I Have a Cottage in the Country (translated by Carmine Di Biase and Rashad Ahmed)

Abdul Aziz Al-Maqalih

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Abdul Aziz Al-Maqlith was one of Yemen's finest modern poets. Born in 1937, he died recently, in November of 2022, having published over fifteen collections of poetry. He worked in education and served as cultural adviser to the Yemeni government. His poetry is known for at once embracing and transforming Yemeni tradition.

Dr. Rashad Ahmed is an assistant professor of English at Jacksonville State University in northeast Alabama. He is a linguist with a multidisciplinary background in TESOL and Composition Studies. He has been granted several awards, fellowships, and scholarships, which included his Fulbright scholarship 2013 to 2017, the Applied Linguistics Concentration Award, and a Summer Fellowship from the University of Memphis.

I Have a Cottage in the Country
(translated by Carmine Di Biase and Rashad Ahmed)

I have a cottage in the country,
as broad as its garden
and cossetted by the scent of roses.
At midnight
I climb up to the roof
and listen to the stars as they make their
dreamy music for me, for my soul.
The stars hold the sky’s night-time face
and write such sweet words
on it that the heart
yearns for it.

I have a cottage in the country
unmatched in its beauty,
which satisfies the hungry soul.
The stones I gathered with my own hands
and built the walls and rooms
like the stanzas of a poem,
but free of any rules of form.
And to adorn the façade it was
Picasso himself who helped me, lending
me his greens and blues.

I have a cottage in the country,
only a few humble, square meters.
The front door is of cedar.
Every dawn, the windows lead my
gaze towards mountains suspended from the sun’s
interlaced beams, towards valleys whose fingers,
covered in crystalline blades of grass,
fill with clear water
that flows proudly, like a scarf
woven by breezes
from the greenish light’s rays.

I have a cottage in the country,
tasteful and luminous,
bathed clean every morning by the sun
and again in the evening by the darkness.
When sadness engulfs me
and tightens round my heart,
I run there,
where I can free my soul
of the burdens it carries
from diseased and decadent cities.

I have a cottage in the country.
The shepherd passes every morning
under my windows
as he makes his way to the valley,
walking behind his flocks,
which grow more numerous by the day.
At noon, when the sun is too bright, too hot,
stillness and silence shade the village,
and wafting over from the far edge
of the valley come soft, enchanting melodies,
from the mouth of the shepherd’s pipe.

I have a cottage in the country
that has no lock or key.
At night, stars that have gone astray
can come inside, where whole flocks
of pigeons find their shelter.
The cottage is open to light,
open to shadow,
open every dawn
to the music
of chirping birds
which wakes the deer
and the water of the sleeping stream.

I have a cottage in the country.
If I go back there
I shall be greeted by the cypresses,
by the warmth of the cedar door
and the green grass of the walkway,
by the butterflies dancing to the rhythm
of the water, which keeps time as it rumbles
down the valley’s fingers, rubbing
their gravel beds smooth.

I have a cottage in the country,
on the village’s rising slope,
seen by no one but me
and built by hand in a dream,
by a patient hand,
a hand that painted the stones
with the colors of tranquility,
and all of it resting on a paper
foundation, on the marble of words.

Can you believe, my dears,
that I own a cottage in the country,
a cottage which delights in the play of the sun’s beams
and is cossetted by the scent of roses,
and that, right under its windows, a shepherd passes by?
O this … sweet, beckoning dream.
It has lifted the veil from my heart’s eyes
with the breath of poetry, made my soul see
again, from the highest peak
of God’s kingdom,
what cannot be seen.