ENGLISH TITLE:
Bitter and Sweet

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ORIGINAL TITLE:
Eztia eta ozpina

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FIRST PART

DREAMS OF MARRAKESH

Every year, towards summer, a single car used to arrive in Imlil. All of us children and young people would keep watch over the road and then, all at once, we'd see a whirlwind of dust rising up, leave everything we were doing and go to welcome Mohamed, because it was he who used to come to our village every year, towards summer, in that single car.

We used to shout as we ran towards him and then he, from the window of his elegant Renault, would throw sweets he'd brought from France at us, saying "Here you are" to us as if we were chickens.

"It's about time you cleaned this donkey-path!", he used to say to us while cackling with laughter. "Is this how you welcome a local lad?"

Mohamed was our brother Abdelhadi's closest friend, and I couldn't wait to hear the news about him.

"Has he got to France? Has he got there?" I used to ask as soon as he got out of his car.

But as Mohamed always used to want to get together with Yamila first of all (and give her all the kisses he'd saved up for her throughout the year, along with a piece of jewellery or silk he'd brought for her), he would tell me to wait, we'd talk in length at another moment, and, in the meantime, I should clean his dust-covered car.

I was as proud as anything with my friends about being Mohamed's favourite; I was the only one he told to clean his car. And before he came back from being with Yamila, and before starting to clean it, I would get into the car, hold onto the steering wheel and dream that some day I would head off for Marrakesh and, like a stork, I would cross the famous Straits of Gibraltar, right across Spain and, finally, on reaching France, I would get rich like Mohamed…

At home, though, they didn't care much for Mohamed. Dad, for instance, called him that damned heathen, and, even though Mohamed used to bring us a present every summer, spoke of him with scorn. And he looked me up and down, too, if I rushed home and told them the latest news about Mohamed and Abdelhadi, because both of their names were completely forbidden in our home.

Every afternoon Mohamed used to take Yamila to a pretty secluded spot, not far from the valley where I herded our goats and lambs, and I used to enjoy spying on the couple there. From my hiding place I could see Mohamed lying on top of Yamila, and they used to giggle while they were playing. At the beginning Mohamed would stroke her hair, playing with it and whispering something to her; and sometimes Yamila would threaten to hit him, while other times they'd start kissing. If Yamila kissed him, Mohamed would start doing what Blackie, our billy goat, used to do with the female goats.

I used to spend a long time spying on them from the sand bank, until I saw them walk away holding hands. Then, hoping that they might have lost a coin or two there, I used to go to their hiding place and search. It was then, for the first time, that I saw those slippery sheaves that Mohamed used for his seed; but it wasn't until I went to Marrakesh that I discovered why he did all that.

One day when Yamila got angry with Mohamed, I finally got to hear the latest news about Abdelhadi. That day, after they'd been quiet together for a while, Yamila stood up and walked away from Mohamed without a word. He

followed after her with his head down: he asked her to forgive him, saying it had all been a joke, and he would never say anything like that to her again; but when he got close to where I was, he gave up.

"You're just a young buck, but you really know how to be in the wrong place."

I don't know if he was talking to himself or to me. But then he did look at me, and he made me a proposition:

"Look, Selim, if you help me get together a beautiful bunch of flowers, I'll give you a French franc, and, once we finish, I'll tell you about your brother, if you like." If he hadn't mentioned Abdelhadi, I would have wondered how many dirhams made up a franc, if fact, I would probably have asked him, but once he brought my brother up, I couldn't think of anything else. It was about three years since Abdelhadi have left home, and since then we hadn't heard a thing about him. Dad, in any case, forbade us to mention our brother's name, and all that did was to make us even more curious.

"Has he finally got to France?", I blurted out.

"This time he nearly got there, but they caught him on the final stretch..."

