

were no longer any differences between intelligent people and stupid people, or between the strong and the weak. Men who had always had a reputation for being cowardly and easily humiliated stood up to men who had a reputation for strength, courage and daring. They beat them and made them laughing stocks. The man who were defeated and humiliated blamed only Said al-Hallaa and his pills, and one day he was found near his house, murdered and mutilated after long torture. The murderer was never discovered, but with Said's death the yellow pills disappeared from the Quwaiq district. Cowards went back to being cowards, the stupid to being stupid and the miserable to being miserable.

TRANSLATED BY JONATHAN WRIGHT

From the collection *Al-Hisrim* (Sour Grapes), 2000

## The Disaster

Dalal ran through the yard grumbling about being bored. When she reached the outer gate, her mother shouted to warn her that playing in the lane was for boys and wasn't proper for a girl of her age, less than seven years old. Dalal took no notice of the warning, opened the gate and was about to go out, but her mother shouted after her. "You'll regret it. I'll tell your father about you," she threatened.

Dalal smiled in contempt. "Father's dead, so what can he do?" she said.

"He'll be angry with you and visit you in your dreams every night and tell you he doesn't love you," her mother said sharply.

"You're wrong," said Dalal. "My father does love me and he'll love me even more and hate you when I tell him what you do every night with our neighbour the butcher."

Her mother looked up at the sky. "May God never let you grow up," she implored angrily.

Her prayer wasn't answered and Dalal did grow up. She became