

# Love at the Crossroads—Advanced English Short Story, With Vocabulary for Talking about Love, Location and Relocation

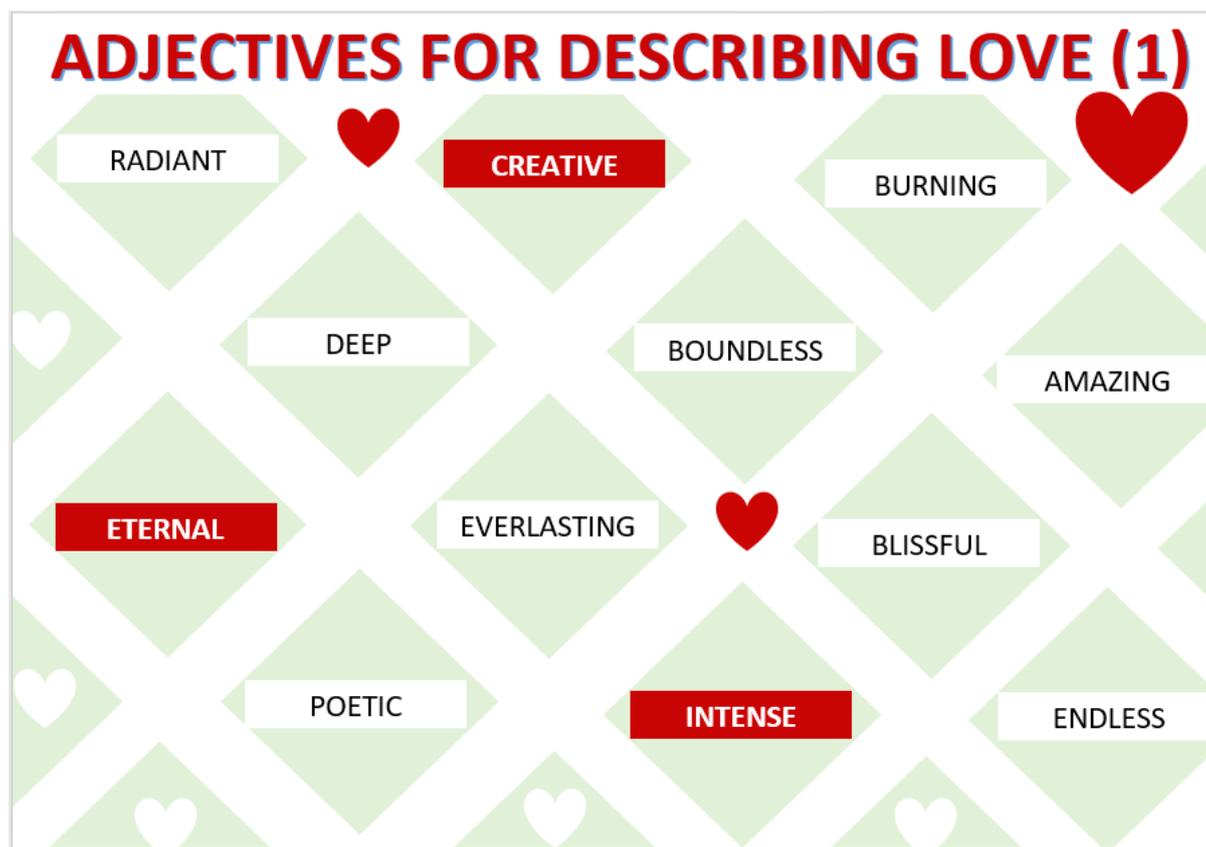
Level B1-B2

**Topic:** This is the story of a magical encounter between a European tourist and her Moroccan tour guide. There is love at first sight. How far will their feelings take them before reason takes charge?

*"If today is not your day, then be happy for this day shall never return. And if today is your day, then be happy now for this day shall never return."*

~Kamand Kojouri, Iranian-born author of [The Eternal Dance: Love Poetry and Prose](#)

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The first time Elena saw Nassim, she was standing in the warm, restless square of Jemaa el-Fnaa in Marrakesh.

She had arrived the previous evening from Spain, her suitcase still dusty from travel. Her holidays were short and she wanted to see the Sahara Desert. This is why she had immediately booked this tour. The reviews online were glowing and she looked much forward to the trip.

Now, she felt both excited and slightly lost. She wondered if there would be a large group or simply a few people.