What on earth! Caught again... And after a heavy silence following his answer, while we were picking flowers, I remembered my friends. From what they had told me, when my brother had been born, the midwife had taken a lemon, cut it in half, and put a drop in each of the baby's eyes. That made him open his mouth and, as was the custom, she put her index finger in. Apparently she had felt a tiny tooth, because without saying a word – not even the usual "He's going to be a clever, strong boy" – she'd frowned and left. And as finding a baby with early teeth brings bad luck, everyone thought Abdelhadi was going to be unlucky, and life wasn't going to give him anything good. Even so, as I'd only ever heard those things away from home and in a mocking tone, there was no way of knowing if they were to be believed or not.

"He's in Tanger bullring now", Mohamed added, "along with another thousand detainees. Many of them were caught on the Straits of Gibraltar; some of the others, though, like your brother, got stopped further away."

"Did you manage to speak with my brother? Is he okay? Did he say anything else? Did he ask you to say hello to me?", I blurted out.

"Yes; this time I paid some money and I got to talk with him."

"And then?" I was on a knife's edge.

"On his latest attempt he got to the French border, to a city called Donostia. There was a bloody Portuguese man there; he was supposed to get on well with the truck drivers. Along with them, sometimes he hid three people, sometimes five in trucks going to France, but when it was your brother's turn the police got suspicious, which sometimes happens, and some damn truck driver reported the Portuguese smuggler... As they had agreed, at midnight the Portuguese man and three of them met on the outskirts of the city, the truck driver arrived with his trailer, and just when your brother was about to get in, shit, the police arrived! Now, as I say, he's in the bullring at Tanger, who knows how long he'll be there, but he's not giving up... In any case, the authorities won't say anything about it, they don't want your brother to know anything. But when he reaches France they'll let you know right away."

"Don't worry; I won't speak whatever happens", I promised him.

And I certainly wasn't going to say anything. I couldn't even mention my brother at home, and I didn't want to embarrass myself in front of my friends. What Mohamed had told me made really sad; I took a little fresh water from Ighighayene stream, and then carried on looking for flowers. But what if those stories of Mohamed's were meant to frighten me, and stop me from leaving Imlil? Because I was dying to get away from there and make myself rich. What's more, I wasn't like Abdelhadi; when I was born, they hadn't found any sign of teeth in my mouth. I didn't have any doubt that I was going to have better luck than my brother, and I didn't leave Mohamed alone:

"I'm going to leave here and get rich like you. I'm going to buy my dad a tractor, the finest silk dress for my mum, and I'll bring my sisters the most expensive perfumes..."

I didn't like the crooked smile Mohamed gave me then at all.

"Think about it carefully, Selim. Where are you going to get the money to go to France from? I'm going to give you a franc, but you'll need a lot of francs, a whole lot of them. You'll need papers, too, and to be over eighteen and, if possible, a job contract... Otherwise there's no way you'll do it."

"I'll go to Marrakesh first. I'm not in a hurry. I'll work there until I'm eighteen and, after I've saved some money, I'll leave in the spring like the storks do, and fly away", I said to him, waving my arms like wings.

"At least keep in mind what happened to Abdelhadi", Mohamed said as if that were a threat. "And watch out: don't repeat anything I've said!"

Finally we found bunch of flowers for Yamila, and Mohamed gave me the franc he'd promised me. With that coin in my hand, I felt happy for a moment: I already had my first franc for the journey.

One day I, too, would come back to Imlil in a big car, and I'd throw as many sweets as I wanted to at the children from the car window, saying "Here you are!", and I'd bring my parents and my sisters a load of presents and, to celebrate my return, I'd bring musicians from Marrakesh, and we'd have an incredible party. Yeah; there was no way I'd be coming back empty-handed. And in the summer, when the children saw a cloud of dust on the road to Imlil, they wouldn't know if it was Mohamed or Selim bringing tons of presents back.

