

looked closely at him and all she could see was a bear disguised as a fat young man, short with bandy legs and eyes the colour of seaweed. They parted in disgust and remorse.

TRANSLATED BY JONATHAN WRIGHT  
From the collection *Al-Hisrim* (Sour Grapes), 2000

## He Doesn't Know

Tarif al-Nabri had arranged to meet three old friends in a bar they often went to, but he arrived more than an hour late. His friends greeted him with noisy cheers. He looked at the table covered with empty bottles and said: "I see you didn't wait for me."

"Cut the nonsense," one of them said languidly. "Sit down and get drinking. When you've got your head straight like us then we can come to terms."

Tarif nodded, looking forward to getting drunk and losing his mind. He started knocking back the whiskies one after another, without water or ice, to make up for lost time and catch up with his friends. When he was as drunk as they were, or even more so, he pulled from his pocket a coloured photograph of a woman who looked like a white carnation. In a voice slurred by the drinking, he swore that he didn't know this woman and had never seen her in his life. He didn't know who had given him the photograph and he didn't know that her name was Layla. He didn't know she had black hair and a white face and he didn't know she had big green eyes. He said he didn't know she worked for a company in a street where he often loitered on the pavement and he didn't know she lived in a small flat with two small rooms and he didn't know her bed and he didn't know she loved silk nightdresses and that her favourite colour was blue. He said he didn't know that her hair got wet with sweat when she was upset or excited and he didn't know that she didn't like eating out and he didn't know she was a talented cook. He said he didn't know she liked to laugh, smoke cigarettes, play with cats and go for walks at night, and he didn't know that her unborn baby