

Madrid, 9 July 1964

Dear Salma,

Searching for La Giralda is easy; searching for the black eyes of unending night, on the other hand, is unceasing torture.

Hunting for those beautiful eyes -- what task could be more difficult! Were I to hunt lions, leopards, or elephants in the jungles of Africa...it would be far easier.

To wit, the eyes of a woman are like a heavenly kingdom unto itself...like Ali Baba's cave, and all it contains of chests filled with emerald and sapphire...

How often have I stood at the door of that cave...reading aloud the password...hoping that the door would split open...to reveal a green tulip, or a black one...to reveal an eyelash like a mouth that could eat me whole...

And Carmen, she who lies within your imagination...where can I find her? What is her address? Where is her house?

I have turned through hundreds of pages...and magazines...and pictures of Spanish beauty queens...but I have yet to stumble across Carmen.

In a sea of faces, a single face gave me pause; a face that destroyed the tranquility within my heart. And when the tranquility within my heart is shattered, it means I have become a burning coal...that I have become poetry.

The Carmen whose picture I am sending you...she is my feelings -- and by extension, she is Carmen Qabbani...And if you find that she is worthy enough to be called Carmen Haffar as well...then it will gladden me to know that she has become that much greater.¹

How beautiful it is, that we should meet once more at the pupil of an eye...

Tell Ridwan al-Shihal² to be gentle with Carmen...to leave her hair as he finds it...to do the same with the blossoms in her locks...and with her eyes, in all their distance...

¹ Here Qabbani references the photograph of a woman which he enclosed with this letter. He views her as a model that resonates with his ideal of the character Carmen, and hopes that Kuzbari will draw similar inspiration from her.

² The editor of Kuzbari's book.

You and Carmen...torment me...
And what sweet suffering it is...

Nizar



Carmen, Daughter of Qabbani
Place of Residence: Mazanet Ash-Shahm
Al-Qaimarryeh, Roll 44³

³ Qabbani has created an imagined identity for his muse by giving her a fake name and place of residence in Damascus, the sort of personal information one might find on a national ID card. The address itself is presumably that of Qabbani's own family home.