The day I'd been with Mohamed I dreamed about Hiazum, archangel Gabriel's horse. When Allah wanted to tell the prophet Mohamed his intentions, he used to call Gabriel, who would use Hiazum, who was quicker thinking than him, an untiring, beautiful horse. In my dream, the sand-coloured horse had a

white star on his forehead, he carried me off to a wonderful, far-off city, and, on returning, I was loaded with riches, and I brought Abdelhadi back with me, sitting behind me.

When he left, my brother had said that he was going to Marrakesh to sign his papers for military service; but nobody at home believed him about that. Although nobody ever said it, we all knew it: just as his friend Mohamed had already done, he was dying to go to France, and fill his pockets with money there before he came back home.

But Abdelhadi was the eldest child, and he couldn't just leave home and the family like that. Which is why Dad did all he could to dampen his intentions:

"The grass is always greener on the other side."

In spite of his efforts, Abdelhadi did leave, and, after saying goodbye to us in a way he never did, Dad went up into the hills to hide his fury. From there he saw his successor leave without bidding him farewell, and then he came back to us with the whitest of white faces, and forbade us from ever mentioning Abdelhadi, from ever bringing his name up again. From then on we kept our memories of Abdelhadi in a cage, and maybe that's why he was always on my mind.

When I left too, Dad was like a goat whose kid has been taken away, or Mount Tubkal when the mist rolls off it. But he acted in a very different way with me. I don't know where he got the strength from, but he embraced me, and then gave me two chickens.

"There you are. If you want you can sell them at Asni market; you're going to need a lot of money to get across the sea and all the way to France. (Back then nobody knew how easily I was going to get across the sea, nor how much I was going to suffer to get over a bloody river...).

I came down from the Ighighayene stream's valley with Dad and Uncle (that's what we called our grey donkey) as I had done a thousand times before. That was the way we used to go to Asni market every two weeks; we sold wheat, corn, chickens, eggs and cakes there, and went back to Imlil with coloured wool, some farming tool or another, or something else we'd bought, and the stories we'd picked up. But this time I was more alone than an eagle, and full of memories as I made my way.

"When I was a child", my dad had once told me, "I used to go to Asni market with my late father, just as I am with you now. I can still remember the first time we went there: "Dad", I asked him, "are there any other towns on the road from Aroumd to Asni?" – I had never left Aroumd before then. "Yes", he answered, "there's just one town on the way... Imlil. In the whole of the Atlas mountains you won't find any women as beautiful as the ones there." "And are there any towns beyond Asni?" I asked him, insatiable for knowledge. And he said: "Yes, after you leave Asni, there's Tahanaout; and a long way further along, Marrakesh, the Red City, and even further along, the sea..." And over time I found out that on the other side of the sea there were many other countries, places where they hadn't heard of Allah, and closer to us there were other famous cities too: Fez, Rabat, and Casablanca. Which is why I couldn't wait for some family to arrive in Aroumd, or for a story-teller to arrive and tell us things about the wide world; but that very seldom happened, only during festivities, or when somebody in the town died."

On the road to Asni my heart was full of happiness mixed with memories, joy with sadness, and I felt sick with anxiety. Now I was the one crossing the sea and going to countries where they hadn't heard of Allah...

"At home", I went on remembering, "when we asked where children came from, sometimes they used to say they brought them from Asni market in a small basket; other times, though, they'd say that the archangel Gabriel brought them on his horse, Hiazum, and left them at our front door. Yeah, right!" Dad said to me. I'd just said goodbye to him in Imlil, and I'd only be able to embrace him once again if I got rich.

And shortly, moved by those memories, I reach Asni market all by myself: no Dad, no Uncle. There I sold the chickens Dad had given me at the highest possible price, and I remember very well the two things I did next: I bought an egg, cracked it open and swallowed it down; and I went to get my hair cut by the barber who was there on market days.

He was a very manly barber, he talked all the time, and it was he who told me that there was a lorry that went back to Marrakesh in the afternoon, and I'd be able to travel in it for just a small fee. So instead of having to walk for two days, the truck took me there, swaying from side-to-side, in just four hours.

