

AN ARABIAN KNIGHT AND A DESERT POETESS

TRANSLATED FROM THE ARABIC BY NA KATIBAH

An Arabian knight was on his way to a spring of water, seeking repose from a long, wearisome journey. On approaching the spot he heard a damsel singing:—

O, bid thy phantom from my sleep depart,
 Mayhap in slumber rests my flaming heart;
 Lovelorn, I turn me on an irksome bed,
 And seek in vain the comforts of the dead.
 Since thou wouldst heal, relenting say thy "yea,"
 And quicken thou this aching lump of clay.

"Whose verses art thou repeating, sweet songster?" he asked. "Mine," came the reply. "Nay if they be truly thine," replied the knight, "canst thou preserve the words and the measure, but only change the rhyme?"

Thereupon the damsel sang:—

O, bid thy phantom from my sleep begone,
 Mayhap in slumber drowns my every moan;
 Lovelorn, I turn me on my burning breast,
 And seek in vain the comforts of the blest.
 Since thou wouldst heal, but grant thy love's rebirth,
 And quicken thou this aching lump of earth.

"Thou hast indeed done well—but canst thou yet make another attempt?" pleaded the knight. "Willingly," replied the desert maiden and sang:—

O, bid thy phantom from my sleep retire,
 Mayhap in slumber ebbs my raging fire;
 Lovelorn, I'm tossed by burning wave on wave,
 And seek in vain the comforts of the grave.
 Since thou wouldst heal, thy willing heart now trust,
 And quicken thou this restless pinch of dust.

"Sweet poetess! let me importune thee but once more. Thou re-echoest the musings of my soul. Wouldst thou, pretty one?" "As thou desirest," replied the maid and again sang:—

O, bid thy phantom from my sleep recoil,
 Mayhap in slumber ends my fruitless toil;
 Lovelorn, I turn me on my bed of gloom,
 And seek in vain the comforts of the tomb.
 Since thou wouldst heal, but breathe thy love divine,
 And quicken thou this withered heart of mine.