long past, is indeed a miracle for a mind like mine, considering all that has happened, and the heavy calamities that have befallen me. You know how restless my brain is, and how broken my spirit, on account of the situation in which we now are: remote from our loved habitations, exiled far from our

motherland, assailed by the treacheries of time and the cruel wrongs of authority, betrayed by the fickleness of friends, oppressed by malignant circumstances, by change of fortune and loss of plenty, by deprivation of patrimony and personal winnings, by confiscation of earnings of fathers and grandfathers, a stranger in a strange land, robbed alike of wealth and position, beset by anxious thoughts to protect my family and children, despairing ever to return to the bosom of my people, condemned to struggle against fate, and awaiting the further blows of destiny. Nevertheless I pray that Allah may so grant that we shall never complain, save only unto Him: may He restore us yet to the best that we have ever known. Verily, what He has spared to us is more than what He has taken away, and that which He has left to us is greater than that He has deprived us of. Infinite are the gifts of God that encompass us, unbounded the graces of God that overwhelm us words can never express, thanks equal to His benefactions. All these things spring from His abounding generosity. We have no authority over ourselves, for from Him we come and to Him we return: every loan must revert to the lender. Praise be to Him first and last, at the ending as at the beginning.

*Translated by A.J. ARBERRY*