There were fifteen of us in the truck's trailer, all together with bundles of things and a load of animals. We reached the city around dusk, and, while I was looking at the walls in amazement, the barber said to me:

"Well, this is Marrakesh. It's also called the Red City because the sky turns it red at dusk every day." And I remembered what Dad had said right away, and that the sea came after the city...

I found that red city amazing from the very start, and I spent two years there.

Taking the few dirhams I had left from selling the chickens, I threw away my ragged childhood djellaba, and bought some long trousers in the bazaar. Then I swapped a fossil I'd brought along in my bag for a T-shirt with a tourist from who knew where. And in my new clothes, and almost without realising it, I became a guide for the see-all-buy-all tourists who came to Marrakesh.

At first, along with doing the heavy work at a laundry, I stayed with the generous barber I had met in Asni. A little later his son, Mahjubi, came back from Casablanca on holiday, and he showed me all the city's nooks and crannies. Just as I'd seen at first, Marrakesh was amazing: the atmosphere in Xema-el-Fna

square was like a dream, the camel market in Bab-el-Khemis every Thursday, the thousands of swallows flying above the city, and so many other things. But the more I moved around the city, the more I saw behind the veil of its secrets, the more revolting I found it…

"Here everyone looks after themselves and, as far as possible, leaves the next guy to his own business", Mahjubi warned me.

He also advised me to stop working at the laundry and start working with tourists: they spent their money like water. But there were official guides for the tourists, and I just had two options: giving the police part of my earnings (which, for another thing, would delay my journey), or work completely free, but with the risk that involved. I chose the second option.

When I started off as a guide I worked really hard. In the morning I'd go to the bus park, talk with some small group of foreigners – I was the goatherd, they were the goats –, and start the show for them. Just in case, I'd walk a few metres away from them, and only after checking that there was nothing risky around – police, official guides, or people who'd report non-official guides – would I mingle with the tourists and take them to the most beautiful, hidden places in the Red City.

Little by little, I got to know about the city's different customs, religions and politics thanks to the tourists. And Marrakesh was also my very own language school: first the greetings, then the numbers, and then the main words and phrases. And they would also ask me how to greet people in Arabic: expressions like *Absalam aalaikom* (Peace be with you) and *Ua aalaikom absalam* (And peace be with you); and how to describe a pretty girl (*Albent yamila*), and say thank you (*Sukran*), and the foulest swear words; finally they would ask me to write their names in Arabic, or whatever they told me in our snake-like writing.

The tourists seemed like happy people, always with a smile on their faces and, thanks to that, they always liked to see themselves in the photos they took all the time. Their hand which had never done a day's work, and delicate skin,

and I had no idea where they got all that money from: they spent all day buying presents, see-all-buy-all. And that made me realise they must have had huge houses to keep so many things. And so, bit by bit, saving my first dirhams, I began to dream I would visit their countries on my journey, and, above all, that I would make a triumphal return to Imlil.

That was how I started to get good at attracting those foreign people: "Mesdames, messieurs, venez, venez avec moi; je vous montrerai les lieux les plus beaux, les marchandises les plus exotiques..."[1]. During the show I used to take the tourists to several shops, and, as I'd already spoken with the shopkeepers, a percentage of the sales – different in every place – was for me. Once in a while there were other types of exchanges too: a beautiful piece of tapistry swapped for ten bottles of whiskey, for instance, and then they'd give me one bottle, which, out of gratitude, I'd give Mahjubi.

Hearing the other guides doing so, I started calling the foreign men Sinbad or Ali Baba, and the women Scheherazade, knowing well they liked to be called those names and, when we said farewell, they'd give me a larger tip. But just mentioning those names brings story-tellers and Ramadan to mind...

