

‘Umar Ibn al-Fāriḍ

### The Wine Ode

In memory of the beloved  
we drank wine;  
we were drunk with it  
before the creation of the vine.

The full moon its glass, the wine  
a sun circled by a crescent;  
when it is mixed  
how many stars appear!

If not for its bouquet  
I would not have found its tavern;  
if not for its flashing gleam,  
how could imagination picture it.

Time preserved nothing of it  
save one last breath,  
concealed like a secret  
in the breasts of wise men.

But if it is recalled among the tribe  
the worthy ones  
are drunk by morn  
without shame or sin.

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From the depths of the jars  
it arose, though truly  
nothing remained  
save a name.

Yet if one day  
it crosses a man’s mind  
then joy will dwell in him,  
and anxiety depart.

Could the tavern mates see  
the seal of its jar,  
without the wine that seal alone  
would make them drunk,

And could they sprinkle it  
on a dead man’s earth,  
the spirit would return to him,  
his body revived.

Could they fling 10  
into the shadow of its trellised vine  
a sick man on the point of death,  
disease would flee him;

Could they bring a cripple  
near its tavern, he would walk,  
and from the mention of its flavour,  
the dumb would talk.

Could the breaths of its bouquet  
spread out in the east,  
one stuffed-up in the west  
would smell again;

And were a touching palm  
tinged by its cup,  
one would not stray at night,  
a star in hand.

Could it be unveiled in secret  
to the blind, he would see,  
and from the strainer's sound,  
the deaf would hear.

Were the riders 15  
to seek its soil  
with one scorpion-stung among them,  
the poison would not harm him.

Could the wizard write  
the letters of its name  
on the brow of one struck by the jinn,  
the tracings would cure and cleanse him.

And were its name inscribed  
upon the army's standard,  
all beneath that banner  
would fall drunk from the sign.

It refines the morals  
of the tavern mates  
and guides the irresolute  
to resolution's path;

He whose hand never knew munificence  
is generous,  
while one lacking in forbearance  
bears the rage of anger,

And could the stupid one among the folk  
win a kiss from its strainer,  
he would sense the hidden sense  
of its fine qualities. 20

They say to me: "Do describe it,  
for you know its character well!"  
Indeed, I have a word  
of its attributes.

Purity, not water,  
subtlety, not air,  
light but not fire,  
spirit without the body.

Lovely features guiding  
those describing it with praise;  
how fine their prose and poetry  
on wine.

One who never knew it  
is moved by its memory,  
just as one longing for Nu'm  
is stirred when she is recalled.

But they say: "You've drunk sin!"  
No, indeed, I drank only  
that whose abstention  
is sin to me. 25

So cheers to the monastery folk!  
How often they were drunk with it  
though they never drank it  
but only longed to.

While it made me drunk  
before my birth,  
abiding always with me  
though my bones be worn away.

So take it straight,  
though if you must, then mix it,  
but your turning away  
from the beloved's mouth is wrong.

Watch for it in the tavern,  
try to uncover it there,  
amid the melodious tunes  
where it becomes the prize.

It never dwells with anxiety  
at any time or place,  
just as sorrow  
never lives with song.

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Be drunk from it,  
if only for the life an hour,  
and you will see time a willing slave  
under your command.

For there is no life in this world  
for one who lives here sober;  
who does not die drunk from it,  
prudence has passed him by.

So let him weep for himself,  
one who has wasted his life  
never having won a share  
or a measure of this wine.

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