"Please, everyone, come closer," a calm voice said behind her. "Stand next to me and let's wait for the others. Keep your bags in front of you."

Elena turned.

There was a tall man giving instructions to what looked like a group of tourists. It was not a group per se because there were just four people. She decided to try her luck.

As she drew closer, she noticed that the man was carrying a small sign with the name of the tour company that she had booked. He wore a blue djellaba and the colour accentuated his physical beauty. Her heart leapt with anticipation.

"Elena?" he asked, checking the list.

"Yes," she answered and found herself smiling without any reason. Their eyes caught for a brief moment. A strange warmth spread through her chest.

The group reintroduced themselves once more. Their tour guide was called Nassim, meaning '*gentle wind*' in Arabic. There was a German couple, two Australian friends and an older woman from England.

Just after the introductions, two more people arrived. They were French middle-aged women and had both resigned from their jobs as real estate agents to do a world tour. It was a quest for meaning, they added.

"That's a very courageous decision," Nassim said and the group nodded in agreement.

Then, without warning, Nassim turned to her as if she were alone and said in a soft voice.

"This is where we will begin our tour. Our van is outside the medina. We will walk there. Meanwhile, I will show you around Jemaa el-Fnaa. As you know, this is one of the most popular squares in Morocco."

She looked at him and felt his gaze rest on her for a moment longer than necessary. It was as if she had known him for years. His face felt familiar and he spoke in a way that put her at ease.

Everyone picked their bags and started walking.

"First," he said to the group, "look around you. This square is the heart of the city. You can see some fresh juice stands over there," he pointed to his right. "Now turn to your left and notice the snake charmers. At night, this square transforms into something magical. It's definitely something you should see at least once in your lifetime."

Elena deemed she needed more than two lifetimes to see all what the world had to offer. She looked at the French ladies and smiled at them.

The group followed Nassim through the noise and movement. Elena walked just behind him. When he stopped suddenly, she nearly stepped into him.

"Careful," he said softly and laughed. "Stay close. We don't want to go to the hospital. The Sahara is waiting for us."

Their eyes met again, and this time neither looked away quickly enough.

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They soon found the van. It was modern and there was the name of the tour company inscribed on its left flank: Desert Rose Expeditions.

She had chosen this company because it was locally owned and specialised in intimate journeys across the High Atlas Mountains and into the Sahara Desert, where travellers were encouraged to slow down, listen and truly experience Morocco.

The driver greeted them warmly when he saw them. His name was Rafik and she remembered that '*rafiki*' meant 'friend' in Swahili. This was a good sign.

"Sit down, everyone," Rafik said cheerfully. "Fasten your seat belts. We have a long journey ahead."

Nassim described the tour, where they would go and what they would see. Their main destination was M'Hamid, a small desert town where they would start their camel trek. On their way there, they would stop by other interesting places just to get a feel of the country.

Everyone was in good spirits. The German couple filmed Nassim as he spoke.

"It's for our vlog," they explained. Nassim waved at the camera and gave a thumbs up. The group laughed and the German couple laughed even louder, giving grateful looks to everyone. They looked very much in love and were very kind to each and every person in the van. The atmosphere was very pleasant.

After Nassim's explanation, Rafik expertly moved the van out of the city. He drove neither too fast or too slow. It was the perfect rhythm that promised a safe and enjoyable journey.

Elena watched as the van moved past the red walls of the medina and into the open countryside. She marvelled at the differences and could not wait to discover more.

Nassim sat in the front with the driver, but he turned often to speak to the group.

"Look out of the window on your right," he said. "You will see olive trees stretching across the hills. In the distance, the Atlas Mountains rise above the plain. Over there you will find Asni, a Berber town. It is very beautiful."

They learnt that Nassim was Berber and spoke Tamazight. The Berbers or the Amazigh people, as Nassim specified, were the indigenous non-Arabic, people of North Africa and lived in the Atlas Mountains. Amazigh meant 'free men'. He also spoke Arabic, French, Italian, German and Spanish.

This sparked Elena's curiosity and she watched Nassim closely as he invited the group to enjoy the ride and the views. What did it mean to hold multiple identities and speak so many languages?

Elena followed his cue and observed the changes in the landscape with delight. Green fields gave way to dry earth. Small villages appeared and disappeared behind them. She had been transported into paradise and wished this moment could last forever.

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The road climbed, and soon they reached Imlil, a small mountain village where excited children waved from terraces. It was a joyful sight to behold.