The army fired a large cannon from Gueliz castle as a quarter to seven, and it was heard all over the city; then people stopped their day-long fast, and rushed to Xema-el-Fna square. I would carry on working for a while, until the tourists grew tired, and then I'd go to the bazaar and go into any of the restaurants and ask for a plate of harira; then, with the warmth of a full belly, I'd go back to the square and enjoy myself, watch a fire-eater, admire a serpent-charmer at work, and then listen to Berber music, which I liked so much, and then go to listen to Kamil, the blind story-teller.

1 In French in the original: "Ladies and gentlemen, come this way. I will show you the most beautiful places, the most exotic merchandise..."

I particularly liked the Ramadan nights; and the square was shadows and light from dusk onwards and, at midnight, the stories told to the light of the moon brought about another type of atmosphere. I was fully attentive until the early hours, and then I'd go back to the barber's house to sleep.

Kamil knew as many stories as there are grains of sand in the desert by heart, and every night he would take a few grains, and show them to us listeners – some sitting, some standing – like jewels.

"In a far-off kingdom, they say there was a widowed king who lived with his two daughters", he began. The daughters were called Anisa and Adjib, and although they were both incredibly charming, Adjib was the younger and the more graceful. Adjib was the daughter of the king's second wife and, as the years went by, Anisa became more and more infuriated by her.

They lived a quiet, peaceful life in that kingdom until, one afternoon, a wounded messenger knocked on the palace door: "There are thousands of soldiers, all armed to the teeth; they're coming on hundreds of camels and elephants…", he was able to say before he drew his last breath.

The king, frightened, and having to take decisions quickly, said to his eldest daughter: "My dear Anisa, as you are prudent and hard-working, today I am going to give you a task of great responsibility. There are frightening enemies about to attack the city, and this is what I want to ask you to do: take Adjib and a servant you trust and, taking advantage of the darkness of night, leave the palace as soon as possible. You are going to take the kingdom's most valuable treasure with you, but nobody must suspect that, so you'll wear servants' clothes and travel on a single camel."

By dawn the next day the fugitives were far from the city, but they carried on travelling and, seven days later, as the king had ordered, Anisa asked the servant to dig a deep hole to hide the treasure in. But her poisoned tongue also said something the king had not ordered: "Tonight, take a knife and stab it into my sister's heart. My father, your king, wants that, and it's best to kill her

without warning rather than letting our enemies torture her. Then bury Adjib's body and, after covering it well with earth, hide the treasure on top."

The following morning, the servant went to tell Anisa that he had done everything she had told him to, and she made him a herbal tea, but, as she put some sleeping potion in too, the faithful servant fell fast asleep. Making a huge effort, Anisa dragged the sleeping servant to the covered up hole, and buried him on top of the treasure. Her sister dead, the treasure there and the buried servant about to die, seeing that everything was properly covered up, and that the only witness had been the sun, Anisa took refuge in a village.

Some weeks later, after a lot of fighting and slaughter, peace arrived at the same time as victory to the king's realm. And then he, as quickly as possible, sent messengers out to the four corners of the kingdom. Before long, they brought Anisa back from a far-away village, but the king, on seeing her alone, was filled with sorrow and pain. He cried aloud as he embraced his daughter, and he asked her: "What about your sister? Where is our dear Adjib? Has something happened to her?"

Anisa, like some vile beast from the desert, said that the servant had killed Adjib, and then suggested they share out the treasure; but she had wanted vengeance for his evil actions, and so she had put some sleeping potion into his tea, and, she admitted, given him the cruellest of deaths by burying him alive.

After hearing about those terrible events, the king felt great bitterness in his heart. Then he gathered up his strength somehow and, stuttering as he did so, ordered a group of soldiers to go and bring back the servant, the treasure, and, above all, his daughter's body to the palace. Anisa went with them too, but when they had finished digging up the hole the only things they found were the servant and the treasure. They kept on digging, going deeper and deeper, dug many other holes nearby, but found not even the slightest trace of Adjib. Anisa was as surprised as she was furious.

Adjib's disappearance led to many rumours and murmuring around the king's realm. It was said that the gene Djin himself had stolen the girl's body; but that mystery would never have been solved if a famous astrologist had not arrived one day: Ibrahim Ibn Abu Ayub. He had walked from Egypt, leaning on his hieroglyph-covered rod, and, the desperate king having heard of him, ordered him to be brought to the palace right away.

After listening to the king's and Anisa's terrible story, the astrologist went to a cave to reflect on it, and to ask the stars for help. One evening the king invited the astrologist to have supper with them, and he accepted. During supper he wouldn't stop talking: wars from the distant past, stories about the prophet which weren't even in the Koran, secrets about the stars, the way thieves had been tortured at one time in the past... He brought all of that and a thousand other things up.

After Adjib's death and disappearance, the king's face had become sad and pale. He hardly slept at night, and because of that he was not very surprised when, after supper, Ibrahim knocked on his door: "Please do me a favour: get dressed and come with me."

He thought that Ibrahim was going to try to console him when he saw they were going to Anisa's room. They silently opened the door, and saw Anisa turning over and over as she was having a nightmare. Apparently, that was because of the things the astrologer had talked about during supper.

In her nightmare, Anisa saw everyone rising against her, and they insulted her and damned her while blaming her for her sister's death: it had been her, nobody else. Seeing that she was not confessing the truth, a type of torture which Ibrahim had mentioned at supper was being done on her... Four huge deformed women took her dress off and put her into some wide-legged trousers. Then they tied up the trouser bottoms, and brought along five starving, furious cats, with sharp claws and dribbling mouths. Anisa started to scream: She knew nothing... The servant had suggested killing Adjib... And many other things too. Then they loosened the trousers at the top, and, after putting the five cats

inside, tied them up again. What's more, the women encouraged the cats and egged them on, and, down in the dark there, the cats attacked Anisa's legs even more fiercely.

Although it was only a dream, Anisa's screams and cries were real, and the king and Ibrahim heard her confession from where they were: "Please, I'll tell you the truth, but get these bloody animals out of here as soon as possible." And then, sobbing with tears, she went on: "I was the one who gave the order for the servant to kill my sister, but not to share out the treasure, no: I wanted that all for myself. I never thought our father was going to win that war; in fact, I thought he was going to lose the war, and Adjib was just going to get in my way, and I really hated her! That's why I told the servant to kill my sister, but I reckon he wasn't up to killing her, and, so, he took pity on her and let her run away…"

At that moment, as if he had drunk a glass with honey and vinegar in it at the same time, the king approached Anisa, woke her up, and cried as he hugged his repentant daughter. "Adjib will soon be back here", Ibrahim the astrologist concluded. "Send your soldiers to find her, and she'll soon be back. That is what the stars in the sky have told me.""

If, after finishing his wonderful story, the blind man had opened his eyes, he would have seen us all amazed and open-mouthed; but all Kamil heard was our long applause and the shower of dirhams landing in his cap.

That night the snow on the far-off Atlas mountains looked like the moon's silver mirror as I set off for the barber's house. Like Abdelhadi, Anisa had been born with a tooth already out, I thought, and, whatever difficulties there might be, I expected to be as fortunate as Adjib. Later, at half past six, I heard the cannon fired by the army at Gueliz, and, woken up by that, the fast sound of the frightened swallows as they flew away from it; but I was still dreaming of the journey which I, like the swallows and the cranes, was going to go on.

I have always liked the dusk. It's at that time the city's nervousness, noise and heat begin to die down and, in their place, the night brings the presents of peace and cool wind. And at that time I most liked to see the cranes' flight, and seeing how they came back to their nests once more to spend the night. Each dusk the cranes reminded my of my journey and, while I ate honey and almond paste and drank orange juice I dreamt about the great day.

At that time I had no idea there could be so many types of journey, and so many types of crane…

"Sorry, I'm lost. Do you know where Le Bédouin inn is?" a girl asked me in Spanish.