Nassim led the group to a quiet rooftop café overlooking the valley. The air smelled of spices and fresh bread. Here, they were served mint tea in small glasses, sweet and fragrant, steam curling up into the light.

"Please, take this glass," Nassim said. "Hold it from the top. It is very hot."

When he handed her the glass of tea, their fingers brushed briefly. They smiled and silence filled the spaces. The other group members were also lost in the moment. It was surreal to be in this place when just days before they had been entangled in the intricacies of their own lives.

Elena took a sip from her tea. The sweetness surprised her. "It's delicious," she said.

"It's a symbol of our hospitality," Nassim replied. "In Morocco, we say that a guest is a gift."

She smiled. "And are we good gifts?"

He laughed. "Some gifts are better than others. They change one's life."

Their conversation flowed easily. They spoke of cities and homes, of movement and belonging.

"I live in Barcelona," Elena told him later, as they stood beside the van. "My apartment is near the sea. When I look out of my window, I see boats moving across the water. And you?" she asked.

"I live here," he said. "My family's house is just outside Marrakesh. If you walk behind the garden, you reach a small river. I have never lived anywhere else."

"Have you never wanted to move away?" she asked.

He hesitated. "Sometimes, but my roots are deep. I feel connected to this land."

His words touched her. She felt a sudden desire to understand that connection, to step into his world and remain there.

Later, they drove through the rich Ourika Valley, its rivers and stunning waterfalls a sharp contrast to the desert they were approaching. Elena felt reflective as she watched the water flow, thinking about how love could move similarly, quiet, persistent, shaping life over time.

Passing through Ouarzazate, the "gateway to the desert," they admired its kasbahs and earthen walls. The town had an air of stillness, as if waiting for travellers to continue onward. It also had a certain, spectacular beauty that drew the eye in. Elena understood why this was a popular location for filmmakers.

A short stop in Skoura, the valley of date palms, gave them shade and tea. Elena noticed Nassim's eyes often wandered, not at the lush surroundings, but at how the light touched her hair as she smiled. Love was budding in their hearts and it was only a matter of time before the flower would come into full bloom.

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By the time they reached M'Hamid at the edge of the Sahara Desert, the sun was already low. The sky stretched wide and endless above the dunes.

"This is the beginning of the Sahara," Nassim announced as they stepped out of the van. "Follow me. Walk slowly on the sand. Do not run down the dunes."

A line of camels waited in the fading light. The group was excited to start the trek and waited for Nassim's instructions when they reached the camels.

"Climb onto the camel from the left side," he instructed Elena gently. "Hold the saddle. Lean back when the camel stands up. Do not be afraid. Look ahead, not down." He was clear and manly and gave her the confidence to follow his lead.

She laughed nervously as the camel rose beneath her. How great it felt to be in this place, far from everything she was accustomed to, far from the life she knew.

The group moved across the sand, the camels swaying in a quiet rhythm. The desert felt infinite, silent, almost sacred.

When they reached the camp, small lanterns glowed between the tents.

Dinner was served under the stars. They ate tagine with tender lamb and apricots, warm bread, and bowls of olives. The flavours were rich and comforting. They drank more mint tea and ate msemen.

"This is the best meal of my life," Elena said, half-jokingly.

"It tastes different here," Nassim replied. "The desert changes everything."

Music began as Rafik started to play the guitar. The group of tourists that had gathered around him clapped their hands and laughed. The night air grew cooler and merrier.

Later, Elena walked a little away from the camp. Nassim followed her.

"Do not go too far," he said softly. "Stay where I can see you."

She turned towards him. The moonlight rested on his face. She could no longer bottle her feelings. His eyes begged her to confess, to say things she would not normally say to anyone else.

"I've never felt like this," she blurted. "It's if I am standing between two worlds."

"Which two?" he asked.

"My old life and something new, something beyond my reach."

He stepped closer and she knew that he understood.

"Sometimes we meet someone and the world shifts. We relocate our hearts without moving our bodies," he finally said and she felt her breath catch as he drew closer to her.

"And what if our bodies can't follow?"

He looked at her and then out over the dunes. "Then we carry the memory. We place it inside us, like a treasure."

There, in the quiet of the Sahara, their hands found each other, and then their lips. Love had arrived without warning, like a sudden wind across the sand. Yet, they could not utter their love feelings aloud in a way that calmed and gave them the certainty of permanence.

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The next day, the group woke before sunrise. Nassim urged them to join him atop of a dune and watch the sun rise from the horizon. Elena climbed beside him.

They watched the sky slowly turning from purple to gold. The sun emerged and the sand shimmered. Their mouths remained agape with awe. She felt tears in her eyes.

"Why am I crying?" she whispered.

"Because you are alive," he said.

Later in the afternoon, as they were walking between dunes, Elena suddenly stopped. A small burst of pink had caught her eye.

In front of her lay a desert rose, as Nassim would shortly tell her its name. It bloomed audaciously between the grains of sand, fragile, yet resilient, defying all odds. It seemed to insist on life in a place that offered almost nothing.

"It grows where almost nothing else survives," Elena said.

"Yes, it's an incredible flower. I love it very much. This is where the name of our tour company comes from."

Elena felt a surge of happiness. The flower mirrored something she longed to see in herself: persistence, hope and most of all courage. She did not touch it or pick it. She simply admired it, letting the moment settle into her chest and plant its roots there.

Nassim watched her, more than the flower. Her joy was infectious and sincere. It revealed her golden heart. In that instant, he realised that he had fallen deeply in love with her.

As she rose, a new awareness passed between them. Love had grown quietly and beautifully between them, like this unexpected flower. They also knew that their love was rare and fleeting, like the desert rose. The truth and urgency of that realisation left them devastated.

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On the journey back to Marrakesh, the mood in the van was softer, more reflective. The tourists shared photos and email addresses. Laughter filled the space, but Elena and Nassim spoke quietly in the front of the van.

"I leave tomorrow," she said.

"I know."

"You could visit," she offered. "Come to Barcelona. Walk along the beach. Stand beside me and look at the sea."

He smiled sadly. "And leave my family? My work? My responsibilities?"

The word responsibilities felt heavy between them.

"I could stay longer," she said. "I could look for work here."

He shook his head gently. "Do not make life-changing decisions in the middle of a storm of feelings."

She knew he was right. Love had risen quickly between them, just like the desert sun, but life was more complicated.

Afterwards, they sought comfort in the silence and dreams of possibilities until reality caught up with them in Marrakesh. Jemaa el-Fna square was bustling and pulsating with life, once again.

"This is where we began," he said quietly.

"Yes", Elena replied and suddenly the whole bus started clapping their hands for Nassim and Rafik. The French ladies said they would always remember their tour guide and driver in Marrakesh who safely guided them in the dunes of the Sahara Desert.

"*Merci mais ce ne sont pas des adieux, mais un simple au revoir,*" the blond one said. These are not farewells. It's just goodbye.

Nassim replied reassuringly: "*Non, pas adieux.*" No, no farewells.

The two Moroccans were obviously moved but also felt uneasy at this burst of enthusiasm and gratitude. They were modest in their success and Elena felt a pang of sadness at the thought of losing someone so good in his heart.

"*Shukran jazilan,*" they repeatedly said. Thanks a lot.

Finally, Nassim gave his final instructions to the remaining tourists. They left, promising to come back in the near future and to write fantastic reviews about Desert Rose Expeditions.

Then he turned to Elena when they were finally alone.

“You must walk toward your riad now,” he said softly. “Do not look back.”

She smiled through her tears. “That is an impossible instruction. I can't.”

“Try,” he implored. His voice was quivering.

She turned her back and took a few steps away, tentatively and then steadily.

When she was at a safe distance, she turned her head. . He was still there, standing in the square, watching her disappear from his life.

This was what was hard about his job. He met extraordinary people all the time, enjoyed their company as long as it lasted, knowing that the people he had grown to love would vanish at the end of their holidays.

Eventually, Elena returned to Barcelona. She resumed her job, her apartment near the sea, her familiar routines. Love alone could not bridge distances or relocate lives. She was now acutely aware of this and no longer felt resentful towards fate.

Yet something inside her had shifted. She carried the desert within her, the taste of mint tea, the warmth of sand under her feet, the memory of his voice giving directions and advice. The brief touch of their hands and their lips.

And somewhere between Marrakesh and the Sahara, between movement and stillness, she had discovered a hard truth: some encounters were not meant to last forever. They were meant to awaken the heart, to teach it how to love and to cherish the impermanence of life.

Though she lived apart from him, she remained grateful. Sad, yes, but she was also happy that once in her lifetime, she had stood together with Nassim under the desert sky and felt the world shift beneath her feet.

## ADJECTIVES FOR DESCRIBING LOVE (2)





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