Then, as I raised my eyes and they met hers, I felt the heat of the desert sand and the cold of the Atlas mountains' snow at the same time.

From the very start I thought that girl wasn't like the others: she had arrived by herself, and tourists almost always went around in groups; she said she was lost (I still don't know if I believe that), and, even so, she didn't seem concerned.

Being used to showing foreign people around, at first I kept my distance from her; I walked three or four metres in front of her, as if in a hurry, and I could feel her eyes looking my body up and down; and, the closer together we got, the more intensely I felt the red needle of her gaze.

Before Adriana reached the hotel – that was this Madrid girl's name – she came close to me and explained it was Christmas Eve, a special night for Christians, and there was a party at Le Bédouin for foreigners that night: Dancers from Ahidud and Ahouatx, from Deka… And, please, she was feeling very alone, and she asked me to come back at midnight, and then she would pay me in the right way.

Although I had heard some young illegal guides talking about things like that, no girl with dirty intentions like that had ever come up to me. To tell the truth, I wasn't sure what Adriana wanted, but as soon as I walked away I

realised I was on fire inside, which must have been what the fakirs at Xema-el-Fna felt like when they ate fire. And, wondering whether to go to Adriana or not, I walked around the streets in the bazaar, trying to remember the colour of her eyes, her body... Finally, I decided to go, and to take a bath before I did. But in the water, too, I was unable to put out the fire inside me.

It was a starry night. As I got close to the inn, I heard the sound of drums. After a moment of doubt, I went up to the hotel and, as I walked through the door, I saw the reddened eyes of the many tourists who were dancing. But I did not feel Adriana's gaze on me there; no, she wasn't at that party. I had started to think that she had been mocking me when a waiter came up to me and gestured at me with his index finger for me to follow him.

He led me to the terrace above the inn and there, on her feet and nearly touching the tallest palm tree in the garden, was Adriana's silhouette.

"Good evening", I greeted her in Arabic.

She rubbed her eyes and turned towards me. Still silent, I enjoyed looking at her: black hair, bright pineapple-coloured pupils, her nose like a beautiful sand dune. And, without breaking the silence, she took my hand and led me to her room.

During that night when I tasted the wine of love for the first time I remembered Blackie, the male goat in our herd, and Mohamed and Yamila, and that was when I realised what the sheaves I used to find in those hiding places were for.

But Adriana left. While the Red City attracts tourists easily they, like the wind, always leave in the end. Adriana, too, left with her group. They were going to spend New Year's Eve in the desert. And for the first time I wasn't going before the tourists, I was going after them, watching them. And when the bus left – no goodbyes, no final kiss – my heart was jumping, and I ran to the city walls.

No, it is not true that to forget love you need to spend twice the time it lasted; although I only spent one night with Adriana, her memory lasted long in my heart. And, since then, when I've had nightmares or other awful situations, I've often taken refuge in my memories of Adriana.

I had heard Kamil the story-teller say it, and it was what I said to Adriana that night: "The Bedouin, when they retire to the desert to sleep, do not forget that there may be some pilgrim or lost traveller there; that's why they light a little fire on a hill, and it looks as if they've lit up a lighthouse on that sea of sand. And if anybody arrives in their camps, they don't ask their name or if they're lost; instead of asking questions, they offer them a meal. Perhaps they'll kill a camel or a lamb, and, if the stranger has come on a horse, they will paint their lineage's mark on it the sacrificed animal's blood. With the Bedouin, the traveller is a prince, a prisoner and a poet: they welcome him as a prince; he feels like a prisoner being honoured so highly; and, finally, it will be his turn to be a poet, finding the right words to praise his host."

I never knew why Adriana wanted me that night, and I never will know; but, of course, like the Bedouin, she had attracted me and fascinated me, and, in her camp, for one night at least, I had been a prince, a prisoner and a poet.